

The world beneath our feet

Today's Aurovilians are not newcomers to a virgin land. For over three decades, archaeological excavation work has unearthed stone-age, megalithic and Chola artefacts in the area now known as Auroville.

More than sixty years ago, in North Germany, a curious six-year old kicking through the rubble of an abandoned quarry stumbled upon a rusty old sword from a battle long past. The young lad was hooked for ever.

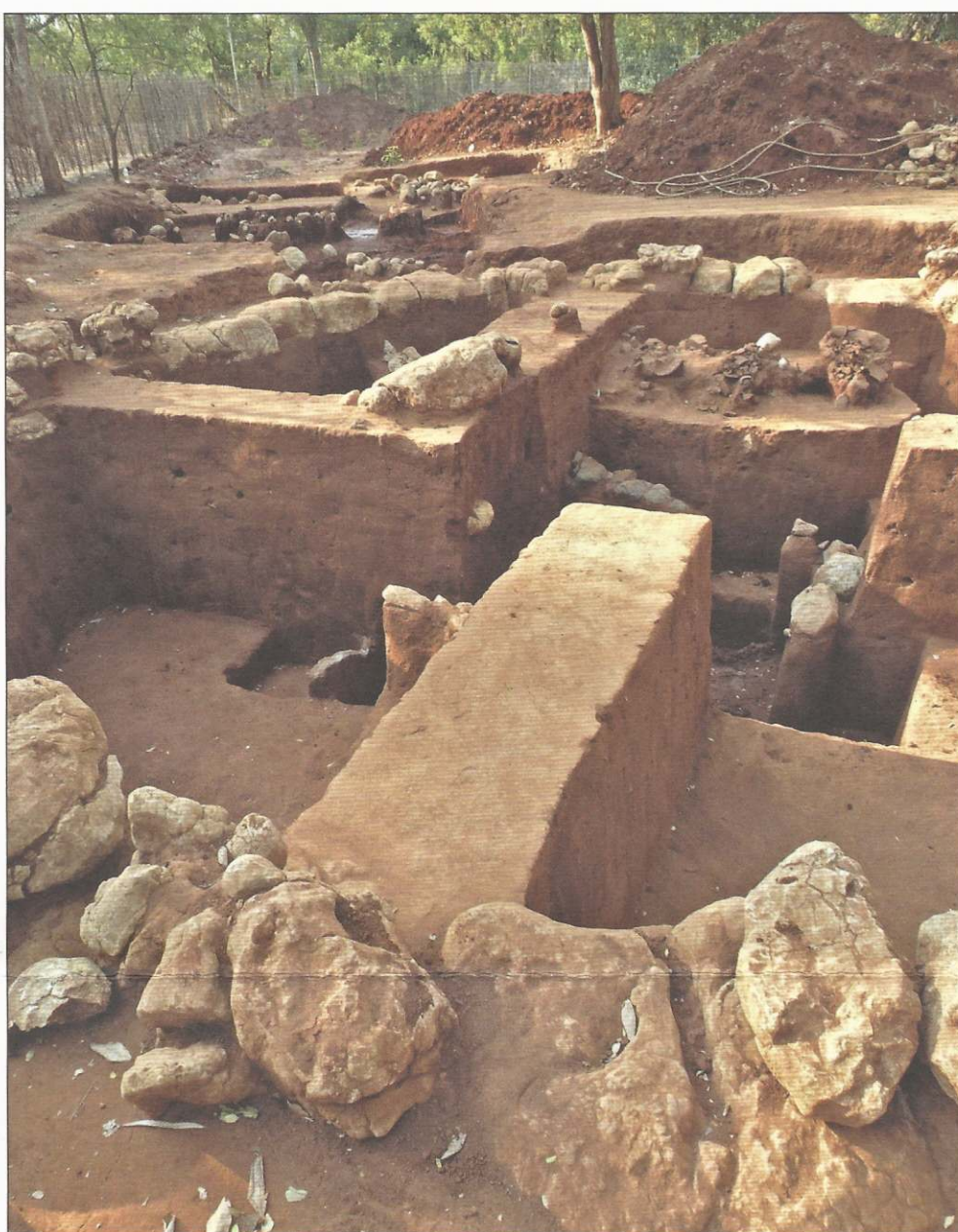
Decades later on a sun-baked plain in South India, under a billowing canopy that offers some shade, he bends over a box of semi-precious stone beads. Sifting through the pile, he picks out perfectly striped specimens and passes them around to the nine-year olds gathered around. Welcome to Poppo's world of Auroville archaeology.

"What we do is rescue excavation, not archaeology," corrects Poppo. "At the same time, whenever possible we provide a hands-on education to interested children, such as from Transition and Deepanam, and from Udavi and other village primary schools."

It was in the early eighties that Poppo and others stumbled upon the hidden world of Auroville's early dwellers while digging holes for trees. Poppo poetically describes the actual moment of discovery in his journal: "The hard crust of the earth was punctured by thousands of tree holes, unearthing pottery shards and limestone. Shards are the Geiger counters for archaeologists, but to the layman are of no significance. However when the crowbars hit hard granite at the bottom of several tree holes, we became alert, because the nearest granite hills are about 25 kilometres away."

A hasty clearing of the top soil revealed a large granite slab – later found to weigh over two tonnes – along with a powdery metal axe and hundreds of pot shards. A test-pit was carefully dug and the slab removed. It revealed a terracotta sarcophagus more than a metre in length, standing on six legs, dramatically ornamented with a pair of horned rams' heads. "It was covered by a lid containing evenly-spaced oval shaped holes with corresponding holes in the lower body, probably used for lowering the heavy sarcophagus on ropes safely down into the narrow burial pit," explains Poppo. Apart from soil that had entered the sarcophagus over two thousand years, it was empty. No organic remains or other objects were found within.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was invited and carted away the specimens for analysis. Thermo-luminescence dating revealed it to be from the megalithic Dravidian era (circa 500 BCE – 100 CE). However, as Tamil Nadu has innumerable megalithic sites, and there was nothing of 'great value' in the artefacts rescued in Auroville, Poppo and his team of volunteers



A cairn circle near the Matrimandir visitors' entrance, excavated in 2013

were allowed by the ASI to proceed with the work. The sarcophagus was returned.

While little is understood about rock cultures or the significance of their funerary rituals, megalithic burials are believed to have served as a mode of transition to the nether world. Megalithic people exposed their dead to the elements and animals. When the flesh was removed, the remaining bones were collected and interred in terracotta urns, sometimes measuring up

to one metre in height. "The six-legged sarcophagus was truly exceptional," says Poppo. "It must have been for the burial of a clan chief or king."

In 2000, the Auroville 'rescue excavation' project got a shot in the arm when German archaeologists visited Auroville and spent a few months leading the excavation work and sharing their expertise with volunteers. "We can't do any better," was one of the compliments Poppo received, when they compared his work to theirs. This interaction later led to an exchange. Gopi, from Rayapudupakkam village, who has an interest in history and is a long-time technician attached to the project, and Anandamayi from Auroville, were invited to the State Museum of Archaeology in Paderborn and Münster, Germany, to learn about archaeological restoration and preservation. Gopi now works full-time in the field and in restoration work.

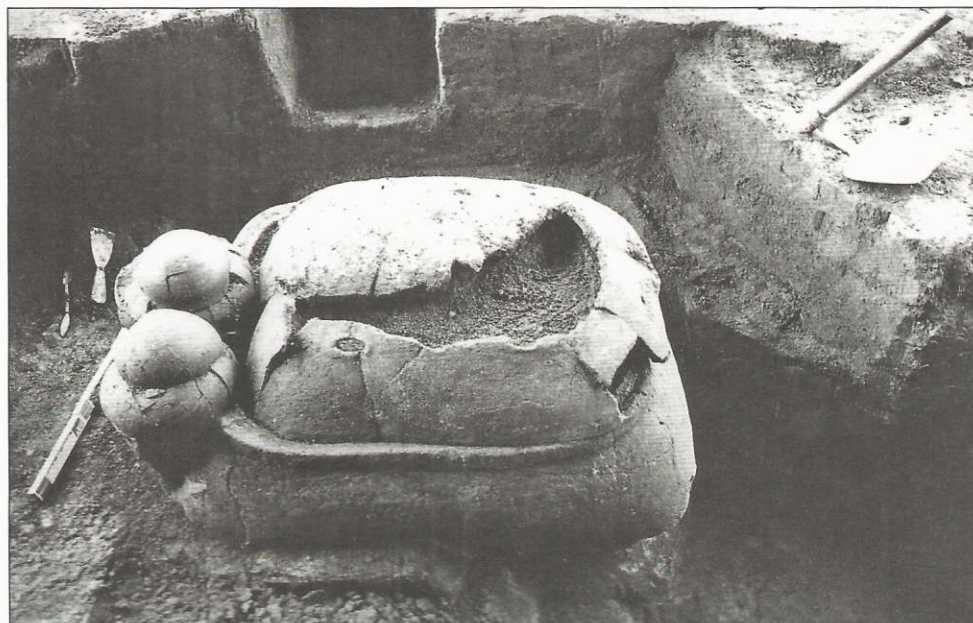
The work

Archaeological work is painstakingly slow and physically demanding. The team preserves everything that can be preserved – the ancient burial sites, capstones and cairn circles are reconstructed in place – while the finds of ceramics, terracotta and metal implements, which are often powdery and greatly corroded, are preserved and restored. Metal objects, often of iron and occasionally of bronze, are cleaned carefully using chemicals, followed by a process of high quality wax impregnation, which is done at Maroma, which provides structural integrity and strength. Every dig and find is documented with survey drawings, photographs and sketches. Global Positioning System (GPS) data is used to integrate the ancient locations with the general Auroville town plan.

Cairn circles, capstone burials and urns have now been uncovered and 'rescued' in certain areas of Auroville in the past thirty years. Around the centre of the township alone, more than sixty locations have been identified within a 45-acre area as archaeologically-rich with a high concentration of megalithic artefacts.

Recent excavations at a site next to the Unity Pavilion and another one between the Kindergarten and Bharat Nivas have shown more cairn circles with urn burials. The collection of red-black ware, terra cotta urns, iron implements (knives, axes, sickles, ladles, swords and daggers) and glass and stone beads continues to grow.

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Sarcophagus during discovery, 1982



Sarcophagus restored by the Archaeological Survey of India, 1985

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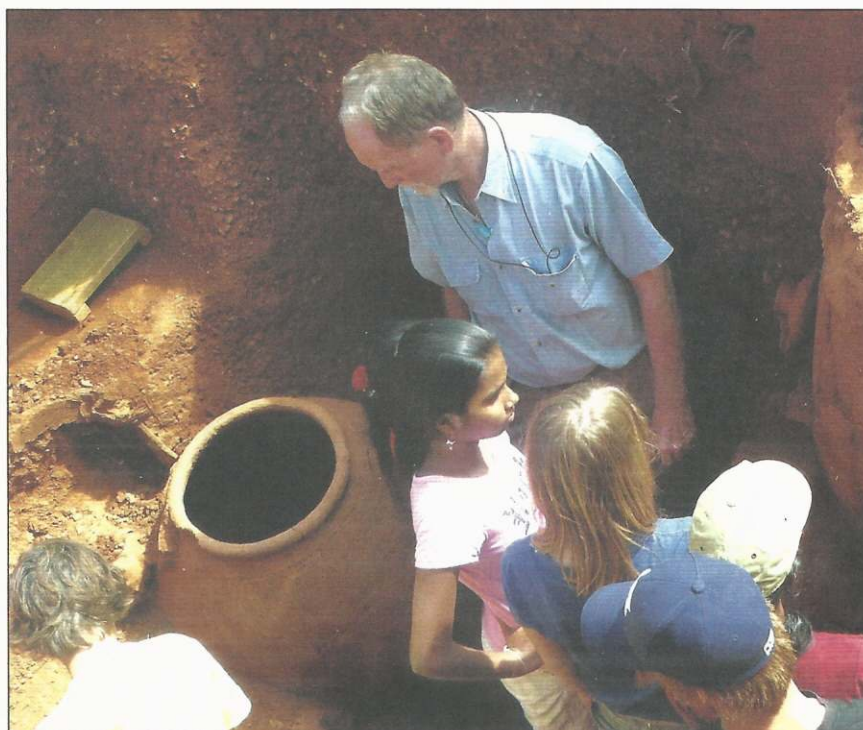
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Transition school children visiting the excavation near the Matrimandir Nursery



Poppo lecturing on the history of the area and showing an iron spear head
Below: Boy with an iron axe head



Devi restoring an urn

The word megalith derives from the Greek, *mega*, which means big and *lithos*, which means stone. It refers to the time when people buried their dead with simple structures incorporating massive stones. In Europe, the megalithic period is dated from 3,000 – 2,000 BCE. In India, the megalithic period is more recent, dating from 1,000 BCE – 300 CE. Coexisting with the more advanced culture of the Sangam period, when international sea-trade with countries such as Rome and Greece was at its height, the parallel megalithic culture of South-India is a mystery yet to be unravelled.

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Sometimes other objects are found, not from the megalithic period. Seven years ago, in the odai (canyon) of Bommaiarpallayam, a team of paleo-biologists discovered a 70,000 year old baby skull in deposits of ferrite layers.

In 2003, during an excavation at the site near Shradhanjali, a 7 centimetre high, exquisite statue of a woman in seating position was dug up, evidence of a 10th century Chola settlement. "I call her the Venus of Auroville," says Poppo, laughing. In 2005, Poppo's team unearthed several embossed copper coins and stone bead artefacts at CSR, dating from the same period. In 2009, while excavating the foundation for the guestrooms of Savitri Bhavan, a 10,000 year old well-preserved stone axe was found at a depth of only 50 centimetres.

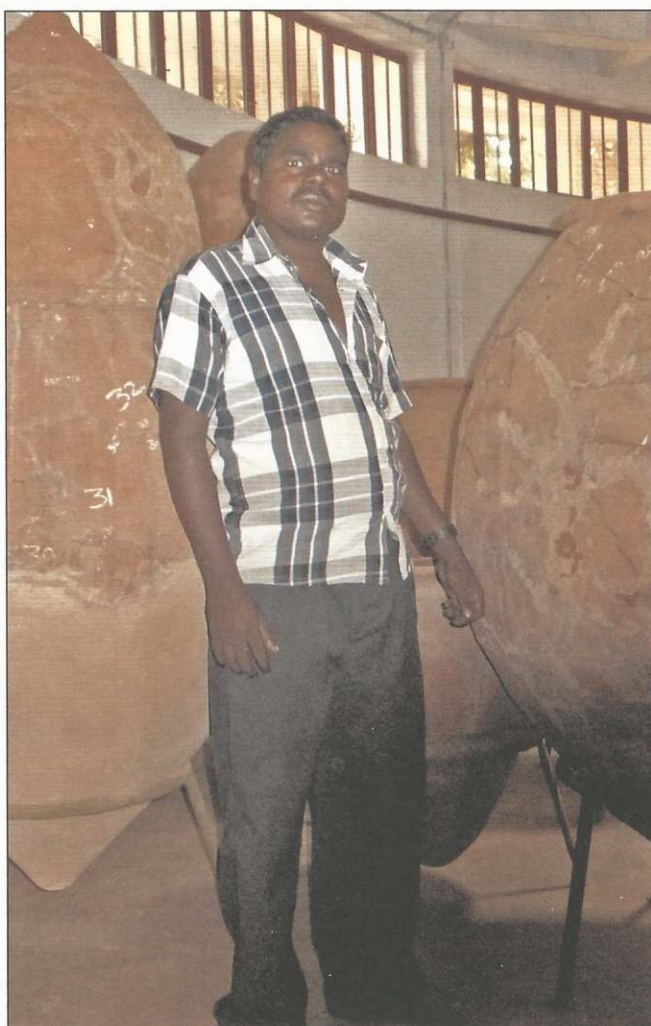
In 2005, the team expanded its work and made a detailed documentation of the destruction of megalithic sites in the Auroville bioregion. "We had to do this survey rather urgently, not only because we are frequently asked to justify why we are doing these excavations, but also because the development in the bioregion is destroying many of these spots," says Poppo with a hint of exasperation.

Challenges

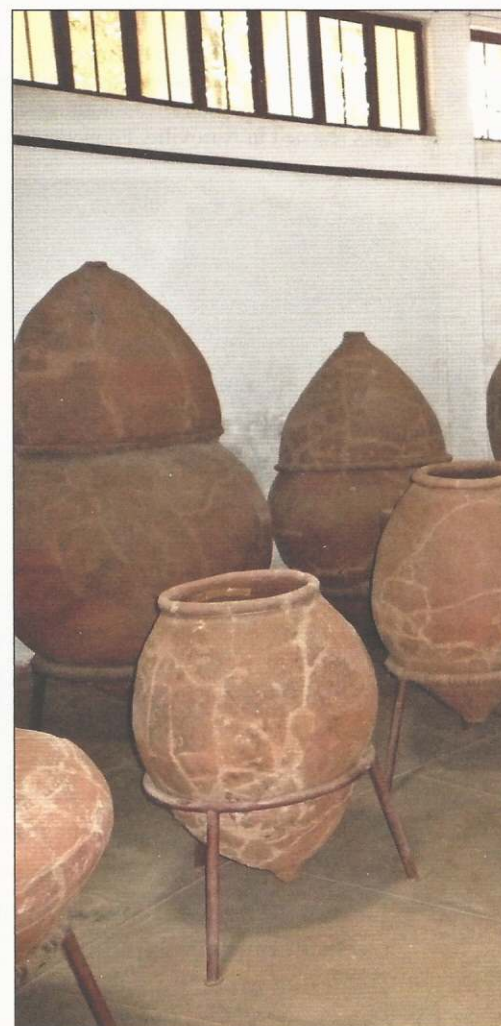
A work of this magnitude could not proceed without the usual challenges, both from without and within Auroville. "At some point in time, someone from a village made a complaint and the police became involved, but this turned out in our favour," says Poppo. "We showed them all the work we had done – the sites where our digs were made, the finds, the documentation, the conservation work and the stored artefacts. In the end, realising that we are not treasure hunters, the police congratulated us on doing a fine job of preserving what is clearly Tamil cultural heritage, and encouraged us to continue the work." With the help of the Auroville Foundation Secretary, Poppo is now formalizing his work with the Archaeological Survey of India. The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, acknowledging the importance of this work, has promised to make a grant of Rs 5 lakhs (US \$ 9,000) towards the archaeological work for this financial year (2013-2014).

Equally challenging are the obstacles the work encounters in Auroville – a limited budget and a seeming lack of community support – although the schools occasionally send their children to the sites to learn about the ancient history of this area. "I love teaching them," says Poppo. "But sadly, there is no budget for this type of education."

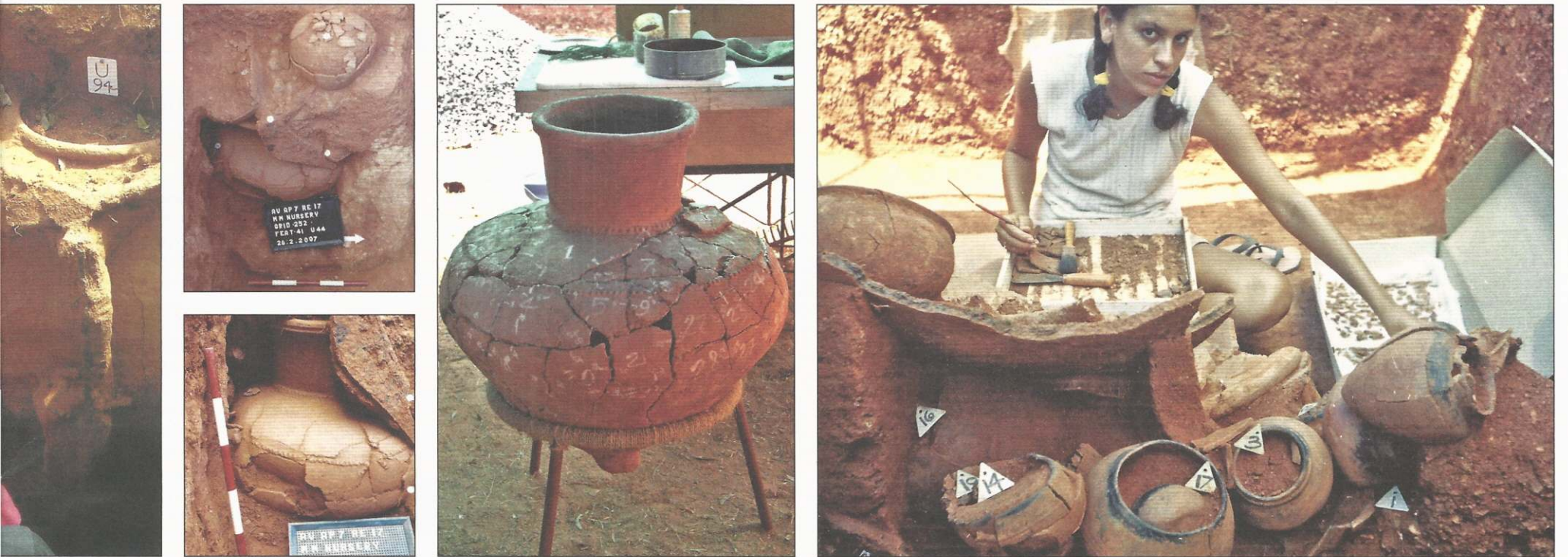
Another problem is the occasional hostility from Aurovilians who have construction projects planned on top of archaeological sites. Although many Aurovilians are aware that they are occupying archaeologically sensitive areas, they do not calculate the costs and the time needed to excavate and document the area they want to build on, into their planning.



Gopi with a restored urn



Restored urns in



An excavation in progress

The restored urn

Anandamayil rescuing bones form burial urns

Suryamandalam

The problems between the future and the past surfaced again when Poppo designed Suryamandalam, the Tamil Heritage Centre and Museum, which will be part of Bharat Nivas, the Pavilion of India in the International Zone. The main building of the Centre, surrounded by water, will have two floors and a basement. The ground floor will be for exhibitions and cultural performances, whereas the first floor is reserved for studies on South-Indian art and will host a library. The basement will be used as storage space for the hundreds of boxes with archaeological finds, as well as a conservation area.

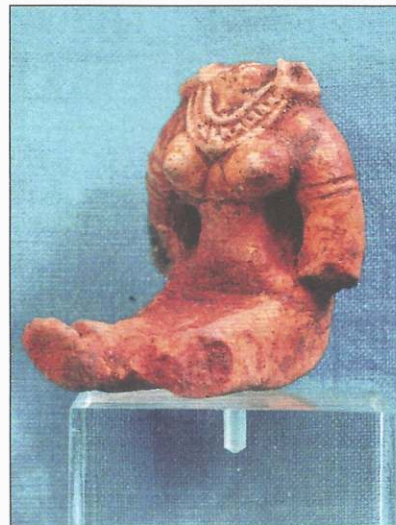
The Museum will be located at a distance of about 100 metres from the main building. "It will showcase the special Ayannar culture of the region around Auroville, and be a modern megalithic museum where all the major finds will be displayed. It will be unique for India," says Poppo. Equally unique is the location right on top of a recent excavation site which will be integrated into the Museum. "This in-situ Museum will offer an experiential quality," he explains. "It will incorporate the educational aspects in a sensory way, where different stations will invite exploration through touch, smell, sound and tactile sensations." There will be ramps where you walk over the excavation site and see partly excavated urns, with the tools and equipment used on excavation sites lying around. The Museum will also offer workshops on history and archaeology in order to create a holistic material and historical awareness.

"The problem," says Poppo, is that the Crown Road is planned right through the Museum and so would cover the excavation site. My proposal to shift the road so as to create an integral compound cannot be discussed. The only other option is to divide the compound into two, and move the road by twenty metres to go in-between the main building and the Museum. I consider this a less-than-ideal solution, but even this meets with objections as some town planners consider that the Crown must be a perfect circle, which is the only argument I have heard against my proposal." The issue has not yet been settled.

"It is the duty of every citizen of India to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture," states the Constitution of India in its section Fundamental Duties (51A). "That's exactly what we have been doing here," says Poppo. "For it is Auroville's duty to Tamil Nadu and to India to preserve their ancient culture as well as we can."

And preserve and persevere he does. The thousands of artefacts now stored elsewhere in the Bharat Nivas compound, awaiting their permanent shift to Suryamandalam's Museum and storage spaces, offer a mute testimony of his years of painstaking and loving work.

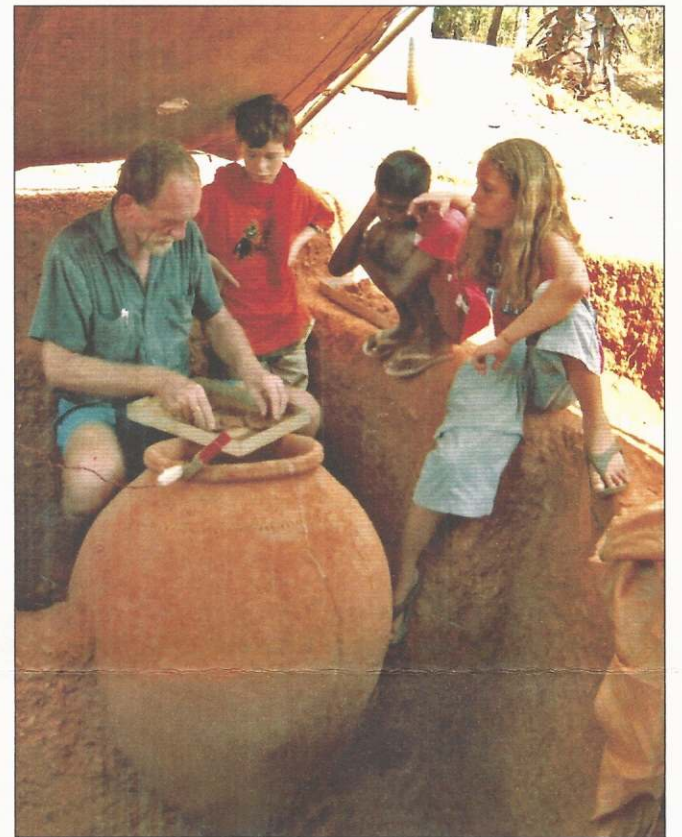
*Priya Sundaravalli
Carel*



The "Venus of Auroville"



Cornelian necklace stones with white lines etched into them

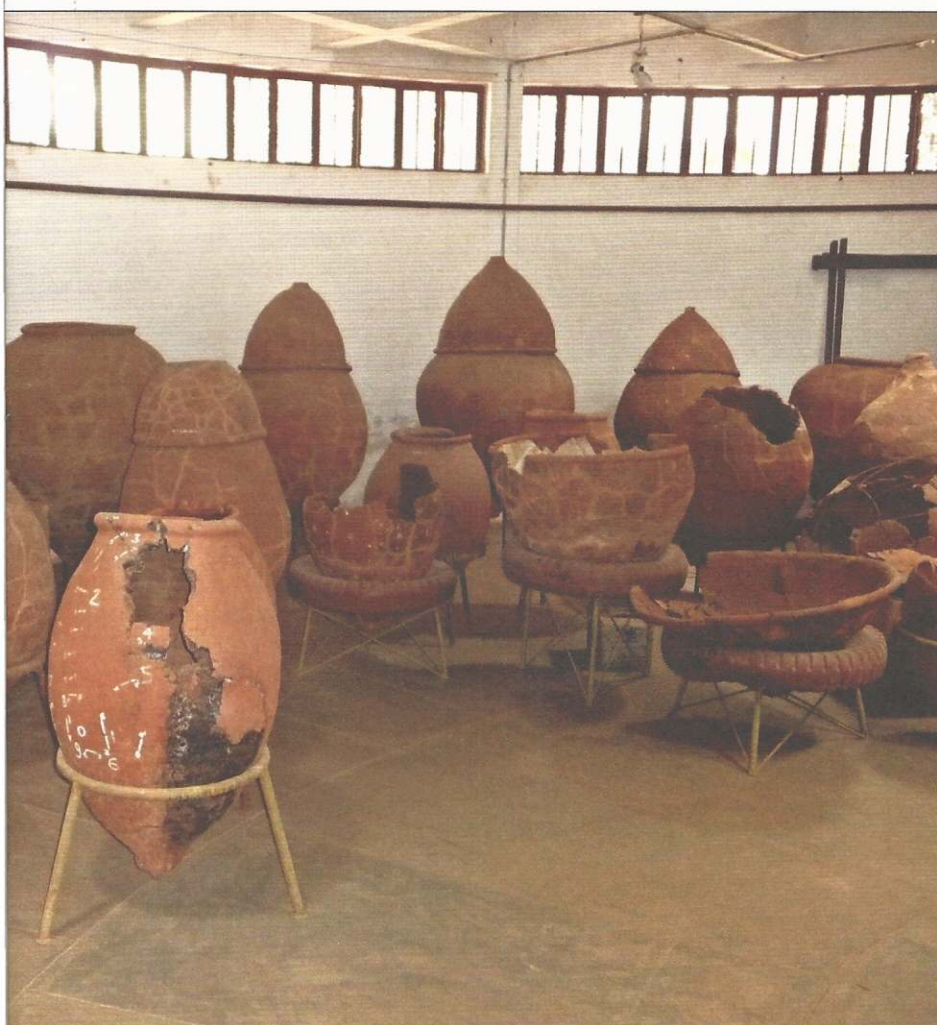


Auroville school children participating in the archaeological excavation, 2007

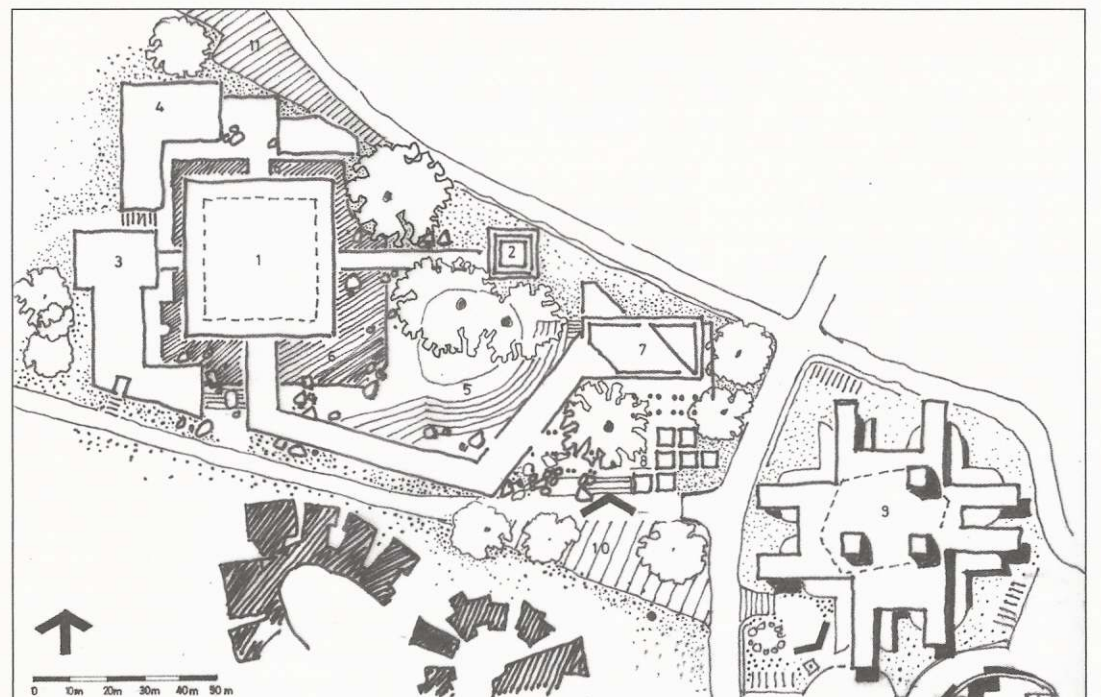


Deepanam children Devi and Priyamwada stringing the beads into necklaces

Poppo (Reinhold) Pingel, born in 1942 in Germany, has been living in Auroville since 1970. Apart from extensive low-cost village housing developments in the early years, he has also been working as an architect for projects such as the Quiet Healing Centre and apartments; the Udavi school extension; and the Afsanah guesthouse complex. He is the driving force behind Auroville's archaeological work on a voluntary basis. A monograph 'Poppo Pingel' was published in 2012.



the basement of the former CIC building at Bharat Nivas



Site map of Suryamandalam. # 1 is the Tamil Heritage Centre, # 9 the Museum. The Crown Road goes in between

Entry and Exit policy finalised

On April 3rd this year, the Working Committee, Auroville Council, Entry Service and Residents' Assembly Service jointly announced that the final version of the Entry and Exit policy has finally been finalised. It has been submitted to the Governing Board.

After an incubation period of about 16 years, the community has submitted the last 'final version' of the Auroville Foundation (Admission or Termination of Persons in the Register of Residents) Regulations, more popularly known as the 'Entry and Exit policy', to the Governing Board, for its meeting of April 23rd this year.

Why such a long incubation period? Mainly because Aurovilians, in general, don't like regulations (even though many are quick to refer to existing ones in case they believe that they haven't been followed). This was most eloquently demonstrated by a General Meeting in 1997 which described the first draft of the Regulations, prepared by the then Secretary of the Auroville Foundation Mr. N. Bala Baskar in cooperation with a senior Aurovilian and members of the then Working Committee, as "old hat" that "does not

testify to Auroville's aspiration to boldly spring towards future realizations".

A second reason is the wide variety of conflicting views that need to be taken into account. Some of these go as far as not wanting any regulations at all, either for ideological or for selfish reasons.

"The process of drafting an Entry and Exit policy that represents as much as possible the diverse realities, needs and opinions surrounding the topic has taken years," wrote the four working groups, recalling that "various Working Committees, subgroups, lawyers and concerned Aurovilians have written, rewritten and again rewritten this document." The list also includes a former member of the Governing Board and a former Secretary, whose drafts were rejected as 'completely unacceptable'. The process has resulted in files with a total thickness of over 40 centimetres.

The present Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr. Bala Baskar, unfazed that no progress had been made since his first try in 1997, took it up once again and presented in August 2012 a draft to the community for feedback. The Residents' Assembly Service (RAS) then called two general meetings to discuss the draft. From these exchanges as well as from comments on the AuroNet, Auroville's internal website, and from letters and emails, the RAS team consolidated 15 pages of feedback that were sent to Mr. Bala Baskar and the Working Committee (WC). In a series of cooperative working meetings, Mr. Bala Baskar, the WC, the RAS team and two members of the Governing Board, Dr. Aster Patel and Ms. Ameeta Mehra, incorporated the feedback received wherever possible.

The four working groups reminded the community that "This policy is unavoidable because it is specified in the Auroville Foundation Act"

and that "We do not have the choice whether to write or not. We do have the choice whether we write it ourselves, as a Residents' Assembly, or to have it written by the Governing Board." They asked the community to trust "that we all did our best to write a policy that both ensures the highest degree of freedom possible, so that we can formulate very specific internal guidelines, while at the same time adhering with the necessities of the legal framework we chose as our umbrella."

Once the Governing Board has approved the Regulations, they will be sent to the Central Government, which, as per section 32.3 of the Auroville Foundation Act, "may make changes therein which appear to it to be necessary" and then will publish the Regulations in the Official Gazette of India. Only then will the Regulations take effect.

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The Entry and Exit policy in brief

The Entry and Exit policy, as submitted to the Governing Board, aims at regulating the process for the admission of new Aurovilians as well as the process to terminate the right of a person to remain on the Register of Residents.

Constitution of Entry Service and Review Committee

The description of the constitution of the Entry Service and the Review Committee is identical. Both groups are constituted by the Residents' Assembly (RA), who either appoints the members directly or constitutes a committee to do this. Both groups consist of nine members, at least six of whom have been resident for a minimum period of five years. Each group will be composed of residents of different ages and nationalities and there will be gender balance. The members need to be qualified for the work to be done.

For both groups the term of office of the members is three years, but after completion of every year three members shall retire and three new members shall be appointed in their place. Outgoing members are eligible for re-appointment after a gap of one year.

A vacancy arising by way of resignation, expiry of term of office, or otherwise, shall be filled up by the Residents' Assembly or by the committee constituted by it for the purpose. The Residents' Assembly will have the right to remove a member and replace him or her with another person if it considers that it is in the larger interests of the community of Auroville.

The Entry Service

The Entry Service will have the mandate to welcome, register and assist an applicant seeking admission to Auroville; to accept or reject the applicant in accordance with these regulations; to request the Secretary to recommend an appropriate visa for an applicant and his/her descendants or wards, if required; and to recommend to the Secretary that the name of an applicant is entered into the Register of Residents.

The Regulations further describe that admission into the Register of Residents can happen if a person has completed the age of eighteen years; solemnly states in writing that he or she has faith in and devotion and commitment to the Charter of Auroville and the aims and ideals as enunciated by the Mother; and undertakes to respect and abide by the founding principles of Auroville (this statement has to be signed in a

prescribed form); and has been accepted by the Entry Service as a resident, after due process. This process is not further elaborated in the Regulations.

The Review Committee

The Review Committee has two mandates.

The first mandate is to conduct an enquiry upon receiving a report or request from the Working Committee or from at least sixty residents, that a resident's behaviour is incompatible with Auroville's ideals or the laws of India or that a resident is not engaged in any community work or meaningful activity relevant to the life and growth of Auroville. The Review Committee shall give due opportunity to the resident and to the working groups and persons making the report or request, to submit any declaration or explanation, before giving its finding.

The Review Committee has then the powers to reject the report; to issue a public warning or censure; to decide that a resident should make good any loss or damage caused by him/her as assessed by the Review Committee; or to direct that a resident is examined by a qualified psychiatrist / psychologist registered in India for obtaining an opinion of the resident's condition and the treatment required. Finally, the Review Committee has the power to decide that a resident has to leave Auroville permanently or for a certain period of time, and determine the period within which that resident has to leave Auroville and to recommend to the Working Committee that the name of a resident be removed from the Register.

The second mandate of the Review Committee is to examine whether the name of a resident should be removed from the Register of Residents, in case the resident has not been residing in Auroville for a consecutive period of three years. While examining such a case, the Review Committee shall give due opportunity to the resident to offer a justification or explanation.

The Regulations further state that of the proceedings of the Review Committee shall be concluded within a period of six months.

Removal of Names from the Register of Residents

The Register of Residents is maintained by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. The Regulations specify that the name of a resident shall be removed from the Register at his or her own request; or if it is found that the name has been

entered by fraud, misrepresentation or by suppression of material information; or if the person has been found guilty of a criminal offence by a Court in India; or upon the recommendation of the Working Committee, based on the findings of the Review Committee.

The Special Committee

The Regulations state that the Residents Assembly shall constitute a Special Committee to consider appeals under these regulations. The Committee is also empowered to consider any other matter as may be decided by the Residents Assembly.

The Special Committee shall consist of four members of the Governing Board other than the Chairman and the ex-officio members and three Residents nominated by the Residents Assembly. The tenure of the Special Committee shall be co-terminus with the term of the Governing Board. The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation shall be the Convener-Secretary to the Special Committee.

The person directly affected by the decision of the Review Committee may file an appeal against the decision to the Residents' Assembly through the Working Committee within a period of fifteen days from the date of the decision. The Working Committee will refer all appeals received within this period to the Special Committee, and pending the proceedings of the Special Committee, the decision of the Review Committee will be suspended.

The Special Committee shall decide an appeal within thirty days. It may decide appeals by circulation or in a meeting, provided at least five members of the Special Committee participate in such decision making process. The decision of the Special Committee to confirm or revoke the decision of the Review Committee shall be final and binding and the Secretary shall give effect to the decision of the Special Committee.

Re-entry

The Regulations state that no application for re-entry of a name removed from the Register shall be entertained for a period of three years from the date of removal, except in cases, where the Review Committee has decided that a resident has to leave Auroville for a shorter period, in which case the application for re-entry can be made after the expiry of that shorter period.

The Entry and Exit policy – a comment

The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, the participating members of the Governing Board (GB) and the participating working groups are to be commended for the work done. The policy is a simple and we may expect that the Government of India will have no difficulty in approving it and publishing it in the Gazette of India.

There are only two aspects that may be problematic. The first is of determining if a person who has left Auroville three years ago should cease to be an Aurovilian. Contrary to the membership rules of many organizations, the Regulations do not contain an automatic cut-off date. If a person has not taken a conscious decision to stop being an Aurovilian, by informing the Working

Committee or the Secretary that his or her name can be removed from the Register of Residents, the decision to recommend removing the name rests with the Review Committee.

This burdens the Review Committee. Firstly, it has to be kept informed every month of each Aurovilian who has left three years ago. Then, it will have to contact the Aurovilian, assuming that his or her whereabouts can be found. The Committee is also bound to pursue all cases; it cannot decide to pursue one and not the other. Lastly, it will have to build up a jurisprudence of sorts: when should the absence lead to removal of a name from the Register; and when is an absence justified and, if so, how much longer can that person stay away from Auroville without losing resident status?

The issue has a practical impact. Almost all Aurovilians donate their private resources to build a house or apartment in Auroville. If they leave for a limited period of time, a house-sitter is appointed in consultation with the Housing Service. But if that time period exceeds three years, and the Review Committee decides that the name of the person should be removed from the Register of Residents, the right to come back and re-occupy the house or apartment is gone. There is no right to a monetary compensation.

The second problematic aspect is that though the Regulations mention that the Review Committee may take the decision that a person has to leave Auroville, it also mentions that the Review Committee will recommend to the Working Committee that

a name be removed from the Register. The Working Committee, in turn, makes a recommendation to the Secretary, who maintains the Register of Residents.

Here a potential conflict may arise as the Regulations do not specify what is to happen if the Working Committee disagrees with the decision of the Review Committee. The history of Auroville is full of such disagreements between working groups. As per the Regulations, the Working Committee has no authority to cancel the decision of the Review Committee, and the Review Committee cannot bypass the Working Committee and make a direct recommendation to the Secretary. This opens the conundrum that a person has to leave because of a decision by the Review Committee

while his or her name would remain on the Register because the Working Committee refuses to follow up on the Review Committee's recommendation.

The Regulations contain the possibility for an affected person to appeal a decision of the Review Committee with the Special Committee, which in majority consist of people not living in Auroville (the members of the GB). In this way, there won't be a possibility for 'preferential' treatment based on likes or dislikes. It would have been good if the Regulations also specify that the Special Committee have authority to decide cases where there is difference of views between the Review Committee and the Working Committee.

Carel

Circle work for individual and collective growth

“Circle work involves a number of people sitting together in a circle engaging in a type of purposeful exchange that has specific guidelines,” explains Aubrey Hornsby, who with his wife Shari Hindman shared their personal experience with this method in a recent visit to Auroville. The number of participants can vary – there can be as many as 35 people, more optimally there are 4 to 12, and it can be very effective with just two. This method of group work is being used widely by the collective intelligence movement [see *AV Today*, February 2013, “Collective Intelligence”] as well as by Ken Wilber’s Integral movement to engage with specific issues such as personal growth, sustainability, and many other topics. Circles can be focused on collective work, psychological healing, almost any mental concept, spiritual practice, or as Aubrey and Shari like to use it, delving more deeply into Sri Aurobindo’s poem *Savitri*.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of circle work is the depth of sharing that takes place. Depending on the focus of the circle, people may speak about the most intimate aspects of their lives, or in business contexts, things which otherwise might remain hidden. Rather than dialogue, storytelling, or directive speech, the more common ways we communicate with each other, Aubrey explains that in circle work “each person offers something of substance in his mental, emotional, or soul asset base to the center of the circle.” The circle form allows everyone to participate, to make their offering. Then after an interval of silence and collective “holding” of that offering, the next person in circle makes their offering which may or may not be related to the previous person’s offering. The first round of the circle will probably be a check-in round to help people settle in and be seen, “to populate the field.” Then things can deepen spontaneously, with very little prompting.

Proceeding around the circle, once, twice, maybe several times, a field of resonance begins to be felt. “With multiple turns of the circle and collective aspiration, a type of progress is achieved that we call ‘spiraling,’” says Aubrey. He explains that it is this willingness to sit collectively with something of significance, it could be any subject, for a long enough time, in silence and speaking, everyone participating, that allows a resonant field to become palpable. By patiently calling upon the emergent possibility, it is not unusual for extraordinary gifts of consciousness to be received.

In circle work, everyone is allowed to speak from their perspective, and are respected for their contribution. It is said that everyone in the circle is an essential part of the circle and that each circle is perfect as it is. Also, that each person’s contribution, whether in silence or in words, feelings, or thoughts helps to “populate the field.” Each person in the circle is expected to participate with a non-judgmental frame of mind.

Agreements

Shari explains that each circle makes certain agreements about how they will operate, and the more sophisticated, internal, or spiritual these agreements are, the greater and more profound are the outcomes. While these agreements may differ from group to group, perhaps foremost among them is the agreement to hold, respect and work with what everyone offers. “If you find yourself judging,” Shari says, “you must stop yourself, just like you would cut off a thought in meditation.”

Perhaps the most common practical agreements for circle work are that you do not interrupt another person while they are speaking, and you do not go on and on, respecting that the time is limited and everyone should have the same opportunity to speak. Another agreement is that when someone is saying something, you do not think about something else, but are very present with what the person is saying. Typically there is an agreement that after someone has finished speaking, which may be signaled with a comment such as “I’m complete,” or the passing of a



Shari Hindman and Aubrey Hornsby

special object to the next person or to the center of the circle, there is a pause such as a deep breath, so that a space is created where the next emergent contribution can come forward. Another agreement is that you are always offering to the center; you do not engage in dialogue with another person leaving others in the circle out.

Another common agreement which facilitates deeper sharing is that when you leave the circle you do not talk to others about what somebody has revealed. Obviously trust is essential and may need to be developed patiently within the group. The reward is that as the greater levels of trust become real to the group, higher states of Love become self-evident. Love has a relationship with action: Love can be extraordinarily responsive and generates collective action. This is called the Trust-Love-Action spiral.

Going beyond stories

Shari explains that in true circle work, there is an aim to go beyond telling stories. Whereas we each have stories, mental constructs about ourselves or about a particular situation which are important, they tend to keep us tied to the surface. Often such stories become stagnant and remain basically unchanged over long periods of time. They typically are more revealing of knots, voids, traumas, resistance, and impediments to progress than they are to the spontaneous offerings of authentic personal substance. She explains that this allows us to explore places in ourselves which are still unknown and which are always changing and developing, and to new places which may be emerging in the present moment.

In offering one’s deeper substance to the center of the circle, there is an acknowledgement that the center can enlighten or inform the circle. As Shari eloquently puts it: “Collectively we put our energies together, we form a vessel. There is a space that we are offering to, and we release ourselves from the regular ego structures that we have and we open ourselves to the possibility of more. When we release a knot or fill a void, more flow is possible. Consciousness is like water, it flows and accumulates in greater depth, thus establishing the gravity for more consciousness and the substance for more powerful force. The same happens within a group, as the depth of the group starts to become accessible then more consciousness flows to it and the group progresses rapidly. In a very sophisticated setting, we have the possibility of creating a vessel that is prepared to receive a descent, whether that comes from the ideal or from the intuitive mind, or elsewhere, depending on the level of sophistication of the participants. It is most defi-

nately an opportunity for participants who are doing soul work to surrender to the soul, which can then direct the mind, life and body.”

Aubrey sums it up, “In fact there is a group soul and it becomes activated and exerts sovereignty as we offer ourselves completely. Circle work not only implies ‘center’, it also implies circumference, the inclusivity of everyone. And it becomes an initiatory process for spiraling which seems to be essential to sustained spiritual and practical advances.”

Clarifying collective vision and mission

Aubrey explains that he uses circle work to clarify the vision and mission of corporations, especially small corporations because you can easily get stakeholders together to discuss founding principles. “People in the company come together to discuss their mission and vision, and their roles in relation to that mission. Obviously, clarifying, committing to and taking decisions relative to the mission and vision is the most immediate result, but empowering, energizing, and activating personnel is a dynamic and continuous outcome when the work is taken seriously and reconciliation to mission is an established practice. One of the best outcomes of this is that each person selects themselves in or out of the company based on his ability to resonate with the other participants relative to the expressed mission. As it becomes clearly enunciated and reconciled, some individuals may find that this is their true calling, whereas others may feel that they do not resonate with the mission expressed by the other participants and choose to pursue other interests. The person is then supported in his pursuit of leaving the circle with grace. Normally in business what happens is that people are not sure about these things, and they may work for years and discover that they actually do not cohere with the mission that they are serving. During that period there would likely have been conflicts that emerged causing a lot of pain. It is wonderful to see people select themselves out of an organization before that animosity emerges.”

Shari adds that it is always a good thing for a committee or development team to periodically check-in about their vision and mission, because even if they have done that work, after a period of time, that mission may need to be tweaked in response to the needs of that collective. At the same time, each person can explore how they are presently fitting in with the goals of the team.

Aubrey notes that a group’s agreement to do circle work makes it easier for them to work together as a team. There is a platform built of mutual respect, honoring, resonance, understanding how each person acts and what is important to them, how much at the center of the mission they are or how much at the periphery.

Right action in the world

We appreciate circle work as preparation for right action. Circle work can help us step out of conventional reality so that we can come back to it with greater capability for right action. Several consecutive days of deep work is strongly generative. You become vaster and more energized. You become powerfully intimate with more of your inner self and more of the inner landscape of the group. Not only do you have more of yourself available for any task at hand, you also have the resonant power of the group. But perhaps most important is the opportunity for continuous reconciliation with your own

and the group’s purpose and the corrective processes of authenticity and integrity. All of us have had the experience of taking an action and discovering later how unfortunate that decision was. This helps mitigate that. But it also makes action more direct, focused, powerful and effective.

The Auroville context

Circle work can also be used to establish paradigms of governance, which Aubrey notes seems to be a core issue for the decision-makers of Auroville. How do we govern ourselves, what are our agreements, how do we make and take decisions? Should everybody be at the table or are there people who shouldn’t be at the table? Aubrey believes that for Auroville, circle work would be the easiest, quickest, most graceful way to resolve things which otherwise might take years to resolve. Once the agreements are formed, it is so much easier to ask somebody to conform to the group’s expectation.

Another problem for Auroville which circle work could facilitate is how to construct compliance without policing. For Aubrey, there is no better way to do this than circle work. He explains that by engaging in circle work, everybody has already deeply agreed to be compliant, or has agreed to leave or to work at a different level. He adds that what needs to happen in organizations as large as Auroville is multiple circles collaborating in a larger field of circles, until everybody comes into agreement about how to operate together.

In Auroville, the differing cultures, and entrenched, conflicting points of view can present formidable obstacles to agreement. Aubrey explains that this is a type of problem that can temporarily stop the circle process until it is dealt with. He elaborates that this is the group equivalent of the individual healing problem which often comes up in circle work. Often, he says, there is an individual in the group with a traumatized psychology or an emotional issue, which he identifies as knots, voids or traumas in the psyche. He has been exploring processes to deal with such issues by working with experts dealing with conflict and trauma of different types, for example, in the socio-political field. Aubrey explains that you actually have to treat or deal with each one of those traumas, you can’t bypass them. The respectful, nonjudgmental, and supportive character of the circle facilitates this healing process, but other tools are available. He surmises that in Auroville, some circles may need to spend a significant time dealing specifically with group traumas, problems, crises, conflicts in order to be able to make progress on the issues.

Facilitating spiritual growth?

Shari says, “In summary, one of the beautiful things of the circle which is hard explain until you experience it, is the emergent possibility. If you learn to sit quietly in yourself, not worrying about what to say, or what people think of you, or reacting to what somebody else is saying, and stay very quiet, then there is a possibility that something will emerge from you that is vaster, wider, higher, deeper, greater. It comes spontaneously because you get out of the way.”

Aubrey adds that in that enlarged awareness, things which may have been problems for you in the past may seem trivial, and easier to move through. For example, if you were bound up in an inner argument with someone, such that every time you saw that person it would bring up within you that conflict, then this method is a perfect way to move past that. He notes that it is the Mother’s grace that allows you to move past that conflict, but the circle becomes the context or vessel for you to receive that grace collectively. In the same way that when we meditate, we construct a vessel for the descent of the Mother’s grace, the circle creates a collective opportunity to build the same sort of vessel.

Aubrey concludes that as we have moved from the age of the guru to the age of the individual, now we are moving towards something that is greater than each individual having their own private reality. The collective reality needs tools and methods for receiving grace and divinity, and circle work is one of the tools that has emerged out of many people’s efforts and is available to those who are willing to work intentionally. It is a productive method of working together for a refined group of spiritual seekers. He believes it is a challenge for each group to find its own unique method of doing this sort of work to further the evolution of the species.

Larry

Circle work has commonalities with ‘compassionate listening’ [see *AV Today*, March 2013] and the approach based on the 12 powers of the Mother [see *AV Today*, January 2012].

Compassionate Listening cultivates inner strength, builds self awareness, and helps self-regulation and acquiring wisdom. It is a skill to enhance interpersonal relations as well as to bring individuals or groups together to bridge their differences. In compassionate listening one cultivates compassion, develops the fair witness, respects the Self and Others, and learns to listen with and speak from the heart. It is also a healing gift to offer a compassionate listening session to a person who feels marginalised or in pain.

In ‘The 12 powers of the Mother’, approach, individuals are asked to consider the connections between the 12 powers of the Mother and various areas of work and activity in Auroville, using their intuition. This method is being carried forward by Jaya and the CIRHU team and has great potential for future work on many issues in Auroville.

Shari Hindman and Aubrey Hornsby currently reside in Boulder, Colorado, and facilitate the ‘Savitri by Skype’ reading circle. For more information, they can be reached at sharihindman1@comcast.net.

Developing the Crown

It is one of the objectives of Auroville's Town Development Council (TDC), also known as l'Avenir d'Auroville, to manifest Auroville's planned road network and infrastructure. This work proceeds on the basis of the Auroville Mobility Plan 2005 [see box elsewhere on this page], be it that today smaller Right of Ways are planned. However, many of the major roads envisaged in this plan – the Crown, the Outer Ring Road and some of the 12 Radials – are being challenged, either for their location or for their necessity.

In the last few months the topic of the Crown Road, which is envisaged to encircle the inner city, has come up. After paving sections from the Solar Kitchen to the Youth Centre, work on this road is stalled for many reasons. A major reason is that many of the lands required are not yet owned by Auroville. Another is the difference of views on the Crown. Residents of Centre Field and Aurodam, the architect of the Tamil Heritage Centre and youth at the Youth Centre, they all object to the routing of the Crown or question its necessity. And residents of Surrender community, which borders the section that has been laid, complain bitterly about noise pollution at night.

The issue came to the front because of the need to lay a High Tension (HT) cable along the pre-defined route of the Crown Road through Centre Field and Aurodam. In mid-February, residents of the affected communities and others signed a petition against the laying of the HT cable. A meeting was held on March 8th with TDC members to discuss the issues. The TDC explained that this cable is a part of the main Auroville infrastructure and that infrastructure services including electricity, water, and telecom are always laid along permanent Right-Of-Ways / roads for future access and maintenance – in this case,



A stretch of the Crown Road ending at the Youth Centre

along the routing of the future Crown Road.

The need of the HT cable

The HT cable is part of the overall electrical infrastructure plan that involves replacing the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) overhead lines with Auroville's own underground cable system and Auroville getting its own dedicated feeder from the nearest TNEB substation. This would give a higher level of reliability and safety and be a step to getting continuous power supply and not being subjected to daily power cuts. Having its own internal HT distribution network would also give Auroville the possibility to 'wheel' the energy generated by Auroville's two wind turbines into Auroville and feed rooftop solar PV and other locally generated renewable energy into the local grid, for usage within Auroville. In brief, it would be a big step towards cleaner, more economical energy.

The urgency about laying the cable is because of the TNEB's demand that Auroville connect a minimum load to the dedicated feeder. The TDC is ready to pledge its commitment, given the manifold benefits of converting the TNEB-owned overhead line system to a much more reliable Auroville-owned and maintained underground system. The TDC promised the residents of Centre Field and Aurodam that the laying of the HT cable would not impact their houses, but would instead go through gardens using manual labour.

The need for the Crown

Though the residents acknowledge the benefits of the proposed electrical infrastructure plan, the laying of the HT cable is seen as a first step that will ultimately lead to the construction of the Crown Road itself. The TDC acknowledges that the Crown Road and

infrastructure are related, but state that the laying of the cable does not mean that the road will come soon.

The argument failed to convince the residents. They consider that the mobility concepts laid down in the Auroville Master Plans 2001 and 2004 and in the Auroville Mobility Plan 2005 are either too visionary or are outdated and that the TDC has first to present a new mobility plan based on present-day realities. The main question is: what kind of traffic will be using this road? Serious concerns were shared about the impact of uncontrolled traffic introduced by a thruway and no sense was seen for a paved road in a residential area without a proper mobility and security study.

The need for a perfectly circular road was also questioned, as 'the original Galaxy model that attracted so many of us has no such perfectly circular road, but is beautiful by its dynamism'. Several residents feel that a perfectly circular Crown Road strangles the movement of an evolving Galaxy. 'It creates a city closed in on itself rather than embodying evolution.' The TDC has meanwhile agreed to update its earlier mobility studies 'to arrive at an evolving mobility plan'.

Lack of community participation

The residents also shared another concern, that of the lack of community participation in planning the city. They perceive the attitude of the TDC as 'hostile', 'one-sided', 'dogmatic' and leading to 'imposition'; as 'we have the Truth' against 'you residents are only in the way and stop the manifestation of The Mother's Auroville'. The fact that the Crown has to be a perfect circle just demonstrates this attitude, they say, pointing out that proposals to lay the HT cable on a different routing were rejected by the TDC.

The TDC has responded to this with two

arguments. The first one mandated by Auroville Assembly 'to preserve the Master Plan', which in

The second one is that infrastructure needs to be Right-of-Ways in the design corridors along the roads for and maintenance. The HT Crown ring mains and will future loads on both sides will have branch lines connect follow the Radial roads loads in the various Additional underground LT cables, water pipes, and water drainage pipes will be laid in the future along the Way.

The residents point out that the mandate is to maintain and goes against itself as says that the TDC has to conduct studies for developing the city in line with the community ignored. 'Some of the decisions that L'Avenir has years have led to a confrontational consensual climate,' they stand for human unity but not disunity in the plans. Will the city to develop with this attitude? The example of the city of where wide community participation in the redesign of the plans and urban development appreciation

A 'Not In My Backyard' attitude

The residents stress against the Galaxy and that the Crown Road going through the city should not be interpreted as a 'Not In My Backyard' attitude. 'The presently planned will affect Auroville,' they argue. Once past, the Dreamcatchers group to make a difference in

Planning mobility

The Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (perspective 2025), which was approved by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in April 2001, describes in the section *Development Proposals* the envisaged future road network to and within Auroville.

Access and bypass roads

To reach Auroville, four principal *Access Roads* are proposed, two from the Tindivanam – Pondicherry highway, which would connect the Industrial Zone and International Zone; and two from the East Coast Road, which would link the Residential Zone and Cultural Zone. The *Access Roads* would bypass existing villages. Thus each zone would have an independent and direct access from the state highways.

The Master Plan further suggests that, in addition to these four *Access Roads*, two more roads would be created, one to the north and another to the south of Auroville, to serve as bypass roads for traffic not bound for Auroville. The planning and construction of the *Access Roads* and the bypass roads would need to be taken up by the government of Tamil Nadu.

Outer Ring Road, Crown Road and Radials

All *Access Roads* would connect to the *Outer Ring Road*, a circular road which runs at the outer perimeter of the city and the inner perimeter of the Greenbelt, so in between the city and the Greenbelt. A second circular road, the *Crown Road*, would circumscribe the inner city centre. The *Outer Ring Road* would be connected to the *Crown Road* through a number of *Radial Roads*. As the City area is seen as a 'non-polluting vehicular zone' and would, progressively, be used by non-polluting vehicles, *Service Nodes* would be built at the intersection of each of the four main *Access Roads* and the *Outer Ring Road*. They would provide parking space for cars and motorbikes and serve as transshipment space. People would park their (polluting) vehicles here and use the municipal transport service to go to their destination within the city. Goods from outside would here be unloaded from polluting trucks and reloaded on non-polluting trucks.

Billinger and Master Plan 2004

Auroville architect Helmut Schmidt invited German traffic consultant, Planingsbüro Billinger, to elaborate these ideas. In August 2001, the study *Auroville Mobility Concept* was submitted in which Billinger warned that, if Auroville wants to be true to its ecological aims, it should not provide a dominant position to motorised transport. Billinger's proposal envisages the street as a common space for all and excludes fast moving vehicular traffic

by shifting it to the periphery, e.g. the *Outer Ring Road*.

In 2004, a second Master Plan was made, the *Auroville Master Plan 2004 – Directions for Growth*, funded under the Asia Urbs Programme of the European Commission. This Master Plan expanded on the concepts of the first Master Plan to chart out a road map for the period 2004-2009.

The Auroville Mobility Plan 2005

In February 2005, the detailed plan *Auroville Mobility – Planning Policy and Design Criteria for movement, traffic and roads* was published. It had been prepared by TDC's predecessor *Auroville's Future* and was approved by Chief Architect Roger Anger. This plan re-interpreted Billinger's Auroville Mobility Concept and states:

'Auroville, to be true to The Mother's vision, will provide alternative forms of mobility to suit the needs for peaceful conditions throughout the city area. Today's type of environmentally-polluting, hazardous, and high-speed motorized transport will no longer have its predominant, overbearing position - the individual will regain his own spatial dignity.'

It then gives the following planning principles of circulation:

'The indications given by the Mother (four zones in the form of a rosary) for an experimental town favouring the evolving conditions for man has been translated into the concept of the Galaxy. The 12 Radials, connecting the Crown Road to the Outer Ring Road, are the dynamic representation of the Mother's symbol.'

Based on these principles, the plan reiterates that inside the town, there would be no private or independent traffic. Municipal shuttle services, accessible within reasonable walking distances from any point in the town, would serve the need of transport within the city and connect to the *Service Nodes*. Traffic within the city would be at a speed of approximately 15 km/h, as indicated by the Mother.

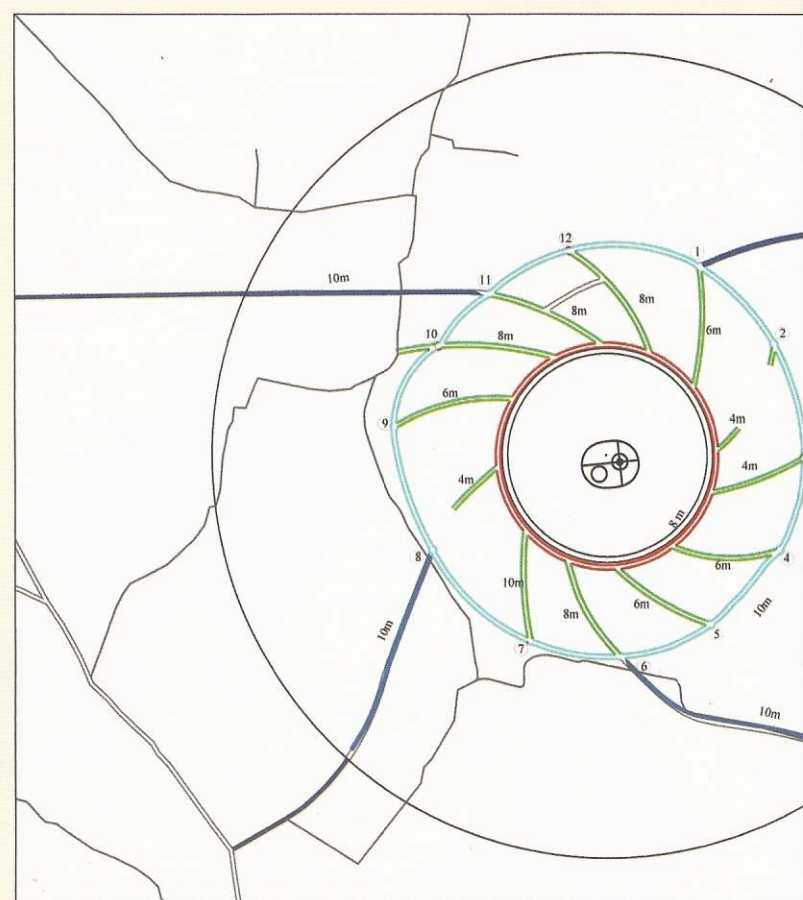
Service Nodes would be located at the intersection of the *Access Roads* and the *Outer Ring Road*, and also at the outer edge of the Greenbelt. Guests and visitors arriving at Auroville by bus, car or two-wheelers would be received here and move with Auroville's non-polluting municipal transport to the place of their destination. Here also construction and other materials would be downloaded and transferred to non-polluting Aurovilian transportation services, which would only

be allowed to enter the city at certain times of the day. (The plan mentions the possible exception of ready-mix concrete lorries.) The *Service Nodes* could also host various Auroville services and government offices.

Road details

In the section *Design Criteria and Guidelines* details are given about various roads.

Crown Road: The inner city area and the Matrimandir area will be a pedestrian zone defined by the *Crown Road*, in the form



Map from the Auroville Mobility Plan 2005 showing the four Access Roads (red) and the twelve Radial Roads (green). Service Nodes are planned at the intersection of the Access Roads and the Outer Ring Road.

A proposal for participatory working groups

is that it has been the Residents' key elements of the Crown. It all underground be laid along the designated service corridor accessibility cable is part of the feed existing and of the Crown and ected to it that will to feed the sector township zones. services including optical fibre cables will also have to be e Crown Right of

t that this interpre- ighly questionable the mandate also nge in 'creating plan' and 'collabo- ', which are being sions and develop- pushed over the itational instead of y say. 'Auroville there is fundamen- e cannot expect the ount of disunity.' 'Dublin was cited, rticipation led to a l to a sustainable iated by all.

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Crown Road concept called *Crownways*. This proposal suggested the development of a denser, pedestrian-friendly urban environment through an exploration of the subtle qualities of the Galaxy model. But at the time this approach was rejected by TDC's predecessor *Auroville's Future*, most probably because it did not respect the perfect circularity of the Crown. The TDC however, feels that this argument is beside the point as the *Crownways* would not change the routing of the infrastructure corridor.

In 2008, planning expert Dr. K.T. Ravindran gave talks about the galaxy and the crown. He argued that one cannot plan a city by translating a diagram into a plan. He also argued that when the Mother spoke about the galaxy, she was talking about an ever-expanding consciousness which has infinite potential for evolution and that to confine it in two ring roads would be a travesty of the original concept. He suggested re-studying the current plan from the original concept of Sri Aurobindo's idea of evolution. But his words have failed to make an impact.

TDC Advisory Council and GB

The issue is at present stuck. The TDC believes that in the best interest of Auroville as a whole the proposed HT ring mains should be laid along the Crown Road in the designated service corridors. It requests marking and clearing the Right-of-Way along the Crown Road for the installation of underground services, and says that the mobility on the Solar Kitchen to Bharat Nivas segments will be introduced on the basis of updated mobility plans from time to time.

The Governing Board has appointed its member Dr. Mallika Sarabhai to be part of the TDC Advisory Council in an attempt to get things moving again. The TDC hopes that a final decision can be taken as soon as possible, preferably before July, if needed with the facilitation of an Aurovilian and the TDC Advisory Council.

Carel

a ring. The Crown will contain a continuous, 3 meter wide, covered (minimum) pedestrian boulevard forming a major artery continuity weaving along and through the Crown.

Radials: The twelve *Radials Roads* will include a tree-lined (shaded) pedestrian boulevard and separate cycle paths alongside the dial carriageway. The Right-of-Way will depend on location.

Outer Ring Road: The Outer Ring Road sits on the boundary the inner limit of the Greenbelt. It will consist of vehicular car-gateway where cyclists will be accommodated on separate paths alongside the road.



oads (dark blue), the Outer Ring Road (light blue), with the Matrimandir Oval in its centre. Access Roads and the Outer Ring Road.

It has become self-evident that the Auroville Residents' Assembly (RA) is a non participative body in the governance of Auroville. The RA has its basis in the Auroville Foundation Act but the Act has left the implementation on how it functions to the residents. The vision behind it was to allow for broad-based inputs to the collective life, and so to ensure self governance and the well-being of Auroville by the residents. But the decision making and implementation on most issues today lack broad-based inputs that would promote satisfaction to the residents.

For example, the members of three major working groups have recently been selected by a limited group of residents. For the constitution of the present Working Committee, the Auroville Council and the Town Development Council (also known as L'Avenir d'Auroville), the residents accepted that there would be Selection Committees. The arguments were that (1) in this way the issue would not become politicized, and (2) that some people have worked in these groups and are thus more suited to select working members than other residents.

Clearly, these arguments have proven to be wrong. What also became clear is that this way of selection has not added many new people to the group. There has been a tendency to concentrate on well-known persons, who keep changing positions from one group to another. This has led to the complaint that our governance is an oligarchy, composed of a small group of old-timers and that not many capable others have a chance to participate.

However, the working groups too complain. They often feel that they are working in a vacuum, without any power of implementation, and that often decisions are being contested or ignored, as was highlighted in the article *Auroville governance in crisis – are there solutions?* published in the April 2013 issue of *Auroville Today*.

New working model

I propose that the community develop new, collaborative and participatory working group structures, in which any willing resident would be allowed to participate and contribute. Such working groups would have four types of memberships: Facilitators, Coordinators, Resource Persons, and Listeners.

All positions in all categories would be open to any resident by self-volunteering, the caveat being that others in the team should approve the volunteer's competence. The group decides who amongst them will fulfill which function. Those who are not approved by the team for any task can still participate by opting to be Listeners. They, the goodwill ambassadors, are the persons who listen in to all that is happening and are the silent witness to support the working of the group. No resident is denied a choice to participate.

Work and responsibilities of each of the categories

Facilitators: Facilitators are full-time members of the working groups and are committed to keep the working group operational. A group can have three, four or five facilitators. The idea is not about quorum on any decisions, but to mark work progress through tasks and issues closures, reporting to the community in a timely manner. Since this is a critical and full-time work, the facilitators of one working group do not participate in other working groups. This opens up the dynamism in each working group to allow full play. Many Aurovilians will then get a chance to be facilitators in one of many working groups thus allowing the community to develop competence in self-governance.

Facilitators have as task:

- to prepare / track long-term directional goals
- to chart out short-term operational goals
- to prioritize tasks and short term deliverables
- to deal with urgent matters
- to ensure that no issues are let to fall off the plate. (Some may be abandoned or moved for a rethink in the future)
- to find a replacement if temporarily unavailable – to coordinate the communication flow between co-coordinators, resource persons and listeners (goodwill ambassadors).

Coordinators: Coordinators have a part-time job on and as needed basis for completing a task on the group facilitators' list in concert with an independent group of resource experts drawn from cross functional pool of capabilities. The number of coordinators in a working group can vary from three to five, as necessary.

- A group facilitator calls upon one of several coordinators of the working group to assign a task to be completed in a timely manner.
- The coordinator in turn sets up an ad-hoc team of the group's resource persons to complete the task at hand in a timely fashion, while keeping the working group in the know of the status and issues in the execution of the task, so that the full team, including the listeners, are on the same page. They report back to the facilitators upon the status, completion or any major hiccup.
- The facilitators and coordinators meet once every three to four weeks to briefly exchange face to face the long-term and short-term goals.

Resource persons: Resource persons are people who offer their expertise in a domain of knowledge to complete a given task for the team. They cooperate and contribute what it takes for the best outcome of the task and the team. The goodwill and team spirit is the overarching reason apart from domain expertise for a person to sign up as a resource person in one or more teams. The time commitment is intermittent and thus allows complete flexibility for the person to help the team in their best capabilities.



Chandresh

Listeners (goodwill ambassadors): The listeners are the critical components of a working group. They are residents who would like to be the witness-support for the working group. The listeners receive all the communication among the group teams and members. They become aware of the short and long-term goals, they see which tasks were farmed out to which sub groups, which team has successfully delivered their task, which team needs help or is stuck, how any hot issues are addressed or are yet to be resolved. The listeners are the future active team members for any areas where they choose to participate in. A listener can silently support many groups in which she takes the mode of just being present. The residents have full passive play into the working groups with this witness mode. They can in future or anytime choose to become active.

Working Group Operational Structure

The working group's broad outline of tasks, resource needs and team member capabilities (facilitator, coordinator, resource person) are drafted by a study group that consists of persons who have worked in a particular working group before. Each working group will have its unique set of capabilities for the three types of workers.

The launch of a group is open to any and all residents of Auroville. All those who feel that they fit the listed criteria are welcome in the formation stage of a group. Each can put his or her name in a list along with the role for which he or she feels qualified to participate. All the persons on the list meet and identify the type of workers from amongst themselves: the facilitators, the coordinators, the resource persons and the listeners. The selection of role type is based on peer review within the team. A person who was not selected for a working role by the peer team members may opt to be a listener or quit the working group at this formation stage. This allows all willing Aurovilians to meaningfully partake in the work. The individual roles may evolve and change, the group dynamics may reorient and the team expand or shrink as necessary. Any person may also join in any time as a listener after having offered her request to the facilitators of the group, such as on becoming a Newcomer or Aurovilian.

The facilitators start the operations of a working group. The forum is setup for all the participants of the working group and the team membership roster along with roles is duly set up and published. The facilitators meet up and start with the goals, tasks and work. Each month a work report is drafted, seconded within a few days by the other team members; listeners may also give their observations to the facilitators in a manner agreed by the group.

As participation in a working group is a privilege, those of the team members who have not been giving inputs or have stopped to participate meaningfully will be removed from the forum by the team as a whole. The role and station of facilitator may be changed by the group. A replacement of coordinators and resource persons is done dynamically on the request of a team member him or herself or by the group as a whole if the group feels that the group work is hindered due to mismatch in group dynamics due to one or more members. Listeners may feel motivated after a few months on the forum and decide to jump in by offering to take on an active role.

Every three months, all the listeners have to reconform their desire to continue the silent listening, otherwise they also will be removed from the forum.

All the documents, materials, information, meeting notes, discussions are shared on the forum for the team members to view and work with. Access for modification and archiving is with the facilitators. As the knowledge and information may be sensitive at times, all team members work with an ethical code of conduct for the benefit of Auroville.

Conclusion

The proposed working group model for self governance allows for a wider role of the residents in any area that a resident feels motivated to contribute to. It is based on self-volunteering and has a self-correcting and self-regulating operational set up. As such, I expect that the group dynamics will be less open to manipulations. But human nature is complex and we may expect to meet blind spots in this self governance model as we roll it out. This should not stop us from trying this other means towards a participatory working group which is sorely lacking today.

Chandresh Patel

An experiment in consciousness development

The Pour Tous Distribution Centre (PTDC) has just celebrated its 7th birthday. The core team reflects on the first seven years of the experiment and shares its plans for the future of PTDC and of a cash-free economy in Auroville.

Auroville Today: You were all very clear you did not want PTDC to be an ordinary shop. Why?

Nicole: We felt if we want a different kind of society in Auroville we would have to try different ways of functioning, especially here at the centre. Mother said there should be no exchange of money in Auroville and that Aurovilians would give their work and have their needs covered. PTDC is an attempt in that direction. Turning the clock back once money exchange and commercialism have set in is very difficult so it was important to us to prevent that by proposing another experiment.

Isha: At that time, there was a strong drive in the community to establish a cash-free internal economy. The FAMC set up a study group to see in what ways we could promote an in-kind economy through enhancing the Aurovilians' maintenance package. Nandini, the clothing service, was already happening, and the next doable step seemed to be food.

Jocelyn: We wanted to be a service. We were thinking in terms of an expanded Prosperity system, rather like that of the Ashram. This was the only way we thought we could take it back to what Mother wanted for Auroville.

Anandi: What developed was a system where the participants pay a fixed monthly contribution and then take the basic food items they require. There are no prices attached to the goods and there is no billing. However, we keep accounts and people can see at certain times of the month the balance on their accounts.

Nicole: It was really a continuation of the attempt to maintain Aurovilians in kind, the original idea being centrally-funded services that in turn take care of the Aurovilians through goods and services. The food component of the maintenance would go directly to PTDC without showing on people's accounts.

Did you feel at the beginning that this experiment was fragile?

Jocelyn: Very much so.

Anandi: The majority of the then Economy Group was completely against the idea. At the beginning we were receiving Rs.17,000 from the Central Fund to support our operation, but the Economy Group questioned why the community should be paying for a service used only by a minority of the Aurovilians: "Let them finance themselves if they want to make this experiment", they said. When the members of PTDC heard about this, there was uproar. A General Meeting was called where we explained that this experiment had to be done. We got full support from the Aurovilians and the Economy Group had to step back.

Nicole: All we were asking for was to be able to try a different system; we didn't want to impose anything on anybody. Experiments are, after all, what Auroville is about.

The Economy Group expected this experiment to fail, presumably because the 'Circles' experiment had just failed.

Nicole: But this was different from the Circles experiment. Circles were basically an exercise in solidarity and sharing. This is an experiment in covering everyday needs in terms of food for people who were fully participating in the community.

How long was it before you felt that PTDC had established itself?

Isha: In the beginning, nobody knew how to run it. It took at least a year of trial and error before we understood what this place needed.

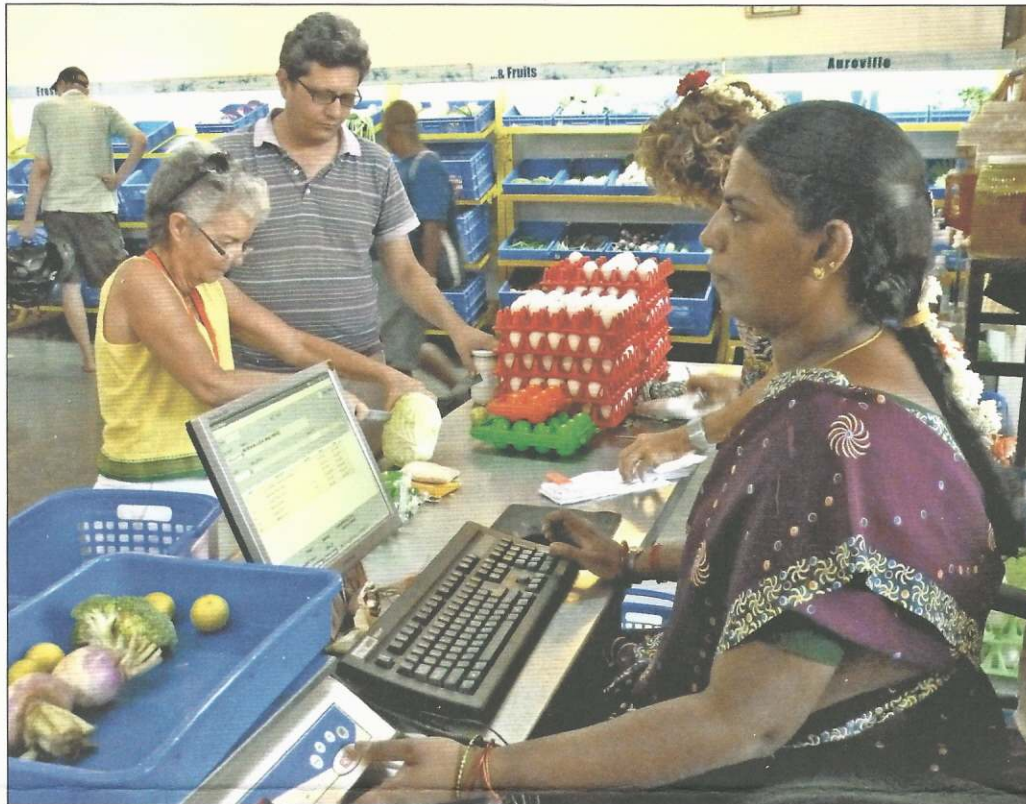
Jocelyn: It took quite a long time before PTDC as it is today evolved. However, we always had some guiding principles. These included that it should be for people who are really involved in Auroville; it should provide basic necessities; it would provide only healthy, good quality and where possible Auroville-grown ecological products; and it should simplify people's lives.

Anandi: We have many Auroville services where the Aurovillian pays the person who provides the service. We didn't want to operate

like this. We wanted Aurovilians to be given food but not to have to pay another Aurovillian for providing it.

Seven years on, to what extent have the original ideals been realized?

Anandi: The strongest achievement is the deep joy in service felt by everybody working here or using this place. We also feel very good that we are not making profits on the shoulders of the Aurovilians, that we are really making an effort in sharing and that, in spite of all our ups and downs, we are balancing the books. In fact, we have enlarged the services we provide without being a financial load on the community.



Inside the PTDC

Isha: This is very important. PTDC has managed to improve and expand partly with community resources, but also largely because individuals have decided to give it financial support in addition to their monthly contribution.

Jocelyn: In the early days somebody who hadn't even been using PTDC gave money because he said he felt it was "a spark of the truth in Auroville".

Anandi: Over the years there has been much criticism of Auroville services. They are accused of being inefficient and of only doing the minimum required, and there is a feeling that you have to have the incentive of profit in order to make people work well. But we have demonstrated that this is not so; we run well not because of any monetary reward but because of the joy that we experience in service.

Jocelyn: I think the atmosphere of this place is so important; it is a very pure and joyful atmosphere. At the beginning we tried not to have any paid workers so that there would be only an Auroville vibration. Even today we don't allow ammas to come into PTDC to pick up stuff for Aurovilians.

Anandi: In the team there is so much harmony: I don't think there is any other team in Auroville of such a size with such a mixture of people that works together so well. The social aspect is also very important. PTDC is a meeting-place for Aurovilians, and the books are balanced because those who need less contribute to those who need more – it is a real sharing.

Which of those original ideals have not been fully materialized?

Jocelyn: At the beginning, the spirit was very pure. My greatest concern is that many of the people joining now do not understand the spirit behind this experiment. Many of them are treating it like a conventional shop.

Anandi: The idea is that people only take their basic needs, they don't 'shop' to a fixed amount. However, not everybody is succeeding in doing this.

Is this where the pricing issue comes in? Some people would like the prices displayed on the

items so they know how much they are spending.

Isha: Those who want to see prices are not surrendered to being part of something larger. We are more interested in participation of people who want to step into something beyond shopping – PTDC is not meant as a place to get but rather to give; it's not about 'paying' for things.

Jocelyn: The pricing thing keeps coming up because some people are so used to shopping, they want to continue shopping in this space. They're saying, "I want to be in control of my money"; they don't trust that larger thing.

Nicole: We want to offer a different model from consumerism. If we put prices on items we

maintenance system was created in 1983. This started the shift away from service and towards a market economy.

What are your future plans for PTDC?

Anandi: We have a number of ideas. These include adding a cool room and a bakery outlet, offering a dinner service (if we can get another cooking team together), increasing food processing from our farms, and starting a web page where we give regular information about what is happening here. I would also like a support group to assist me in planning changes and in dealing with people.

Nicole: We should go in the direction of providing more prepared foods so that people don't need to think so much about shopping. This will help us move away from the consumerist attitude and make us feel that Auroville is providing for us in a very practical way.

Can you see the PTDC model expanding into other areas of our lives?

Nicole: We would like to see the prosperity system expanding to include other essentials of our daily existence. We could experiment with creating service nodes which bring together a laundry, bakery, food, community kitchen, gym, crèche etc., the things we need daily.

Jocelyn: We already have this system for clothing, and we have the Free Store. We were talking about the possibility of providing basic furniture. But I think what we need most at the moment is a central purchasing department which purchases items for all of Auroville. Take the example of food. Today, every restaurant and shop does its own food purchasing, which is a huge waste of energy and time.

But if we are talking about the providing the basic essentials, surely this should also include housing and transport?

Nicole: Yes. In fact, in a recent meeting someone asked if we couldn't have a PTDC system to provide housing for Newcomers. Newcomers would make a contribution and they would get what they get, not necessarily tied to the size of their contribution. This is very different from the present system where you are told you can get this house if you pay so much, and once you have paid you feel it is 'your' house. We are seeing if we can initiate something along these lines for the proposed Sacred Grove project near Aurodam.

Jocelyn: This is how it was in the early days of Aspiration. You gave your money, if you had any, and you got a place. We need to go back to that again so that housing is depersonalized.

Isn't the PTDC experiment really about consciousness development and how far you can assist this by external means?

Isha: Perhaps this is the real reason we're doing this experiment. Maybe the food and the rest is secondary, maybe it is education and consciousness-raising that is really at the core of this experiment. People join PTDC for all kinds of reasons but I have seen that over the years people change and begin to embrace something vaster than mundane shopping. But it's not by beating people over their heads and saying you've got to do it this way that people change. One has to live it and be it.

Jocelyn: I have definitely been changed. Prior to this I had the shopping mentality. Now I take what I need and over the year it seems to balance out. I trust the system and I trust myself, so for me it's working fine.

Nicole: It is sometimes hard for the people running this experiment today, on top of all the work it represents, to have to convince some people that we should be doing this experiment at all. At the same time we are not carrying anything. We are all instruments and the fruit of our actions do not belong to us. The fact that PTDC exists gives us a field of experimentation towards an economy that is not based on exchange of money. And that is important for it recalls some of the magic of the early days of Auroville. It is a little door open towards "something else"...

From an interview by Alan

Gajendran and GP Foods

I first met Gajendran – Gadje to friends – at the Matrimandir when we were both bending steel rods underneath the Chamber. The year was 1986. Gadje had joined Auroville one year earlier, when he visited the Matrimandir by chance. “It touched me so deeply. It reminded me of a dream I had had six years earlier, seeing something like that. I met John Harper, and told him that I wanted to work here. He asked me when I would like to start. I answered, ‘tomorrow!’, and so it happened.” The next day he began work at the Matrimandir, never to stop.

“My father full-heartedly approved. ‘This is your place and I am very happy you’ll live there,’ he said. And he added, ‘I’m not your father – Sri Aurobindo is your father. She is not your mother – The Mother is your mother.’ So I joined with my parents full blessings.”

Though he knew nothing of Auroville, he was a little aware of The Mother. “My father was the first constable of the Pondicherry Police corps after Pondicherry joined India. He had chosen to become Indian, while another part of my family opted to become French. I grew up at the Governor’s House where my father was stationed. Often, I would run off and play on the walkway in front of the Mother’s house, the Ashram main building, although at the time I had no idea what it was or who lived there. I later learned that she was called The Mother. It must have been in 1963, when I was five or six years old.”

At Auroville he lived in the Matrimandir Workers Camp. “All my love and energy went into working for the Matrimandir. It’s now 28 years ago that I joined Auroville, I’ve also served as member of an Auroville Council and started GP Food, but the Matrimandir is my anchor.”

In 1988 another love entered his life. He met and married Prema Latha, a woman from a village close by Auroville, but who never had visited Auroville. “In her traditional family, the women never came out of the house. Our marriage was arranged, and then she came to live with me in the Matrimandir Workers’ Camp. It was a tremendous change for her. In the beginning, she was very shy, but soon she started preparing tea and snacks.” Their two children, daughter Nithiya Auro and son Auroanand, were born there.”

“Auroanand,” he says proudly, “was named by the Dalai Lama. He was born in 1993, a few weeks before the Dalai Lama came to lay the foundation stone of the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. He also visited the Matrimandir and I took courage and asked one of the accompanying lamas if His Holiness could name my son. ‘The time table won’t



Gajendran, Prema Latha and Auroanand

probably allow for this,’ objected the lama, ‘for His Holiness first has to visit the Matrimandir.’ But His Holiness was more flexible than that. He gently decided to first name the child and afterwards visit Matrimandir. And when he saw the baby, sleeping and smiling at the same time, he exclaimed that it was Ananda and named him Ananda three times. We later added ‘Auro’ to his name because he was born in Auroville.” While daughter Nithiya Auro studies tourism at the Pondicherry University, Auroanand has just finished his studies in hotel management in Pondicherry. “I want to gain some experience abroad before coming back and joining GP Food,” he says.

GP Food was a natural consequence of Prema Latha’s work. “Prema, the executive of Auromode, mentioned to me the need for a simple kitchen in the Industrial Zone and asked if we would be willing

to take it up and prepare breakfasts and lunches. She and others helped us with a loan to build a 5 x 5 metre kitchen, and so GP Food – the abbreviation stands for Gajendran-Prema Latha – was born. “We want to make people feel at home and provide good quality and low-priced traditional Tamil food,” says Gadje. And the people responded very positively. “They often would stand outside if the tables were occupied. But it took us seven years to repay that loan, and all those years Prema Latha went without maintenance.”

The eatery was soon too small and a new building became necessary. New loans were taken, Rs 2 lakhs from Auroville, the rest from family and friends. In 2012, the new building, with 40 chairs, was ready. Now, one year later, it is already bursting at the seams.

“Prema Latha is the heart and soul of the undertaking,” says Gadje. “Without her, this would never have manifested and we would not be able to function.” For Gadje never stopped working at Matrimandir. “In the morning, from 8-12, I work at the Matrimandir, for that is my God-given work which I won’t give up for anything,” he says. Then he goes to GP food, to work in the kitchen and supervise the work. From 2.00 to 4.30 he is back at the Matrimandir, then returns to GP Food once again and stays there till 11.00 or 11.30 at night. Because there is no watchman, he often sleeps at GP Food on top of a table.

“After paying the running costs and making a loan repayment, only a little money is left over,” he says. “GP Food will need to expand and Prema Latha and I would like to live upstairs.” But money is still tight. “Neither I nor Prema Latha nor my son Ananda, who often helps out, take a maintenance from GP Food. Our first priority is to finish repaying the loans.”

Yet, GP Food is marginally priced, and is one of the few Auroville eateries that is affordable to Aurovilians living on an Auroville maintenance. “We cater to Aurovilians, to staff and employees of Auroville units and to tourists and guests,” he says. “But unlike other eateries, they all pay the same rate.”

True to Tamil traditions, any extras are provided for free. “You want more rice or sambar? Just ask and we’ll give. For us, this place is ‘Athma Thriпти’, ‘Athma’ meaning ‘soul’ and ‘Thriпти’ meaning ‘being satisfied’. Here we cook with the aspiration that our guests are happy and fulfilled in body and soul when they leave. That’s truly important for us.”

In conversation with Carel

EDUCATION

Teaching film-making

Sasi and Tom are teaching film-making in Auroville and local schools. What does this involve? Why is it important? And what is their vision for the future?

Auroville Today: When did the film-making project in schools begin?

Sasi: It grew out of the first Auroville Film Festival and the idea was not just to show films but to educate students in and around Auroville about film-making. It is called the Auroville Film Festival Education Outreach Programme

We are also part of the One People International Schools Project. This project has children from all over the world making films on specified topics and then sharing them with others. It is interesting to see how students from different parts of the world interpret common themes like environment, equality and money.

Do you two work together?

Tom: So far we have been working separately. We cover similar material, like teaching the students film techniques, film language, editing etc. We do documentary work, but I also do animation with some younger students. So far we have worked with most of the Auroville schools and some local village schools.

Sasi: We offer either two week intensives, or a longer six month course. And I am just finishing a one-year programme with four students from Future School. We covered the history of cinema and film technology, we looked at different genres of cinema and cinema from different parts of the world. Alongside that they learn scripting and the skills of film-making.

In the summer holidays, I always try to run a short course in film-making with students from outside Auroville.

Do you notice differences between the kinds of films made by students in Auroville and those outside?

Sasi: To put it bluntly, I think the films made by the Auroville kids are somewhat self-indulgent. The films made by the kids in

the villages are always about doing the right thing, doing good things; they are more moralistic. It is interesting for us to see this difference because the tools and the knowledge we provide are exactly the same.

What do film studies bring to the school curriculum?

Tom: It’s another form of expression, like painting, music or photography. Actually it brings all these together. To make a film you need to learn how to plan a story, write a script and master the technical aspects of camera work and editing. At the same time, you are working in a team, learning how to work with others and to organize time very precisely. So while we are giving film-making workshops, we are also teaching basic life skills.

Sasi: In today’s world, everything is visual. From the time we wake up until the time we go to bed we are assaulted by images, and the kids’ perception is influenced by this, it is evolving along that line. So if you want them to learn something, it is better to show it in some visual form.

At the same time, it is important to give them the tools and the knowledge and skills to be able to decipher this imagery, to master rather than be manipulated by it. They need to understand what is real, what is not real, how it is put together and what the purpose is of what they are looking at.

Tom: For example, they learn how a director uses music, sound, lighting and editing to instil a particular kind of emotion. They learn how the audience can be manipulated through the use of these techniques.

For some people who are more print-oriented, cinema is seen as a lesser form of art because it appears to be focussed upon trivial entertainment.

Tom: It’s true that a lot of film has always been geared towards escapism, but more and more today it is taking up real life issues. Documentaries have really exploded, and there are some amazing films coming out now which are about educating people and changing the world rather than just simple entertainment. Film is a really powerful medium that is very necessary in today’s world.

Sasi: Actually, I think all that has been done in cinema so far has only scratched the surface. It’s such an incredible medium and you can go on mining its depths for new ideas.



Tom and Sasi

Tell us about the next Auroville Film Festival which you are planning.

Sasi: This will be the third Auroville Film Festival and it will run from 18th – 22nd September. There will be different categories. One category takes as its theme ‘human unity’, and in this category we will show films from all over the world. Other categories are films made by Aurovilians; films about Auroville by non-Aurovilians; and all the films we helped make with our students during the year. The deadline for submitting films is 15th August.

Tom: It’s a real opportunity for Auroville to promote itself in a positive manner to the world. Unfortunately we don’t have any funding for the Festival at present. Ideally we need about eight lakhs, but we will adjust to whatever we get.

What are your dreams for the future of film in Auroville?

Sasi: I would love to have an Institute for Film here, a purpose-built place where students could come and do their editing, where there will be enough machines for them to work on and all the equipment would be current technology. Today, we only have three computers for editing and we have to carry them from school to school. And our three cameras are all old technology and are falling apart. Luckily the Dutch Foundation Stichting de Zaaier has just given us money to buy new ones.

Tom: Regarding the Institute, I have the same dream as Sasi. It should be a place where people from outside Auroville could come and participate in film-making, and we could encourage professionals to come and give talks and workshops, and directors to show their films.

From an interview by Alan

For further information about the third Auroville Film Festival, visit aurovillefilmfestival.org.in or contact +91.413-2622432



Two students working on a film

Laughter is the best medicine!

Fif and Hamish, a jovial couple from Canada, are medical clowns and certified Laughter Yoga teachers who are exploring their calling as Newcomers. "Medical clowning is creating and nurturing heart to heart connections with patients and their families. It is about being completely present and sharing joy, love, laughter, even pain and tears," says Fif. "People may think it is just about entertaining kids and making them laugh. That is one small facet of therapeutic clowning," adds Hamish. "We are trained specifically to work within healthcare settings," continues Fif, "with newborn babies and families in the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), to seniors with complex needs. We collaborate with the multi-disciplinary healthcare team to provide the best possible integral and integrated care for the patient to help them cope with confusion, pain, fear, hopelessness and helplessness," says Fif, her red peace-sign earrings grabbing attention as she elaborates how medical clowns parody the hospital routine to help patients adapt to their surroundings, which in turn helps the medical staff to relax and de-stress.

Methods

Medical clowns use a variety of tools: movement, music, play, imagination, storytelling, laughter yoga, and puppets to give patients a sense of control. "I was at a senior's home with my dog puppet. He sniffed as we approached one of the seniors sitting with his head dropped, seemingly disinterested. 'Woof, woof. Woof, woof.' The man turned his head responding with, 'meooooow.' My puppy instantly became a cat and the two had a conversation of 'meow' for five minutes. The staff told me that's the first communication the man has had with anyone in the last four years."

A scientific study from Tel Aviv University in 2010 found that magic is an effective tool for distraction. It also empowers patients when they learn magic and share it. Fif relates, "A boy had an organ transplant. He was in isolation and couldn't leave his room for months. We taught him magic. Soon he was performing for nurses, doctors, support staff and everyone who came into his room!"

Fif and Hamish were invited to Uganda where they initiated the 'Art of Peace, a Camp for Kids' in Africa, trained the first Laughter Yoga Leaders and did hospital clowning. They were invited to stay in a mud hut, in a village, where many children had been brutalized, girls 'made to marry' (raped) by the LRA (Lord's Republican Army). Hamish relates, "One young boy watched soldiers



Jumpa the Clown entertains a child in a medical centre

murder his parents when he was eight years old. They then abducted him and forced him to be a child soldier. We listened with our hearts and shared Laughter Yoga, storytelling, music and peace activities. At the end of the Peace Camp, Nicolas hugged us and said, "Now I can forgive my wrongdoers and leave my luggage behind."

"Hamish played his harmonica during painful dressing changes in the Burn Unit," Fif relates. As soon as he played the first note, you could feel the pain and tension in the room transform. Hamish reflects, "This was one of the most profound moments in my life. As I played, I felt touched by Divine grace. What an incredible gift I received."

Fif tells about her work with a 13-year old boy, who with his mother and sibling were hit by a passing truck. His mother was killed instantly. His sibling survived. Fif recalls, "For weeks I would talk and gently laugh while he was in a coma. When he regained consciousness, he wanted to play killer golf or killer hockey. I would toss him an imaginary club or stick and from his bed he would aim at me and swing. I would duck, twist, turn, bounce off the walls and floor. We had lots of fun and laughed hysterically. It was his way of venting frustration and anger, taking back control of his life."

"One of the most challenging situations was a twelve year old who attempted suicide. The irreversible brain damage regressed him into a child of a few weeks. I felt totally and utterly helpless. There was nothing I could do to alleviate the pain of the boy or his family. Another most difficult experience was hearing a mother's gut-wrenching wailing. Her child experienced an unexpected life

threatening trauma. He was rushed to emergency. In spite of the medical team's best efforts, the child died. That mother's cries still haunt me," says Fif.

Auroville

Jumpa is the name of the medical clown character that Fif embodies. In Tibetan, it means 'a gentle, loving and kind friend'. "There was a naming ceremony in which the children named her. Out of 619 names, Jumpa magically popped out of the hat." Her clown costume, which she designed, is inspired by different countries. The pants are Turkish, the vest Tibetan, headband Peruvian, the bells on her feet Indian, peace earrings universal and the poofy hair is clown. They symbolize unity and all have their own story."

During her first working day at Kailash Clinic, Auroville, Fif decided to observe. She did not wear her costume, make-up or nose. Within moments, she was pulled into action: with Mousy, her puppet, she did distraction during a dressing change of a mid-fifties male Aurovilian, engaged with patients in the waiting room, and prepped a six year old child for an examination and injection by encouraging him to examine Mousy and administer injections using coloured pencils. "For years I have taught that clowning is a gift of the Divine and comes from the heart. Costumes, make-up and clothes just extenuate the character. In Auroville, for now, the costume seems superfluous – we shall see."

Hamish and Fif first came to Auroville in 2006. They were on their way to Varkala Beach in Kerala when a serendipitous meeting made them change

their plans. Within 12 hours, they were on a bus to Auroville. "We felt we had come home," says Hamish. "We stayed seven weeks in the Tibetan Pavilion and made some very special connections. We both had commitments in Canada. We knew we would return when they were fulfilled." Fif and Hamish finally arrived in December 2012.

Ever since, they have been very involved in Auroville. They have done several Laughter Yoga programmes in Auroville and the bio-region; as a fundraiser for the Tibetan Pavilion they held a certified Laughter Yoga Leader training; and as part of the Auroville Institute for Integral Health they made a presentation on the benefits of Laughter Yoga and medical clowning. They are now developing Laughter Yoga teaching modules and editing a Laughter Yoga Manual for Tamil translation with Lourdes from the Pitchandikulam Environmental Education Centre for use in the SEDAB (Social Enterprise Development in the Auroville Bioregion) programme. "To have a therapeutic clown, and one that also does Laughter Yoga, as part of an integral health model is very avant-garde," says Hamish, "Auroville is ideally positioned to expand this practice and research the evolution of this new model."

Clowning outside the box

It is a known scientific fact that the healing power of laughter combats stress, increases your endorphins, and promotes a positive outlook. It helps in creating bonds and building trust between people. In the context of Auroville, can clowning and laughter help with collective decision-making? Fif believes it is possible and gives as example the indigenous Hopi people of the United States, "They do not begin certain activities until everyone in the village laughs." Hamish adds, "When you laugh your defence mechanisms are lowered. It's a natural reaction to first resist laughter because it breaks down the barrier which serves to maintain decorum, privacy or protection. Letting go of one's guards and opening up to a trusting environment are key characteristics in the facilitation of better decision-making. And here over time and with deepening trust, as an evolutionary experiment, clowning and laughter may help." Fif continues, "Mother said, 'No matter what happens – something wrong in the body, something wrong with people, something wrong in circumstances – instantly, my first movement is: 'O my sweet Lord, my Beloved!' And I laugh! Then all becomes well."

In conversation with Mandakini

NEW BOOKS

The New Spirituality

When Georges Van Vrekhem passed away on 31st August 2012, he left behind a number of unpublished essays. Some of these were planned to be used for his talks in Auroville at the end of 2011, when he was to embark on a second series of eleven lectures on a wide variety of topics related to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

Cyclone Thane, which hit Auroville on 30th December 2011, disrupted these plans and his talks were postponed; they were delayed again in the second quarter of 2012 due to his health condition. Georges planned to restart the lectures in September 2012 but, unfortunately, his passing away decided differently.

It was our intention to publish these lectures in an edited version as a sequel to the book *Preparing for the Miraculous*, which contains his first series of eleven lectures at Auroville. With Georges' passing, we decided to publish these essays as we found them, and added some articles that were previously published in the magazines *Auroville Today*, *Mother India* and *The Advent*, and in the book *The Journeying Years* by Dianna Bowler.

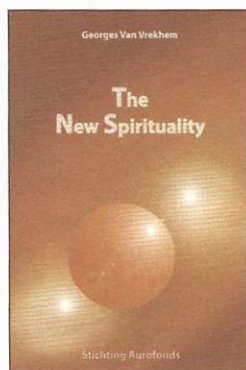
Thus, *The New Spirituality* contains eleven unpublished essays on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, two articles on how to write about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, three on Auroville and two on World War II. It also has two In Memoriams (Satprem and Amil Kiran), and four autobiographical texts.

The essays deal with topics such as *The Aurobindonian Revolution*; *Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Humanity*; *True Philosophy*; *Matter*; *The Closing of the Western Mind*; *The Fall*; *The Integration of the Four Varnas and the New Dharma*; *Overman: the Transitional Being*; *The Metamorphosis of an Avatar*; *Aswapati and Sri Aurobindo*; and *On Occultism*. The two articles on World War II – *Lest We Forget* and *Churchill's Mission* – reveal fairly unknown aspects of the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Very touching are Georges' texts about his own development, such as *Moments that do not fade – Meeting The Mother*.

We publish this material in honour of Georges and in recognition of his immense work in helping to understand the life and work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. We hope that this posthumous publication will inspire all his readers within and outside Auroville.

Carel Thieme
Guy Ryckaert

The New Spirituality by Georges Van Vrekhem is available from Wild Seagull bookshop at the Visitors' Centre, Auroville and from Auroville Press (email aurovillepress.org.in). Price in India Rs 300.



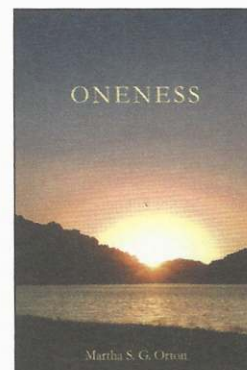
Oneness

One is Martha Orton's new book which explains, clearly and concisely, one of the most central concepts in Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy. What does it mean when we say that all is one, how do we reconcile this with our everyday experience of diversity and conflict, what are the real-world implications of the oneness of existence, and how can oneness become a living truth in our experience of ourselves and the world? These are the central questions of this book and are among the most central questions of human existence and spiritual philosophy.

Martha walks us through these issues in 15 short, accessible chapters. She is not content to present them solely through philosophical abstractions, but persistently explains the philosophical and spiritual concepts in reference to the ground realities of our human experience. As such, although the philosophical material here discussed is deeply profound, she presents it in a way that allows readers to follow her and appreciate the implications of what she explains.

In the first chapter we find that 'oneness' is a descriptive term for the more abstract philosophical concept of the Brahman. She says that in *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo "progressively reveals a deeper understanding of Brahman, the reality of Oneness, and the implications of this truth." Martha does the same in this book; she does not attempt to philosophically prove that Oneness exists, but bases the assertion of its existence on the experience of spiritual teachers "described in the Vedas and Upanishads and also in literature of spiritual mystics in other traditions." She also discusses some of the recent scientific discoveries which support this assertion. She explains that even among those who have not realized this Oneness, many people have had a sense of its reality, with resultant far-reaching effects on their lives.

In another chapter she illustrates how we can find glimpses of the reality of Oneness in everyday life, for example, in the innate tendency to reconcile conflict, to find agreement and seek harmony, to feel others suffering or enjoy their happiness, to engage in acts of kindness and charity. Movements towards unity and harmony bring us happiness, joy, and a feeling of



nearness to the Divine, whereas their opposites tend to result in unease and distress. All these clues to its existence are evident in our day to day life, but Oneness nevertheless remains illusive and lost in the plethora of phenomena we confront.

Dealing with such a foundational pillar of our existence, the book necessarily brings in a full range of related issues that are necessary to reconcile our fragmented human experience with the reality of the Oneness of all. It tackles all the important philosophical and spiritual issues: the nature of Brahman as *Sachchidananda*; the interrelations among the transcendent, the cosmos, and the individual;

the distinction between ego and the true spiritual individual; the nature of the mind and its role in creating the appearance of division; the involution of the Divine Oneness in matter and its progressive evolution through life, mind and spiritual awakening; the natures and relations of the inner being, the psychic being, and the outer nature; the ranges of spiritual mind linking human mentality to the supermind; the cosmic consciousness; the apparent duality and underlying unity of *purusha* and *prakriti*. There is even a short chapter which summarizes the key processes of Integral Yoga leading to the experience of the psychic being, the spiritual realization of Oneness, and finally supramental transformation leading to the full restoration of Oneness in our experience of existence.

The beauty of the book is that it moves, step by logical step, through all this material in a masterful and concise way which makes it easier to grasp than in more expansive philosophical treatises. By covering all these essential issues in Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy so concisely, and grounding them in human experience, it helps us to more clearly perceive and move towards that illusive Oneness which ties all together.

Larry

Oneness (2013, 140 pages) by Martha S.G. Orton, published by iUniverse, Inc., Bloomington, IN, USA, is available as an ebook at <http://books.google.co.in> for Rs. 118, at barnesandnoble.com and scribd.com for \$3.99, or as a paperback from various online sellers and stores in the US at \$10 to \$15.

It's bitter-sweet

Abbey Schoenfeld came to Auroville at the age of 44. 16 years later she is going back to the U.S.A. What brought her to Auroville and what calls her back?

"In 1995, my then husband Peter was getting his master's degree in environmental science from Antioch University, New England, USA. His professor, Heidi Watts, who's been coming to Auroville for almost 25 years offering teacher-training programmes, mentioned to him that Auroville's Last School was looking for a science teacher for a year and would be interested in going? One of our daughters who was 16 then, said, 'Oh India, how amazing, can we do it?' Before we knew it we had decided to go. Peter already had a teaching commitment over the summer in the U.S.A so he had to stay back until August; but I came in June of 1995 with two of my four children, aged 16 and 10, in time for the new school session in July. We would stay in Auroville for a year.

Suzie, who was associated with Last School at the time, asked me if I would be willing to take Peter's class until he arrived. I said, 'what in the world am I going to teach?' 'Well, you are a midwife,' she said, 'you could teach human reproduction.' So that's what I taught. After that I started working with Dr. Devashish at the Auroville Health Centre. It was a great experience. The Health Centre had a programme training women from the surrounding villages as health care workers, who would work at the various sub-stations in the villages. My job was to train these women to give pre-natal care. On Saturdays, with an interpreter we discussed various topics from health to human reproduction.

I realised that Auroville is my place when, on 29th February 1996, the Golden Day, the Peace Table for Asia was inaugurated at the Centre for Indian Culture. Joy sang Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra, there were recordings of the Mother speaking, and we drummed on the Peace Table. It was a transformative moment for me. I don't know what happened but suddenly I realised that Auroville was my place.

But at the end of May our one year was coming to an end. We reconsidered our plans and decided that we would return to the U.S. to wind up our

affairs and then come back to Auroville. However, once back in the U.S., I got cold feet. Three of my children were either going to college or started living on their own and I would have to leave them behind to go half-way around the world if I wanted to live in Auroville! How could I do that? I wasn't sure anymore. Some time passed and winter came. But the call for Auroville was too strong. Our next-door neighbours bought our house and in August 1997 Peter and I joined Auroville with Maria, our youngest, who went to Transition School.

The Entry process was easier in those days. It was expected that when you came to Auroville you would spend your year as a Newcomer exploring different communities so that you could find out where you wanted to live, and experience different jobs so you could find out what you wanted to do. That time was given to integrate into the community.

It was a very welcoming experience. Bhavana was my contact person. We became good friends and I had the honor to be with her at her passing.

I have had many gratifying experiences in Auroville. I taught in Transition School as a class teacher for four years. We had a lot of fun in the classroom and it was probably the most challenging work I have ever done with great support from the team of teachers there. For many years I gave *Lomi Lomi* Hawaiian massage to Aurovilian women at the Verité community, where they have a massage room with a beautiful atmosphere. For the last six years, I worked for the Living Routes programme as the administrative coordinator. That's been wonderful work. This programme brings American university students to Auroville twice a year, for a stay of 14 weeks. It's beautiful to see how they are touched and changed by their experiences in India, and particularly by Auroville which has a special impact.

One of the most rewarding experiences I had was living in the community of Adventure. I first moved there in 1999. It was an intentional community at that time and we ate together,



Abbey with her family – from left: Karen with her sons Quinn and Max, Jonah, Abbey, Alla and Maria

had personal sharings each week, and did a lot of experiments in group building and communication. We meditated together and sang *bhajans* on Sundays. I made pancakes. For about six years it was idyllic. We created a beautiful atmosphere and guests loved to stay with us. One of the most important things I discovered during that time was about decision-making or problem-solving: if a group of people are committed to having goodwill, are open to each other's ideas and not fixed on their own as being 'right', something new can arise from that openness that everyone can agree to. When that happened, it was magical. When Adventure fell apart it broke my heart.

If I could, I would change two things in Auroville. One of them is the way the Entry Service has developed. What bothers me in particular are the cases where pregnant women or women who have small children are not made Newcomers because they can't work full time for the collective, while their husbands/partners are made Newcomers. This is discrimination against women and families. Robert wrote an interesting article about this [See September 2008 issue #235 of *Auroville Today*]. Auroville is a wonderful place to raise children. So many kids who've been born in Auroville go away and then come

back and make a life here. They have their own children here. I understand what a hard job the Entry Service has, but at the same time Auroville should be a shining light, an example for the world in their stand towards women. Somebody said to me, 'You should've done something about it,' and I feel really sorry that I never took it up as a crusade. I have had several friends who have been discriminated because of this; it's been very controversial for years. I could've taken an active role and I didn't and I am sorry. If Auroville is the city the earth needs then why are we discriminating against pregnant women and families? Is Auroville only about a certain kind of work?

The other thing I would change is the process for new members entering Auroville's working groups. This has been on my mind ever since I came to Auroville. Most people who take up a position in the Working Committee, the Funds and Assets Management Committee or the Auroville Council do not have the level and skills needed to do such an important job. We have highly-skilled people in Auroville who could train every working group member in mediation, non-violent communication, compassionate listening, group dynamics, and problem solving. Auroville could implement a dynamic training policy required

before new members begin their term of office. I believe that this would dramatically change our process of governance in a very positive way.

Now, after 15 years of a rich and intense life in Auroville, I have decided to return for good to the U.S.A. I have been thinking about this for three years now, it's not a whim. I have spent a good portion of my middle years here. I am now 60. I would've stayed, but it's my attachment to my family that's pulling me back. I have four children and two grandchildren, and honestly, at the end of the day, I really miss my family. I have never even once been to their birthdays! My grandchildren are growing up before my eyes and I am missing it all. I want to be with family. So I decided to go back now while I am still young enough to be able to work and establish a new life. My grandsons are 8 and 10, it won't be long before they are teenagers, and they won't have time for their grandma. My family is very excited and happy I am coming back! There are so many people in Auroville who have touched my life. I have grown so much through my years here. I have welcoming arms embracing me in the U.S.A and at the same time, saying goodbye to Auroville and the people I love here is sad. It's bitter-sweet.

In conversation with Mandakini

LETTERS

In October this year, Auroville Today will be 25 years old. It is heartwarming that so many people have continued their subscriptions over this long period, and that some of them, old age notwithstanding, continue to send us their views. One such is Colonel Buckfast-Smythe (retired) whose letter below demonstrates his unmitigated interest in Auroville.

Sir,

The Athanaeum, London

Greetings from an old soldier and admirer of your esteemed mag. Thought I'd dial you up to straighten things out and stop me featuring prematurely in your obit column, which, by the way, is getting damn bloated these days. What's up with you chaps? I won't be hanging on for ever but I thought you lot were meant to be cheating the grim reaper. Anyway, Hackett [*Nurse Hackett, his carer, eds.*] went AWOL [*Absent Without Leave*] for a few days last month. Consequently, I didn't get my magic potion and spent a few days under a copy of *The Times* before somebody in the club bothered to give me a poke. Not surprising, really. Half the buffers in this club spend their lives under copies of *The Times* and it's anybody's guess how many of them have shuffled off the mortal. Anyway, finally the old bat returned, I gave her a good dressing down and now we're trundling on pretty much as before.

But since I'm scribbling away, thought I'd share a thought or two about your Auroville campaign. First thing, Hackett tells me you're all busy doing courses these days. Now, I'm all for assault courses, keeps you fit to fight the Hun, but seems this is something else. Something to do with massaging the old grey matter [*sacrocranial therapy?*] and getting snakes off your backs [*raising the kundalini?*]. Now, don't get me wrong. You chaps deserve a bit of fun now that you've cut down the jungle and shot all the tigers. But all things in moderation, know what I mean? I mean, you chappies are meant to be building a city for 50,000, right? And that's not going to happen if you spend your time massaging each other's brains and wrestling snakes.

So first things first. Housing. Heard you were in a spot of bother about where to put the troops. Obvious, though, isn't it? Bivvies [*bivouacs*]. Just sling a tarp [*tarpaulin*] between two trees and they'll be as snug as bugs in rugs. Course, you can't have officers hobnobbing with the ranks so put 'em in Nissen huts [*prefabricated structures made from corrugated steel*]. Course, they're damn hot in the summer and deafening when it rains, but you can't have everything, can you?

Next, latrines. You're going to need 'em, lots of 'em, miles of 'em. Put 'em in a star shape if you like [*a reference to the Galaxy plan?*] but don't believe that guff about an army marching on its stomach. We won the war because our latrines were bigger and better than Jerry's. Course, digging them is hard work and some of you are getting a bit long in the tooth. So put those newcomer chappies to work. Shave their heads, give 'em crowbars and let 'em get on with it. One or two will fall by the wayside, but you don't want wimps in the City of the Dawn, right? And, mark my words, the survivors will thank you for it. You'll have made men of them. Even the women.

OK, chaps, She-who-must-be-obeyed approaches, along with her damnable witches' brew. Remember, keep your muskets oiled, your feet dry and never, ever, feed the bears. That way you won't go far wrong.

I am Sir, your humble servant,

Colonel Buckfast-Smythe (retired)
OBE, MBE, GPS, Grand Order of the Golden Oriole.



Residents participation

At a community meeting held on May 1st, the ever-widening gap between the working groups and the community at large was discussed. The meeting also revealed the deeper gap felt by Aurovilians from across the spectrum: the growing disparity between the organizational structure that is in place and the life of unity, mutuality and harmony that they came for, and still dare to believe is possible. The organizers have proposed to hold monthly community meetings to explore the reasons for this chasm between the ideals and today's reality, with the intention of finding ways to move concretely towards those ideals.

Auroville Council' concerns

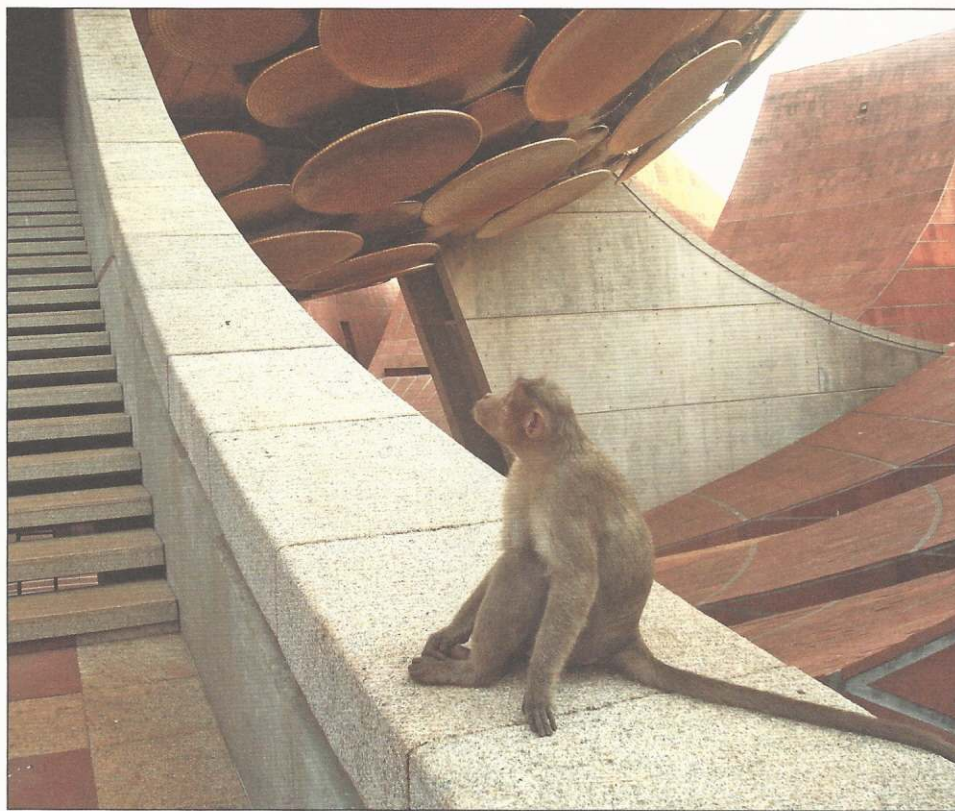
The Auroville Council (AVC) has observed that there is an increasing tendency of individualism, where community members put their personal interests above those of the community. The AVC daily experiences how the execution of its decisions or recommendations depend on the goodwill of the community members involved. Like all major groups in Auroville, the AVC has little power of implementation. Observing that the working groups have been profoundly eroded by endless attacks and accusations of power games, to the point that less and less people want to serve in these groups, it has asked the community to define what the AVC should stand for. The AVC now proposes holding General Meetings every two months where it intends to inform the community about unresolved and pending issues, so that the community can convey its recommendation and stance to the AVC, which might lead to better understanding and support of decisions made and to less animosity towards the groups.

FAMC 2013 mandate finalised

The Auroville Funds and Assets Management Committee have recommended a final draft of its mandate. There are 14 regular working groups which each will appoint a member, who must also be a member of the appointing working group. This member must have been an Auroville resident for at least 5 years and has some working knowledge, education, understands the aims of Auroville and/or has experience in finance and asset management. Members hold office for a period of three years, and can be reappointed after a gap of two years. The Secretary and the Financial Administrative Officer of the Auroville Foundation are permanent invitees to the FAMC. The FAMC may select one of its members to be chairperson, or a non member. A non-member chairperson has no right to vote. The FAMC will normally take decisions by consensus, and in extreme cases, after having tried to achieve consensus or consent, by a two-third majority. The quorum for taking decisions is 8 members.

New housing projects

Three new housing projects are being prepared. *Maitreye phase 3* will have 20 flats for singles, couples and families and have a provision for modular office spaces. The buildings will use Light Steel Frames for the structure, a new and innovative building technology for Auroville. *Invocation phase 4* uses conventional techniques and consists of two apartment blocks containing 15 apartments in total. *Sacred Groves* is an innovative row housing project for 268 people, singles, couples and families. Houses would be designed with 2 to 3 feet thick walls using a poured earth construction aggregate and waste material, which would help the interiors to remain cool all year around. The project would be off the grid with solar pv roof systems. Living spaces would be small as this the project will be located in a high-density area.



A monkey at the Matrimandir entrance

Monkeys at the Matrimandir

The Matrimandir Newsletter of May 2013 reports that a small troupe of monkeys has visited the Matrimandir area for three days, visiting the gardens and the Banyan tree, drinking from the white marble lotus pond underneath the Matrimandir and climbing on top of the Matrimandir to watch the full moon rise out of the Bay of Bengal.

Farm maintenances

A discussion has started if maintenance for farmers should be related to the farm's production of primary products or should be provided in view of other values.

Building bridges with the neighbours

The second phase of a four-part panchayat leadership programme, initiated by L'Avenir d'Auroville and Auroville's Village Action, designed to build relationships and look at future sustainable development with our immediate neighbours, took place at the end of March with an excursion to Tranquebar to view its successful solid waste management programme. The group of 41 people included members of 12 panchayats, presidents, vice presidents and Block Development Officers. The excursion was funded by the Dutch Stichting de Zaaier. The first phase of the programme was an exposure day in Auroville. The next two phases will include a symposium on areas of mutual concern such as water, and a workshop on master planning for villages, led by Dr. Razaak, head of Planning, Anna University, Chennai.

University of Human Unity website

The University of Human Unity reported that its website www.universityofhumanunity.org which contains the lectures and papers delivered since 2007, is getting a good number of visits, which indicates that the project is achieving one of its main goals, to provide a platform for learning and sharing knowledge.

French Pavilion website

The French Pavilion has launched its website www.paviliondefrance.com which shows all past and future events organised by the Pavilion. The total number of these events, since the end of 2006, will soon number 150. The website also provides information about the relations between India and France and France and Auroville and has texts and images which are considered important, such as on the inauguration of Auroville and the first *Caravan of Love*.

"Sometimes I Can Fly"

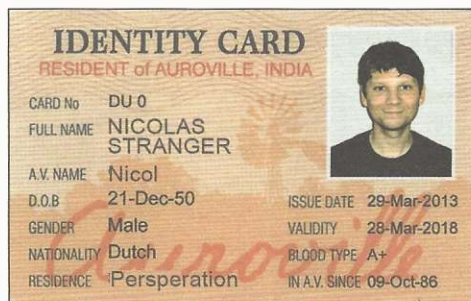
The documentary *Sometimes I Can Fly* directed and edited by Srinivasan and produced by Susmita for *Accessible Auroville* has won the second prize at *Brotherhood We Care Filmfest* New Delhi. To see the film visit www.auroville.org/gallery/videos/Sometimes_fly.html. For information on Auroville's work on access for differently-abled people visit accessibleauroville@auroville.org.in.

Unwelcome guests

The Working Committee and Auroville Council have declared that two guests are no longer welcome in Auroville and cancelled their Auroville guest facilities because of their negative blog on the internet in which Auroville is described as a place where violent events happen frequently, facts are distorted and Aurovilians are exposed to defamation.

AV Nature Camp

Children in the age group 9-14 years participated in the yearly Auroville Nature Camps in the hills of Kodaikanal. There were three separate camps, beginning in the month of May and running through mid-June. Each camp was held for 11 days.



Identity cards

The office of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation is issuing identity cards to Aurovilians. The card carries the name, date of birth, gender, place or residence and blood type group of the Aurovillian, and has the signatures of the Secretary and the Aurovillian. The validity is 5 years. The omission of not having a bar code, which could be used in Auroville shops, restaurants and other localities, may be corrected in the coming years.

Outer Ring Road construction

L'Avenir d'Auroville is constructing parts of the Outer Ring Road in the Kottakarai region of the Industrial Zone to facilitate access, connectivity and facilitate the ultimate development of the Industrial Zone. The present

width of 4.7 metres is small (ideally it should be 8 metres) as not much heavy traffic is expected or wanted on this road, which is essentially an existing mud road that is being paved.

According to the Master Plan, the centre of the Outer Ring Road should be 1,250 metres from the Banyan Tree; however, aligning this stretch of the Outer Ring Road to the plans was not possible without cutting many trees and removing buildings.

The stretch which is now made will have a storm water trench parallel to the road. L'Avenir is also studying the Vêrité and Yantra radials to determine the location of these roads, also to promote the development of the Industrial Zone.

Thamarai moves

Thamarai, facing a funding crisis, has moved from its rented location in Edaiyanchavadi to an empty building in the Udavi school campus compound, which will now host the daily playgroup. The night school will shift to the Thamarai healing centre opposite the temple.

Unit closure

Upon the recommendation of the Auroville Funds and Assets Management Committee one of Auroville units has been closed for not submitting its balance sheet and not responding to FAMC's repeated communications.

Eco Service Landfill

Local villagers are objecting to the use of a parcel of Auroville land in Puthurai village by Auroville's Eco Service as land fill. The land fill has been in use for a few months. The matter is under discussion.

Gas cylinders

Stringent government regulations demand that *Know Your Customer* forms are now submitted by Auroville's Gas bottle service for Auroville residents to continue to avail of the benefits of government-subsidized gas cylinders.

Cashew leases

The Land Resource Management Group reported that a tendering system has been implemented for the cashew lease 2013 with or in front of the concerned working group's representatives at Town Hall. The total lease income amounted to Rs.3, 24,727.

Land exchange difficulties

The Land Matters Task Force (LMTF), a task force of the Funds and Assets Management Committee, is trying to effectuate a major land exchange in the Green Belt. Though numerous options have been explored, the only current possibility seems to include exchanging two Auroville communities, to which the residents of these communities object, expressing that they feel being pressurized. The LMTF expressed its understanding of the situation of these residents and asked all Aurovilians to support the residents of these communities and not to add any pressure.

Wind turbine workshop

A wind turbine workshop was held at Windarra Farm, teaching the basic understanding of wind energy. As a hands-on activity, participants engaged in building Auroville's largest wind turbine measuring 4.2 metre in diameter.

Eco Industrial Park

Auroville Consulting has been engaged by the German-based organisation *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit DIZ* to write a research paper on an Eco-industrial park using Auroville expertise in the fields of site master planning, building design, energy, water and waste water management, organic farming, ecological landscaping and management processes.

Subscription rates (including postage):

- One year subscription rates: India Rs. 450; other countries Rs. 2,000 equivalent.
 - Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 800; other countries Rs. 3,700 equivalent.
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