

Blessings

To celebrate Sri Aurobindo's 150th birth anniversary, Savitri Bhavan hosted Blessings, an exhibition of the photographs of Sri Aurobindo made by Henri Cartier-Bresson. It was opened on July 22nd by Dr. Jayanti Ravi, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. The exhibition was curated by Willemine Pernette.

The story behind the last portraits of Sri Aurobindo is a truly remarkable one. They were taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson who passed away on August 3, 2004, at his home in Paris aged 95. Widely recognized as one of the founding fathers of photojournalism and a pioneer in the art of photography, his pictures are admired for their spontaneity and mastery of form. A painter both at the beginning and end of his career, Cartier-Bresson took up photography in 1930 and went on to shoot some of the most memorable photographs of the 20th century.

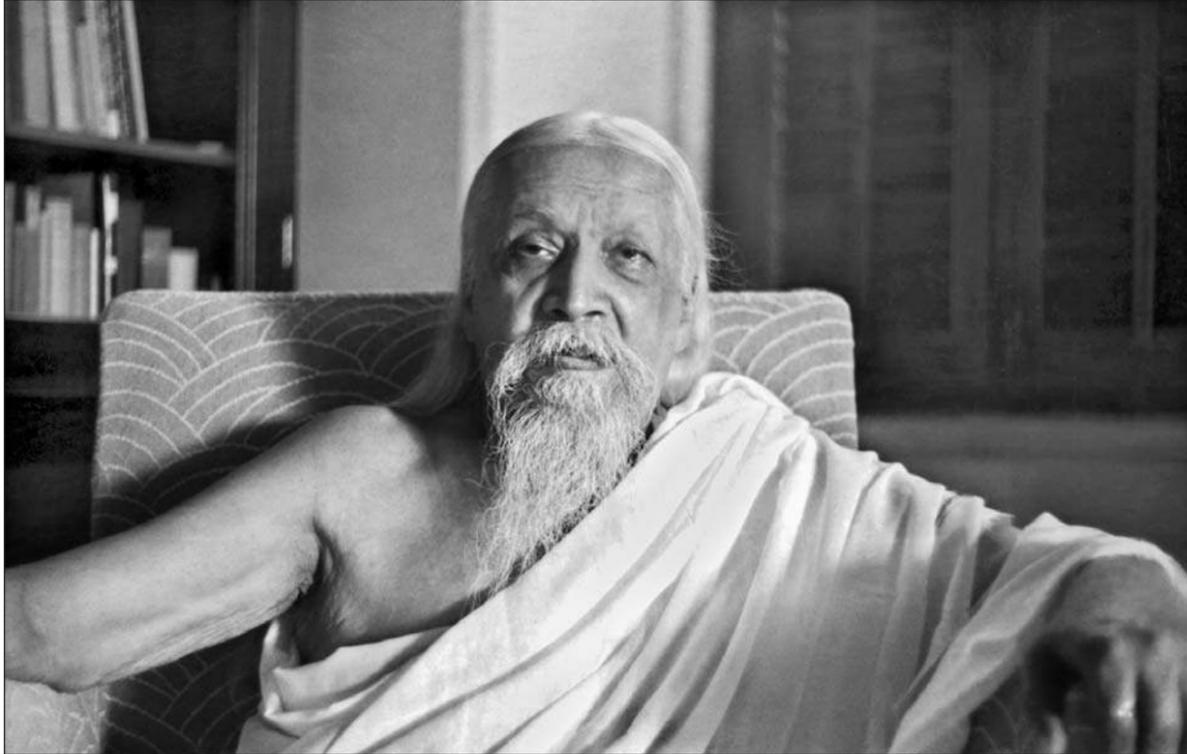
Cartier-Bresson always said his aim was to capture "the decisive moment," i.e. the essence of a situation or event that was unfolding before his eyes. Armed with a small hand-held Leica camera, and using as little artificial light as possible, for four decades he roamed the globe capturing human beings in the midst of action. From the historic events, such as the funeral of Mahatma Gandhi and the rise of China's Mao Zedong, to the smaller moments of workers relaxing or a family picnicking by the river Marne, he had a knack for being in the right place at the right time, and seizing the spirit of the moment.

There certainly was a yogic element to Cartier-Bresson's art. He loved perfection, and his quest as a photographer was to have a glimpse of eternity in the fleeting instant. Inspired by Zen Buddhism, he once said that his photographic method consisted in using his open eye to look through the viewfinder upon the outer scene, while with his other, closed eye he was looking within. It was, perhaps, this inward gaze that caught the Mother's attention and prompted her to grant him permission to photograph the Ashram in April 1950.

When Cartier-Bresson arrived in Pondicherry on April 23, in time for the Darshan on the 24th, he was in the midst of a truly extraordinary series of events. He had just come from Tiruvannamalai, where he had photographed Sri Ramana Maharshi's leaving his body, and borne witness to the fireball that passed slowly over the Arunachala Hill at 8.47 p.m., the exact time of the sage's absorption into the Self. On the 24th, Cartier-Bresson was destined to take the only photographs ever taken of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo giving darshan together, and on the 25th to conduct the last photoshoot of Sri Aurobindo, thus completing a series of 'final statements' on the life and passing of three remarkable sons of modern India: Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, and Sri Aurobindo.

Why Cartier-Bresson was blessed with a chance to get pictures of India's three great thinkers, yogis and spiritual figures of the 20th century as they stood on the threshold of life and death, we can only speculate. What is certain is that it had a deep reason.

When Cartier-Bresson arrived in Pondicherry in April 1950, Sri Aurobindo had been in seclusion for over 20 years, and had repeatedly declined requests to be photographed. In retrospect, we also know that Sri Aurobindo had already decided to leave the body, and



was deeply engaged in two Herculean tasks: completing *Savitri*, and preparing for the first fully conscious descent into Death in the history of mankind. In a very real sense, Sri Aurobindo was poised on the edge of his own 'decisive moment.'

Initially, the Mother gave Cartier-Bresson permission to photograph only the premises of the Ashram, as well as the Ashramites engaged in their daily activities. However, she soon allowed him to take shots with herself in the background, and as the trust grew, she even let him take portraits of herself although she never sat for a formal photoshoot. Cartier-Bresson's diary shows that he distinctly felt the Mother's sweetness and kindness, and his photographs of her distributing flowers certainly express these qualities.

Yet the greatest photos were yet to come. On the morning of April 25, 1950, the day after the Darshan, Cartier-Bresson went to thank the Mother for the favours granted and to ask for one more – permission to photograph Sri Aurobindo. According to Cartier-Bresson, he finally persuaded her with the statement, "I am only photographing the female aspect of the Divine. What about the male aspect?" In any case, the Mother consulted with Sri Aurobindo and – surprisingly – consent was given.

From the technical perspective, the session was quick and quiet. Cartier-Bresson took about ten minutes, during which Sri Aurobindo impressed the photographer with his complete immobility. In his diary, Cartier-Bresson recorded: "The room was so neat and tidy and impersonal. Sri Aurobindo did not wink an eye during the entire ten minutes I was watching him, he did not seem to belong to that impersonal setting." During the interview given in Paris 40 years later to the day (25 April 1990), Cartier-Bresson recalled: "My impressions of the Mother – a power woman. Sri Aurobindo was very remote. I had 'a tremendous meditation' far away."

From the spiritual perspective, on the other hand, Cartier-Bresson's portraits of Sri Aurobindo sitting in his armchair stand among the most substantial documents of human history. The side shots, in which Sri Aurobindo's face is less prominent, are unproblematic. What one sees in these photos is a meditating sage who seems to have materialized on the film from the future. Sri Aurobindo barely appears to belong to this time and place.

The frontal compositions are, on the contrary, more perplexing, especially the head-on portraits. The first and most obvious feature of Sri Aurobindo's last portraits is that he is not smiling. Also, he gives no revealing gesture or motion of note, and the composition seems rather static. There is nothing here to suggest transcendent bliss, not even that distantly tender smile from the Beyond, like Mona Lisa expresses so delicately in her portrait made by Leonardo da Vinci.

On the surface, at least, Sri Aurobindo seems almost the opposite of the *jivanmukta* that he was: his face is lined, his expression serious, and the atmosphere grave. This is not the delightful face of Krishna, rather the appearance of a warrior who has marched a thousand miles on foot and has yet miles to go before he sleeps. Even the Mother later commented that she was surprised by Sri Aurobindo's

look, for it was not the ever-patient and sweet visage she had come to know and love.

And yet, there is a deeper message behind Sri Aurobindo's solemnity. For what we do see in Sri Aurobindo's bare, frank look is the face of the supramental Avatar preparing to confront Death, to plunge into the very heart of Darkness and sow there the first seeds of the Life Divine. Sri Aurobindo looks grave here because the moment literally is grave. This is no light *lila* of a God who does not feel the pain of human clay, it is the full conscious surrender of the Godhead who has become the death-bound suffering that we are.

When one looks to Sri Aurobindo's last portraits in such times of critical need, then suddenly he looks different: one will see that Sri Aurobindo's face is one's own face, is every human face, is the Divine who has taken birth on earthly soil. As if his fatigue is our fatigue, is all human fatigue, is the Divine who has assumed the burden

of human toil.

Looking into Sri Aurobindo's left eye, one may be taken in by the soft, receptive compassion of the Avatar who understands our pains because he shares them, whose sympathy is boundless because he walks right at our side and knows intimately every rock and pitfall on the Path. In his right eye, one is met by the steady gaze of Wisdom that looks dispassionately upon the labour of ages and fills the viewer with a calm knowledge that the final fruits of evolution are as certain as the failures of the moment now seem. One looks again upon the lined visage of the great Divine Warrior who has fought so much, endured so much, and a new resolve enters one's soul. Since He has borne so much for us, we should give something small in return. Let us go one more step forward on the Path – in honour of Him. And so, one's heart warms again and one's resolve strengthens. One feels the arm of the great Protector around oneself. And suddenly the grim predator of darkness that has been long stalking one's soul retreats, banished by the bright Light that blazes from behind this very human visage.

This is likely the significance of Cartier-Bresson's final portrait of Sri Aurobindo. It extends to struggling mortals 'the helping hand' of an Avatar who otherwise might have remained forever impersonal and distant to us. For though *Savitri* and *The Life Divine* bring us glowing intimations from a brighter future, the weaker parts of us needed something else, too – this visual reminder that the supramental Avatar was also human like us. He is not only above and beyond us, He is also with and inside us, feeling our feelings, fighting our battles, facing the same mortality we face. Evidently, Sri Aurobindo knew exactly what he was getting in Cartier-Bresson, and he decided the French photographer was the right instrument to convey the Avatar's parting gift to a suffering humanity.

As Sri Aurobindo declares in his essay *The National Value of Art*, "Art can express eternal truth, it is not limited to the expression of form and appearance. So wonderfully has God made the world that a man using a simple combination of lines, an unpretentious harmony of colours and contrasts, can raise this apparently insignificant medium to suggest absolute and profound truths with a perfection which language labours with difficulty to reach... What Nature is, what God is, what man is can be triumphantly revealed in stone or on canvas." Looking at the last pictures of an Indian sage taken by a French photographer, one is tempted to add: "and on film," for a camera, if placed in skillful hands, can capture the essence of the Divine no less effectively than a brush or a chisel.

Willemine

This account has been based on the article "The Decisive Moment" by Dr. Michael Miovic, edited by Alexander Pereverzev, which appeared in *Mother India, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry*.

Sri Aurobindo's The National Value of Art has been published in the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. I, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2003*.

Discussing what it means to be an artist, Sri Aurobindo says:

It is not necessary that every man should be an artist. It is necessary that every man should have his artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty and insight into form and colour and that which is expressed in form and colour, made habitually active, correct and sensitive... It is necessary that those who create, whether in great things or small, whether in the unusual masterpieces of art and genius or in the small common things of use that surround a man's daily life, should be habituated to produce and the nation habituated to expect the beautiful in preference to the ugly, the noble in preference to the vulgar, the fine in preference to the crude, the harmonious in preference to the gaudy.

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"We came for the city"

The following is the first in what may become a series of articles featuring Aurovilians who hold the city deeply in their hearts, even though they may disagree about the details of its manifestation.

Anandi and her partner, Joseba, joined Auroville in the early 1990s. Since then she has been actively involved in various planning and economy groups. She has also managed for many years the Pour Tous Distribution Centre.

Beginnings

Joseba and I first saw the Galaxy Plan in an alternative magazine in Spain. It was a special issue about communities in the world, and there was an article about Auroville, and the Galaxy image was on the front page.

We were already reading Sri Aurobindo at that time. We had been part of yoga groups in Spain where the emphasis was very personal, upon discovering oneself, but when we read Sri Aurobindo it was very 'expanding' because here was somebody who was transforming the future of the earth. It changed our lives.

But we hadn't heard of Auroville. So when we read this article, we thought this was fantastic. What could be better than a city based upon Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, for the article presented Auroville as having a dimension as vast as Sri Aurobindo himself, and the Galaxy image represented something of that movement, a dynamism which embraced the whole world. Then there were all these mind-blowing things like no police, no money...

I was born in a small village, and was demonised when I was a teenager by the small village gossip. I was horrified by this atmosphere. Later, we lived in Pamplona, which, although a small city, allowed me to breathe more easily because there was more of a feeling of diversity. But we loved going to Paris and walking around, because it was cosmopolitan and lots of interesting things were happening there.

We had always thought that cities were very beautiful inventions. Joseba used to read a lot about cities, and the impact that cities like Athens and Venice have had on humanity. Unfortunately, modern cities have also become very horrible places, and that's why people are so afraid of them. But I think cities deserve to be saved, to become bringers of beauty and peace again.

That's why Auroville could be such an interesting experiment in rediscovering the marvel of cities. For I don't think that living in small communities in the countryside is the dimension that humanity needs at this time.

Where is the city?

In 1988 we visited Auroville for the first time. It was a shock. The article in the magazine had suggested that the city was already finished, and that's why we had come, but there was nothing. We couldn't find the city anywhere! Only the Matrimandir was under

construction, and that's where we went to work. Polishing marble pieces for hour after hour, we connected with the centre. But as for the rest...some of it was jungle, and whenever we went there, we got lost.

However, we met Sharanam, who was the only Spanish person living in Auroville at that time, and she made a big impact on us. She was working in the Laboratory of Evolution, where they had made compilations of what Mother had written and said about the city and about Auroville.

We took copies of these back to Spain with us, where we also started reading *The Agenda*. All this had a very strong impact upon us, for even though the city was not yet realised, we understood we could collaborate in manifesting it on different levels.

We came back the next year with the intention to stay. But we met Aurovillian Prema who convinced us to open a shop in Spain to sell Auroville products. So we went back and put all our money into it, and it was a disaster because the quality of the products we received from Auroville was poor. We found ourselves with a big debt. So we decided to pay it off, save some money and then go to live in Auroville.

It took us more than three years, which was really a wonderful exercise in detachment. All this time we had a photo of the Galaxy in our home, and we would look at it every day because it was our dream to see it manifested.

Opposition

We had come to Auroville for the city, to help manifest the city. But what was painful was that very soon we realised that some people were against the city. We had a friend, a long-term Aurovillian, who asked us to accompany her to an interview. The journalist asked her about the plans for the city and she explained that The Mother at that time was an old lady, who couldn't see or speak much. And when an architect presented his city plan to her, she accepted it because she was so nice and she would have said 'yes' to anything then. But, continued our friend, this city plan has nothing to do with what we are doing here.

We were so shocked we couldn't speak. We went to see Luigi in *Aurofuture* for an explanation and he said that some people were very attached to a 'green' Auroville and saw the city as a threat. So we agreed to work with him, Roger and Jacqueline in *Aurofuture* to help manifest the Galaxy plan.

We worked there for ten years and learned a lot about the city. Roger had received a lot of detailed information about it from The



Anandi

Mother. However, he didn't know all the details, and we had to make many calculations regarding densities as this would influence circulation etc. Roger was very flexible, but there were certain things that were absolutes, non-negotiables. These included the Crown, the outer ring road, the Greenbelt, the Lines of Force, and, of course, the central area. The rest was open for research.

I began to imagine daily how the city could be. I felt the whole movement, dynamism, of the city could be beautiful, taking our minds into a different space. I imagined getting into my electric vehicle and driving along the avenues and through the parks. And I always dreamed that the Lines of Force would be like mountains that I could walk up and down, experiencing different vistas.

During this time, our enthusiasm for the city grew more and more. Moreover, our conviction that this was what Mother wanted for Auroville was confirmed when a friend of ours in the Ashram told us a story. When he was young, he was on the staircase to Mother's room when Roger came with a big model of the Galaxy which he was about to present to Mother. Roger asked this young boy to help carry it into Mother's room. So this boy went into Mother's room for the first time and stayed there quietly in the background. And he reported that when Roger presented the Galaxy model to her, Mother was so happy. She said, "This is fantastic, this is wonderful".

But in Auroville we kept encountering opposition to the city. We had presented a

plan for the first Line of Force, which we wanted to live in, because for us the joy of our life is to start something, to get the city moving. But a hundred Aurovilians signed a petition against it, so we were forced to make only three apartments rather than the fourteen we had planned for the first stage, and our architect, Dominique, left Auroville in disgust.

People didn't want to see a big building, but I think the larger fear is the fear of losing a paradise. More and more people seem to be coming here attracted by the greenery, the peace, by workshops and nice things for the kids. But how are we going to build the city of the future if people only want a peaceful life, a place they can retire to?

I'm not looking for a comfortable place to live. I want to participate in building something big, something that has the dimension, that 'breathes', The Mother and Sri Aurobindo and their work for humanity. I don't mind if I have to live in a hut. I'm much more interested in the larger work we can do together.

How can we change the present mindset? I think it can only happen by removing the importance we give to individuals' choices about how they want to live, and giving importance to the larger mission instead. We have lost the ability to think big. If we had to start building Matrimandir now, we would never manage it because there would be endless meetings and discussions.

I don't know why the city is planned in this way, and I don't want to know. I know She saw it and indicated how it should be, so let me do it. If it is a mistake, it will be The Mother's mistake, not mine!

A last opportunity?

Perhaps now we have another chance to build the city. The fact there will be money to build the infrastructure for the city means we can establish a base. However, in the present climate I do not know if it will succeed.

But I don't think it's accidental that the present disruption has happened in Sri Aurobindo's anniversary year because Auroville needed a bit of a shake-up. Perhaps She's given us the last opportunity to demonstrate that we are serious about what we want to do here. If this fails, who knows what will happen?

Actually, I realise we actually have no idea about what is going on. I know The Mother is behind it because She would not allow all this just to happen, but what this is going to provoke we will only see after some years. Only then will we realise what happened, and why it had to happen like this.

From an interview by Alan

REFLECTION

Changing behavioural patterns

It is hard to believe that anybody is happy with the present situation in Auroville. We seem to be trapped in a situation in which action inevitably leads to escalating reaction, to the serious detriment of our work, our health and social fabric, as well as to Auroville's image in the larger world.

Some Aurovilians blame the present upheaval on a new Secretary and her supporters. They characterize the approach of this group as information and individuals being manipulated to attain certain ends, by intransigent dogmatism, and by a certain elitism which leads, among other things, to a relentlessly top-down approach to development and problem solving.

However, the Secretary's supporters makes similar accusations against those they feel are blocking development of the city. They accuse these 'blockers' of dogma-

tism, of taking unilateral action to get their way, and of claiming superior knowledge concerning how Auroville should develop.

This suggests that while we are confronted at present with radically different visions of how Auroville should develop, the different orientations actually mirror to some extent the way they relate to each other.

But if we honestly introspect, we see that the accusations that these groups direct at each other – of dogmatism, elitism, unilateral action, manipulation etc. – are actually much more widespread. In fact, they are mirrored, even sustained, by how many of us think and act in our daily lives. For every time we achieve an end by doubtful means, every time we quote Mother to suit our own purposes, every time we have an attitude of superiority over others or use them to achieve an end, every time we take

a unilateral decision without including those who are affected, we are reinforcing this kind of behaviour. In other words, we are contributing to a particular energetic or behavioural 'field' that is influencing all of us, for there is no such thing as a purely personal action in Auroville.

This is not to relativise the present situation, to claim that everybody is equally responsible for the present upheaval, and that when it comes to promoting Auroville's ideals and building solidarity we cannot distinguish between helpful and unhelpful behaviour, between sincerity and falsehood. Rather, it is to suggest that certain behaviour which at present we see displayed in bold relief is not be a new manifestation, but something much more longstanding and widespread.

Therefore, while all of us must continue to stand for our highest values and manifesting Auroville's

ideals in any way we feel capable, and we must definitely and actively resist whatever we feel is unjust and against the spirit of Auroville, we need to consider doing this in a different way if we are not to continue feeding the kind of behaviour which sets one Aurovillian against another and ties up our productive energies.

In other words, it's no longer a matter of simply changing a superficial narrative which pits those who want Mother's city against those against development, but of embodying something radically different in our daily lives: it starts with ourselves.

For every time we refuse to answer slander with slander, stereotyping with stereotyping, divisiveness with divisiveness, every time integrity is favoured over narrowness and a sense of our common humanity triumphs over politics and we refuse to allow dif-

ferent views to separate us, the present cycle of action/reaction is broken, and a different field of behaviour is created. And while it is not a guarantee of change – for personal agendas and powerful external forces over which we have little or no control may remain powerful factors – it creates the potential for opening up new ways of being with each other and of approaching those issues which seem so intractable.

The good news is that this other way of being/relating, which also has always existed in Auroville, is becoming more and more powerful and widespread in response to the perceived threat to our unity. It speaks, above all, of a deep desire to heal our social fabric and to move forward together on the basis of what Mother once referred to as the 'spirit of Auroville': the art of creating unity out of complexity.

Alan

Community Gatherings

Over the past two months, a group of Tamil Aurovilians organised three community gatherings with the intention to bring together the residents of Auroville in unity.

These gatherings were initiated due to the felt need by some Tamil Aurovilians to break the generalised false narratives painted about Tamil Aurovilians, such as: they are the silent majority, they support one side strongly, they are afraid to speak up, etc. We felt that these narratives should be broken down and – as we mentioned in the first gathering – we would like to act to bring a space of Unity in the community.

Our group is composed of mainly young Aurovilians from the bio-region, who want to express their support for the Residents' Assembly (RA). We first organised a gathering on June 13th at the Unity Pavilion. During this event, we presented our stand, focused on understanding the roles and responsibilities of the RA, and also tried to understand the extent of the term 'development'. More than 600 people attended this gathering.

Our key objectives in organising this gathering were: i) to increase Tamil Aurovilian participation in community events; ii) to raise awareness about the role of the RA; iii) to break down the language barrier amongst Tamil Aurovilians that sometimes prevent them from attending meetings; iv) to evoke the sense of unity among the residents; and v) to show that the diversity in our larger community cannot be misconceived or misquoted as 'division'.

Each one of us present in the gathering experienced a renewed beautiful connection and felt that it was like a new beginning. We announced



PHOTO: THE DRONE ZONE

that such gatherings would continue in some way in the future, for this sense of unity and togetherness is necessary in view of the challenging situation we are currently in.

This gathering was followed by a peace walk on July 2nd, which we organised together with other community members. More than 500

Aurovilians walked peacefully from the Solar Kitchen to Matrimandir, and then participated in the collective concentration under the Banyan Tree, to show the solidarity of the RA.

The third event was a 'community potluck', held on July 16th. We were really excited to organise this first-of-its-kind all-community

potluck in Auroville, for which more than 1,000 residents showed up. All the work for the preparation of this potluck was done by Aurovilians themselves, utilising only Auroville resources and in-kind help, except a few that were sourced from outside. It was beautiful to see so much willingness and support pouring in in so many ways. It reassured us that the Auroville spirit is very much alive and that each one of us sincerely carries it in their Auroville journey.

We want to work further towards deepening the sense of unity and the meaning of belonging to this beautiful experiment. A short-term goal is to open up our team so as to be able to work towards our long-term goals, our key focus mentioned above. We are aware that these gatherings may not be direct responses to any challenging situation in Auroville at the moment, but through these we aspire to keep the Auroville spirit and our unity alive.

In this journey, we aspire to move forward with our intentions sincerely, despite the misconceptions about our efforts. We believe that this will widen the perspectives and pave the way for a true Unity. We sincerely request all the members of this beautiful Auroville family to strongly hold hands and jointly navigate towards the light, feeling Her Grace that is with us.

Anand, Aropriya, Arosugan, Bharathy, Dinagar, Ganesh, Induja, Krishnaraju, Murali, Padmanabhan, Prakash, Raj, Ramanan, Satya, Senthil, Uma, Vadivel, Valli and others.



PHOTO: KRIPA



PHOTO: KRIPA

AUROVILLE SERVICES

"We are vastly under-utilised"

For the early birds it's a familiar sight: a team of workers fills potholes and equalizes the Auroville dirt roads, using plate rammers, road rollers, lorries, tractors and JCBs, all neatly marked with the words "Auroville Road Service". But all is not well.

"We are not being recognized," complains Jacques. "The Auroville Road Service has an impressive history: it built all the existing paver block roads in Auroville, starting in 2007 with the first paved road from the Matrimandir Visitors' entrance to the Savitri Bhavan turnoff. Later we built the Surrender Road, the Vikas radial, the road past the Kindergarten, the road in front of the Solar Kitchen, the Solar Kitchen roundabout and the roads in the Kottakarai area. After a bad experience with an outside supplier regarding pavers quality we opted to manufacture the blocks ourselves ensuring even quality and standard size. We also made the kerbs and whatever else was needed. Only the road from the Edaiyanchavady tar road to the Visitors' Centre was not made by us; it was built and donated by NLC India Ltd, the Neyveli Lignite Corporation.

"So we are a bit upset that nobody from the Town Development Council even talked to us about the Crown Road and that we did not receive an invitation to tender for its construction. All that the TDC asked us to do is to clear bushes for a cycle path, from Savitri Bhavan to Serendipity and level the cleared area of the Bliss Forest. This had to be done urgently, probably in view of the visit of the Minister of Health of the Central Government who was invited to cycle along the Crown. But for constructing the Crown, we have been completely ignored."

It pains in more than one way. The Road Service struggles to survive, its equipment is old, and an order for making the Crown would have been a tremendous push. It is therefore difficult to understand that Auroville is now using the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) to do construction in Auroville. The CPWD floated the tender for the Crown. "We heard through the grapevine that the winner is a company from Tirupur which quoted 9.3 crores for the work. It would have been better if that money had stayed in Auroville and would have been

allocated to the Road Service, which after all is an Auroville unit," says Jacques.

The Road Service survives in part on a monthly repair budget allocated by the Budget Coordination Committee; the rest comes from paid work. "We have two teams," explains Manickam. "I am responsible for the 7-member maintenance team. We repair and maintain the roads and the cycle paths in the City area, up to the Outer Ring Road. Jacques manages the development team of about 10 people. This team does paid work, such as digging trenches for optical fibre and electrical cables, laying sewer pipes and doing road repair work for communities outside the city area."

"As can be expected, some residents are not always happy with our quotation," says Jacques a bit wryly. "Sometimes they prefer hiring an outside contractor if there is some price difference. But we don't really make a profit – we try to survive." He recalls that in Auroville's early days, people were happy to support Auroville services, even when they knew that the services were a bit more expensive. "But times have changed."

"I would like to take the opportunity of this talk to respond to two often-heard criticisms," says Tom, who is in charge of equipment maintenance. "One is the accusation that we have been involved in the destruction of the Youth Centre and the clearing of the Bliss Forest in December last year. This is not true. One of our JCBs was there on December 3rd to do some ground levelling; but we refused to let our JCBs be used for demolition work or for the felling of trees. That was done by outsiders."

The other criticism is about the dismal quality of the Certitude Road, the most-used road in Auroville. "We can only repair a few stretches," explains Manickam. "We cannot touch the stretch in between Dinesh teashop and the privately-owned land opposite. We have tried a few times, but these people won't let us to do the work; there were even physical fights and they let the dog loose, and one of



The Road Service at work on the road near Certitude

us needed hospital treatment. We filed a police complaint but nothing came of that and no help from any authority was offered. These people object to the dust of the road and want us to pave or tar it. But this road does not feature in the Auroville Master Plan, and part of it is *peramboke*, under the ultimate responsibility of the Collector of our district. Until the Town Development Council has solved this puzzle, the Road Service can't do a thing."

Asked about the future, Jacques throws up his hands. "We have the know-how, we have the experience, we have the machinery, we even have a large stock of paver blocks, we can do so much more. But we are vastly under-utilized. We could once again become a prime community service. But if that vision is not shared, there will be not much future for the Road Service."

In conversation with Carel

From philosophy to living

I used to call myself a wanna-be hippie who missed the boat. Born in 1964 to a French Canadian father and American mother, it was too late for the Woodstock ride. Recently a friend teased me because I dared to say out loud on a steamy hot day here in Auroville: “I love air conditioning!”

I have aspired my whole life to be as close to consciousness, peace and love as I could be. As a six-year-old child, I watched my mind say one day: “See this thinking going on in your head – you are the thing watching it. You have always been and will always be.” Then I spent the rest of my life trying to figure out how to embody that knowledge in a practical way. I see that many of us seekers and aspirants have been working solidly to put that puzzle together. How do you go from philosophy to the living application?

While studying at the University of Minnesota, I worked at a big spiritual bookshop in Minneapolis. Passionately, I guided our patrons to all the sections of the store. I was also a volunteer for the Continuum Centre, a sister organisation to Noetic Science where, in the early 80s, we brought in the latest speakers on consciousness research. I watched an unfolding of a larger society trying to outline what to do. Now we know there is much more to us than meets the eye.

Soon, at the university I met our new volunteer coordinator and future husband, Daniel Greenberg. At that time he was researching for his doctorate in education. A year later, his thesis work would be on children’s alternative schooling in intentional communities. I was a producer for a small video company downtown and was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant to develop a documentary on what used to be called communes. We travelled in our Volkswagen bus across the United States and Canada for eight months while I interviewed dozens of middle-age communitarians and created a film called: ‘Follow The Dirt Road: An Introduction to Intentional Communities’.

During this adventure, I experienced society’s fringe fully and saw people’s commitment to ecological sustainability, equitable leadership, resource sharing, and group spiritual habits. I loved being in those wilds: planting trees, cutting carrots, talking enlightenment and the age of cooperation.

While travelling, we stayed at ‘The Farm’ with Ina May Gaskin, known as the grandmother of natural birth in North America. There, her midwifery partner, Pamela said, “You should be a midwife”. The idea thrilled me but it felt like it was still something for older, wiser women.

The following year we looked for inspiring places for Daniel’s practicum and wrote to communities all over the world. In response, The Findhorn Foundation in Scotland invited us to work with their children and teenagers. So off we went. I revelled in being in this magical community of 300 people on the edge of the North Sea where we held hands before community meals,



attuned together before work, and had group tea breaks for bonding time during our shifts.

I cherished gardening in the Park Garden. Work was called “love in action” and I certainly felt that. Our children and team programmes were rich with meaningful experiences and exchanges. I was learning how a community can govern itself from spiritual attunement, and experienced how members support each other in conscious evolution. Once, while sitting in the dining hall at a table with a bunch of pre-schoolers, I noticed how I loved the feeling of being in my rightful place and helping to serve community. The parents, who were my chefs, accountants and maintenance crew, were sitting at other tables enjoying themselves, knowing that their children were being well cared for by me. That sense of belonging and doing what was mine to do in a community setting was a striking feeling of fulfillment.

While we lived at Findhorn, we witnessed a few university student groups who were brought over for study abroad programmes. We watched them inside this setting of deep connection and meaning where they were bathed in the profound ethics, that included the care of each other and the tending to the soul. We saw them “pop”. Their transformation into becoming more awake beings was exciting and beautiful as we had experienced it ourselves over the past couple of years. Impressed with this kind of work, Dan took the phone number of Bruce, one of the leaders who had guided the students to the community.

Then came the time when we watched a slideshow presentation by Dhanya on a community called Auroville. Our jaws dropped. So much of what we held dear was on that red-soil

land that had been transformed by the kind of values and beliefs that we treasured. We wondered, when would we get to go there?

We returned to the US so that Dan could defend his dissertation and then went travelling again to find our new home. While we were camping in a national park on the Rio Grande, I made an invocation to the Divine to give me my mission, now that Daniel had completed a phase of his. After so much dynamic human intimacy, I did not want to go back to my old editing room life.

The next day we were sitting naked in a hot spring and, out of nowhere, another young couple asked to join us. Within the first minutes of introduction, the young woman said she was going to a birthing place in El Paso and she would be witnessing women delivering their babies for 24 hours. She was looking into enrolling in the midwifery programme in this three-bedroom house on the Tex-Mex border. I blurted out: “I wanna come!”

I joined her and as soon as I stepped into the home, I knew I would be coming there to train. A few months later I was learning how to catch babies and the art and science of midwifery. This birthing house was infused with Heart and Spirit. At night, after another birth that was more like a sacred family fiesta, I would stand in the backyard under the stars praying that the universe would feel my gratitude.

One day, Dan reached into his pocket and found the old piece of paper with the phone number of Bruce, that director of a student programme in Findhorn. Dan called him and soon Bruce asked him if he would like to co-lead on a long study trip to Thich Nhat Hanh’s monastery in France, then up to the Findhorn Foundation, and then over to Auroville for the greater portion of the semester. This was so exciting! I prayed this was going to be our life.

For a few years in the mid-nineties, we were faculty with dozens of learners, all eager to soak in everything that Auroville could teach on a programme that was called ‘Geocommons’. Leading groups to Auroville opened me up even wider to the possibilities for this world. Eventually we inherited the programme and it grew into ecological semesters abroad in communities worldwide, under the name ‘Living Routes’. The students came from a variety of American universities and received academic credits through the University of Massachusetts for four courses during their time of studying and working in Auroville and other ecovillages. ‘Living Routes’ offered classes in sustainability, spirituality, community dynamics, communication and permaculture. Our students interned in a variety of Auroville units such as farms, schools and ecological technology centres. We started our days with earnest group sharing and teaching. Our cohort became very close while students blossomed on Auroville land.

Auroville showed these young people what can happen when humans come together, to steward the earth while pursuing their vision of growing in consciousness. The students were

introduced to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and loved sitting in contemplation at the Matrimandir. They grew in so many different ways in their months here – it was a thrilling and profound experience that shaped their lives.

Our student groups kept coming to Auroville for 19 years, and we were determined to come back to live in Auroville ourselves. During those years, I completed my M.Ed in Integrative Education for adults, with research on what empowers transformation. Finally, in 2019 our eldest child went off to college and this left us in a position to be able to move here. Our youngest daughter is very happy attending Last School. The plan was to develop another programme like ‘Living Routes’ in Auroville, so we packed up our home and came to live.

Before leaving North America, Auroville’s midwife, Paula Murphy, invited me to work at Morning Star Midwifery Services out of Santé. I continue to serve as a midwife and support our birth team to create a holistic birth centre, with the vision of bringing to it all that is known about consciousness in birth practices.

For the new families here, I teach hypno-birthing, water birth, mindfulness birth, auto-suggestion, and a variety of psycho-spiritual approaches to bringing in souls to the world. I’m especially passionate about the transformative and awakening potential of childbirth. I envision our Morning Star Birth and Family Centre as a place to prepare mothers and fathers for higher consciousness partnering. We study how to be more mindful in parent communication and relating. I’ve created and taught a few workshops on relationships here, as things change with the arrival of children.

There are so many ways to be of service to this growing city. I want to bring all that I have to help expand the vision of the possible on Earth.

I see Auroville as a research and demonstration site for a world that dearly needs this transformation of the land into beauty and the unified gathering of diverse people striving toward higher states. This charged place feels like a leverage point on the earth, where our efforts reverberate far and wide. It’s an amazing feeling to live with others looking to better the world in as many ways as they can imagine. I love the closeness to others I sense when going to yoga, dance sessions or aerial trapeze. I am growing exponentially in this environment of mutual support.

After two years of volunteering here, I’ve just been confirmed as an Aurovilian. I have deepened numerous friendships and been able to stay in close contact with and support the young families I work with here.

I wake up every morning counting my blessings for being in Auroville and fully enthused for the day ahead – evolving consciousness while walking on the red soil. My eternal six-year-old self is smiling with all that is embodied here in this ‘City The Earth Needs’.

Monique Gautier

Edited from the original article from the LFAU-A4A newsletter of October 2021.

ROAD SAFETY

Transport survey

On April 15 and 16 Youthlink surveyed the community about road safety. There was a polling board, letterbox for further suggestions and information was given out.

Polling Board

Outside Solar Kitchen, Youthlink set up a polling board split into twenty-four sections with individual road safety concerns such as speeding, driving under the influence etc. 235 votes were cast. As each participant had three votes, roughly 78 people participated. The survey shows road quality as the biggest concern for residents, with a total of 38 votes, followed by speeding (31) and people driving with high beam headlights on(24).

Concern Letterbox and Dreamline

The ‘dreamline’ gathered information on people’s outlook into the future of road safety. The ‘concern letterbox’ allowed people to voice con-

cerns which were not presented on the polling board.

They received 29 concern letters and 13 dream letters, as well as verbal community feedback:

14 letters about the way people were driving; such as driving whilst using a mobile, underage driving and driving under the influence

8 letters addressed road quality

6 letters on the Solar Kitchen roundabout and whether people knew how to use it properly

5 letters on too much traffic on the roads

3 letters were concerned with electric bicycles on cycle paths

Suggestions

After gathering all this information Youthlink came up with the following suggestions:

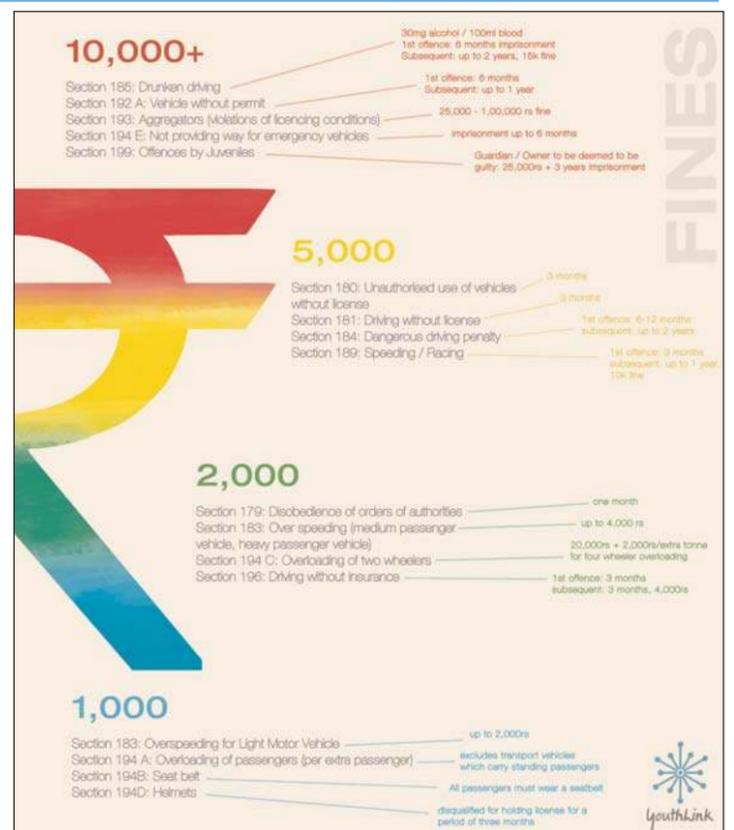
1. Creating leaflets to be circulated in all guest houses for tourists/guests to understand the regional driving laws and safety concerns within the community

2. Creating benches on cycle paths
3. Creating a cyclepath map of Auroville
4. Putting up more road safety sign boards
5. Build a driving school that has driving courses for Aurovilians and Newcomers and have a place for new learners to practice driving
6. Put reflective tape on turns
7. Place convex mirrors on blind spots
8. Place reflective tape on cow horns

Action Plan

The Youthlink team wish to visit the high schools of Auroville to help spread information and start an open conversation on the dangers of some of our driving habits. They hope to collaborate with working groups on implementing some of the above points. They are working alongside the Auroville Security Service Team to design a First Aid course, so more people are able to provide assistance in case of accidents.

Peter Lloyd



One of the posters made by YouthLink

One dream and many questions

Bhavya grew up in Auroville, and is currently studying Urban Design in Ahmedabad, India. She will continue her studies in Milan, and eventually plans to come back to Auroville with her acquired study, work and life experiences.

I found myself in Auroville in a way that many other children do, with a suspiciously large number of suitcases and a one way ticket. Never could I have imagined that this would be the greatest adventure I had ever known.

At a young age, my brother and I were brought to Auroville by our family from Gujarat, India. The reason was simple – our parents wished us to get an education which went beyond grades and examinations, hardly anticipating that our future aspirations would take shape so significantly around Auroville.

I remember feeling ecstatic on my first day at school. There were trees everywhere, we had clay, crafts and painting classes and I could run around barefoot! Perhaps because I had spent the first eight years of my life in a traditional education system, in the frantic life of a city, I immediately saw Auroville as a place of magic.

The little girl who had experienced school as a line of dark corridors in a crisply ironed uniform and had only known her teachers as sirs and madams, thought she had entered a fairytale. And fairytales always have magic. This magic was the red sand between my tiny toes – always connected to the earth. This magic was my new friends who didn't look like me – but we all laughed and played together. This magic was my young teachers – who were strong, determined, kind and most of all, had this unwavering spirit of offering and service to the fairytale land. I was fascinated by it.

Once a year, we would go back to the 'outside world' and visit our family in Surat, one of the largest cities in Gujarat. My worn out red stained chappals would have to find a place in the back of the cupboard and a pair of clean, fancy sandals would strap themselves around my feet. The city was no joke.

I would meet my cousins and friends briefly – they were quite busy with their grades and examinations. Hearty congratulations and chocolates would be offered to those with 'A's on their mark-sheets. I began to wonder where my hearty congratulations and chocolates were. Was it extremely difficult to study in a 'proper' school? Perhaps I simply didn't have it in me?

At 13, I found an opportunity to answer these questions and enrolled in a 'proper' high school system within Auroville. Was I capable of adapting to a new environment with new challenges? As it turned out, I was. I grew to enjoy academics and a variety of subjects that were offered. Grades became little affirmations of my abilities and exams became specific goals to work towards and accomplish. I collected many A's and hearty congratulations, but realised I had never really liked chocolates, anyway.

There were some challenges that I hadn't expected to face. I started struggling to find a sense of belonging amongst my peers: suddenly there was not much I had in common with them. We didn't laugh and play with the same things anymore and the only thing that seemed to be shared was our childhood in the fairytale land. I felt out of place, uncomfortable with myself and my surroundings. The absence of new people and new energy in my life nudged me to consider a change in environment. The idea of a university life, where I would have similar interests with many more people my

age, became a new beginning that I looked forward to. By the time I completed high school, my mind was made up to pursue further education outside of Auroville. But what would that be?

The outside world was terrifying – without Auroville, I was probably nothing. That was my only mark of identity. Who was I, other than an Auroville child?

Up until now I had never considered what Auroville truly meant to me. It was my home, my family was here, and I had a regular routine between school, sports and other activities. But I had also been taught that there was a larger vision, a Dream that Aurovilians are to manifest. For the first time, I began to ask myself whether this journey was something I actively wanted to be a part of. If yes, how could I be a part of it?

I sensed an aspiration to feel within me the magic I had felt in the people around me, the magic shaped by a firm resolve towards achieving this Dream. Putting a hold on further education plans, I took a year to explore Auroville in a deeper sense to answer the questions that had been nagging me. As a young adult, why couldn't I find work here to gain financial independence? We had many decision making groups and decision making processes, but why weren't more people like myself – the youth – involved in these systems?

I decided that I would be that youth. My fairytale land has been a constant source of opportunities and explorations throughout my life. It has shaped me into the individual I am. Now, I wanted to help shape Auroville into the city it envisions to be.

During this gap year, I took part in many architecture and spatial design workshops and discovered a passion to learn about how people interact and move within public spaces. These spaces could become the physical environments where our individual selves could begin to merge into a collective. My experiences of our communal spirit have always come from spaces of gathering: Solar Kitchen, where we can share a meal with our entire community; amphitheatres and auditoriums where we come together to celebrate our diversity; our mud roads where we stop for a moment to chat with a familiar passerby. I think the human unity we strive for already exists in these spaces and these encounters. The individual lives we live within our houses spill out here, to create the unified spirit we have always known.

In 2018, I enrolled in a Bachelor degree of Urban Design, at CEPT University, Gujarat – a 5 year multidisciplinary course geared towards developing skills to design public spaces and rethinking the nature of our future urban habitats. My goal was defined: what could I learn about public spaces and people? What could I learn about urbanisation, a phenomenon Auroville is destined to experience in its future? What could be brought back and offered to Auroville, in its journey forward?

Over the course of my studies, I have had the opportunity to study and design for public life in many different contexts and cities of India. I studied heritage neighbourhoods in the old town of Ahmedabad, where mediaeval monuments are still alive with activity, and learnt how different com-



munities engage in vastly different lifestyles. I studied slum settlements in Dharavi, Mumbai, where populations have migrated from across the country and created their own dignified world despite the economic challenges.

During the pandemic, when classes had shifted online, I had the opportunity to study public behaviour patterns on our very own main road in Kulilapalayam! I observed how the shops and cafes have become important nodes for encounters not just between Aurovilians, but with people from the bioregion and beyond. I also observed how, perhaps, the boundary between what is considered a neighbouring village and what is considered Auroville has started to merge as our activities and lives have started to merge. Whereas these remain observations for now, I believe such kinds of studies have the potential to inform our future growth. My project was recognised for its sensitivity and depth of research and I was awarded for being one of the top performing students of the university.

Thanks to the virtual classes, I was also able to attend the Dreamweaving Workshops that took place in Auroville. They brought together experts on planning, infrastructure, architecture and design to brainstorm upon Auroville's path of development. I was invited to be a focus group participant from a 'young urban design perspective' and was introduced, for the first time, to the vast number of people who have been working in the same areas that I am so intrigued by.

I have never felt the magic stronger than I did during these workshops. There was a palpable spirit of togetherness, which reflected in the many ideas that were presented and shared. I was encouraged tremendously by this experience and my own journey seemed to be on the right path.

During the past four years, the experience of living in a metropolitan city – with its frantic pace and its enormity – has been overwhelming. My naivety was quickly crushed when I learnt of the

stubborn presence money tends to have in all social, cultural and educational interactions. Out there, progress seems to be governed less by one's sincerity and more by one's economic wealth.

Fortunately, I did not have to overcome these challenges alone. The support I have received from Auroville, from people and institutions alike, has been extraordinary. Professionals in the field of architecture and design have mentored and guided me, I have been granted scholarships to pursue my studies and have received countless words of encouragement. These experiences constantly fortify my belief in my fairytale land with its special Dream. Not only has it taught me to look deeply within myself and to discover what I am capable of, it unceasingly gives me the strength to fight for my aspirations.

Yet, during the past four years, the experience of a metropolitan city – with its constant activity and granted anonymity, has been exhilarating. I have grown to be comfortable with myself and my surroundings. In a sea of young people like myself, I was pushed to create my own identity. I learnt to recognise my flaws as well as my strengths and to hold myself with confidence regardless of either. The city is no joke but now my red stained chappals strut proudly under my feet.

At university, I realised Auroville has honed in me the ability to respect people's beliefs and ways of life, and absorb from them what I think is valuable. It has taught me how to be receptive and approach situations from multiple perspectives. This reflects in my work, which takes shape with considerable sensitivity and depth. There is an absolute need to do my best because I am not just an individual but a representative of Auroville. The sincerity in my work is not my own, it is the sincerity of an entire Vision, one that is easily dismissed as an unachievable utopia.

Friends often ask about this 'utopia', but there is always a slight hesitation to answer. Will I be able to do justice to the profundity of Auroville with my simple words and sentences? How can I talk of something that I myself am still discovering? Over time I've learnt not to be bogged down by these thoughts. I am proud to share what I know, and eager to learn what I don't; my experience is as meaningful as any other.

As I approach the final year of my course, more curious than ever to see where this remarkable journey will take me, I have the opportunity to step into the larger world and study in Milan, Italy where another new beginning awaits me. I look forward to learning of the innovation taking place around the world in the field of urban design and planning. I believe the more I can experience, the more I will be able to bring back.

The further I move from Auroville, the closer I feel to it. I believed that without Auroville, I would be nothing. I now realise there is no such thing as being 'without' it; it is within me. Once in a while I'll miss the breeze and the soil. Once in a while I'll miss my family and friends. Yet every time I begin to doubt myself or my journey, a force grips me tightly and the path reveals itself once again.

Bhavya

ORGANISATION

The recent selection process

The new selection process started in May with a call for nominations/self-nominations for candidates for the following Working Groups: Auroville Council, Auroville Town Development Council, Entry Board, Funds and Assets Management Committee and Working Committee.

78 Aurovilians came forward as applicants. The wider community was then invited to give feedback on the nominees. By mid June, 838 feedback responses were received. The nominees were then presented with the (anonymous) feedback the day before the Selection Process.

To choose the selection team, the Residents' Assembly Service (RAS) started creating a pool of randomly chosen people in order to have a sufficient number of selectors (min 24, max 40).

The selection process took place over three days at the end of June at the Unity Pavilion. The first day consisted of the preparation and training session,

where 31 chosen selectors were given presentations with questions and answers by each Working Group, in order to better understand each of their needs and *modi operandi*.

Other topics that are at the heart of Auroville were also covered, such as the 'Charter of Auroville', 'The Dream', 'To be a True Aurovillian', the Auroville Foundation Act, working group structures and mandates.

Mini-workshops were given on listening skills, bias recognition, consensus building, and how to manage community feedback.

The second and third days were dedicated to the selection. To select members for each Working Group from the candidates, the following process was followed: The candidates gave a presentation of themselves and were then interviewed. The selectors were then divided into four independent

teams and made a first selection round, with a second selection round and third random selection round in case it was needed.

The whole event was coordinated by an organisation team selected by the RAS. The team was made up of a facilitator, RAS members, Citizens' Assembly members, RAS resource persons, and volunteers. Also present during the whole process were the Silent Presence Keepers.

A few selectors opened up about their experience of the whole process. The unanimous feeling they conveyed was that everybody who participated showed goodwill and solidarity in the process, and that overall it was a success. They said that although there is always room for improvement, the process was a great step forward and a welcome development in the community's selection processes.

There was appreciation for how thought-through, structured, and well-organised the whole process was. Someone commented on how they appreciated the random re-shuffling of the 4 group members throughout the process, and how that reminded them to constantly adapt and allow flexibility to flow within themselves.

There was gratitude for feeling connected, united in spirit, and in the joy of being there and sharing that responsibility together. The demographic being relatively well-balanced and mixed, people appreciated connecting with others they never had a chance to talk to.

When talking about what could be improved, some selectors shared their disappointment with the low percentage of community engagement in the process. For example, to find the required number of selectors (24-40), more than 400 emails in 4 successive

Chandra

Community updates

The last two months have continued to witness dramatic and, for some residents, distressing events in the community. Here is a brief update, drawn from reports in the public domain.

Different interpretations of the Auroville Foundation Act

Apart from differences regarding how development should happen, there are differences among residents in how they view the respective powers of the Residents' Assembly and the Governing Board. The Working Committee appointed by the Residents' Assembly (WC-RA) clarified that selection of members of the Residents' Assembly for the Working Committee, the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC), the Entry Board/Admission Committee, the Exit/Termination Committee, the Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC) and the Auroville Council or any other group or committee constituted under section 19.3 of the Auroville Foundation Act, 1988, is the prerogative of the Residents' Assembly, which is recognized in the Auroville Foundation Act as one of the three authorities of the Auroville Foundation. If any of the other two authorities, namely the Governing Board or the International Advisory Council, would like to propose membership for any such groups or committees, then the right authority to collaborate with would be the Residents' Assembly, through its duly-selected Working Committee. The Residents' Assembly has not delegated its right to select its group and committee members to any other body of the Auroville Foundation.

However, the other Working Committee supported by the Auroville Foundation office (WC-FO) believes that the Governing Board has the final authority and is the executive power of the Foundation structure, as it argues that "As per the Foundation Act, the Governing Board can, at any time, question Auroville's internal policies, review them and create new processes, which is within their functions and powers. The RA's role is advisory and to give recommendations."

More groups, individuals, replaced

On 18th January 2022 the Governing Board set up an Organization & Governance Committee (OGC) to look into the organization and governance of Auroville. It recommended the reconstitution of certain groups, like the FAMC and the ATDC, "to bring about more transparency, accountability, and productive utilization of the various assets of Auroville". Consequently, the Foundation office has continued to replace members of key working groups selected by the Residents Assembly with those they feel are more attuned to its programme. Members of the RA-appointed Funds and Assets Management Committee (RA-FAMC) and the Budget Coordination Committee (BCC) have been replaced in the past months. The team responsible for managing the Town Hall, has also been replaced, as have almost all the team of the Auroville Archives. Also two members of the Land Board have been dismissed and replaced by others.

The WC-RA has protested against the Office of the Secretary issuing several Office Orders "of dubious legality to dismiss and/or appoint some executives of units and services, as well as working group members who were selected through processes ratified by the Residents' Assembly, without consultation with the relevant working groups of the RA and without following due process." Pointing out that the eight new members of the Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC) Council were also appointed in a manner which violates the processes and procedures prescribed in the relevant Standing Order, in a letter of 1st July they appealed to the Chairman of the Governing Board "to halt this unprecedented and illegitimate abuse of power from the Office of the Secretary".

The managers of Auroville email services, and Massbulletin have also been removed, citing a 'police complaint' based upon unsubstantiated claims of "anti-national and anti-government activities" being propagated through these media. They have been replaced by individuals nominated by the Foundation office, as has the longstanding manager of the Compat Forum (a long-established email forum consisting mostly of early pioneers of Auroville and other well-wishers of Auroville currently living abroad).

A number of residents have complained that they can no longer access their personal auroville.org email accounts. There is also concern that these accounts are no longer secure. Consequently, residents have been advised to take out non-auroville.org accounts. The Auroville Residents Forum has also been set up to provide an alternative forum to Auroville. Meanwhile, a new initiative has been announced which aims to

"ensure that the voice of the Residents' Assembly and its legitimate working groups are represented within internal communication platforms and towards any external agency or media platforms".

Parallel groups and their programmes

On the weekend of 25th, 26th June a selection process for Working Groups took place using the new RA-approved process. New teams, made up of ongoing and newly appointed members, were selected for the Auroville Council, the Auroville Town Development Council, the Funds and Assets Management Committee, the Entry Board, and the Working Committee. (see article on page 5)

This means that there are now parallel Working Committee, FAMC, and Town Development groups, one set created or supported by the Foundation Office, the other selected through an RA-approved selection methodology.

The different groups have been laying out their programmes. The Foundation appointed ATDC explained, "Over the last years, we have seen that the ever-changing membership of this office, coupled with a perceived divide between 'Galaxy Plan' based city implementation and 'Ground Reality' based city implementation, has brought a deadlock and has led only to pressure-based unblocking of projects. The newly appointed team of 7 Aurovilians, together with the Member-Secretary Dr. Seetharaman, is charged with the task of dispelling this perceived divide and of assisting the Governing Board to take necessary steps towards practical and eurythmic implementation of the Galaxy Master Plan at the earliest." Their immediate goals include:

1) to identify and detail the development priorities for a projected growth of 12,000 new residents by 2025.

2) set up project cells for project development for large projects such as CIRHU, New Town Hall, Lines of Force, and others

3) to make the Crown a cyclable corridor by August 15 2022

4) to clear the Right-of-Ways (RoWs) as per the Master Plan by December 2022

5) to make the Crown and City Centre of Auroville free of motorized traffic by February 28, 2023

6) to develop a portion of the Line of Goodwill in Sector 5

7) to review together with FAMC, all existing farms and forests and to allocate/reallocate lands as per the zoning regulations of the area as prescribed in the Master Plan.

8) to stop or revoke permissions for projects in the Green Belt which are unrelated to the prescribed zoning regulations, with exceptions given to temporary solutions to address issues such as encroachment.

The Foundation constituted FAMC defined its tasks as including

1) putting in place a collective shared accounting System

2) introducing one (collective) GST accounting gateway

3) reducing the present number of trusts to two, one for services and a second for income generating enterprises

4) creating a programme for expansion of Auroville farms

5) reviewing all land utilization for productive use

6) creating a start-up programme for new entrepreneurs with support both with space, finance and mentors

7) a similar programme to support existing units to grow and provide income for the community

8) Human Resource Service and an apprentice/volunteer programme

9) reviewing stewardship policies for all the Auroville assets.

On 14th June, a joint meeting of the Foundation-approved Working Committee, ATDC and FAMC identified projects for immediate implementation. These included development of the Line of Progress; farms and forest to be divided into smaller plots where temporary housing can be quickly built; land use to be according to the Master Plan; all public properties (roads, parks, public buildings etc) to be stewarded by ATDC; and a proposal for a new governance system.

Recently, the WC-RA had three meetings with members of the four other newly selected groups by the Residents' Assembly (Auroville Council, Entry Board, FAMC and ATDC) to discuss topics of common concern.

The ATDC-RA explained that "The events of

the last few months in Auroville have made it clear that appropriate planning and implementation are indispensable to solve the present divisive situation and to help avoid similar conflicts in the future."

They have been meeting and providing reports to the Joint Commission set up by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to make a decision on the Crown road decision, "to get a better outcome for Auroville", and clarifying whether present construction work can continue or stop according to the NGT ruling.

The four newly-selected groups also focused on possible ways to streamline the communication flow and interactions between the different working groups, and between the working groups and the community. One of the ideas that will be explored with the help of the Residents' Assembly Service is the organization of a regular 'Open House' gathering during which residents can interact directly with members of the working groups. This will happen every Tuesday morning at the old Koodam office, and all residents are welcome to ask questions, share ideas, and discuss the challenges and opportunities that Auroville is currently facing.

In addition, a new Police Liaison team has been set up to assist the WC-RA with its work, as well as a Media Cell to fulfill communication needs, both internal and external, with liaison teams to gather and integrate the views of different residents and working groups. Auroville Media Liaison was launched on July 23rd and can be accessed via Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. The RA-appointed groups felt this was needed to ensure that the voice of the Residents' Assembly of Auroville and its bona fide Working Groups is represented within internal communication platforms and towards any external agency or media platform.

Community meetings

The recently selected Working Groups by the Residents' Assembly announced a community-wide 'Meet and Greet' on Saturday July 30th, 4.30pm-6.30pm at Unity Pavilion. They stated that the intention of the meeting is to "introduce ourselves, and listen to whatever you would like to share with us".

The well-attended gathering started with a few extracts from Shradhdhavan's interview with François, followed by a short introduction to members of the five Working Groups. Then the Working Groups broke into small groups to give everyone the opportunity to ask questions, and voice suggestions and concerns.

The Working Groups appointed or supported by the Foundation Office also recently had a meeting to provide updates on new projects. Invitations to attend were only sent to a select group of residents and supporters.

At this meeting, a "1000-beds" project to accommodate 1000 new Aurovilians was presented that they want to realise in the next two years. They also want to welcome 100 new people a month in the very near future, and a member of the Foundation-appointed ATDC presented their city infrastructure and development plan to accommodate 12,000 new residents in the next four years. This would involve unblocking developments in sectors 1 and 2 (between Gaia and Vikas), and starting development of sector 5, near Aurodam, where the Line of Goodwill, housing 7,000 residents, would come. They want to start building this in the present financial year.

Meanwhile, on the initiative of the Secretary, regular Wednesday 'circles' are being held at Bhumika Hall to "create a space for more personal sharing". At a recent meeting, the Secretary said, "I don't think anyone is in disagreement with the fact that we are all here to see Auroville, Mother's city, manifest. There might be some issues that one wants to go about it this way, another person the other way, and there is a scope to that, but all that can take shape once we start 'walking the talk'. Because otherwise, if we all the time will be talking theoretically, if we went this way or that way, sometimes it doesn't get us anywhere.

"We would be happy to hear your ideas, we want your insights, if there is anything that you feel you'd like to take up and contribute, then this Wednesday circle could become a forum for that kind of sharing and brainstorming. We could gather those ideas and some could be developed further by L'Avenir d'Auroville or other respective committees."

Town Hall incident

On 1st July, a member of the Foundation appointed Town Hall (ACUR) management team

informed the Council that they should immediately vacate the meeting room in the Town Hall. The Council refused and community members have been holding a vigil to ensure the meeting room remains available for the Working Groups of the Residents' Assembly. On 28th July, a member of the new Town Hall management team attempted to forcibly lock the room but this was resisted by the secretary of the Council. Both parties subsequently accused the other of violence.

The next day a group of approximately 250 Aurovilians came together in the Town Hall to express disapproval of the use of violence in Town Hall premises.

Legal matters

Four writ petitions have been submitted in the Madras High Court by Aurovilians against the Foundation. One challenges the dismissal of the executive of OutreachMedia and the appointment of new executives through an office order issued by the Auroville Foundation; the second challenges the appointment by the Auroville Foundation of members of the ATDC; the third the legality of the dismissal of three former Working Committee members appointed through a community-approved process by the other members of the Working Committee and these other members appointing new members in their stead. This petition also requests the High Court to recognize the due position and role of the Residents' Assembly according to the Auroville Foundation Act and therefore the legitimacy of its duly selected Working Committee, and that the Auroville Foundation office not interfere in the work of the Residents' Assembly and its emanating organs. The final submissions for these cases were handed in on Wednesday, 20th July. The community now awaits the judge's verdicts, for which there is no timeline.

The fourth petition was filed to challenge the appointment through an office order issued by the Auroville Foundation of the members of the FAMC.

Also, on May 20th, First Information Reports were filed against three members of the WC-RA, one member of the Council and two other residents, based on a complaint made by the Under-Secretary. The complainant claimed that there was "obstruction of (Foundation-appointed) Working Committee members from entering office, illegitimate seizing and tampering of mail accounts by Auroville individuals who are against Auroville Foundation and wrongfully having the keys of the Auroville Working Committee office". The complaint goes on to state that there is a suspicion "that these persons are engaging in deletion of incrimination and official [sic] data" and requests the police to "take appropriate legal action against the above mentioned persons who are indulging in criminal activities against Auroville Foundation and restore the office and mailbox in the hands of the lawful WCom for continuing regular duties". The WC-RA has asserted that "the charges brought against these six residents have no substance and are an extreme attempt to intimidate the Residents' Assembly and its working groups into submitting to the decisions and actions of the Office of the Secretary". On 10th June, Anticipatory Bail was granted to these six Aurovilians.

Meanwhile, work on the Crown Road continues by the Central Public Works Department, which has been contracted by the Foundation office to do this work, both on the existing road, where the old paving blocks are being taken up, and in the Youth Centre area. An allegation has been made that more trees have been cut here despite the National Green Tribunal (NGT) court order, and it is also pointed out that the route of the Crown has been re-marked, shifting it five metres more into the Youth Centre area. The Foundation Office appointed ATDC explained that the first markings by the Road Service of the area were incorrect and this had to be remedied.

Two Auroville residents moved the National Green Tribunal again regarding unauthorized destruction of Bliss and Darkali forest prior to the Report of the Joint Committee set up by the court. Subsequently, the Secretary of the Foundation was served notice to attend the court to give an explanation.

The Office of the Auroville Foundation and its ATDC have also threatened legal action against residents who obstruct government works, like construction of the Crown, clarifying that "obstructing government works in India is a criminal offense". It further warned that there would be "legal consequences" if residents fail to fill up all required fields of the Register of Residents form by 15th August.

A true child of The Mother

Shraddhavan, the executive of Savitri Bhavan, left her body on July 19th, 2022, aged 80 years.

When young, she was a rationalist, a materialist, and an anarchist. She described herself as a seeker, someone who wanted to do something meaningful with her life and her energies. But her protestant background didn't give her what she sought. When someone advised her to meet a truly great man, she laughed, as she believed that there weren't any great men anymore.

The winter of 1968–1969, which she called the nadir of her life, provided an unexpected opening. Visiting a friend on a lazy Sunday afternoon, she walked into his London flat packed with people who were listening to a German speaker. The talk mesmerized her. As she recounted in an interview, "I do not remember his words but remember the experience. It was as if a room inside my head had opened, as if all rooms had opened; everything fitted together and there was a way forward! At the end of the talk, I rushed up to the man and asked who he had been talking about. It was Sri Aurobindo. I had never heard of him." She managed to get hold of some of Sri Aurobindo's books and read them all in an unused conference room of the Library Association where she was working. In her words, "I soaked it all up. It was the Water of Life."

Meeting The Mother and going to Auroville came in 1970. She had been invited to join an overland trip to India but was waiting for an inner indication. Then a postcard from a friend arrived: "I am at the airport leaving for Auroville hope to see you there." It was the hint she needed. She took the plane to Bombay, went by train to Pondicherry, and hired a rickshaw to bring her to the Ashram. "I was wearing a miniskirt and was dressed all in black," she recalled. M.P. Pandit, who received her, didn't mind. She was allowed to enter and see Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi and Pandit organized a meeting with The Mother the next morning.

It was Roger Anger who took her to the Mother. It was pouring with rain, she had managed to bring a bedraggled bouquet of flowers and was repeating in her mind what she would say to the Mother. But waiting on the staircase leading to Mother's room, she was told it would be a silent interview. "After some time I was called in. I don't remember anything about the room or about anybody else being there. Someone must have told me what to do: kneel down, let Mother look into your eyes – I don't remember. I tried to be open. She looked at me, and after some time gave me a rose, and I understood it was time to go out. I kind of drifted down the staircase. Roger followed. And he said, 'Mother says yes'. I had received permission to go to Auroville. It was a very special moment." In June 1972, Mother gave her the Sanskrit name Shraddhavan, meaning 'one who has faith in the higher being'.

During the first six years in Auroville, Shraddhavan worked at the Matrimandir and joined the first Auroville school as a teacher, living in the Tibetan boarding house. She would cycle to Pondicherry every afternoon to revise the existing translations of Mother's collective works, together with Mirajyoti and Pushpa.

For a short while, she became involved with the Auroville Society, created to counter the Sri Aurobindo Society's control of Auroville, and joined its many meetings. But soon she got disillusioned. "One day I said that I had come to the conclusion that we should work from our hearts, not our minds, what Nolini had asked us to do, and follow Nolini as representative of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There was quite a positive resonance. But there were also people who were not willing to accept that, which made me suddenly feel weak. That was the end of my active participation and I resigned." Some people felt let down and betrayed.

The disputes between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society intensified, while those who did not want to take sides, like Shraddhavan, were branded as 'neutrals'. It was a very difficult time for all. Trying to understand what was going on, she



realized that after Mother's passing, all the forces that didn't want Auroville to happen poured into everybody who was a tiny bit open to these influences – "all of us were open, all of us were beginners," she recollected wryly – and so confusion reigned supreme. Many people got hurt in this battle and we can only be grateful that we've come through. For any other community that would have been the end, but not here. And somehow our little group of neutrals has contributed something to that coming together." The government intervention in 1980 and the coming into force of the Auroville Foundation in 1991 brought the necessary respite and contributed to the re-establishment of harmony.

It was during the tenure of Dr. De as the second Secretary of the Auroville Foundation that study classes on *Savitri* started to be held in a keet hut. One of the regulars, Narayan from the Matrimandir, suggested that there should be a place where all the materials associated with *Savitri* could be collected, a place that would breathe the atmosphere of *Savitri*. Shraddhavan got inspired and decided to put all her energies into trying to manifest it. A plot of land between Bharat Nivas and Matrimandir was allocated and fundraising started. Shraddhavan's partner, Helmut, made the designs and in 1995 the foundation stone was laid by Nirodbaran. Four years later, the first permanent building was completed and over the next 20 years the complex slowly grew. It now has auditoria, exhibition halls, libraries, a hostel, and a large garden and nursery. The statue of Sri Aurobindo, identical to the ones that grace the Indian Parliament building in New Delhi and the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, dominates the entrance.

Savitri Bhavan's mission is to help manifest the spiritual side of Auroville through education, based on the vision and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. To that end, Shraddhavan conducted study classes on the various works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and edited the journal *Invocation: Study notes on Savitri*. The main focus was on Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri – A Legend and a Symbol*. As the study classes were also attended by non-native English people who had problems understanding Sri Aurobindo's poetic language, Shraddhavan decided to give "The English of Savitri" classes, explaining difficult English

words and giving sentence by sentence explanations. These classes were recorded and transcribed, which led to the publication of the series *The English of Savitri*. It was a daunting task. Shraddhavan had not anticipated that she would be required to explain the whole of *Savitri*, in particular not the last nine cantos of Book Two of the poem which are amongst the most difficult of the entire epic. But she has finished her task. Ten volumes of *The English of Savitri* have been published; the eleventh volume will be launched on Sri Aurobindo's 150th birthday and the twelfth by the end of this year. These books are an unparalleled guide for any person wishing to better understand *Savitri*.

Shraddhavan enjoyed a warm personal relationship with Huta, an artist from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram who, under The Mother's direct guidance, had made 472 oil paintings illustrating selected passages from *Savitri*, trying to express the true inner vision of her soul as asked by the Mother. Huta agreed that these paintings could be exhibited at Savitri Bhavan. Shraddhavan managed to raise the necessary funds and Helmut built a beautiful exhibition hall where they are now on permanent display, to be experienced in inner silence.

Apart from all her teaching, translation, and administrative work, Shraddhavan still found time to study poetry with her beloved mentor, Amal Kiran, which she considered an important part of her life. On the occasion of her 70th birthday, she published a small collection of her own poems titled 'Stars in the Soup'. She has been honoured with the *Auro-Ratna Award* by the Overman Foundation in November 2012, and received the *Sri Aurobindo Purushkar* from the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata, in 2016.

She was a true child of The Mother, one who consecrated all of herself and all she had – work, life, and soul.

Carel

Interviews with Shraddhavan can be seen at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdjHjFHg-BQ;>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_QWH-8_Ry0; and
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqBDEJK_G8

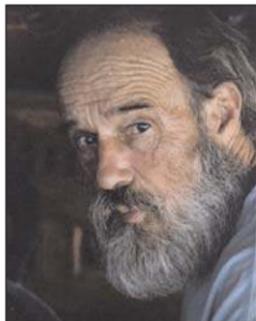
Daniel Brewer

On July 3rd 2022, Daniel Brewer, one of Auroville's early pioneers and co-founder of the Kottakarai community, passed away at the age of 84 in his home in Sayulita, Mexico.

Daniel had left his home in southern California in the mid-sixties and travelled overland from Europe to India in 1969. A year later he joined, along with his then partner Iris and young son Mitra, the early residents living in the 'Silence' community, located on the site of the future Bharat Nivas. Understanding that they would have to vacate when construction began, and armed with Auroville property maps, the small team went on the look-out for a place to start a new living space. When they found a suitable location just outside Kottakarai village, and Mother gave her blessing for the same, the beginning of Kottakarai community started in close collaboration with the villagers nearby. Daniel built a house on the edge of the large grove of silk-cotton trees and made Auroville his home for the next 8 years, enormously helping Kottakarai community manifest with his hands-on skills, practical experience and always willing demeanour.

As Andrea, Daniel's wife, once reminisced in a newsletter of Auroville International USA: "Daniel had a gracious relation with the villagers. He spoke Tamil with surprising fluency, even able to make jokes. Besides being involved with planting trees and care of the land, he had become the local cobbler. He was making handsome leather sandals for any and all who needed them, including the villagers who were quite amazed that this *velekarran* (white man) would stoop to a work that was normally only done by Harijans, the outcasts. Small wonder that the villagers adored Daniel. We couldn't have had a better ambassador for Auroville in the village of Kottakarai."

Daniel left Auroville and settled in Mexico, where he living for the last 22 years. But he stayed always in touch with the City of Dawn.



Trini Blanch

Auroville International Spain reported that on July 4, 2022, Trini Blanch, left her body, at age 57. "She left with a suitcase loaded with love, light, constancy and delivery. For Auroville International Spain she has always been an example and a fundamental pillar for the tenacity of the Centre's aspiration and dedication to the Divine. She leaves a deep imprint on all. We here share with you the link of her blog <https://laflamadauroville.blogspot.com/>



Marion Maekin

On June 13th, Marion Maekin passed away. She was 72 years old, and had been struggling with clinical depression.

Hailing from the UK, Marion came to Auroville in 2014 with her husband Tony, and joined in 2016. With her straightforward, direct and friendly nature, she was a much-appreciated teacher in several schools and other



educational projects, took part in the Aikiyam support group, was involved with the Farewell team as well as with the Tibetan Pavilion, and functioned as a lively and hands-on member of the Auroville child protection group.

Many of us will remember her from the road, on her three-wheeler scooter with, on the back, her elderly husband Tony, whom she always surrounded and treated with the utmost love and care.

Laura Mosci

On June 7th Laura Nina Mosci passed away in Italy after coping with cancer for several years. She was 62. Nina joined Auroville in 2001 and was involved in various activities for the community. She will be remembered for her spontaneity and zest, and her lively participation in community life.



Experimental images

The images on this page are from experimental photography classes from Future School and from Analogue Photography Workshops at Centre d'Art, Citadines. The Future school students are exploring subjects such as double exposure and motion blur. They also did an exercise where they picked one architectural subject, which was then photographed by each student from his or her own perspective. In the Analogue Photography Workshops, students learn to use film and the chemical photographic process. They use the darkroom to develop and print their own photographs. Most images captured by the students in these workshops were personal and of their surroundings. The true goal of these exercises is to understand the nature of light and how to capture it, using either a digital or an analogue camera.

Sasi



PHOTO: SHIVA SICOOS



PHOTO: HASSI



PHOTO: SOLIDAD



PHOTO: LEEEA



PHOTO: PEMA TENZIN



PHOTO: BARATH KUMAR



PHOTOS: LISBETH



Correction

In the article "The power of work and possibility" which appeared in the previous issue of Auroville Today, Sigrid's name was mistakenly omitted from the team of Land for Auroville United (LFAU), of which she is a founder member and for which she remains very active. We apologise for this omission.

Editors

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