

August 15, 2022

PHOTO: KIRTAN / FREDERIC MARTIN DUCHAMP



'Light Mandala and Sacred Fire Offering' on Sri Aurobindo's 150th birthday at the Inuksuk in the International Zone

The 15th August is always a special day in Auroville, but this 15th was particularly so as it marked the 150th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's birth and 75 years of India's independence.

PHOTO: MANOHAR



The traditional bonfire at the Amphitheatre

The day began with the traditional dawn bonfire in the Amphitheatre, streamed live for those who could not attend, followed by the flag hoisting and Shanti Mantra chanting at Bharat Nivas.

This was followed by the inauguration of an exhibition on Sri Aurobindo's life and work between 1872 – 1910 at the Kala Kendra gallery. Other events that morning included the inauguration of the 'Divine Flowers' exhibition at Savitri Bhavan : this year the focus was 'Collaboration'.

In the afternoon, the film 'Spiritual History of India' was premiered at Cinema Paradiso. This film, the fourth in the series 'Evolution: Fast forward', traces the spiritual evolution of India over 4000 years, seen through an original Indic perspective based on Sri Aurobindo's research. Earlier, other films about The Mother, including 'Mother as the Artist' and 'Mother and Dragons' were shown in the Unity Pavilion.

In the early evening, Dr. Alok Pandey also gave a



Maquette of the Line of Force as displayed at Bharat Nivas

talk on 'Sri Aurobindo: the Divine example' in Savitri Bhavan and, later, there was the first performance of 'Usha and the Dawns

to come', a theatrical compilation of sacred texts relating to the dawn, in the small amphitheatre of the Matrimandir gardens. There was also a presentation in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium by the Blue Light Dance Studio Cultural Team as an attempt to pay



PHOTO: MANOHAR

Flower offering at Savitri Bhavan



"Usha and the Dawns to come" performance at the small Matrimandir amphitheatre

honour to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's desire to illuminate India.

The main event of the evening, however, was a "Light Mandala and Sacred Fire Offering" at the Inuksuk behind the Tibetan Pavilion, as an expression of gratitude to Sri Aurobindo and Mother India, with the collective aspiration to embody the Spirit of Auroville. Attended by approximately 1000 people (Aurovilians, Newcomers, Volunteers, Guests, Children and our local neighbours), the evening comprised gentle music, offerings of flowers, light food, the live singing of Vande Mataram and the reading of some of Sri Aurobindo's writings in Tamil and English, all taking place around a sacred fire, an oil-lamp mandala of Sri Aurobindo's symbol.

The event came together spontaneously with community members working together and offering their time, amenities, expertise and finances. As a celebration of our spirit of collaboration and fundamental unity in diversity, it was a fitting conclusion to a very special day.

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Landmark judgement of Madras High Court

Under the Auroville Foundation Act, there are three statutory authorities who jointly administer and manage the Foundation and they are a) Governing Body, b) International Advisory Council and c) Residents Assembly and all the three are having well defined powers and one cannot override the power of the other.
Excerpt from the discussion section of the judgement



AERIAL VIEW OF THE MADRAS HIGH COURT. PHOTO: MADRAS HIGH COURT WEBSITE [HTTPS://WWW.HCMADRAS.TN.NIC.IN/](https://www.hcmadras.tn.nic.in/)

“The World knows ‘Auroville’ is a haven of unity and peace. But however, of late, it is disheartening to know that the sweat, blood and tears of its founders namely Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are getting shattered due to the infighting between some of the groups in Auroville,” were the opening remarks of Justice Abdul Quddhose in his judgement on August 12th on a batch of three writ petitions filed by three Auroville residents against the Auroville Foundation.

The issues

- The issues the judge considered were:
- (1) whether the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation can restrict the functioning of the Residents’ Assembly on account of the alleged non updating of the Register of Residents;
 - (2) whether the office order passed by the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation appointing official spokespersons as Executives of “Auroville Outreach Media” and replacing the current Executive without the consent of the Residents’ Assembly is valid; and
 - (3) whether the Governing Board has the authority to reconstitute the Auroville Town Development Council and appoint its members.

Locus standi and Outreach Media

The judge also considered whether the respective petitioners had the *locus standi* to file their writ petitions. He dismissed the writ petition filed against the appointment of new executives of Outreach Media on the ground that the writ petitioner had no *locus standi* to challenge the appointment as she was a fellow Aurovilian and not the affected former executive.

The Residents’ Assembly

He, however, allowed the other two writ petitions. Regarding the functioning of the Residents’ Assembly, the judge held that the Governing Board under the Auroville Foundation Act cannot take a unilateral decision on its own and restrict the functioning of the Residents’ Assembly, as the functions of the Residents’ Assembly are statutory functions as prescribed under Section 19 of the Act and the Governing Board cannot act unilaterally without consulting the Residents’ Assembly, though the Governing Board is the authority under the Statute to accord final approval.

The Master Plan

The judge stated that in accordance with the Auroville Foundation Act, the Auroville Master Plan must be formulated in consultation with the Residents’ Assembly and that only in consultation with the Residents’ Assembly any change of Master Plan for Auroville can be made. “Only after consultation with the Residents’ Assembly, the Governing Board is empowered to prepare the Master Plan for the International Cultural Township of Auroville. The Master Plan for Auroville will have to be prepared keeping in mind the best interest of its residents and that is the reason why the Act stipulates that the consultation by the Governing Board with the Residents’ Assembly is mandatory before preparation of the Master Plan.”

The Auroville Town Development Council

The judge therefore stated that the Auroville Town Development Council, being the body which is entrusted with the task of preparing the Master Plan for Auroville, cannot unilaterally

appoint members without consultation of the Residents’ Assembly. For “if that is allowed to happen, the interest of the residents of Auroville may get defeated. The Auroville Foundation is meant for the residents, who follow the noble and divine ideals of the Mother’s Charter.” The judge held that “any reconstitution of the Auroville Town Development Council can be done only after consultation with the Residents’ Assembly that too, by a proper resolution passed by the Residents’ Assembly.” Hence, the judge quashed the Office Order reconstituting the Auroville Town Development Council as being violative of the Auroville Foundation Act, as well as the Standing Orders issued from time to time by the Foundation. He allowed the petitioner to file the Writ Petition as the petitioner is a resident and a member of the Residents’ Assembly and the impugned Office Order “is detrimental to his interest as well as the interest of Residents’ Assembly and therefore he has got *locus standi* to file the writ petition.”

The Register of Residents.

Justice Quddhose then elaborated on the Register of Residents. “This court is of the considered view that only after the Register of Residents is updated and all eligible residents are registered as members of the Residents’ Assembly, the democratic set up of the foundation can be achieved ... Only when the Register of Residents is updated, the Foundation which has been created for fulfillment of the noble ideals of the Mother’s Charter will be successful as the Foundation will have to run through the collective decisions of the Governing Board, Residents’ Assembly and the International Advisory Council.” He directed the Secretary of the Auroville foundation to update the

Register and ordered that “till the Register of Residents Assembly is updated, the four statutory bodies namely (a) Governing Board, (b) Residents’ Assembly, (c) Working Group of Residents’ Assembly and (d) International Advisory Council shall not take any policy decision which alters the existing structure and working of the Auroville Foundation. Once the Register of Residents Assembly is updated by the Secretary of the Auroville foundation, all the four statutory authorities referred to supra shall act in accordance with the Auroville Foundation Act and its rules.”

Concluding remarks

Before parting with the case, Justice Quddhose reminded all the parties of the motto “United we stand, divided we fall”. “If all the four statutory authorities under the Auroville Foundation Act work together having the Mother’s Charter in mind, the noble and lofty ideals of Sir Aurobindo and The Mother will certainly be achieved and there will be peace and prosperity for the Residents of Auroville. This Court is confident that all the parties to the dispute will forget the recent unpleasant incidents and work together in terms of the Mother’s Charter in future.”

Appeal

The Auroville Foundation filed an appeal against this judgement. On August 26th, the appellate bench of the Madras High Court led by its Chief Justice passed an interim stay order for two weeks on the ground that the directions given by Justice Quddhose are beyond the ‘prayers’ of the petition.

The case continues.

The discussion section of the judgement

Before arriving at his conclusions, Justice Quddhose elaborated his views in the “discussion” section of his judgement.

Justice Quddhose stated that “under the Auroville Foundation Act, there are three statutory authorities who jointly administer and manage the Foundation and they are a) Governing Body, b) International Advisory Council and c) Residents Assembly and all the three are having well defined powers and one cannot override the power of the other”.

He clarified that “the nature of the enactment shows that there is no place for egoistic thinking as all the three authorities will have to jointly work for the achievement of The Mother’s Charter. The relationship between the three authorities is of mutuality. In this world, as Sri Aurobindo says, there are always three terms of existence: the individual, the group in which he lives, and largest group which is humanity as a whole. And nobody can get rid of these terms. The world cannot get rid of groups and the individuals, individual cannot give up group or their largest group, and no group can exist without a membership of individuals and the largest group around. The three are inter related.

“There is a spiritual unity between the three namely the individual, groups and the largest group. Therefore, if you are really spiritually governed, you will see mutuality of the three. Sri Aurobindo says ‘by no mechanical law can you attain to this mutuality’. It is only when you develop true brotherhood and you exercise true brotherhood that this mutuality can be experienced and can be realized.”

Justice Quddhose then considered that “The Auroville Foundation Act has been enacted to fulfill the noble and divine ideals of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and to develop brotherhood. The enactment prescribes brotherhood and is of such a nature that you are

bound, even if you want to throw away brotherhood, you are bound to have it, it’s like a spiritual compulsion”.

He further stated that “Under the Auroville Foundation Act, Auroville will be administered by the people of Auroville. Secondly, as long as the people of Auroville want to develop Auroville in accordance with the *Charter of Auroville*, they have full freedom to do so. Even the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation cannot infringe upon the Residents of Auroville as long as they follow the *Auroville Charter*. However, the Governing Board, of course, has the power of control and supervision and to see that everything is run smoothly and, particularly, that it is bound to promote the ideals of Auroville.”

Justice Quddhose further stated that “any policy decision for the Foundation will have to be taken collectively by the Governing Board, Residents’ Assembly and Working Committee of the Residents’ Assembly. But, the Governing Board has to accord its final approval. The Foundation has been primarily established for the welfare of the residents of Auroville, who are followers of the *Charter of Auroville*, whose primary teachings are human unity, peace and progress. The establishment of Auroville by the Mother, whose residents are nationalities from various countries including India, would go to show the Mother’s desire that Auroville should act as a shining example for human unity, peace and progress despite its diversity.”

The judge concluded that any decision concerning the Foundation will have to necessarily get the concurrence of the residents and that any policy decision of the Foundation can be taken by the Governing Board only in consultation with the Residents’ Assembly.

NEW BOOKS

Reading Sri Aurobindo

On the occasion of Sri Aurobindo’s 150th birth anniversary, Penguin India has published *Reading Sri Aurobindo*, a book that introduces in 31 chapters each of the works of Sri Aurobindo through the words of 21 contributors.

Reading all 36 volumes of Sri Aurobindo’s *Complete Works* is a daunting prospect, even for those acquainted with his philosophy and practice. Each volume comprises between 400 and 1600 pages; in total, his works encompass more than 21,000 pages. Now, for the first time, one can find in one volume the essence of Sri Aurobindo’s ideas. The result is a book inviting the exploration of Sri Aurobindo’s deep wisdom and vision in his spiritual philosophy, sociology, cultural explorations, poetry, political thought and his own yogic development.

Reading Sri Aurobindo introduces each of his works through the

perspectives of its contributor. Some of them are teachers, some writers, politicians, thinker, editors. All are scholars who have been studying Sri Aurobindo’s works for a long time.

Each approaches Sri Aurobindo from his own vantage point. It is to their credit that they have been able to retain in their brief description of the works the richness and complexity of Sri Aurobindo’s language and vision. Editors and contributors, Gautam Chikermane and Devdip Ganguli, are to be complimented for having done a fine job and making this anthology available to the public.

This book is not only a boon for all those who are curious and eager for a short but deep introduction to Sri Aurobindo’s works; but also those who are already studying Sri Aurobindo will benefit from the insights presented in this book..

Carel

Reading Sri Aurobindo
published by Penguin India.
304 Pages
Price in India Rs 599.00

The Galaxy model is revolutionary

This is the second in the series 'city perspectives' in which individuals with a deep interest in the urban dimension of Auroville talk about what this means to them.

David Nightingale trained as an architect and explored this role both before and since coming to Auroville in the late 1990s. Some years ago he was part of a team which conceived 'Crownways', a proposal to encourage the development of the Crown more in line with the original Galaxy model, and recently he presented his proposal, 'A Strategic Approach to Mobility on the Crown in Auroville', in an attempt to trigger some discussion on the issue. However, his main interest over the years has been exploring different processes where the community can creatively share common visions and ideas towards the manifestation of that ever-elusive human unity.

Auroville Today: Are you a city person?

It's an interesting question. I have lived in cities – in Newcastle (UK), Toronto (Canada) and Berlin (Germany). As a young professional in my first job I loved Berlin. So much was happening there: it could take you a day just to read through the weekly magazine of events. There's something around the youthful vitality and energy of cities which is very attractive where you feel have you got your fingers on the pulse.

But as I grow older I'm glad I'm not living in a big city, although I'm happy that they are there and that I can visit them.

Actually, when we talk about the cities we love, what often comes to mind are places like Florence or Siena which, in spite of the tourists, still have something of what made them special. Although I would consider these to be more large towns rather than cities.

In fact, what attracts me to Auroville is that it is not a city in the modern sense of the word, since 50,000 is clearly the population of a small town, which means it can never become like a Tokyo, Berlin or Delhi.

In fact, in Auroville we have an opportunity to completely redefine what a city or town is for the 21st century.

Why does Auroville need an urban dimension?

One reason is critical mass. A common argument is that we need a certain critical mass from a spiritual perspective. I can't comment on this particular aspect, but on a very practical level we see how many skills are missing in Auroville today. It's impressive how many activities we have for a population of three and a half thousand residents, yet we are constantly needing to reach out for help to people outside, who we feel have a connection to Auroville, in order to help provide us with all the inputs we require.

So I think there is not only something about a few tens of thousands of people living in a fairly dense environment which can nurture a certain quality of life, but which would similarly help to maintain that quality of life.

But, for many people, urbanism has acquired a negative image.

When we think of the cities and towns that we like, they developed around a set of traditional values that people lived day-to-day, like Christianity in Europe or Hinduism in India. As societies are shifting to a mindset which is more individualistic, the day-to-day focus has shifted to being successful, and this has pushed the whole developmental bubble which we see in cities throughout the world today, resulting in even greater inequalities than before.

What has added to the destruction of many cities was the invention of the automobile at the beginning of the last century, the subsequent cranking up of automobile production after the Second World War with the resulting planning decisions that have allowed the ploughing of massive roads through city centres.

But surely cities had acquired a negative connotation before this. For example, big cities in the 19th century were a hotbed of disease and insecurity.

It's true that industrialised cities in the 19th century had problems with disease and security but, as Lewis Mumford points out, technological advances in disease prevention and the establishment of police forces etc. ultimately made cities safer places.

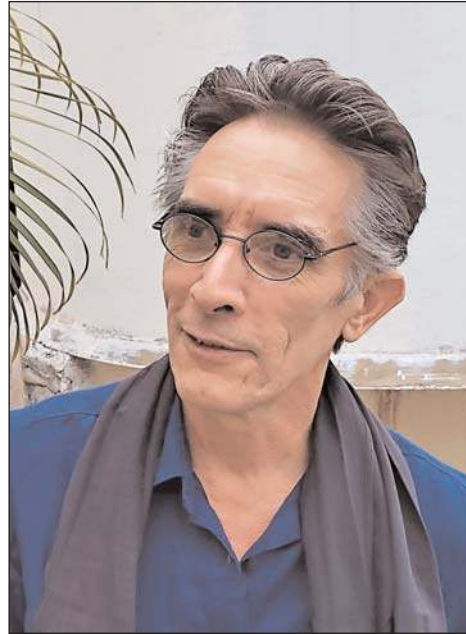
However, when the car came along the disruption to the social fabric became much more permanent.

Is this why people were attracted to the suburbs?

Many of the first suburbs came about in the US after the American troops came back from the war and there was a huge push to provide them with a house with a picket fence, and a car in the drive as an embodiment of the "American Dream". The idea was to provide the best of the countryside, the 'bucolic' experience, and the best of urban life, but the ever-sprawling suburbs ended up providing neither.

In Dreamcatching we came up with the idea of 'supra-urban', a way to combine nature and dense living which the suburbs failed to do. But to do this you need a completely different planning approach with an economic foundation which is egalitarian rather than capitalist, because capitalism further skews development.

I think one of the key points why cities do not work today comes down to the inequalities and environmental problems created when money is the dictating force. Money will plough over greenfield sites on the outskirts of cities to build soul-destroying housing estates, and to do this money will convince people in government to deregulate protected areas to achieve it. And money can also afford the best lawyers in this evasion and undercutting of planning regulations.



David Nightingale

However, when it comes to the conditions for creating a 'supra-urban' town or city, I feel that here we are already aspiring for quite a few of the elements that we require. Here money is not intended to be the 'sovereign Lord', we have the Matrimandir as the soul of Auroville at the centre of our development, and we have the possibility to integrate the urban and green elements in a built environment designed around alternative transport.

Do you feel that the Galaxy concept allows for such a 'supra-urban' township?

Totally. It is truly revolutionary. There is so much potential in this model. We have been given this incredible vision and it potentially ticks every box that you can imagine, but we are not truly embracing it for what it can be.

It's all about interpretation. Does the Crown have to be a certain number of metres wide, or can we do something which is adaptable? Adaptability is crucial, not just because our values will change over time, but also because of factors like climate change. What if the temperature, rainfall, or the prevailing wind direction radically change? All this will anyway force us to adapt our architecture and planning 'on the go'.

Regarding inequality, one view is that dense clusters of population, like cities and towns, actually increase inequality because they require top-down structures to administer them. Isn't there a danger that this will happen in Auroville?

That is always the danger and it's already happening.

So how does one change that trend?

I think that's exactly what we have been tasked to do here, to come up with an alternative, to break free of 10,000 years of doing it that way. And there is so much potential here in terms of an alternative to the traditional top-down approach. That is why we have been doing Dreamcatching and Dreamweaving. It's also what drew me to the Citizens' Assembly concept, because all these initiatives finally give us the possibility of exploring how we can make wiser collective decisions under the auspices of the Residents Assembly.

Then just as I felt we were getting somewhere, it has suddenly all been put in question [see below the note from the Dreamweaving coordinators eds.] For me, this is the tragedy of what has been happening recently. Now we are being told that others will solve it for us, but I don't think they realise they're potentially threatening the very thing we have been tasked to do.

In other words, I don't think it's about finishing the city first and then Mother will do what she has to do, which, for me, is a rather unusual form of collective 'spiritual bypassing'. My interpretation of what Mother said is that it is about developing ourselves and our understanding of this place through the process of building it. The Galaxy as a destination is an ideal goal, as Mother foresaw, but the work is in getting there.

Doesn't any profound change depend upon us changing our value systems?

Absolutely. The values that we inculcate manifest day by day in what we choose to do, so we need to change our mindset. The solution will come from a new economic system, a new governance system and a new decision-making system. Those are the methodologies which will allow us to start thinking differently about how we plan and how we inhabit this emerging Galactic Township.

From my perspective, Auroville is trying to be what in Spiral Dynamics [a model of the evolutionary development of individuals, organizations, and societies eds.] would be called a 'second-tier' collective where, among other things, the energies are centred upon blending and harmonizing multiple perspectives among a collection of strong individuals – our elusive 'unity in diversity'. We're in the very early stages of this, but I think we already have one or two examples, like the way the Botanical Gardens has evolved, and I also think we're tapping into that energy on a community level with the Citizens Assembly approach.

The planet desperately needs a collective second-tier solution, and Auroville could provide this. It's a fascinating time. We are facing a very serious, even existential, threat at the moment, and the outcome is uncertain. But an existential challenge may be exactly what's needed for something truly new to emerge.

From an interview by Alan

A statement to members of the Auroville Residents' Assembly from the Dreamweaving initiative

Since the final report of the Dreamweaving process was sent to all the participants and made available via Auronet, we have since published only one brief note in News & Notes (# 924 on May 28th, 2022) to update Aurovilians in regards to developments on our side.

Considering some recent questions which appear to have been based upon inaccurate information publicly communicated, but more importantly our ongoing efforts, this is our second – and this time more detailed – statement:

The bottom line is that the holistic participatory planning path charted by the Dreamweaving initiative in collaboration with the Vastu Shilpa Consultants (VSC) has been unfortunately sidelined. This was to be expected considering the variety of subtle and not-so-subtle obstructive interventions we have been experiencing since day one of the initiative, specifically from members of the previous Auroville Town Development Council and a few key people influencing them. We wouldn't make this statement without the capacity to clarify, and detail if needed.

Yet, nothing can change this simple fact: the Dreamweavers' experience has challenged a narrative, proving our capacity to positively and efficiently collaborate on a larger scale. It is our collective responsibility to evolve this experimental model.

Whilst committing consciously to not waste our energy on negative disputes, we have instead been quietly and diligently following up on the Dreamweaving process and investigating possibilities of building up potential collaborations within the RA framework, even while challenging at the moment as we will explain.

Since the conclusion of the Dreamweaving, we have been approached by the Auroville Foundation Office to work on

Urban Acupuncture on the Crown. The dreamweavers have consistently rejected these requests, stating our reasons directly and clearly to the Secretary of Auroville; the atmosphere, basis, and acceptable standards for quality urban design and planning are far from being in place at present. Under such conditions, no harmonious quality work can emerge.

We believe that Auroville is meant to develop through sincere collaborations toward higher quality work.

Therefore, we have aimed for a well-executed, productive, collaborative holistic planning methodology including: (1) Auroville's range of capable multi-disciplinary experts and designers – currently mostly marginalized; (2) Reputable external urban planners and designers – currently not well received; (3) Aurovilians' candid participation – currently not encouraged.

The Dreamweaving process proved not only the possibility but also the natural joy inherent in this choice of path. However, residents should understand that initiating and organizing an inclusive collaborative process, on that scale, has been a challenging and daunting work. For many months of the Dreamweaving process itself, we had to step out of our daily work and in some cases postpone commitments. The eventual obstruction of this effort led to a wave of frustration among many of the participants, many of whom have experienced repeated obstructions of collaborative efforts in the past. Over the last few months, since the Dreamweaving report was published, it has become clear to us that it would be most challenging, yet uplifting, to recharge, regroup, and continue the effort. Yet, we have not given up.

We are publishing this update now as we finally started receiving a tentative positive sense of further possibilities. A

slowly unfolding process with Aurovilians covering the range of multi-disciplinary expertise present in Auroville seems promising, and exploratory interactions with some of the Auroville architects to investigate possible next steps also seem positive. We hope to have more to share in our next planned event. We are trying, yet again, we see this as a collective responsibility.

We have repeatedly noted in different events that the Dreamweaving process is simply a trial for a model exploring our capacity to collaborate more efficiently on a larger scale. The support of different groups (from the architects, the multi-disciplinary participants, the members of the focus group, the randomly selected residents, and the Citizens Assembly team), as well as the majority of supporting Aurovilians and AVI centers, made this prototype not only possible but with the promise of a new way forward. We hope and trust that many other initiatives will keep emerging. We are under no illusion that many of these coming initiatives will be obstructed. Yet we believe that if we keep on the path, at some point, we will break through to a higher place. For those with initiatives in progress or further thoughts on these ideas – those in agreement and disagreement with the DW approach – we would love to meet to share and learn from each other; in the hope that this might help us all move forward.

We are planning to screen the premiere of a full video documentary on the overall Dreamweaving process and this will be followed by a panel discussion and Q&A session on the Dreamweaving experience. At that time we will explain and qualify this statement as needed. More importantly, we will share and discuss our current efforts and possible next steps.

*David, Mona, and Omar
(Published in News and Notes on 15th August)*

12,000 new Aurovilians by 2025?

The Auroville Town Development Council appointed by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation Office plans for the addition of 12,000 new residents by 2025. Gilles Guigan, author of the two-volume book “Auroville in Mother’s Words”, gives his perspective.

For decades, a section of our community has been arguing that our collective yoga should focus on building a town for 50,000 inhabitants at the earliest, in the shape of Roger Anger’s ‘Galaxy’ model. This argument is based on the words of The Mother who, in the late 1960’s, was talking about building a township of 50,000 people in 20 years or less. Mother also put her signature on the Galaxy model, which, for many people, means that She approved this model in all its details.

Interpretations of Mother’s intentions galore. One is that the Galaxy stands on the same level as Auroville’s Charter; another that the Galaxy is a Yantra, a geometrical symbol that should not be distorted (*see Dr. Alok Pandey in https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4nHQ3QsZl8*). Some argue that the figure of 50,000 represents some kind of critical mass below which Auroville’s ideals cannot be achieved. This, for them, is the reason why this figure needs to be reached at the earliest.

But there is no record of Mother mentioning or approving any of these assertions.

Governing Board plans

The new Governing Board met in Auroville on November 2nd for the first time. It was subsequently reported in the Indian press that the Governing Board had discussed a time-bound implementation of the Master Plan Perspective 2025, with a focus on creating infrastructure to accommodate at least 15,000 residents who share the Auroville philosophy. The minutes of the 57th meeting of the Governing Board conducted a month later confirm these views. “The Entry Process of Auroville should be more welcoming and the Auroville population should grow to 50,000 as envisaged while ensuring that newcomers understand and subscribe to the ideals of Auroville. A population of 15,000 by 2025 may be achieved.” [*see AVToday #389 of December 2021 and # 390 of January 2022*]. This amounts to increasing the population by almost 400 persons each month if the full year 2025 is included.

But is such an increase in accordance with Auroville’s ideals?

The aims of Auroville

Auroville’s stated aims are: “an effective human unity” and “peace upon earth”. Mother explained that the latter would come though the former. She spoke extensively about what this means and how it could be achieved, individually as well as collectively.

Individually, each person needs to find his or her inner being, identify with the Divine within and become willing servitors of the divine consciousness. Then, and then only, will they be ONE with others in the Divine and will it be possible to achieve an effective human unity. There is no other way. This individual transformation is the individual yoga which every Aurovilian is expected to do.

As Auroville’s aim of human unity is so high – it has never been achieved anywhere – Mother also wanted Auroville residents to take up, as their collective yoga, the transformation of their environment (social and physical) so that it becomes increasingly favourable to their individual transformation.

This means that developing a more ideal society and a more ideal town are means (and not aims) to achieve Auroville’s aims. This explains why, in two distinct interviews, Roger Anger, the Chief Architect of Auroville, and Satprem, the Mother’s confidant, said almost the same thing: “The point is not building a new town – it is building a new man”.

One of humanity’s oldest fears – perhaps, the oldest fear of all – is fear of the unknown: of how the world was created, why the sun disappeared every night, why winter followed summer etc. Above all, there was the enigma of death.

Humanity attempted to manage, to control, these fears by creating myths as explanations of these phenomena, as well as rituals to propitiate the larger forces which it felt to be behind them.

In a scientific age like ours, many of those early myths and propitiatory practices appear quaint, ridiculous. Yet, we haven’t entirely banished fear of the unknown. One primeval fear that continues to be fairly widespread is fear or suspicion of difference, of the unfamiliar or unknown.

How do we cope with this?

Doudou Diène, an ex-member of our Governing Board was also the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination. Coming from Senegal, a nation of many different tribes and cultures, he was very aware of what he termed the “tension of difference”, the tension engendered when cultures or individuals with different values and beliefs come into contact with each other.

The outcome of such a tension, he learned, could be one of two things. Either a culture or an individual embraced the unknown, learned new values, perspectives, and consequently modified their own perspectives and beliefs. Or the culture or individual drew back into itself, fiercely reaffirmed its familiar identity, and rejected, even demonised, everything new or different by which it

felt threatened. Diène noted that the latter response was far more common than the former...

The threat to our familiar identity and ways of perceiving seems to be one factor why we often reject the different, the unknown. But another, or additional, component may be our difficulty in dealing with diversity. Our normal minds excel at categorization, logic and analysis. But generally these minds are far weaker when it comes to synthesising, to integrating new and disparate elements, and usually give up the attempt completely when confronted with apparent contradictions, like unity and diversity.

It’s why spiritual disciplines which seek to break the hold of the mind upon the individual often employ *koans* and other such ‘illogicalities’ to confound it.

This tendency to reject or be suspicious of diversity because we cannot deal with it takes many forms. Most commonly it is expressed in a retreat into simplistic solutions based upon either/or choices: “You are either with me or against me”.

Another response is to emphasise the need to preserve the ‘purity’ of a concept or belief from adulteration from different perspectives. Herein lies the roots of dogma.

Yet another response is to ‘round off the edges’ of diversity by making out that very different beliefs and perspectives are actually similar, a kind of ecumenism of the mind.

All these can be witnessed in Auroville which, because of the extreme diversity of its inhabitants, tests our ability to deal with it to the limit. What is

The main programmes of the transformation of our social environment are: (1) Education, (2) Economy, (3) Organisation and Governance, (4) Membership policy and (5) Communication with non-Aurovilians within Auroville and via the media. As said, the aim of these programmes is to make our individual transformation easier.

The aim of the transformation of Auroville’s physical environment is to enable it to house up to 50,000 people who are sincerely taking part in this individual and collective yoga so that throughout its development (and not just when 50,000 inhabitants will be living there) it will become increasingly favourable to the Aurovilians’ individual transformation and to the transformation of their social environment.

The side by side transformation.

In May 1912 and again in April 1952, speaking of the individual transformation and of the transformation of the social environment, Mother stressed the need for these two transformations to take place side by side:

“Since the environment reacts upon the individual and, on the other hand, the value of the environment depends upon the value of the individual, the two works should proceed side by side.”

And She made it clear that expecting to give birth to a higher consciousness (a more ideal man) simply by developing a would-be more ideal society or a would-be more ideal town would be foolish:

“This erring race of human beings dreams always of perfecting their environment by the machinery of government and society; but it is only by the perfection of the soul within that the outer environment can be perfected. What thou art within, that outside thee though shalt enjoy; no machinery can rescue thee from the law of thy being.”
(Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Aphorisms* # 343)

“The conditions in which men live on earth are the result of their state of consciousness. To seek to change these conditions without changing the consciousness is a vain chimera.”
(Mother, *Bulletin*, 4.1952)

Hence, in order to improve the quality of Auroville’s environment, there has to be some progress in our individual and collective consciousness. This explains why, on June 8th, 1951, Pavitra-da, then the Ashram’s General-Secretary, wrote to his friends Antonin and Noémi Raymond about the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre, which Mother was then in the process of launching: “It is a works (*sic*) which will develop slowly, from within to without, like all works of Sri Aurobindo and Mother.”

The above quote applies even more to Auroville as it is even more ambitious than the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

Therefore, Auroville’s focus should be on the Aurovilians’ individual transformation and on the transformation of Auroville’s social environment. It is mainly the latter which will create the natural selection (elimination process) Mother spoke about in the quote below (as well as in other quotes):

“In 200 years it [Auroville] will be a fine place. The elimination process must go on because there will be no one in Auroville to say, “Get out!” and those who don’t fit will have to leave in disgust. They will leave voluntarily because they don’t like it.”

Recruiting for Auroville

Given the aims of Auroville, one may ask if advertising and recruiting for Auroville is the right way to go. Five statements here are relevant. One is from Sri Aurobindo, who in 1934 wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy:

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

Mother instructed Satprem to send a copy of this letter to Auroville, saying “That passage should be typed and put up in Auroville. It is indispensable. They all have a false idea about propaganda and publicity. It should be typed in big letters; at the top, “Sri Aurobindo said,” then put the quotation and send it to Auroville. Say I am the one who’s sending it.”

The other four statements are from Mother herself. In June 1970, Roger Anger noted down what She had just told him: “I want people to need Auroville and not Auroville to need people. Working for Auroville has to become a grace.” In June 1971, after meeting with Mother, Shyam Sunder noted her words: “Mother said that in Auroville she did not want numbers but quality. Twelve good men would be better than hundreds of stupid persons.” In October 1972, in reply to a question from the Auroville Association USA about recruiting people for Auroville, Mother replied “We don’t want any recruitment.” And in October 1972, after meeting with Mother, Shyam Sunder noted down Her words: “In Auroville I do not want many men. I want some people, but true people. If you want many people, I can give you a hundred thousand in a moment from South Africa.”

After reading the above, one understands the view of the renowned architect Shri Balakrishna Doshi, who in a discussion in 1990 with a group of Aurovilians argued against the need for Auroville to speedily build infrastructure and accommodations. “In a country in which crores of people have either no accommodation or very poor ones, these accommodations would surely be filled in no time – but most probably not by the kind of people Auroville needs,” he said, and suggested instead to create institutions which would attract the kind of people Auroville needs.

If we study Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s words, we cannot but conclude that the transformation of Auroville’s physical environment by adding so many more beds will not be in the best interests of Auroville. Auroville might draw the wrong people; the serious progress of Aurovilian’s individual transformation may be hindered and the improvement of our social environment, in particular with regard to our economy, our organisation, our governance and our relationships with the people from the surrounding villages, will become even more challenging than it is today.

Gilles Guigan

The challenge of diversity

common to all these responses is they make the world a poorer place, devoid of the rich complexity necessary for living a fulfilling life. For they deal with diversity either by excluding everything that doesn’t fit with a particular narrow vision – the ‘purist’ approach – or by reducing it to binary choices, or they play down genuine differences.

But if the ordinary mind resists such integration, what can we do?

Sri Aurobindo and The Mother made it clear that only when we raise our consciousness to a higher level can we comprehend how to integrate what seem to us now disparate, even contradictory elements.

But until then?

Well, it’s worth noting that fear, distrust, of that which is different, of diversity, is not the only deep urge within us. There is also the opposite. One part of us also seems to crave novelty. It’s why we go on holiday to unknown places, why we abandon small village life for the exciting diversity offered by cities, and why we seek out new books, new films, new contacts.

The problem is that often we set bounds to how much novelty we are willing to absorb, for it should not be so novel as to threaten our fundamental sense of ourselves, our beliefs and our culture. It’s why, while some of us journey to exotic locations, they stay in global hotel chains where the décor and cuisine are standard, and thus comfortably familiar, the world over.

In other words, to adapt the famous phrase of T.S.Eliot, it seems that “humankind cannot bear very much diversity”.

Nevertheless, if the impulse to seek some kind of novelty, diversity, is also within us, it may be possible to encourage it by creating the most propitious settings for it to manifest.

Socially, this may mean creating a secure environment which allows individuals to relax their need to defend their entrenched perceptions and start listening to other perspectives. The recent Dreamweaving exercise was one such attempt. While it wasn’t fully successful, partly because of time constraints, for many participating architects the opportunity to ‘weave’ new ways of thinking into their own way of seeing things was liberating, allowing them to embrace greater diversity.

Ultimately, one thing seems clear. Diversity, whether of natural systems, mindsets or human populations, is a vital component of life, driving creativity and allowing the flexibility to adjust to new realities. For an experiment like Auroville, which seeks to evolve its group-soul along with the development of its individuals, it is particularly important that we preserve our diversity for, as Sri Aurobindo points out, “the group-soul rather works out its tendencies by a diversity of opinions, a diversity of wills, a diversity of life, and the vitality of the group-life depends largely upon the working of this diversity, its continuity, its richness.”

As individuals and societies, then, our ability to solve our most pressing challenges, as well as to evolve to higher levels of consciousness, will depend upon our capacity to enlarge our understanding of the diversity of existence while simultaneously grasping its underlying unity and interconnectedness.

Alan

A 'more welcoming' Entry Process?

The minutes of the 57th meeting of the Governing Board held in December last year mention the need for a more welcoming Entry Process to allow for a speedy growth of Auroville's population to 15,000 by 2025. Alain Bernard, an early Aurovilian and a confidant of Dr. Kireet Joshi, explains the history of the Newcomer process and Dr. Kireet Joshi's views as laid down in the Auroville Foundation Act.

The Governing Board has expressed the need for a 'more welcoming' Entry Process to speed Auroville's growth to a population of 50,000 as initially envisaged. Regrettably, the Board does not indicate what 'more welcoming' implies.

The Auroville Entry Process originated with Mother herself. In the first years of Auroville, Mother was the authority who accepted or rejected applicants. Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala, Mother's Secretary for Auroville, noted in February 1971 that "Admission to Auroville is subject to approval by The Mother. There will be a trial period of one year. This period can be made longer or shorter." The note was approved by The Mother and signed by her. This is the genesis of the one-year Newcomer period which is now an essential part of the Auroville Entry Policy.

When I came for a one-month visit in 1972, admission requests were dealt with by Roger Anger (Chief Architect) and Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala (Mother's Secretary for Auroville). In my case, when I presented myself in August 1972, there were also with them André Morisset (Mother's son) and Navajata (SAS General Secretary and Treasurer). They reviewed my application form, asked a few questions (mostly by Roger, who was very friendly). My application with my picture and their recommendation was then sent to Mother. A few days later, Shyam Sunder, with his well-known grin, told me that I had been accepted by Mother on probation. (Incidentally, as no one has ever told me that the probation had conclusively ended, I am still under probation, which is true in many ways!)

Acceptance into Auroville was such a serious task that Mother herself had the last word. As early as 1967, in a talk with Yvonne Artaud, She had elaborated on the conditions required for selecting people for admission to Auroville:

"There was something about the choice of people and admission to Auroville...so I told her that naturally the essential condition to be able to choose people is that preferences, attractions, repulsions, sympathies, antipathies, all moral rules, all that must have completely disappeared – not that one is in the process of overcoming them, it's not that: all that must have disappeared (laughing), there must be no more ego! And then I told her: "it's not a judgment, it's not looking at people

and judging if they're capable of being there or not, if they are destined to be there or not, it's not that at all – you don't – judge"... And when she was gone, I jotted down the end of it.

"The Force is put on all, identical and supreme..."

The Force is identical for all (uniform gesture all over the earth) and supreme, that is ... well, it means supreme, like this (same even, outspread gesture). Whoever they are, whatever their attitude, the Force is put on all identically and they are the ones who classify themselves; it's not that you decide that such and such person goes here or there or here: they classify themselves according to...

"And everyone classifies himself, by himself, according to his own receptivity and the quality of that receptivity – or else his refusal or incapacity."

Mother spoke to Yvonne at a time when the possibility of Mother remaining in her body and therefore continuing to guide the development of Auroville was very much in the air. It was obvious to all that only She would have the power to put the Force equally, as she said, which would determine whether a person is fit. But I believe that this Force is still very active today.

In the years following Mother's passing in 1973, when the problems between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society intensified, there was no formal entry system in place and people were admitted on an ad-hoc basis. It was only after the Auroville Cooperative was formed in 1978 that something more formal began. When the Government of India promulgated the *Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act 1980*, which vested the management of Auroville temporarily in the Government of India, a more formal entry group came into existence which was recognized by the Administrator appointed under this Act as the working group that had the right to admit people into Auroville.

The Auroville Foundation Act

The person instrumental in the preparation of the *Auroville Emergency Provisions Act* and its successor, the *Auroville Foundation Act*, was Dr. Kireet Joshi, the former Registrar of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram who, after Mother's passing, had been appointed Educational Adviser, and

subsequently Special Secretary, to the Ministry of Education and Culture by India's Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi. Having witnessed the control mindset of the Sri Aurobindo Society and particularly, of its chairman Shri Navajata, Kireet proposed that the right of admission to Auroville would be given exclusively to the Residents' Assembly. This was enacted in the Auroville Foundation Act, which gives the Residents' Assembly the power to allow the admission or cause the termination of persons in the Register of Residents in accordance with regulations made by the Governing Board, approved by the Government of India and published in the Gazette of India. The *Auroville Foundation (Admission and termination of persons in the register of residents) Regulations* were published in the Gazette of India on June 23, 2020. Auroville now has an Admission Committee (also known as the Entry Board) whose members are appointed by the Residents' Assembly.

The question of admission into Auroville is of paramount importance. It makes sense that this responsibility has been given to people who have committed their lives to Auroville – not because they would have reached the state of 'no more ego' Mother was talking about, but because they know through their lived experience what it means to live in Auroville. The one-year probation as decided by Mother has been maintained, for it is only through the experience of this period that the Newcomer knows if joining Auroville is indeed his or her calling; it also provides an insight to the community on the suitability of the Newcomer joining Auroville. The final decision is with the Entry Board, after having invited feedback from the community. But I think we may safely assume that the Force Mother spoke about is still the ultimate authority if a person should join Auroville.

What it means to be an Aurovilian

While talking about admission to Auroville in a talk given to the Auroville community on the internal organization of Auroville (25 august 1999), Kireet Joshi said the following:

"I would like to read one last statement of the Mother: 'For millennia we have been developing outer means, outer instruments, outer techniques of living and finally those means and techniques are crushing us. The sign of the new humanity is a reversal in the standpoint and understanding that

inner knowledge and inner techniques can change the world and master it without crushing it.' It's a wonderful balm to mankind which is striving to find the true solution. And then Mother adds, *'Auroville is the place where this new way of living is being worked out. It is a centre of accelerated evolution, where men must begin to change this world through the power of inner spirit.'* I think this should be stated to all the people who want to join Auroville. Because this is the starting point of Auroville and this is elucidated by the Mother further where She says, *'We will strive to make Auroville the cradle of the superman.'*

And The Mother clarified in June 1970 in the message *To be a True Aurovilian* what is expected from those who want to join Auroville. The first point encompasses all: *The first necessity is the inner discovery in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the centre there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville.'*

The deeper truth

Kireet spoke about the deeper meaning of Auroville. There is also a deeper truth about entry to Auroville, which is that it is in answer to the call from the Divine. Mother had said that many of those who have come to Auroville had already been associated with Their work in previous lives. She spoke of redeeming a promise to those souls that, when the time comes of the great transformation, they will be called again to participate in the last stages of this divine work. This is another mystery of Auroville, this association of souls beyond the personal appearances.

This is why we cannot recruit Aurovilians. We, and in particular the members of the Entry Board, can only aspire to be open to a higher consciousness to facilitate the entry of those who are destined to participate in the work of Auroville for the Earth. The experience of many Aurovilians is that they were guided to Auroville through the circumstances of their lives. And through the experiences of recently joined Aurovilians we can see that this process continues. Obviously, recruitment to Auroville is best left to that pervasive omnipotent Consciousness that we believe is behind the building of the true Auroville.

Carel, in conversation with Alain Bernard

FUNDRAISING

Art for Land

The seventh Art for Land exhibition was inaugurated in the Unity Pavilion on 7th August by the Secretary, Dr Jayanti Ravi. This edition moved from its usual February slot to August due to the corona wave and to coincide with the 150th Sri Aurobindo birth year celebrations. Quoting Sri Aurobindo, the organisers remind us that he said that "it is Beauty that expresses the Divine best" and "Beauty is his foot print showing us where he has passed".

Every year there are different tones and emphases in Art for Land. The pertinent theme of this year is 'Unity for Peace and Harmony' with an aspiration to create a space where art could bring people together. The over one hundred and sixty paintings, twenty woodworks and thirty ceramic pieces included over fifty paintings and black and white sketches by Amit Bawa, an Aurovilian who sadly recently passed away recently. They were discovered in his home and are a last offering to the community. There were also two pieces of intricate needlework by Terra where the graded colouration was striking. Cristel's art work involves pyrography, burning on to wood, which she then paints over.

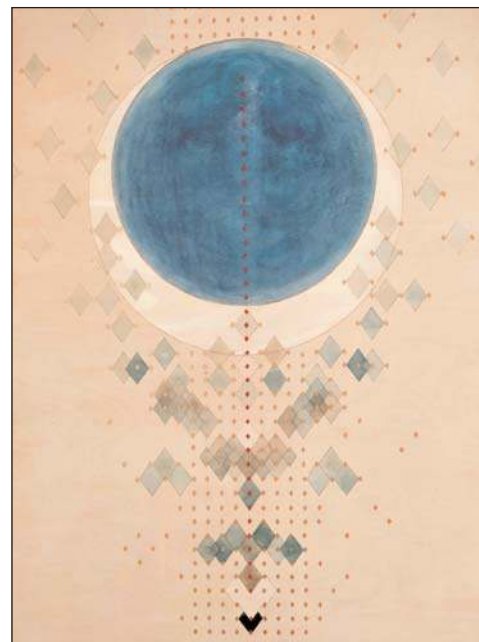
The organisers were happy that in the last week many of our Puducherry neighbours contributed art works, including Dipti Agarwal who drew some beautiful landscapes, and Vivechana's mandalas which lit up the



String art by Terra



Sketch by Amit Bawa



Pyrographic artwork by Cristel



Landscape by Dipti Agarwal

Peace Hall of the Unity Pavilion. This year just over half the artists were Aurovilians, with contributions from local supporters. One image not for sale was Usha Patel's rendition of Mother's Prayer of the Earth in 1971 which was exhibited as an inspiration.

As before, all money raised through buying art will go fully to purchasing land for Auroville. Since Acres for Auroville, the initiator of Art for Land, started some eighty-three acres of land have been purchased for Auroville.

A new inspiration came from Jaya of the Unity Pavilion with a suggestion that people buy art pieces for Auroville to be kept for the community in what will hopefully be a permanent art gallery.

Aside from the art, there are four weekends of cultural evenings, with visiting artists from Puducherry and Bangalore offering dance and song as a gift to Art for Land. Anandi, a long term Argentinian Aurovilian, has published a book 'Matrimandir – the Privilege' of her poetry with photographs, and the proceeds of the sales are also being given to Acres for Auroville.

Compared to the fifth Art for Land in 2020 this was a quieter year, but the theme of 'Unity for Peace and Harmony' is a much-needed aspiration for our times.

Peter

For more information visit artforland.in

The Solar Kitchen is beefing up

On August 15th, the new Solar Kitchen management team celebrated one year in office. Auroville Today asked executives Harishini, Vanitha, Shakthi and Manimaran about their experience. (And yes, the Solar Kitchen is strictly vegetarian.)

“A bit rough,” says Harishini about her entry into the world of the Solar Kitchen. “There is a Tamil saying ‘Left in the jungle blindfolded.’ For three of the four executives, Vanitha, Shakthi and me, it was like that. There was no handover. The former management team and more than 20 employees had been dismissed and only the 12 Aurovilian ladies of the kitchen team and Manimaran had stayed on. Understandably, they were a bit wary of us and were looking how we would perform. Till December last year the atmosphere was tense. We struggled with a human resource shortfall - over time we re-hired 10 former employees for maintenance work - and all of us had to get used to one another.”

“It took us months before we knew exactly what we had to do,” adds Vanitha. “We were also unfamiliar with accounts and book keeping, so we had to learn on the spot and at times re-create and re-invent the wheel. But the FAMC & Budget Coordination Committee (BCC) has been very helpful throughout. They created a special support group with whom we continue to interact on a monthly basis.” The BCC pays for the maintenances of all Aurovilians working at the Solar Kitchen and provides a budget for all other expenses, with as the result that the Solar Kitchen’s income and expenditure break even most months.

Changing management styles

“One of the main changes is the way we work together,” says Harishini. “We abolished the top-down approach and the work-specialisation in the kitchen. Now we all share the work. We, the executives, help with the food preparation; and we also share the chores, such as the dishwashing, serving and cleaning the kitchen. We meet regularly to discuss ongoing issues and how we can improve. The atmosphere has notably changed. Everybody is on board now, and each of us participates and gives suggestions on how we can improve this community service.”

“Another change was amending the menu,” says Vanitha. “For many years there had been a fixed menu: Monday mashed potatoes, Tuesday noodles and so on. We are tweaking it one bit at a time and also providing vegan and non-vegan and spicy and non spicy dishes. And we went into the dining room to ask the people how they liked the food and what had to be improved. We eat together with the people and get first-hand feedback. Overall, the community members and volunteers are happy: the food, we learn, is better than before.” “We would like a nutritionist to be a part of our team, to work along with Santé and the Health Center to understand the needs of the community and serve better,” adds Harishini. “Also, we will need to start thinking of providing for special needs, such as gluten or dairy-free meals. But that’s a next step.”

Supplies

The Solar Kitchen gets its Auroville supplies from FoodLink, the Auroville unit which coordinates the supply of the Auroville Farms. “In fact,” says Harishini, “The vision of Auroville is to be fully self-sufficient in terms of food. Auroville farms need to be committed to this goal and as a community kitchen we are fully in line with that vision.” What cannot be grown in Auroville is bought from outside. The ratio is about 50-50, with half of the requirements coming from outside.



The morning meditation

“The pricing is something the community will have to look at, as the farm produce from Auroville costs far more than the market price of vegetables,” says Vanitha. “In the market you have negotiating power, but in Auroville, prices are fixed by the Farm Group. Of course, the farms need to manage their income and expenses as much as we do, and it is not that they make fat profits on their sales. Their expenses are higher than those of local farms as they pay fair wages to their farm workers and produce organically grown vegetables, fruits and organic dairy products. But it would be better if the BCC could support the farms and the farms could just give their produce to the Solar Kitchen. That is the system of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. But we are not there yet.”

Farm supplies are sometimes in excess or too little. “For example, last year we received 600 kg of ladies finger, which was seven times more than what we could use,” says Harishini. “We can use 90 kg a day and, as the dish is not all that popular, we can only serve it once a week. We can store some produce in our cold rooms, but this was too much and we had to ask the farms to grow less. But we can’t get enough bananas. We need 350-400 bananas every day, but only in a certain period can we give the children Auroville-grown bananas.”

“To solve this problem a pilot project has started,” adds Vanitha. “The Solar Kitchen now works with a new working group called Aruvadai which has made agreements with seven farms to grow the crops we need, and the Solar Kitchen has committed to buy a certain

volume. One of the Aruvadai team is visiting the farms regularly to see how the crops develop. The first crops will be harvested in September or October.” [for more on Auroville’s food sector challenges see AVToday #394 of May 2022]

The equipment

Manimaran is in charge of the maintenance of all of the Solar Kitchen’s equipment. The Solar Bowl, from which the Kitchen derives

its name, is in need of a big overhaul. “The bowl is 20 years old, mirrors have to be changed and we have to repair the leakage in the coils,” says Manimaran. “But its use is limited, perhaps not more than 18-20% of our energy requirement.” And he explains: “Our food needs to be ready by 11.30 am, which means that we have to start our food preparation at a time when the sunlight is not yet intense. The good solar energy comes at midday, too late for lunch and too early for dinner. We can’t store that energy. The Kitchen therefore uses a diesel boiler, and petrol and gas.”

The purchase of some new equipment is being considered. One is a chapati-making machine (Rs 5 lakhs), another a dishwashing machine (Rs 70-80 lakhs). Both are required for hygienic reasons and to lessen labour. “We will soon submit a proposal to the BCC which will pay for the machines if it approves our request,” says Manimaran.

Community involvement

Volunteers regularly help out in the Solar Kitchen, and recently many children joined during their school holidays. “It was an eye-opener for many children,” says Vanitha. “I’ve heard them exclaim ‘Oh my god, you put so much energy in it, now I am gonna eat it!’ They have started to realize what value the community kitchen contributes. It was also an eye-opener for us. We would welcome it if all newcomers and children work for a few days at the kitchen, and perhaps also at the farms. It will create better understanding about the value of our food.”

“Educating Aurovilians about the food they eat is another of our aims,” contributes Harishini. “For example, many do not like red rice. We use parboiled white rice instead, which is a little less processed than pure white rice. We have also added more carrots and spinach to the menu, as we were told that many people here have a B-12 deficiency. But we have not yet started a true food-education programme. For that, a nutritionist should come in.”

The Solar Kitchen’s dining room has a seating capacity of 300, which, with a bit of squeezing, can be extended to 350. In total it serves 1100 people a day, which includes providing 500 school meals and filling 250 tiffins. “But we can do much more,” says Harishini. “Come back next year and see how we have fared.”

In conversation with Carel



Cutting vegetables

Celebrating breastfeeding

World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) began in 1992, set from the 1st-7th August, in order to promote public awareness to encourage and support breastfeeding. The theme of this year’s celebrations was to “Step up for Breastfeeding – Educate and Support.” And so, the Morning Star team in Auroville did just that. On the 5th August, all breastfeeding mothers and their partners, and children were invited to an event organized by the Morning Star team and held in the International Zone of Auroville. The WBW event was designing to honour and celebrate the breastfeeding mother; to ensure she feels comfortable, safe and supported. Her family was welcomed with her, to help spread education on the topic, and to ensure that she continues to be supported when she returns home.

Health workers and students from the bioregion were also invited to add their knowledge and enthusiasm to the event. The Mother Theresa Post Graduate and Research Institute of Health Sciences, from Puducherry, was represented by Dr. Manju Bala

and her students. The students performed theatre in Tamil, which was enthusiastically applauded and loved by many who had seen it in several other regional venues as well. The Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences was also represented at the event, by students who had prepared an informative presentation.

Nirmala, a “Human Milk Donor”, who also happens to live near to Auroville, attended the event to share her inspiring and award winning story. Nirmala has successfully been donating milk for over 7 years, and has been recognized for her efforts throughout India. She was accompanied by her husband who also shared how the topic of milk donation was initially received skeptically, but now brought a deep sense of pride to their families. What could be more sacred than offering such a life support, freely, to others that need it at the most vulnerable time in their infant’s life? We were reminded that human milk donation must remain a donation, and that commercializing it could result in



Nirmala, India’s award winning human milk donor, addresses the audience.

a chain reaction of harmful results for mothers and their babies.

Morning Star also screened a video on Global Health in Tamil, which helped understand the challenges faced in our area regarding social norms and difficulties that a breastfeeding mother may have to face. The Morning Star team of midwives and doulas follow the recommendations by the World Health Organization (WHO), that state that all mothers should be supported to

initiate breastfeeding as soon as possible after delivery of a baby, ideally within the first hour. This sacred act of bonding between mother and child is sometimes challenging, and thus the counselling of a midwife is often crucial.

At the end of the presentations, one woman suggested that Auroville become a ‘Breastfeeding Friendly Community’. We could reduce barriers to breastfeeding for all women,

regardless of work place. Women should be entitled to, and encouraged, to take nursing breaks at the workplace. Auroville could also consider establishing lactation stations in public spaces, parks, restaurants, and shops, where breastfeeding is a matter of convenience for every mother.

The WHO recommends that mothers exclusively breastfeed for the first 6 months of life. It is also recommended that she introduce complementary food for up to 2 years, but that she continues to breastfeed alongside. Not only breastfeeding, but skin-skin contact also improves neo-natal survival and reduces infant mortality. Thus, it is beginning to be widely understood, that one must not only tolerate a breastfeeding woman in public, but that efforts should be made to make her feel comfortable and celebrated. The hope is that this event brings attention to the importance of supporting the breastfeeding mother, and inspires us all to make efforts to put safeguards in place for nursing in private or public contexts, throughout all levels of society.

Kavitha

Echo – an art installation

“In the midst of the mountains, unable to hold onto their stillness, I was swept away. Only Silence remained. Tracing silhouettes of mountains became the mantra of my hands.”

The art exhibition *Echo* by Bhavyo, was hosted by the Centre d'Art in Citadines in August.

It showcases Bhavyo's skills, acquired over the last five years within his art medium – a combination of ink, acrylic, and spray paint. The exhibition depicts, in various forms, a mountain range of the Himalayas where Bhavyo has trekked and found inspiration.

The elegantly understated piece at the heart of the show is a long scroll of paper humbly hugging a length of curved wall. Painted on it are several iterations of the same mountain range. This piece of parchment has voyaged in Bhavyo's backpack all the way to the Himalayas, and once there, at the foot of the mountains, he took in his object by painting it live. Based on this scroll, he painted several of the showcased pieces over the last two years.

Standing apart from other exhibitions and artists, the bigger pieces that would inhabit the art gallery with more stature (to mimic the imposing mountains they represent), were painted on the spot, in the art gallery. Bhavyo spent the few weeks leading up to the exhibition in the Centre d'Art itself, where he took



Bhavyo at work

the time to tune in to the gallery rooms and natural lighting and sense how he could, accordingly, create these large pieces to best fill the space. Standing upright and equipped with a giant metre-long inkbrush, he started trialling with minimalistic strokes, finding how to best represent the snow-capped peaks with a few touches of black ink. The trials were what took up most of the preparatory time, with the final pieces being created within minutes, springing out spontaneously thanks to all the prior preparation.

Rocks brought back from the same mountain range add to the atmosphere and pave a virtual stone path, from one room to the other. Bhavyo and his friends each painstakingly brought back one of those heavy stones in their backpacks from their Himalayan trek.

The biggest piece showcased consists of massive scrolls of paper hanging down from the ceiling to the ground, generously unfolding

a few metres horizontally onto the floor, perhaps suggesting an expanse of snow. Slowly walking through these strategically hanging scrolls painted with great fragmented mountain lines, one emerges at the other end to discover a sizable painting of the same mountain, depicted in its entirety. The installation thus reminds us of the journey that is to be undertaken, whether on an adventure trek, or an inner artistic journey, to behold the mountains.

Bhavyo puts it in his own words:

“The journey which led me to paint this mountain began five years ago on slopes of another range. Battered and beaten by weather in the midst of a trek, the world stood still. The

mountains and a little me, unable to fathom their presence in the slightest.

Caught in a moment which called me back to their arms again and again I had to find a way to go past the noise, to Them and unearth in silence their story chiselled as far as the eye can see.

This process of repetition in an attempt to translate onto paper the mountain as it stands, a presence absolute, like a Truth one cannot fathom, is my search for That which is intangible, yet so clearly present.

I am at the beginning of a long road, a few steps into the journey.”

Chandra



A view of the exhibition

CELEBRATIONS

Youth Day Fest

International Youth Day is celebrated annually on the 12th August globally, and marks YouthLink's largest annual event in Auroville. This year it was celebrated around the world, focusing on the theme of “Intergenerational Solidarity”, which it remains ever so important to be reminded of, even within the Auroville context. Exploring this theme was important to YouthLink as it was as an occasion to honor all that the older generations have set up for Auroville, while also remind the community that youth are here, and that youth keep coming to Auroville; and that they are building their capacity to take on and continue the good work. YouthLink is a Service, located at the TownHall, which helps empower and integrate young people into Auroville.

This year YouthLink was grateful that the event was held at the Pavilion of Tibetan



A member of YouthLink displays artwork

Culture in the International Zone, this venue was large enough to host its many activities, which were spread around the gardens and inside the various halls. The event included many Workshops on various themes such as – Compassionate Communication, First Aid, Self Defense, Carpentry, Learning Sanskrit, Yoga, Wasteless, and Mandala Art. Each workshop was well attended, with a diversity of youth from Auroville, its bioregion, and even groups from elsewhere in India attending. Overall, the event was attended by a total of about 250-300 youth, and also those from older generations.

The youth who attended these workshops could have a taste of what the topic could include, and hopefully be inspired to sign up to join such activities on a regular basis. The topics were chosen specifically to address local issues such as the trash problem, personal health, expressing creativity, and finding ways to con-

nect to one another.

The event also included a variety of stalls displaying various types of opportunities in Auroville, such as Marganam apprenticeships, Mohanam Heritage handicrafts and women's group incubation, and Yuvabe, which shared information on climate change. Kailash, a youth housing project in Auroville, also brought a stall of fresh juices and cakes to invite more support to improve Kailash, and remind the community of the importance of such spaces for young people.

As most of the exhibitors were also youth, the event embodied what YouthLink likes to call “for the youth, by the youth” ... but staying true to the theme of the year of “intergenerational solidarity,” the event also included elder generations in sharing their knowledge, and invited all age groups to come and enjoy the space together.

Kavitha

THEATRE

Usha and the Dawns to come

On August 15th, 16th, and 17th, the illuminated fountain-pond at the Matrimandir Gardens was once again converted into a stage for a theatre presentation of ‘Usha and the Dawns to Come’.

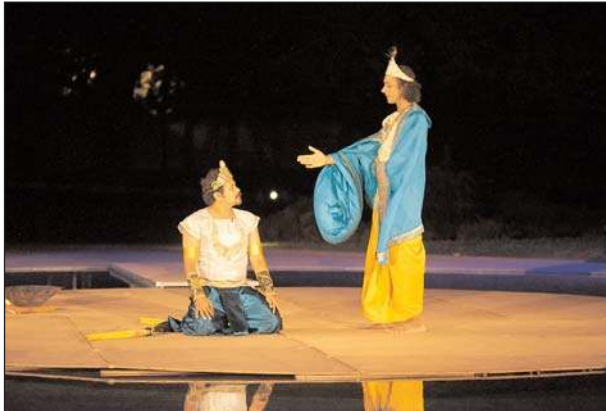
Instead of following a thread from an already established story (such as Nachiketas from last year's play), this performance is based on a much more exploratory work and is an amalgamation of excerpts and short stories from the Vedas to Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*. As Aryamani, the director explains:

“The texts for this performance were chosen as an attempt, in a visual form, to bring close to us the immortal knowledge they express. As golden drops of Light, tiny drops from a vast Ocean, this selection from the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, creates a particular atmosphere conducive to an inner opening towards this eternal knowledge. The presence of Sanskrit language in various moments was

essential for the creation of this atmosphere.

Usha, the opening lines of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*, was our first source of inspiration. From there, an invocation of Dawn, with a few quotes from the Vedas, leads us to the joy of the manifestation, the Divine Presence everywhere, through the verses and two stories from the Upanishads. Lines from *Savitri* permeate the whole, helping us to receive Krishna. The sounds of His flute prepare us to listen to some of His teachings to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The performance concludes with the last lines of *Savitri*. They affirm our best hopes and aspirations, and unite the past dawns and noons of the future.”

‘Usha and the Dawns to Come’ was a one year project that started in August 2021 and concluded with the three performances this August.



Krishna admonishing Arjuna

“It is the result of a combined effort by a small group of people in their sincere aspiration to make an offering to Sri Aurobindo.” This group has been meeting once a week for the first six months of preparatory work to explore and hone all the skills and stage presence required for the final performances. This preliminary training included regular voice lessons, singing, Sanskrit lessons, yoga, yoga

nidra, Awareness through the Body, martial arts, and other forms of physical education.

For the second part of the year-long preparation, the group started meeting more than once a week, to start exploring the shape that the play would take.

All this hard work and dedication is what truly held the performance together, and it visibly emanated through the actors' strong poise, polished gestures, posture, and clarity of voice projection.

The play was woven together with lines from *Savitri*, recited by two storytellers who filled the entire stage with their presence as they stepped in and out to narrate, using grand slow gestures that, combined with the verses, inspired a sense of timelessness.

One of the highlights of the perfor-

mance was the classical scene from the Kurukshetra where Krishna converses with a remorseful Arjuna. That single short scene, ending with Arjuna's realisation, conveyed the essence of the *Gita* in a touching and inspiring way.

The whole design of the play very successfully came together with each detail clearly thought through meticulously. The costumes, mostly consisting of elegant, flowing light gold and blue satins worked in harmonious symbiosis with the lighting which was made to represent the bluish night followed by the golden hues of dawn. The live music complemented the whole, with a wide variety of sound effects, ambient sounds, and Indian instruments. In spite of the challenging windy conditions of the venue, the music and the actors' speeches were extremely well delivered.

The performance was an uplifting and transporting event, encouraging the audience to turn their gaze inward and reflect on what touches and inspires us most deeply.

Chandra

August is always a busy month, but this August has been exceptionally so.

Cultural activities

There have been numerous cultural events, the majority of which have been occasioned by the 150th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo’s birth. One organizing group took as its theme for the month, *Invocation-the Gnostic Festival*, in a wish to invoke the various aspects of Sri Aurobindo: the revolutionary, the poet, the guide, the guru and most importantly the modern seer and greater luminary for the future. The majority of programmes took place at Matrimandir, Bharat Nivas, Savitri Bhavan, Unity Pavilion, Town Hall, and various other locations in Auroville.

Talks

There were many talks, on topics like Sri Aurobindo and the cosmic yagna and the Foundations of Indian Culture. A series of morning conversations, featuring scholars of Sri Aurobindo, sadhaks and long-term Aurovilians were held at Savitri Bhavan, which also hosted a talk by Sri M, the spiritual guide and social reformer, on 14th July.

Exhibitions

Meanwhile, in addition to the ongoing Art for Land exhibition, there was a Savitri art exhibition at Savitri Bhavan, ‘Echo’, an installation by Bhavyo at Citadines, and ‘Unexpected’, a stone sculpture exhibition by Charles Zanon at Botanical Gardens.

Performances

Musically, we were privileged to host flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia and his students on 14th August, and there have been many other music performances, as well as Odissi and Bharatnatyam dance performances.

Films

Filmwise, in addition to the premiere of the ‘Spiritual History of India’, the fourth in the series ‘Evolution: Fast forward’ (see front page), Manohar presented videos he had made in previous years dedicated to events connected with Sri Aurobindo in Auroville, as well as his video of the ‘Dawn’ performance in the small amphitheatre, and there was the premiere on a TV channel of “Sri Aurobindo: the beginning of spiritual journey” based on Sri Aurobindo’s inner and external life in the prison between 1908-1909, related in his own words.

Marathon

On 20th August, a ‘Lap of Honour’, a walk/run marathon around Auroville was organized by the Sri Aurobindo Circle, an Ashram group from London.

Community matters

There have been a number of community meetings, in addition to the big event on the evening of 15th August. On July 30th there was an invitation to the community to ‘Meet and greet’ the recently RA selected working groups in Unity Pavilion. The meeting was well attended, and as a result of feedback received, the FAMC agreed to create sub-groups to look into how we can support units with various licenses,

such as for packaging, food, music, etc., and how to support the small guest houses (registered under Exploration). The Council will also organize open houses where the community can interact with them every Thursday morning.

Youth Day Fest

On Youth Day (August 12) Youth Link organized a Youth Day Fest to present projects initiated by Auroville youth, as well as a variety of short workshops on topics like Self-Defense, Mandala Art, Carpentry, First Aid. [see article on page 7]

Auroville International

The General Assembly of Auroville International (AVI) also took place on 12th August. This year, due to the 150th anniversary programmes and events, there were no special AVI programmes. Many AVI members could not attend this year, mainly due to travelling difficulties occasioned by the high price of flight tickets.

Mela

Auroville Bharat Nivas held a mela, celebrating food, crafts workshops and performances by bioregion centres and schools of Auroville, including a chanting of the full Bhagavad Gita.

City the earth needs exhibition

On 14th August, there was an open invitation to the exhibition ‘The city the earth needs: Auroville – the vision takes shape’ in India Space at Bharat Nivas.

Visitors to this exhibition found a 1:100 scale model of the city centre laid out on the floor, including the proposed Line of Goodwill. As the invitation to the exhibition put it, “The buildings in this model are not meant as a final display, but rather as a place for experimentation and immersion, where all architects, designers and anyone with an aspiration can come and play with architecture, interconnectedness of buildings, design of roads and many others.” Dr. Anupama Kundoo, ex-Aurovilian and designer of the Line of Progress, was introduced by the Secretary of the Foundation, and subsequently interviewed by Lakshay about her perception of the city and how it could be manifested. [More about this from Anupama in the next issue, eds.]

Community fun dance

On August 25th, the community was invited to the Unity Pavilion to enjoy a ‘community fun dance’ – a way of learning Orissa folk dance.

Forest Moot

On 26th/27th August, the Botanical Gardens team invited the community to a ‘Forest Moot’ celebrating, as they put it, “our journey with nature”. The event included an orchid show, talks, kids’ activities and a tour of the gardens.

Community meeting at Kalabhumi and Emergency RAD

After the High Court judgment, The Working Committee selected by the Residents’ Assembly called a community meeting to discuss the outcome of the High Court case. They also called for an emergency Residents Assembly Decision to reject the Office Orders, Standing Orders and any other form of orders that have been made and may be made in future by the Office of the Secretary and her appointees without consultation with or approval by the Residents’ Assembly, and affirm sup-

port for the groups and appointees by the RA. The RAD process culminated on 22nd August. The result was announced a few days later. In spite of the Foundation supported Working Committee warning that the call for a RAD “is nothing short of a flagrant contempt of court”, and the Residents’ Assembly Service’s Auroville email account having been blocked so that they could not reach out to the community members via their regular mass email communication, this Emergency RAD attracted an unprecedented number of participants. A total of 1161 valid votes were cast, which exceeded the 10% quorum (the 239 votes needed to validate a decision). 97% were in agreement with the resolution, 1% disagreed and 2% abstained.

More Residents’ Assembly appointed groups abolished or replaced

Meanwhile, more RA-appointed groups have either been abolished or replaced by nominees by the Foundation Office. The Archives team has been replaced, with the exception of one executive, the Budget Coordination Group has been replaced by the Budget Coordination Service, and Auroville Media Liaison Services has been shut down.

Other RA-appointed groups have had their ability to function seriously curtailed. The FAMC lost their office on the first floor of Town Hall, The Entry Service can no longer access its data from the domain auroville.org.in, and the Auroville email address of the Residents Assembly Service has also been disabled. At the same time, a number of Aurovilians have been prevented from posting or accessing Auronet, without any explanation as to why.

However, these affected groups have established new ways to communicate with the community and continue their work.

Both RA and GB selected working groups continue

Meanwhile other groups selected by the RA – the Working Committee, the FAMC and TDC – are continuing their work and have laid out the issues they intend to focus upon.

In the meantime, the Working Committee supported by the Foundation Office has stated that they continue to be the properly appointed WC, and this has not been nullified by the High Court judgment. They write that the removed members of this Working Committee (who are now part of the new Working Committee recently appointed by the Residents Assembly) had no right to call for an emergency RAD and “such a course of action is blatantly illegal and contumacious. Therefore, you are called upon to take notice of the same and refrain from acting against law.”

L’avenir d’Auroville/ Auroville Town Development Council appointed by the Foundation Office also made a statement. “During this time of confusion intensely propagated by a faction of residents, we would like to reassure the residents of Auroville that we, as the duly appointed and legal Auroville Town Development Council, continue to work towards fulfilling the program of works as specified in our first two announcements... While the court cases are ongoing and the divisive faction of residents continue to make noise and try to cause disruption in ongoing works, we call for Mother’s Grace to guide us actively in every step we take

and leave the outcome entirely with her. A solid peace, joy and a dynamic and undeterred will to build Her city are our indicators.”

They also informed the community that “while we are figuring out a way for redefining stewardship in Auroville, ATDC’s role as the Planning and Development Body, being the Prescribed Authority as per the Master Plan, supersedes the role of all stewards of all land vested in the Auroville Foundation. The Auroville Foundation and the ATDC are making sure that the land is consolidated, and developed according to the Master Plan...We request all stewards of land parcels to cooperate with the development work without obstruction.”

Governing Board and International Advisory Council meet

From an article in *The Hindu* newspaper of August 15, 2022, the community learned that on August 13th, a day after the Madras High Court stipulated consultative decision-making among the mandated bodies of the Auroville Foundation, the Auroville Governing Board and International Advisory Council met to deliberate on the steps to be taken to realize The Mother’s vision in a collaborative and harmonious manner.

Appeals against judgements

On August 23rd, the Auroville Foundation filed an appeal at the Supreme Court of India against the April 28th judgement of the National Green Tribunal Southern Zone Bench [see AVToday # 394 of May 2022]

On August 25th, the Auroville Foundation filed an appeal at the Madras High Court against the judgement of the Justic Quddhose [see page 2 of this issue]

Other Legal Matters

On August 18th, the Joint Committee appointed by the Green Tribunal in its judgement of April this year published its report. Among its findings were that:

1) Proposals for having a meandering Crown road or for a further narrowing of the Crown Right of Way (ROW) in some locations were found not to be feasible after consultations with external town development and infrastructure experts, and it was decided to stay with a RoW width of 16.70 metres.

2) However, in the case of Darkali the width of the Crown Road could be restricted to 9.10 metres to conserve trees and the environment. Further, while other ponds here should be relocated, an elevated bridge should be constructed over the main channel, tun-

nels and canopy crossings for semi-arboreal and arborial species created, and a speed reduction enforced.

A response to this ruling is being prepared and the next hearing is scheduled for 29th August.

Register of Residents

The Auroville Foundation Office urged everybody who has not done so yet to fill out the Register of Residents (ROR) form as soon as possible. The Chennai High Court has directed that no new policy decision can be taken by any of the authorities of the Auroville Foundation which alters the existing structure and working of the Foundation until the ROR is complete. The Office gave a final deadline of August 31st after which existing residents can not be entered into the RoR.

Infrastructure work

From the end of July, sections of the paver blocks on the Crown road have been taken up and work has begun on replacing them with new blocks by a contractor appointed by the Public Works Department of the Government of India. The RA-appointed Working Committee asked Satprem, executive of the Earth Institute, to make a detailed study what is being done. On 10th August he published his report. Among other things his report noted that the road is extremely badly done and may cave in after the first rains; that the contractor does not follow the Indian standards; and that the old paver blocks made by the Auroville Road Service are stronger and more water resistant, meaning they are better for heavy traffic. It concludes that the design for the road is highly inappropriate for the climatic conditions of Auroville, and the road will be “unlivable during the hot season because of the heat caused by the sun radiation.”

Correction

The above photo which appeared



in the August issue of Auroville Today was mistakenly attributed to Soledad. It was taken by Girish.

PASSING

Bruce Elliot

On Monday August 22nd Bruce Elliott left his body at the age of 82. He had been suffering from metastatic throat cancer.

Bruce, originally from Massachusetts, USA, came to India in the nineties and lived several years in Ganeshpuri Ashram near Mumbai. From there he joined Auroville in 1999 and was confirmed as Aurovilian in November 2000. He worked at the Matrimandir Nursery, but because of his gradually deteriorating health he had to stop. He then devoted his time to the study of Sri Aurobindo’s works and authoring a book on him.

Bruce was living as a recluse; most people will remember him for his twice-daily walk to the Solar Kitchen for his meals, with a peaceful and light expression on his face. Since April this year, he lived at Marika’s Home and was very appreciative of the kindness of the people around and the quality of care he was given. Bruce’s remains were cremated at the Auroville Mandapam on August 23rd.



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