

New hope for our beaches?

Beach erosion has very badly affected some of our beach communities for the past decade. In *Auroville Today* we have reported a number of times on the problem as well as on proposals to solve or mitigate it, but so far, apart from research, very little has been done on the ground. Now, due to various factors, there may be a little light at the end of the tunnel.

In 1986, a new harbour was built in Pondicherry. The breakwaters of the harbour disrupted the natural flow and movement of sand in the sea resulting, for much of the year, in an accumulation of sand to the south of the harbour but widespread erosion to the north. While the new harbour was equipped with a sand by-passing system to compensate for the disrupted flow, this system never operated well or for long periods.

Due to the erosion, within a few years the Pondicherry beaches north of the harbour had completely disappeared. The municipality responded by building sea-walls and groynes. While this stabilised the affected Pondicherry shoreline, it transferred the erosion several kilometres north to the beaches and shoreline of neighbouring Tamil Nadu.

It was at this point that Auroville's beachside communities, including "Quiet Healing Center", "Samarpan", "Gokulam", "Meera", "Waves" and "Repos", began to be badly affected, along with the local fishing communities. Today, the communities of "Repos" and "Gokulam" have almost completely disappeared into the sea and other beach communities, like "Waves" and "Quiet Healing Centre", have lost significant amounts of land. The erosion has even been experienced as far north as "SriMa", albeit on a lesser scale.

The response

People in the local fishing villages were so badly affected – some of their houses disappeared into the sea and the fishermen had nowhere to put their boats – that they made a series of demonstrations and appealed to the Tamil Nadu Government for help. In October, 2012, the Government announced it was allocating 30 crore rupees to build a sea wall and some groynes along the most affected coastline. In January, 2013, the Tamil Nadu Public Works Department started to build a 400 metre sea wall along the beach between "Quiet" and "Samarpan".

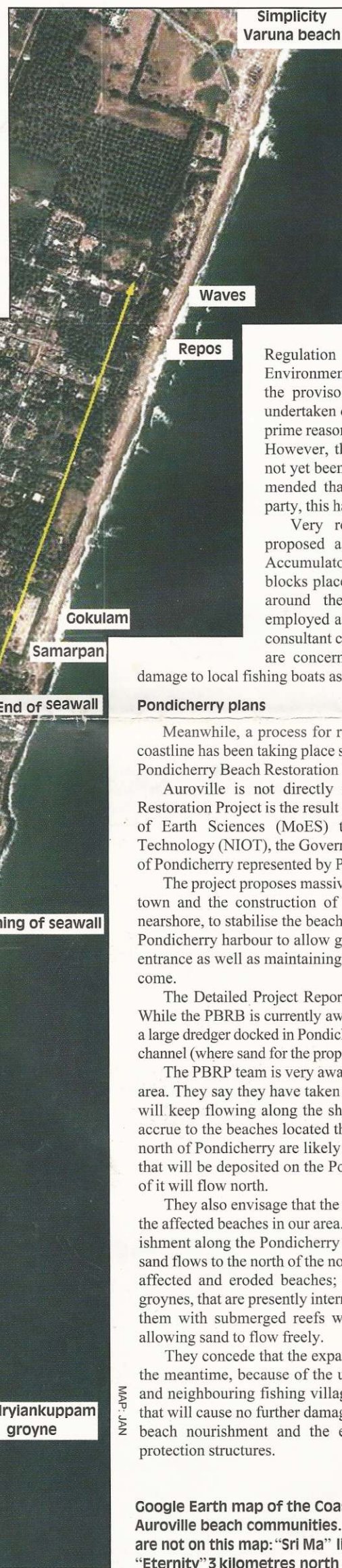
The project was stopped after the wall and six groynes were built by an interim injunction from the National Green Tribunal. This was in response to an appeal by the Chennai-based NGO, Coastal Action Network (TNCAN). They wished to prevent the building of further groynes and sea walls along the coast because they argued that these measures would not only not solve the issue of beach erosion but would aggravate it: the problem would only be pushed further along the coast. They also pointed out that this project had not received environmental clearance from the Ministry of Environment.

Unfortunately, this injunction left the land immediately before and after the newly-built sea wall and groynes without protection and these areas consequently suffered from aggravated erosion. Within a period of two months, 70 metres of beach and private coastal land were lost in some of these areas and more houses in the coastal villages in Tamil Nadu were destroyed.

In November, 2012, after cyclone 'Nilam' devastated some of the coastal communities, concerned Aurovilians approached L'Avenir and the Working Committee, urging them to take an active part in the planning and execution of erosion control along the beaches where Auroville communities are located. Subsequently, a core group formed that met with various government officials and expert consultants to discuss the options.

The group did extensive research on the implication of various protective measures. These included what are sometimes referred to as 'hard' and 'soft' measures. 'Hard' measures, like sea walls and groynes, tend to be permanent and solve erosion problems only in a specific locality: the problem is simply transferred elsewhere unless a sand replenishment programme 'downstream' is also included. 'Soft' measures rely upon natural methods, like beach nourishment, beach and dune restoration or planting mangroves, or use materials and techniques, like geotubes, that do not adversely impact the environment and can be replaced if necessary. Removing the Pondicherry breakwater, which was the cause of the erosion in the first place, was never seriously taken as an option, although it has been suggested that it could be remodelled to allow more sand to be transported around it.

While the Aurovilians initially favoured the use of soft measures, none of the ones explored offered an immediate solution to the ongoing erosion problem. On the other hand, a study of the area done by the Department of Environment of Annamalai University in consultation with DHI, an internationally renowned coastal engineering specialist, concluded that a series of nine additional groynes spread over the affected



area (four kilometres) would provide optimum protection. The study suggested that sand replenishment should also be done to prevent further erosion downstream of the new structures.

Subsequently, the Tamil Nadu Government announced a plan to build nine groynes between Tandriankuppam (Banyan beach) and Pillaichavedy, which covers the area where most of the Auroville beach settlements are located. The groynes would be perpendicular to the shoreline, they would be tapered – the longest being 170 metres, the shortest 120 metres – and spaced 300-450 metres apart.

The proposal received Coastal Regulation Zone Authority permission (equivalent to Environmental Clearance) on 22nd January 2014, with the proviso that sand replenishment work would be undertaken downstream. This effectively eliminated the prime reason for granting an injunction to stop the work. However, the National Green Tribunal injunction has not yet been lifted. While several officials have recommended that Auroville be implemented as a concerned party, this has not yet happened. It is not clear why.

Very recently, a beach erosion specialist has proposed a new option for our beaches. Sediment Accumulator Technology involves the use of artificial blocks placed on the beach to allow sediment to settle around them. This technology has already been employed at Mamallapuram and in Gujarat, where the consultant claims it has been successful. However, there are concerns about the cost as well as the possible

damage to local fishing boats as the blocks would be made of concrete.

Pondicherry plans

Meanwhile, a process for restoring the beaches along the Pondicherry coastline has been taking place since 2012. This initiative has been called the Pondicherry Beach Restoration Project (PBRP).

Auroville is not directly involved in this. The Pondicherry Beach Restoration Project is the result of a joint collaboration between the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) through the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), the Government of Puducherry, and concerned citizens of Pondicherry represented by PondyCAN.

The project proposes massive sand replenishment in front of Pondicherry town and the construction of two artificial reefs, one offshore and one nearshore, to stabilise the beaches. The PBRP also recommends redesigning Pondicherry harbour to allow greater natural by-passing of sand around the entrance as well as maintaining sand nourishment of the beaches in years to come.

The Detailed Project Report was submitted and accepted in May 2016. While the PBRP is currently awaiting environmental clearance, in December a large dredger docked in Pondicherry to begin dredging the harbour mouth and channel (where sand for the proposed beach nourishment will come from).

The PBRP team is very aware of what is happening to the beaches in our area. They say they have taken great care to ensure that all the surplus sand will keep flowing along the shoreline towards the north and no harm will accrue to the beaches located there. In fact, they believe that beaches to the north of Pondicherry are likely to benefit from the fresh inputs of sediment that will be deposited on the Pondicherry beaches because from there some of it will flow north.

They also envisage that the PBRP could be expanded in future to restore the affected beaches in our area. This could be done by increasing sand nourishment along the Pondicherry coast so that a significant amount of surplus sand flows to the north of the northern reef; by direct sand nourishment to the affected and eroded beaches; and by the removal of structures, such as groynes, that are presently interrupting the natural flow of sand and replacing them with submerged reefs which will provide shoreline stability while allowing sand to flow freely.

They concede that the expansion of their project may take some time. In the meantime, because of the urgent need to arrest erosion on our beaches and neighbouring fishing villages, they recommend intermediate solutions that will cause no further damage to our shoreline. These include emergency beach nourishment and the employment of the least intrusive coastal protection structures.

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Google Earth map of the Coast north of Pondicherry, showing Auroville beach communities. The "Sri Ma" and "Eternity" communities are not on this map: "Sri Ma" lies 2.8 kilometres north of "Simplicity"; "Eternity" 3 kilometres north of "Sri Ma".

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New hope for our beaches?

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Challenges

Why has it taken so long for our affected beaches to receive some kind of protection?

There are a number of reasons. One is that there has been unclarity about which option is the best to pursue. For the local fishing villages it is clear: they want groynes. Some members of the Auroville group that has been focussing upon coastal protection have also come to favour this. Jan, an Aurovilian engineer on the group, has clarified the advantages of this option. They include providing an effective protection against erosion of those beaches enclosed between groynes, a protection that remains effective even if no significant sand-replenishment is undertaken.

Jan summarises, "If both Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry fulfill their obligations regarding sand-bypassing, then we will in future have a wonderful beach along the entire 15 kilometre stretch. If, however, the sand by-passing proves too difficult to maintain, then a series of groynes along the Auroville beaches would nonetheless put a stop to further erosion in this stretch."

However, Aurofilio of PondyCAN is strongly against such measures as they merely transfer the problem elsewhere: they are not a sustainable solution for the whole coastline. "To protect the shoreline from erosion, knee-jerk, ad hoc and piecemeal solutions have been adopted in the past, mostly in the form of coastal armouring structures such as seawalls and groynes. These structures have in turn been found to aggravate the problem of erosion by causing further disruption to the natural movement of sand, thereby accelerating and adding to the problem of erosion."



PHOTO: COURTESY AUROFILIO

The Tandriankuppam groyne south of "Quiet"

"A study of the performance of the six groynes built near "Quiet" beach shows that for every square metre of beach the groynes create, about 3-4 square metres of beaches get lost on the other side of the groynes: groynes create a net loss of beach land. Groynes built at "Repos" beach will only accelerate the erosion further north at "SriMa" and "Eternity"."

He points out that worldwide the softer options for restoring beaches are increasingly favoured now as they are cost-effective and sustainable in the long run and offer a comprehensive solution.

Sunita Narain, Director General of the Centre for Science and Environment in Delhi, also supports this line. Some years ago, she attended a major coastal conference in Pondicherry where she gained the impression that the Aurovilians present were favouring groynes and seawalls. In an interview with *Auroville Today* she said she felt 'saddened' by this. "It's always the biggest challenge when you want to fix the world and your own home is under threat. But if we start adopting the same damaging 'solutions' as everybody else, like groynes and seawalls, how can we ask anybody else not to do so?"

The problem is that none of the 'soft' options examined so far have promised adequate protection for our beaches against the scale of erosion they are facing, or else they involve huge technical challenges.

For example, one of those options is beach nourishing or replenishment – which proponents of groynes feel should also happen to mitigate the downstream effects of groynes. Beach



PHOTO: COURTESY AUROFILIO

Sand has accumulated south of the Pondicherry harbour entrance, the beaches north have disappeared

nourishing can be achieved in several ways. Sand can be pumped from the upstream side to the downstream side of the groyne field, or sand from further out at sea can be pumped into the eroded area.

Both methods involve the use of mature technology, they require continuous operation and they cost a lot of money. Some time ago, AuroFilio estimated it would cost about 12 crores annually to replenish the beaches immediately north of Pondicherry harbour, and this would be a year-on-year expense. However, he points out that the expense of pumping is actually far less than the expense of constantly having to keep constructing new groynes and seawalls and repairing old ones, as well as the loss of livelihoods, homes and the environment caused by continuing coastal erosion.

However, sand pumping is tricky. Sand is very abrasive, causing pumping machinery to break down frequently. This is why even Sunita Narain has her doubts about taking this route. "I think we have to try and find a way to move beyond this as it's going to be very difficult to depend on structures that have to continually pump sand. If our experience in India teaches us anything, it is that structures like these are the first to get shut down."

A further complication when it comes to local beach replenishment is that the sea current changes direction during the year. For most of the year the current transports sand from the south to the north, but during the monsoon period the current reverses. As the local coastline spans two states – Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu – it would require one state to pump sand for some of the year, and the other state to take up that responsibility for the rest.

In any case, given the geography, close inter-state cooperation is crucial for a sustainable solution for the whole shoreline. This may be difficult to achieve.

And then, of course, there is the challenge of financing beach protection. Jan's report points out that the Government has already sanctioned the groynes option and allocated funding for it, so it could happen relatively quickly once the court injunction is lifted.

The Pondicherry Beach Restoration Project is primarily funded and managed by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) through the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) and the Government of Puducherry. The PBRP group suggests that MoES/NIOT, as well as the Ministry of Water Resources may be approached by the Auroville group to provide know-how and financial support for work in our area.

Another factor that may militate against experimental 'soft' options being government-funded or supported is the local situation. Sunita Narain points out there are vested interests in the construction of expensive groynes and seawalls; there is the apathy of engineers who know how to construct groynes but not redesign a harbour to facilitate sand movement; there is lack of political will; and there are bureaucrats who say that the Right To Information Act makes it impossible for them to take risks, to do anything different and imaginative.

The success of any of the proposed options is also tightly linked to the ability of the implementing agencies to supervise construction and technically maintain the projects. This is not an easy task. For example, the closest groyne to Auroville, at Tandriankuppam, was badly built. It is only eight years old, but it has already eroded at the end.

If the planned nine groynes are constructed along the Auroville coastline, it is important that the Public Works Department and the contractor carefully oversee the sequence of building the groynes. Failure to do so might lead to aggravated erosion on Auroville land as happened after

the sea wall was built.

But perhaps one of the most potent factors inhibiting protection of our beaches is a less visible one: a sense of fatalism among Aurovilians that, in the end, little can be done to curb the power of the waves. For many years, Bhaga lived by the sea in "Repos", before a cyclone and the resulting erosion toppled her house on to the beach. At the time, she was saddened by what she felt to be a lack of community support and a passive acceptance of the situation.

"People could see, month after month, how the land here was being destroyed by the waves, but nobody lifted a finger ... When something bad happens people think it will continue that way and I have to tell people, 'Stop imagining a horrible future. It doesn't have to be that way; there are so many possible futures.'"

A new beginning?

Recently the Working Committee and the Town Development Council has constituted a Sea Erosion Management Group to look once again at possible solutions to halt the erosion of the Auroville beaches. It plans an interaction with the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai, among others, and recently it viewed a presentation on Sediment Accumulator Technology. The group has promised to keep the community informed of their research and proposals.

We seem to have been here before. After all, the concerned Aurovilians' group that formed in 2013 did extensive research on



PHOTO: COURTESY AUROFILIO

Google Earth map showing the harbour entrance of Pondicherry and the pier further north

options and met with government officials and expert consultants, including those from NIOT. What is different this time?

Perhaps a number of things. Firstly, a full scale beach restoration project is about to begin in Pondicherry which may offer valuable lessons for the protection of our beaches. Secondly, the nine groynes project has funding and environmental clearance. It could be implemented relatively quickly once the court injunction is lifted. And thirdly, there are new technologies available now, like SAT, which may be promising if the cost and materials factors can be solved.

The formation of the new beach restoration group may also signal a new awareness in the community of the value of our beaches and a renewed resolve to take effective action. The fact that this new group consists of members who favour different options may be an opportunity for the emergence of an integrated approach. Actually, the existing approaches are not so different. As Jan points out, both the groyne proposal for our beaches and the proposed Pondicherry project utilise a combination of 'hard' and 'soft' options.

Hopefully, the conjunction of all these factors will result in a comprehensive and sustainable solution being implemented very soon for our beaches and for the larger coastline. We have already waited so long ...

Alan



PHOTO: COURTESY AUROFILIO

Dredging the Pondicherry harbour entrance

An Auroville working group in transition

When I began serving as the secretary to the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) in December 2010, there were twelve men, including the Secretary, Auroville Foundation, as well as the Finance and Administration officer, Auroville Foundation, and one woman member. I remember noticing immediately that this configuration did not represent our community at all well. But I certainly was in no position to do anything about it. Working groups sent their chosen representative to the FAMC and that was that. Admittedly, over the years I did start, somewhat jokingly, asking specifically for the representative to please be a woman but I don't think it was until 2014 that a second woman member arrived.

The FAMC has a far-reaching range of responsibilities. The members are responsible for creating policies concerning funds and assets of Auroville and ensuring those policies are applied in daily operations. The FAMC collaborates with the Land Board (previously the Land Consolidation Committee) in moving land exchange and purchase transactions to completion. It supports the Housing Service and Housing Board for loan requests and in implementing the Housing Policy. It cooperates with the Working Committee on issues such as the annual consolidation of accounts, and with L'Avenir d'Auroville, otherwise known as the Town Development Council (TDC), in ascertaining the financial viability of public projects such as housing, health, etc. It reviews and approves the creation of all commercial unit and service activities, including the appointment of executives. With the Working Committee, the FAMC oversees the review of trustee appointments, and from time to time, the creation of new Trusts under the Auroville Foundation. And then, of course, there are all the 'other topics' that arise which usually are concerning a conflict or allegations of wrongdoing, or unclarity in process or policy.

Many of the issues we deal with are challenging. They include housing stewardship questions; weighing the financial liability of a public project, such as housing, in relation to the benefit to Aurovilians; deciding where and when to purchase land; investigating allegations of financial and asset mismanagement; and reviewing project proposals that bring up challenging questions like, "Are cash transactions OK here?", "Do we need this in the City Area?"

In the beginning I inquired about process and came to realize, fairly quickly, that generally things were considered 'case by case'. I sat in the meetings, week after week, taking notes and being as sponge-like as possible, soaking it all in. I soon observed that the members didn't have ample time to give much consideration to the matters at hand because each one was fairly busy with other work, such as running a unit, or serving in town planning and development, or working at one of the schools, or running a farm, etc. Each member already had a 'full time job'. And because of this fractured focus, when it came time to meet once a week, there were a lot of holes in the available

information. Research into a topic was often half-baked. A lot of time and energy went into hashing out what individuals happened to know, or speculation on what they didn't know. It just wasn't efficient. Members expressed frustration. And the Aurovilians waiting to hear from the FAMC expressed dismay at the amount of time it took to get an answer. I found it amazing that things did get done... eventually.

Over the years, as current members left and new ones joined, the conversations increasingly were taking place over email during the week between meetings so when the members came together for that one afternoon, more information had been shared and taken into consideration. This meant better-informed decisions were being made. I was providing the team consistency in preparing for the meetings, distributing meeting minutes, and following-up and following-up. Did I say following-up? Most of the work happened outside the meetings, as is usual.

As the months and years rolled on, the faces changed. Someone would leave their primary work and that would mean a new representative would be sent to the FAMC. This created some hiccups in our slowly transforming processes but since the majority of the members remained, the new ones had time to pick up on what was happening and how things were done.

Meanwhile, the FAMC workload was increasing steadily and considerably. The situations being presented to the members became markedly more complex and I was working tirelessly to create a framework of clarity, consistency, reliability and cohesion. Part of this framework included having a regular chairperson for the meetings. In October 2012, I was requested to take on this additional responsibility. It was clear to me that to be effective there needed to be mutual respect and trust, so I consciously strove to create an environment where anyone could say what they needed while providing an atmosphere of care for each individual.

A few other changes made the team increasingly dynamic: more women entering the conversation,



Angelo prepares an FAMC meeting, Lyle and Auralice look on

some decisions being made via email, holding the meeting in the Town Hall, inviting guests regularly in order to review challenging situations as well as proposed policies, and adding a second weekly meeting.

In May 2012, the FAMC initiated a comprehensive participatory process to update the FAMC mandate to reflect the reality of the work. After a lot of subgroups, reworkings, and a couple of general meetings followed by more adjustments, there was a Residents' Assembly (RA) decision-making event conducted in January 2014 on a new FAMC mandate. The outcome was unexpected: not enough residents participated in the process so there was no quorum to make a decision. The Residents' Assembly Service who facilitated the process, didn't quite know what to do. The matter was taken up finally by the Auroville Council (AVC) in September 2014 and from there it was taken out of the FAMC's hands.

The AVC constituted a subgroup that took another year to bring their version of the FAMC mandate to a point where it could be presented to the RA for a decision. In April 2016, the RA finally approved what is now the FAMC mandate. There

are three significant changes in the new mandate. Firstly, it is now the "Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) of the Residents Assembly". The previous mandate gave one the sense that the FAMC was directly accountable to the Governing Board (GB). However, the GB was not directly involved in the workings or decisions of the FAMC on anything like a regular basis. The FAMC reported to the RA monthly and it was high time to make that accountability abundantly clear. Secondly, members would be selected in an open process, based on their willingness to serve and skills and ability,

and not on the basis of being part of a specific work area. Thirdly, the emphasis now is on the ideals of Auroville and creating a new economy. The new mandate covers six pages. The expectations are set out in black and white; the bar has been raised.

So, who is this new 'super group'? The nine members have been selected from the community during an Residents' Assembly-approved selection process that took place over three days. The members stand on their own merit: skill, capacity, experience, knowledge, goodwill, and willingness to serve. We are four women and five men. Two previous FAMC members were selected to serve under this new mandate. And I was called upon to change my role from secretary to member.

There is understandable frustration with the level of inefficiency at the moment. Some amount of inefficiency is to be expected considering an increasing workload with six out of ten members being pretty new to the game. Recently, we had a four page agenda for a meeting. That was a little bit difficult to face. Thankfully, for several weeks we've had a regular secretary to prepare meeting agendas, attend meetings to take notes and prepare minutes, as well as a chairperson to help us with our collective discipline. To further support our process, we all agree that an issue tracker should be implemented to assign tasks to subgroups, and set 'to dos' and deadlines that can easily be monitored. We've been trying some online tools but we've still not found the one that meets all our various needs.

I am feeling very 'bridge-like' these days, spanning the space between the outgoing and incoming members. I am also on a journey from being the secretary to becoming a full team member, a co-creator and decision-maker. I find myself in the weekly meetings having to hold back from directing the conversation, or bringing the matter to a conclusion, or asking someone to please stay on the topic. I also still have to do quite a bit of the paperwork. I haven't asked any of my colleagues if they might like to help out with it. And I find that when scheduling additional meetings I just do it instead of looking to other team members to take on the responsibility. For the first weeks I didn't say much. I am so used to listening, synthesizing in my mind what is emerging during the sharing. One day I heard the voice inside of my head say, "Amy, speak up. You have something to contribute to this conversation." So now I am speaking up but I still prefer to listen. And because I was the document keeper, I am often doing a lot of extra legwork, providing the team with history and explanations. This makes me feel like I have my "secretary" hat on but at the same time, I give my '2 paisa' and that helps me to develop the growing sense of being an equal member of this new team.

Sometimes it feels like a lot to carry but I'm not alone and with a humble heart and quiet centeredness I trust that the Grace will guide me.

Amy



The new FAMC members - from left, standing: Lyle, Chandresh, Yuval, Ulli, Angelo (secretary); seated, from left: Prabhu, Amy, Stephanie; absent: Bindu and Auralice (chairperson)

OPINION

The monetary contamination of the Auroville economy

"Money is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation on earth work on the vital and physical plains and is indispensable to the fullness of outer life. In its origin and in its true action it belongs to the Divine." *The Mother*

Sri Aurobindo and The Mother spoke more than a half a century ago, long before the full monetization, mercantilisation and financialisation of our societies, about money and its role in the development of humankind. They recognized its power and strength, both for good and for great evil. And although money has become increasingly central to our lives, choices and relationships with one another and with nature, permeating and subtly influencing our visions and actions, the necessary alternatives, the necessary diversity, the necessary critique is rather absent, silent and has lost its momentum. From my perspective, this is particularly true in Auroville, where I argue that a full monetary contamination of community life and common vision is currently taking place under everyone's nose and eyes and yet passes unchecked, unrivalled, unquestioned. Auroville stands today, more than ever, fully exposed to the laws of international markets and international finance that impose their rules, their prices and their own logic on this small community, once a utopian protected project towards human unity. Its monetary exposure comes from three main sources: the overflow of guests and visitors that bring lakhs of rupees well within the community and that due to their growing scale start to disrupt and change the economic system and nature of Auroville,

converting more and more community assets to Guest Houses, cafés, shops, Yoga centres, etc.; the openness of commercial units to exports and trade in international markets which forces them into competition-like behaviours such as turnover maximization and higher capital intensity; and finally, the lack of self-sufficiency in terms of basic needs such as food which forces Auroville to be dependant in outside supply and by doing so subjecting itself to outside imposed rules and prices. These threefold factors added to the relevant issue that Auroville does not, surprisingly, have its own sovereign money resulting in a progressive, invisible corruption of the Auroville economy by the neoclassic financial market logic which uses money as its own Trojan horse.

Now, this is not an inevitability and Auroville certainly possesses the resources, the creativity and the resilience to transform this process into an opportunity for community re-engagement, bonding and aliveness. In my opinion five core actions would be required: (1) create and promote monetary diversity, specifically Auroville's own internal money unpegged from the Indian Rupee that serves the community - assuming that this would at all be possible in India and not go against any Indian laws; (2) decouple the Auroville economy from the

international markets; (3) increase investments and community focus into developing its own production capacity of basic needs, namely food; (4) create buffer zones and regulate monetary contamination in commercial units by separating and controlling financial flows, allowing them to continue their exports but not allowing these to spill over to the community; (5) and finally, better regulate and internalize the overflow of guests and visitors so that they do not become the priority and the focus of the karma yoga of the community but rather serve its higher purpose with other means rather than money.

These proposals, to be effective, need a collective planned action which targets all of them simultaneously while envisioning a sustainable pathway for that once radical idea of a full no-money economy, a gift economy, inside Auroville. And although many dangers lie ahead, namely the bureaucratization of economic life, it's possible, it's doable, and Auroville has the people and the vision to pull it off and be a model for the future.

Filipe Moreira Alves
M.Sc. Economics and Public Policies
Lisbon, Portugal
(a visitor to Auroville)

Education in Auroville as experienced by Auroville's y

Education has been a significant area of activity for Auroville since its inception, with many initiatives throughout its history seeking to provide for the needs of the community's youth, while attempting to actualize the foundational aspiration of 'Integral Education.' While we have some record of the variety of educational developments, we have lacked a record of the subjective experiences of those who underwent an Auroville education and upbringing. Deepthi, a long time educator in Auroville, was interested in this and began to draft a few "inward-looking and psychological" questions to ask Auroville youth.

Inspired by the idea, a group of young Aurovilians took up the task of circulating the survey to their peers – any adult who had been raised here and received some form of education in Auroville was eligible. This was in the summer of 2013, and over the next two years at least a third of those eligible to participate responded, close to half of whom were residing outside of Auroville at the time. The youngest respondents were born in 1991, the oldest as early as 1959, so that they collectively span over 40 years of experience of Auroville's schools (not including all outreach schools), as well as schooling experiences outside of Auroville, in places like the Lycée Français and Kodaikanal International School.

Auroville as 'Life Education'

Asked "Which part of your education, whether in Auroville or not, has been the most formative for your personality?" the majority answered that the time spent in Auroville was the most formative, many describing it as a form of 'Life Education':

My education in Auroville reached far beyond just the schools. I was given the freedom to grow as a person; was given responsibility in my own life. These things helped me learn from all my experiences... Growing up in Auroville prepared me more than just academically for the world.

The 'out of classroom' learning that took place in every stage of my life – growing up with a diverse group of people, being involved in different aspects of the community, and being associated with mentors that gave a lot of individual attention.

The most formative part of my education for my personality was being engaged in building and creating Auroville.

Some of the early youth of Auroville, born in the 1960s and early 1970s, stated that Auroville was formative due to the lack of structured education.

My time without a formal education in Auroville taught me more than my attending school could ever have done. I am a maverick, a lateral thinker and pretty fearless. Life skills have made anything life today has to offer easy to deal with.

However, many described deficiencies in Auroville's educational landscape at the time, characterised by the lack of training of the teachers, the lack of structure and continuity of educational opportunities, and the lack of guidance for youth in the community.

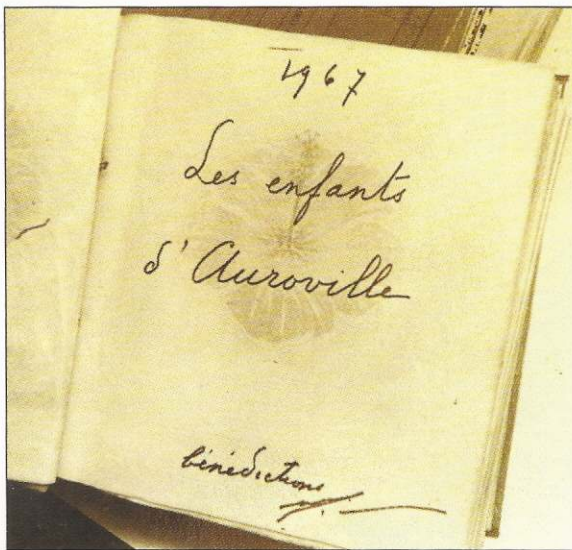
I think that my lack of education has made me so eager to want to learn, and want to achieve. I really worked hard to get my BA and MA, not for the sake of getting a diploma but to have a goal and reach it.



Johnny's school in Fertile

Not having access to school and the structure of regular adult teachers made me long for that in my life. I am very disciplined when I work or study because I have had enough chaos to last a lifetime.

I was influenced by adults who had many idealistic views and ideas, some were my teachers. Not being qualified or trained educators they probably had no idea of the influence and impact they had on young impressionable minds... when I left Auroville I realized a formal education was required to be able to function in life... one could not but feel a sense of... having been cheated.



The book with the names of the children born in Auroville written by The Mother

At the same time, these deficiencies were accompanied by significant benefits. In answer to the question "Do you feel that you have benefited from the Auroville experience/upbringing?" close to 90% answered affirmatively, many expressing how 'grateful' and 'lucky' they felt about being raised in Auroville, describing it as 'invaluable,' 'immeasurable' and 'priceless,' something they would never trade and could never repay. Interestingly, especially the earlier generation expressed such a strong identification with their Auroville upbringing that they could not conceive of questioning its benefit.

Valued qualities of Auroville education

The most valued qualities of an Auroville education and upbringing were surprisingly consistent across generations. These were freedom (often correlated with responsibility), openness, teacher/community support, well-rounded personal development, exposure to the yoga of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and a multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment.

I feel the best part of my education was the balance of freedom in a very nurturing environment that fostered a close and personal relationship with one's teachers while at the same time developing a strong sense of self-responsibility.

The feeling of being allowed to be who one is.

The broad spectrum of skills that Auroville education provides. And by this I don't mean just practical/intellectual skills, I mean a richness of thought, a deep awareness of my self, my surroundings and a rich perspective of life and our existence.

The philosophy and ideals of Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and Auroville, which one becomes aware of and is surrounded by have an impact and influence on one's life. I am happy to have been exposed to these from a young age and somehow they have become a natural part of my life.

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Being Aurovillian: A Strong Connection

In answer to the questions, "Do you have a sense of connection with the idea forces as embodied in Auroville's founding texts such as 'To be a True Aurovillian' or the Charter? In what way do you connect with them?" over 80% expressed a strong feeling of connection, mostly as something they embodied and applied in their daily lives, whether they are in Auroville or not:

I feel that as children of Auroville, we were brought up with the ideas of Auroville and the Charter. Whatever much or however much we understand from the

written context, I believe that we express the Charter or the ideas of Auroville better through our actions in our day-to-day life because it's part of us, it's deeply embedded in us whether we know it or not.

I try to practically implement and live the ideals of Auroville. I work to create and get involved in projects where the ideals of Auroville can manifest."

I connect with them on an everyday basis, whether I am in Auroville or not... I carry that atmosphere and those words in me. I try to let that feeling out and I try to express it

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Many referred to the texts as a whole, or highlighted specific concepts within them, as 'idea forces' they felt especially personally connected to or inspired by at a personal level. And some saw them as the collective reference point for the community at large:

A servitor of the divine consciousness is something I am not always ready for, to say the least... But I know that the main seed, the main drive is there, it is deeply rooted... I feel it is the idea of my life on earth.

"To be a true Aurovillian" makes me aspire, and I believe if one hasn't got there yet but aspires to it or even just recognises its merits truly one can still be quite aligned with its ideal.

They are high ideals and, although they may not all be lived up to by everyone, or myself, I feel that they are the glue that holds us Aurovilians together. They create a common aim and a common language giving a unique sense of community and comradeship.

A few, however, felt disconnected from the way the ideals were interpreted by other community members:

In a very private way I often feel disconnected from the way they are publicly aired in Auroville. I feel we have turned what was once an open and free sense of adventure and quest into something of a rigid religion with dogma and rules – I don't identify with that at all.

I believe that the higher consciousness which Mother and Sri Aurobindo speak about is not confined to Auroville. However people who live in the community believe they are superior and righteous. This creates a barrier of ignorance and does not welcome knowledge and input from outside of Auroville.

In answer to the questions "In which way do you feel Aurovillian? What are the signs of this feeling? Can you identify its characteristics?" – all but three people identified with 'feeling Aurovillian,' even if they had not visited Auroville in years. Three common characterisations of this identification emerged throughout the answers. These were a sense of belonging and of Auroville being "home"; an attitude of striving for progress, individually and towards the realization of Auroville; and feeling connected with others who share Auroville's ideals and experience:

A feeling of 'belonging', like I am in the presence of something that – although much too profound for me to understand – is fundamental to me.

I think that the characteristic of an Aurovillian is this sensation of looking forwards, to always talk about what can be or what could become.

I feel Aurovillian in the way that I want to give my service for a higher purpose without expecting anything in return just like many other Aurovilians.

The resonance I feel with other Aurovilians is a sincere aspiration to live beyond the confines of the individual self by aspiring for spiritual growth (both personal and collective), and that this exists in the context of daily life rather than removed from it.

One of the survey questions asked, "Would you say that there is an 'Auroville type' and, if so, how would you describe it?" Some declined to answer, and the most significant proportion of responses negated the very premise of the question. They felt it inappropriate to conceive of an 'Auroville type' given the diversity of people in Auroville and of a type restricted to Auroville:

As we are all so different and all trying to achieve our goals in many different ways, I am happy that we do not have to stereotype ourselves as an AV type!

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Perfo

Education in Auroville as experienced by Auroville's youth since 1968

Education has been a significant area of activity for Auroville since its inception, with many initiatives throughout its history seeking to provide for the needs of the community's youth, while attempting to actualize the foundational 'Integral Education.' While we have some variety of educational developments, we have a lot of the subjective experiences of those who grew up in Auroville education and upbringing. Deepti, a teacher in Auroville, was interested in this and a few "inward-looking and psychological" Auroville youth.

At the time, a group of young Aurovilians took to circulating the survey to their peers – any adult raised here and received some form of education was eligible. This was in the summer of the next two years at least a third of those who responded, close to half of whom were born in Auroville at the time. The youngest were born in 1991, the oldest as early as 1959, so they actively span over 40 years of experience of Auroville education (not including all outreach schools), as well as experiences outside of Auroville, in places like French and Kodaikanal International School.

Life Education

Which part of your education, whether in Auroville or elsewhere, has been the most formative for your personal growth? The majority answered that the time spent in Auroville was the most formative, many describing it as a 'life education':

Education in Auroville reached far beyond just the classroom. It was the freedom to grow as a person; was a part of my life. These things helped me to grow in my own life. Growing up in Auroville pre- than just academically for the world.

The 'classroom' learning that took place in every part of Auroville – growing up with a diverse group of people, in different aspects of the community, and with mentors that gave a lot of individual

formative part of my education for my personal growth engaged in building and creating Auroville.

The early youth of Auroville, born in the 1960s and 1970s, stated that Auroville was formative due to its unique education.

Without a formal education in Auroville taught by attending school could ever have done. I am a lateral thinker and pretty fearless. Life skills that help life today has to offer easy to deal with.

Many described deficiencies in Auroville's education at the time, characterised by the lack of formal teachers, the lack of structure and educational opportunities, and the lack of connection in the community.

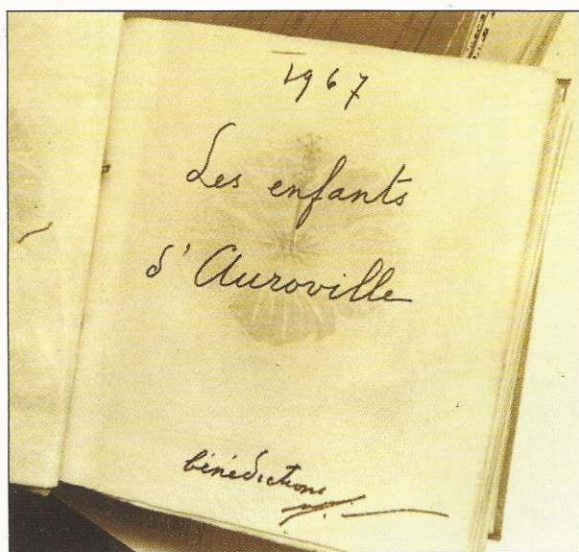
My lack of education has made me so eager to learn and want to achieve. I really worked hard to get a MA, not for the sake of getting a diploma but to reach it.



Johnny's school in Fertile

Access to school and the structure of regular education made me long for that in my life. I am very disciplined in my work or study because I have had enough of my own time.

Needed by adults who had many idealistic views, we were my teachers. Not being qualified or experienced, they probably had no idea of the influence they had on young impressionable minds... when I realized a formal education was required to move on in life... one could not but feel a sense of... created.



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Recognition and suggestions for Auroville's education

An on-going concern for youth in Auroville is the lack of wider recognition for Auroville education. During periods where there was either no high school education or no externally-recognised high school education available, teenagers were faced with a painfully contradictory choice between staying in Auroville and pursuing an accredited education. The majority of respondents recommend that Auroville develop internal forms of recognition for the range of educational experiences of youth within the community, and move towards international accreditation for these. They highlight the importance for youth of being able to pursue educational, professional, and life experiences outside the community, and the benefits of interaction between young Aurovillians and the world at large (over 70% of respondents pursued higher education outside of Auroville).

Many made suggestions for an internal recognition system, which could be synthesised as a broad inclusion of educational experiences from the academic to extracurricular, personal development, social skills and life skills, and the embodiment of values that reflect Auroville's spiritual ethos. This would be captured in an individualized certification that could be developed into an in-depth portfolio, including self-evaluation and a presentation of the Auroville context and its educational approaches.

Other suggestions for the future of Auroville's education, in answer to the specific question "Do you have any wishes or suggestions for the future of Auroville education?" include upholding diversity, flexibility and focus upon the individual, and that it continue to experiment by supporting the training of teachers and drawing inspiration from developments in educational processes and innovations worldwide. In addition, people suggested that practical skills and work experience, vocational training and



Performance at Transition School

apprenticeships, be emphasized and developed. And that relationships between teachers and institutions in Auroville be improved.

The themes that emerge evoke a rather striking resonance with the four points of The Auroville Charter. In answer to how they felt 'Aurovillian', Auroville youth emphasised a calling and ethic of service to a "higher" ideal; in response to the question of an Auroville 'type,' they welcomed a diversity of interpretations. Both correlate to the first point of the Charter: "Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But, to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the divine consciousness." Many identified as 'Aurovillian' their attitudes of striving for progress, and Auroville as an educational 'life' experience, reflecting the second point: "Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages." The third point of the Charter, "Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations" was echoed in recommendations for the future of Auroville's education – to keep experimenting and drawing inspiration from advances in alternative forms of education worldwide – and in support of Auroville youth interchanging and acquiring experience in a diversity of fields and contexts. Finally, the strong feeling of interconnectedness with fellow Aurovillians and valuing of Auroville's multi-cultural environment are good indicators for the realization of the fourth point, "Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity."

Suryamayi

The full analysis and report of the "Auroville Education Survey: 1968-2013" can be found on AuroNet, on Auroville's research website, and is available in hard copy at SAIER and the Auroville Archives.

From inside-out: Monica Sharma on new models of change, leadership and stewardship

Monica Sharma trained as a physician and epidemiologist, then worked for the United Nations for 22 years. She was the Director of several global programmes, including the UNDP programme on HIV/AIDS, as well as being Director of Leadership and Capacity Development at the U.N. She now works on leadership development with individuals and in management institutions, governments, business, media and civil society organizations worldwide.

Four years ago, she began offering 'Stewardship for a New Emergence' workshops in Auroville for Aurovilians and those from the bioregion. So far, these workshops have been attended by around 400 people: the general response has been very enthusiastic.

What are these workshops about? And how have they influenced Auroville? On a recent visit, Monica spoke about the core principles and her interest in the Auroville experiment.

Auroville Today: *You are much in demand with corporations, institutions and individuals all over the world. Why have you invested so much energy in Auroville?*

I'm not sure I really planned it; in a way it just happened. Perhaps destiny and grace brought us all together. A couple of Aurovilians heard about a seminar I did in Mumbai and thought I might have something useful to offer to Auroville, so they were trying to contact me. At the same time, I was planning to do a workshop for the Government of India in Pondicherry, but the venue was cancelled and we ended up in the Unity Pavilion instead. That's when I was asked to come and do something here.

I'm attracted to Auroville, firstly, because of its sacredness. My own journey in life is informed by a sacred spirituality that my parents cultivated in me. I'm drawn to the Ramakrishna Mission and Krishnamurthy, and I study Buddhism. But there's an additional dimension in Auroville which is great, because here sacredness manifests in human unity through action and I resonate with people who are exploring an inner journey to manifest external change.

When you were asked to come here, were you given any kind of brief?

I don't think I was asked to fulfil a particular need. In any case, I told them I had not come to 'fix' Auroville, and I would not work on governance or management structures because I have enough of that in the United Nations.

I'm very clear that I'm here to manifest my own inner work and to provide a platform for others to manifest their inner work through changes in culture that promote human unity.

You have said that individual transformation is necessary but not sufficient for social transformation. So, practically, how does one move from individual transformative practice to transforming a culture or society?

The three pillars that I work on here are knowing who you are – your unique life force, your core principles – sourcing an inner sacred space for action, which you refer to as the psychic being, and creating systems and a culture that enable problems to be solved.

There is one non-negotiable: one's core inner values. So the constant endeavour is to preserve the integrity of these values in everything you do: you must embody them. The next thing you need to be very clear about is what you 'burn' for, what you ache to manifest. Then you try to see what aspect of the present culture needs to shift to make that possible.

Regarding the latter, we do exercises where I ask participants to write down the five shifts in Auroville's culture they would like to happen. Taken together, it generally comes down to about ten things they want to shift.

Everybody needs to agree on these shifts?

Yes, but each can work in his or her own way on achieving them: they don't need to keep connecting with each other in a mass movement. So, for example, there could be a hundred different initiatives connected with afforestation.

But all these initiatives are aligned because they are working towards the ten major cultural shifts that have been identified. We have developed tools to ensure that this connection is made.

One of the important capacities you speak of is the need to recognise the invisible rules or patterns of a culture. What do you mean by this?



Monica Sharma

Take the body, for example. We may experience a fever but there's a whole lot of other things happening in the body that make our temperature go up. It is up to us whether we want to enquire into these 'invisible' factors or whether we just want a quick way of getting the fever down. If we go for the quick fix, we are not going to change anything in the system or culture.

But there are also patterns that promote change, transformation. I see the invisible pattern or 'architecture' of Auroville as a place where the individual manifests through service, through letting go of ownership. I see a space has been consciously created here that says this is not a meditation place but a place for karma yoga; here you have to work. This very much resonates with me.

In fact, through texts like *The Charter*, *The Dream* and *To Be A True Aurovillian*, Mother provided very clear guidance about what you need to sign up for when you join Auroville. These values, like the fact we don't own things but have to let go, hit at the core of the coping mechanisms of the ego. They are a template for manifesting a new society.

Is your work also designed to make us aware of the patterns that each of us has imported into Auroville from the past?

It's absolutely that, and I need to recognise those patterns in myself as well. What comes in our way is not our intention: we have beautiful intentions. What comes in our way is our egos, and we are hijacked by our emotions.

I mentor two nobel laureates but I also work with landless construction workers; it's the full range of humanity. But the principles of personal change remain the same because human beings think in the same way and have the same needs and blockages.

Consequently, many of the tools I use are really ways of looking at ourselves and finding ways to transcend what is blocking us, like our egos and emotions. They provide bridges between who I am, in my deepest nature, and what I want to manifest in the world.

The work you do challenges many of the established ways of looking at organization. For example, you seem to be talking about a very different kind of leadership from the traditional top-down, hierarchical model. How would you describe the new concept of leadership or stewardship?

Firstly, leadership is about action and the ability to create a new future. In this sense, the new leadership is like the old one, except that for us the new future is not extreme materialism but human unity. Stewardship adds another dimension to leadership: our ability to work 'in trust' – not owning assets, but caring for people and our planet.

Secondly, the new leadership and stewardship does not operate from the top-down or from the bottom-up. It is from 'inside-out', sourcing an inner sacred space for outward manifestation. Wisdom is sourcing action from the deepest place within ourselves and generating appropriate action for meeting challenges.

The large-scale successes of leaders at the top have been based on narrowly-focused interventions, such as smallpox eradication or wealth creation. This was appropriate. But they have little experience in innovations that foster the expression of individual and collective wisdom in action. Considering the urgency and complexity of today's crises, we have no option but to learn to do things differently.

Thirdly, leadership and stewardship is about

responsible speaking and deep listening from the heart, and about the ability to generate new conversations that result in changing culture. It is about knowing who I truly am, understanding the old patterns in my culture and myself and creating new patterns that shift the status quo.

Have you seen or been told of any changes in Auroville as a result of your work here?

I have been asking some people who have participated in the workshops what they see has changed in Auroville. And what could be the next step.

One of them said that our meeting culture is different now. People are listening a little more, a little deeper, and not putting others down so much in public. Another one said he had always known there were many quiet people in Auroville who wanted to do something for the community but didn't know how to go about it. Now many of these have learned about tools that helped them manifest something that could serve *The Dream*. STEM Land [an innovative learning laboratory for young students. See *Auroville Today*, December, 2015 eds.] is just one of the examples of something that was born out of these workshops.

At the same time, Auroville cannot be complacent. I love the global nature of Auroville, it is an entity for the world, but inevitably the external forces of India will influence it. In your immediate neighbourhood, there are issues like alcoholism and domestic violence against women. I don't think Auroville is influenced yet; you have a certain protection. But Aurovilians need to be aware of these things and be ready to respond to them. And the response does not lie in the wisdom of the past.

Will your work with Auroville continue?

Yes. This is the last time I am doing Stage One of my Learning-in-Action programmes – I am training Aurovilians to be able to lead these workshops – but I will be coming back next year to do the next stage. And I'll keep doing this until I am made redundant in a nice way!

From an interview by Alan

The impact of the programme upon individuals

Bridget (Thamarai): The programme has aligned my work from a base of what I really care about towards creating value-based results in the bioregion, while questioning the structures and normatives that hold problems in place. It has given me practical tools that allow me to reflect, design, implement and measure. Our project team (Thamarai) have grown so much through the programme that has established a shared language and mode of operation that allows us to deal with problems as they arise and to plan for the greatest impact that we as a group, and with aligned partners, can achieve.

Martin (Auroville Consulting): A few of the distinct take-aways that I got from participating in *Stewardship for New Emergence* are:

- Establishing a common language among my colleagues at Auroville Consulting (and within the wider Auroville Community) in regard to project design and operations;

- Project design tools that are iterative, extremely practical and that facilitate connecting actions and system change to what I deeply care about;

- Tools that can be applied in operationalizing project design and that act as a lens that foster a continuous enquiry on whether my actions are congruent with my values.

Sanjeev (STEM Land): The tools help me connect who I am with what I do – at home, in school and at work. They help me be explicit about my values and work towards shifts in systems and cultures for their manifestation. As a team, practice helps us listen deeply to each other, speak responsibly and have a common language that supports our growth while being efficient and efficacious. STEM Land was the result of a breakthrough exercise of the workshop and is a space of self-directed learning. Introducing the same tools to the children supports them transcend fear and work from their possibility.

The demons of demonetisation in agriculture

Demonetisation – this brittle word with its short, sharp syllables, gained currency overnight with the draconian move of the Indian Government to invalidate Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 notes. Many in Auroville were not affected, and jokes about Auroville finally becoming a no-money society abounded. But as week after week the cash crunch refused to subside, the demons of demonetisation began to show up. And these demons have particularly reared their heads in the cash-dependent sector of agriculture.

Demonetisation in India invalidated approximately Rs 14,180 billion worth of high value currency, which is almost 86% of the total currency in circulation. With the government failing to distribute adequate new notes, coupled with a shortage of low value currency, the farming sector in India, which is highly dependent on cash-exchange, stands crippled. To get some idea of how bleak the picture is, consider these facts: nearly 81% of the villages in India do not have access to bank branches; in many states co-operative banks dominate, but co-operative banks were excluded from exchange-deposit of demonetised currency; and without government help, wily money-lenders stepped in to exploit the need of cash-strapped villagers. It is rumoured that in many rural areas, including the villages around Auroville, old currency notes continue to change hands, but by December 30th, these will be worth only the paper that they are printed on, for they will no longer be accepted in banks.

The economy has visibly slowed down with this cash crunch – shops stand closed in the town and cities, and trade in the “subji-mandi,” the vegetable market, is slow. Given the subdued demand, prices for perishable goods, like vegetables and fruits, have slumped by 40-50%. In Chhattisgarh, the prices of tomatoes came down to 50 paise per kg, and angry farmers in one town dumped tomatoes on the national highway to express their frustration. Apparently there are similar stories from the nearby regions of Cuddalore and Panruti, where



Rice fields at Annapurna

the vegetable farmers did not even bother to harvest the produce.

Admittedly, these demons may be short-lived, and as promised by the winning election slogan, the “Good days” will soon come. But not so for farmers. All over India, these are the busiest months in the agricultural season, when the *Kharif* (summer) crops are harvested and the *Rabi* (winter) crops are sowed. Both these operations are hugely labour-dependent and cash-dependent. Without access to cash for

purchasing seeds, fertilizers, implements and tools, it is likely that fields will lie fallow or will be sown late, and next year yields will be low, with the inevitable domino effect that we all pay higher prices for our daily bread. How long will demonetisation drag down the agriculture sector? And how soon will the sector rebound? Questions such as these still stump agricultural economists, for no one truly knows when the storm kicked off by demonetisation will finally abate.

“But, ah, what has this to do with Auroville?”, the selfish gene in us may well ask. Unfortunately, the agricultural sector of Auroville is not totally free from these demons. Agriculture has never been a central concern of Auroville. The wheels of Auroville’s formal economy turn around the commercial units and their contribution to the City Services. The services, by and large, are left to manage on their own, and in the agricultural sector there is no centralized strategic planning to ensure food security for the community. On the positive side, the community provides maintenances to farm stewards and fair prices for farm produce. But, due to the lack of centralized strategies, there is little help to be had in times like these, and Auroville farmers struggle to pay their manual labourers or find the needed capital to sow seeds. Consequently, as with the rest of India, fields will be sowed late or not at all this season.

Turning this challenge into an opportunity, recently there has been a small movement towards community-supported agriculture (CSA), pioneered by Solitude Farm. Community-supported agriculture implies a shift from the current scenario, where farmers take primary responsibility for food production, to having the community take equal responsibility for it. It also implies that farmers seek to meet community needs rather than producing solely for the market and for profits.

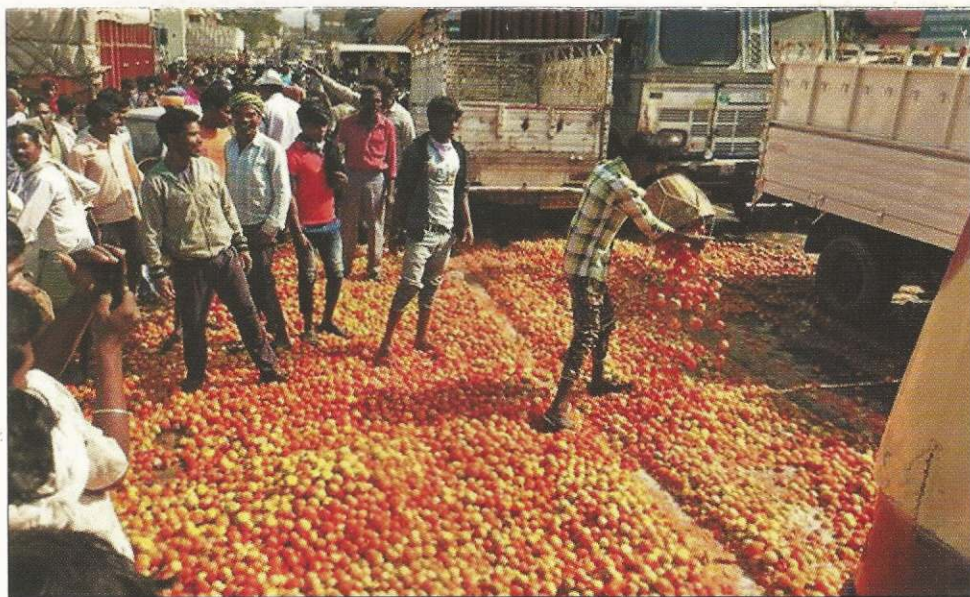
This year, another small step in that direction was made when an Aurovilian raised funds for additional rice cultivation. The grain group (comprising the main farms in Auroville producing grain) recently calculated that the community’s demand for boiled/raw Ponni rice is approximately 9,500 kg/year, as measured in terms of consumption at the Solar Kitchen and two distribution outlets at the Pour Tous Distribution Center and Foodlink. At present, Auroville produces about 6,000 kg boiled/raw Ponni rice per year [see box]. This creates a deficit of 3,500 kg/year, which can be bridged by bringing six more acres of land under rice cultivation, as it is estimated that 2 acres of rice fields yields 1,000-1,500 kg of boiled/raw Ponni rice per year.

Increasing rice cultivation involves raising seedlings in seed-trays and bringing additional land under irrigation, for which trenches and pipes are needed. Most farms cover their operational expenses each year, but rarely have

funds for new initiatives. Also, there is no profit to be had in grains, so if left to market forces grain cultivation in Auroville would slowly die out. A grant from Auroville International The Netherlands has made it possible to bring two more acres under rice cultivation, which will bridge a third of our current deficit. Emboldened by this move, the grain group now seeks in the coming year to bring an additional four acres in two other rice farms under cultivation with community-generated funds, thereby ensuring self-sufficiency in Ponni rice.

Achieving self-sufficiency in rice production and consumption is by no means an easy task but not an impossible one. And every journey begins with a single step – the one we took this year, despite all the demons that plague our efforts.

Bindu



Tomato dumping on the National Highway in protest against low prices due to demonetisation

REFLECTION

The Dangers of Dogma

There is a tendency for the mind to take a saying of The Mother – on Auroville’s organization, economy, the international pavilions etc. – and interpret it in a certain way. Then this becomes something we must all sign up to because ‘Mothersaid it’.

Somehow, even while we do it, we are aware of the danger. In the early years of Auroville, there was a lot of emphasis upon ‘spontaneity’ and an associated distrust of anything too fixed, too ‘mental’. This was also a distortion – the spontaneity was often an expression of the lower vital rather than of anything higher. Nevertheless, it reflected an intuition that the mind alone, which seeks clarity through fixity, is an insufficient compass on this voyage.

In fact, what is striking as you read through *The Agenda* is how Mother keeps moving forwards, refusing to take a stand on any kind of dogmatic statement and often rejecting what was seen by others (and even, sometimes, by herself) as the ‘truths’ she may have uttered some years before.

As she put it in December, 1966, *Truth is a living, changing thing, which expresses itself every second and is ONE way of approaching the Supreme. And she added, Truth cannot be formulated, it cannot be defined, but it can be LIVED. And one who has completely dedicated himself to the Truth, who wants to live the Truth and serve the Truth, will know EVERY MINUTE what he has to do...*

Finally, she stripped away everything to one essential. Get in contact with THAT, the ultimate, irreducible That. It doesn’t matter how, she said, just do it. Because once you are THAT, everything changes. Everything that before you thought important, everything you thought you or others should do, all your favourite projects, all your beliefs, even those involving The Mother herself, now become froth, merely the mind keeping itself busy with... the mind.

From this perspective, all the rest is... noise.

Alan

On cultivation, processing and consumption of rice

In Auroville rice is grown in four farms:

- Annapurna
- Ayarpadi
- Kalpavrukshaa
- Siddhartha Farm

There are four main varieties of rice cultivated in Auroville:

- White Ponni
- Chinna Ponni
- Poovan Samba or complete red rice
- Annapurna (a complete brown variety that has been developed at Annapurna!)

Paddy (rice in the husk) is processed in different ways:

- Complete rice (red and brown varieties): where only the husk is removed from the kernel totally
- Raw rice (Ponni varieties): where the husk, bran and germ are removed from the kernel
- Par-boiled rice (Ponni varieties): where paddy is soaked, steamed and re-dried before husk, bran and germ are removed.

All Auroville grown paddy goes after harvest to Annapurna. Here the grain is cleaned, dried and bagged and goes into storage. The total paddy production in recent years is approximately 27,400 kg, which after milling gives approx 17,800 kg of rice.

In 2015, a grain separation machine was donated to Annapurna by the Dutch foundation Stichting Aurofonds.

Animal Care in Auroville

It is common in India to see uncared stray dogs roaming the streets. For many years, until April 2005, a long time Aurovilian, Ann Plummer from New Zealand, known in Auroville as 'Animal Care Ann', provided food and care for the stray dogs and cats in the surrounding villages of Auroville, and to a lesser extent within Auroville. Her work was recognized by Auroville and in 1997 an official Animal Care Trust was formed.

Ann passed away in June 2005 and suddenly there was a vacuum in the animal care scene which needed to be filled urgently. A few of Ann's friends, who were also supporters of animal care work, came together to form the "Integrated Animal Care Centre (IACC)". This is their story.

What is IACC?

IACC is Auroville's animal shelter located on 2 acres of forested land on the fringe of Auroville. It serves to protect vulnerable Auroville land from outside encroachment; more importantly, it is home to almost 70 dogs of all ages, colours, shapes and sizes, each one with their own unique personality.

Over time, and with our limited boarding facilities, we have developed primarily into a dog shelter, though we are open to all animals in need. A majority of our resident animals are "dumped" puppies left outside our gate or within Auroville, who could not get adopted or animals that cannot be sent elsewhere because they are sick, aggressive or fearful. These will remain at the shelter where they will be cared for and fed for their lifetime. Most of



The IACC team with Foxy, a crippled dog

our dogs run free in one happy, rowdy pack, though some unsocialized or weak animals live in large separate enclosures for their own wellbeing. As a policy, we do not euthanise an animal unless it is very sick or suffering from age, incurable pain or chronic disease.

Since its inception in 2005, the Integrated Animal Care team has focussed its efforts in animal care on the basis of five main guiding principles:

- Birth Control; to help address the terrible stray animal over-population issue and the suffering it brings, a condition faced across India.

- Antirabies vaccination for all animals; rabies is a major public health concern in India, with more than 40,000 rabies-related human deaths each year.

- Medical Care to stray animals in need or for owned animals

- Adoption and finding new homes for abandoned dogs/cats

- Sensitization and education of the general public towards animals; especially important in India where many locals grow to fear animals and react with mistrust rather than compassion.

IACC has organized (and in many cases, paid for) more than 2,000 sterilizations of both male and female dogs, vaccinated countless animals against rabies, adopted hundreds of abandoned puppies and found homes for many of them in Auroville and the surrounding villages. It is a very small start in a gigantic problem experienced across India: there is much work yet to be done.

The Future

IACC has recently strengthened its team, and with this new momentum, we would like to focus a large part of our energy and (hopefully additional) resources to implement extensive animal birth control and vaccination programmes aiming at reducing the stray dog population in and around Auroville. Well regulated, wide-scale sterilization and vaccination programmes are a proven means to stabilize a healthier, familiar stray animal population in a locality; and it significantly limits the danger from rabies as a human health hazard.

Another important issue that requires our

urgent attention and is yet to be tackled is the aspect of widespread sensitisation and education of the general public. We are hoping to approach this task through education programmes in the local schools, organised visits to the shelter, regular communication with the community and other ways of spreading awareness.

Our Struggles and Celebrations

Animal care is not an easy work. It is gut-wrenching to see animals suffer daily because of human apathy and cruelty. But the rewards are immeasurable too.

Dany, a devoted team member writes, "For me working at the Shelter is 'que du bonheur', (only happiness). It is funny to see some of the animals showing you how they are upset after you come back after having been away for 3 days... then this moment passes and they show you their love..."

Animal care is expensive. The monthly City Services budget barely covers a third of the monthly expenses: we depend heavily on donors and, mostly, on the unfailing generosity of our team members to keep it going.

If IACC is to achieve some of the goals it has set itself, if it is to grow and flourish as a project that reduces animal suffering in and around Auroville by even a small amount, we need the continued support of our larger community. There are many ways you could help in this effort – whether it is of adopting a young dog from the shelter, an online sponsorship of a resident animal, a monthly contribution, or a donation in kind (food, clothes, old mattresses, bed sheets, towels, brushes, fencing and construction materials, or medical supplies) or even a few hours of your time volunteering at the Shelter, working with the dogs... Every act of kindness is received with immense gratitude.

Ayesha

For more information contact:

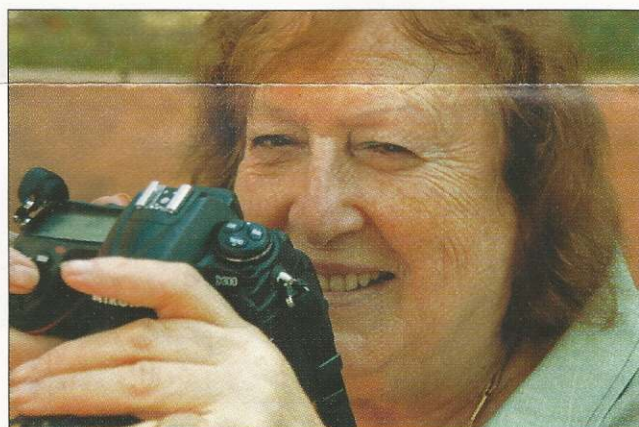
integratedanimalcare@auroville.org.in or visit Facebook: Integrated Animal Care Centre.

PASSINGS

Dominique Darr

Dominique Darr left her body on December 25th in her apartment in Citadine at the age of 84. The cause of death, most probably, was diabetic coma. Dominique, who was an accomplished photographer and a close friend of Roger Anger, first came to Pondicherry and Auroville in December 1970. She was introduced to The Mother during the Ashram's Christmas celebrations, and then came back to Pondicherry and Auroville almost every year. Exceptionally, in 1971 she was given access to a terrace opposite The Mother's balcony to take a photo of The Mother giving balcony *darshan*.

Some of her photos, like that of the lone granite stone with the letters AV painted on it marking Auroville land or that of men, goats and cows ambling through a dry, eroded landscape, have become iconic. These are amongst her earliest photos of Auroville. But over the years, Matrimandir became her main interest and she shot more than a thousand photos of its construction. These represent a unique document of the stages of Matrimandir's construction and the people who worked on it. The book *Matrimandir – a hymn to the builders of the future*, published in 2014 by the Centre d'Art d'Auroville, is a selection of these photos, taken between 1972 and 2008.



Dominique was known as a strong-willed, independent person with a big warm heart, fully dedicated to Auroville and closely connected with many residents. In the Auroville International world she was active as well. During her last years, Dominique established the elegant Centre d'Art at Citadines. Her photo exhibition on Auroville's first years, which she was busy organising, will take place there in February.

Dominique's body was taken to the Farewell Centre before being interred at the Adventure burial grounds on December 27th.



Photo from the Matrimandir excavation, taken by Dominique

Stephen Raj

On Tuesday 13 December, Stephen Raj (Jesudass) from Isaiambalam, left his body in Pondicherry's Mahatma Gandhi Hospital. Being a heart patient and feeling quite unwell these last weeks, he was being prepared for treatment of a liver infection when the cardiac arrest occurred. He had just turned 60 in September.

Stephen Raj was one of the early Aurovilians. Having arrived with his family from Coimbatore in the early seventies, they joined Bryan's community work in Fraternity. Afterwards he was active as a member of the LEM, the LCC and Land Board staff. Together with his wife, Stella, he was also teaching at Isaiambalam School in Kottakarai. In 2004 he officially joined Auroville.

After a short ritual visit to his home in Isaiambalam and a stay at the Farewell Centre where friends and relatives bade him goodbye, his body was buried on Wednesday, 14 December, at Adventure's burial grounds.



Krishna Tewari: clarification

In the October issue, the obituary of Krishna Tewari stated that, after attending the inauguration ceremony at the beginning of Matrimandir, he and his family wanted to join the Ashram and Auroville immediately, "but The Mother forbade him to do so".

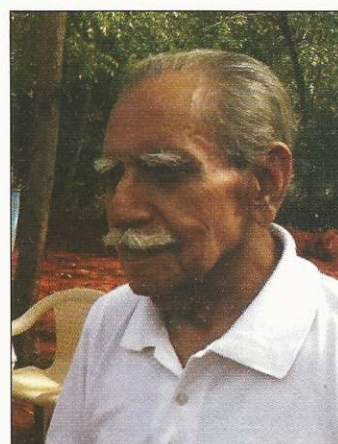
His daughter, Deepti, explains. "After he visited the Ashram and had The Mother's *darshan* in February 1972, Krishna had put in his resignation asking for premature retirement from the Indian Army. He wrote this to the Mother. She immediately had one of her secretaries get back to Krishna with very forceful instructions, repeated 4 times.

To quote from Krishna's book:

"She said it four times: He is not to leave the army. He must continue in service. He must not leave the Army. We shall decide when he will leave the Army."

So the refusal was in relation to his giving up his army career and had nothing to do with Auroville. He continued to serve in the Indian Army for another 4 years until his superannuation in December, 1976."

Krishna and his family joined Auroville soon after.



Stained glass windows exhibition

This January, the Centre d'Art at Citadines hosts the first ever Auroville exhibition of stained glass, made by Robert l'Heureux.



PHOTO: MARCO SAROLDI

His name is virtually unknown, as is his art. I chanced upon his work during a morning walk, passing by Luminosity, when something glinting caught my eye – the sun reflecting a stained glass window.

"It was meant to be covered," says Robert by way of explanation. "I wanted to keep it from the public eye until my exhibition in Citadines which opens on January 8th. You see, this will be the first appearance of my work."

Robert came to Auroville in early 2013 while visiting a friend in Pondicherry. "I didn't know anything about Auroville. He took me around and then..." He hesitates, trying to find the right word, "And then something completely unexpected happened. I felt I was being submerged by something, something drew me in that was so powerful that I just had to surrender. I stayed on for three months working at the Matrimandir. When I returned to Canada, I knew that the next step in my life would be here." In September, 2014, he became a Newcomer, and 18 months later an Aurovilian.

It was not Robert's first time in India. "I always had an attraction for things out of the ordinary. I had visited India 25 years earlier, staying for a few weeks in the Sera Jey Monastery in Karnataka near Mysore. I was helping a friend shoot a movie about a young person from Montreal who was recognized as a reincarnation of a Tibetan Buddhist lama." During that stay, Robert realised that he had a strong bond with Tibetan Buddhism. "I studied it, felt connected, but taking refuge in Buddhism was not for me: there were too many rituals. My spiritual path is more in line with the

powerful energy that's here in Auroville."

Robert's interest in glass art came at an early age, when he visited a stained glass workshop. He was captivated. "I'm a fast learner and soon started my own atelier in Baie-Saint-Paul, a small city outside Québec on the Saint Lawrence River. This was the birthplace of *Cirque du Soleil* – all the crazy people lived there." He worked for five years trying to survive on glass art, but it was not easy. "You need to put bread on the plate so, when opportunity presented itself, I opened a café. I did the interior design, installed a few stained glass windows, then sold it, and bought and sold the next one, and so on for quite some time. I didn't like to stay quiet at that time. In 2002, I opened a French bistro with an attached bakery and patisserie, employing 35 people. This one I

kept for 12 years. But I knew that at some point in time, when there would no longer be an economic and family pressure, all my life's questions, the inside call, would take priority. Then Auroville arrived, and took over, and circumstances arranged themselves that rekindled my aspiration to restart my glass art." Soon he got "the perfect studio in Luminosity", and almost immediately afterwards the apartment on top. "Circumstances or synchronicities allowed me to follow my dream. I was finally free to create what I wanted."

Asked about his inspiration, Robert says he admires the fantastic stained glass windows of the Romanesque and Gothic churches, and those of modern artists such as Chagall, "but my true inspiration is Tiffany, famous for his lamps and beautiful glass panels. He innovated stained glass art. The stained glass windows of the cathedrals were made of glass placed in thick leaden frames. Tiffany invented a method where glass edges are wrapped with thin copper strips, and then the copper is soldered with melted tin. This permits a much more elaborate design, with finer separations between the glass pieces."

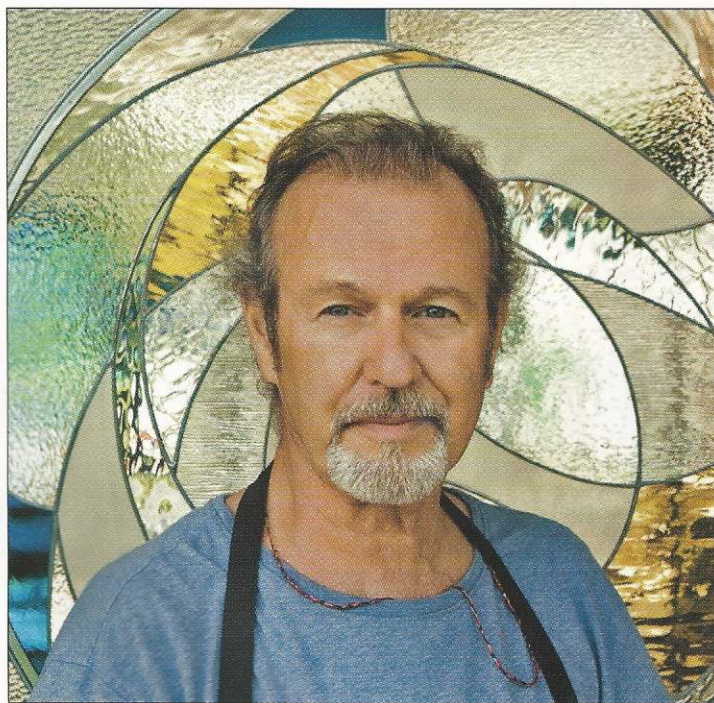
Stained glass is not so common in India and good glass is difficult to come by. Not that this bothered Robert. "I am an entrepreneur and used to starting from scratch. I got directions about where to buy glass. I went to Bangalore, but the

choice of glass available was very limited and it was very expensive as it was imported from the USA. Last summer I managed to contact a Chinese firm which had the material I wanted. It was a five months' process. They sent the samples, provided an excellent service, and a month and a half ago I took delivery of 2,000 kilos of differently coloured glass panes. This will last me for the next few years, if not longer."

As he is not looking for orders at this moment, Robert freely designs his own one-of-a-kind stained glass windows or panels. Imagination, he says, flows freely, often unexpectedly so. "Since I have been here, so many things have changed in my life. I go to my place and meditate, and often inspiration flows like never before – sometimes a veritable explosion. Of course, I also draw a blank – but more often it is rich and abundant. I am much more confident than I used to be, as if restrictions have dissolved. There is a great evolution in my artistry – it feels a hundred times better than my earlier attempts in Canada." He points at a drawing for a triptych, a room divider. "The frame is being made, but the artwork is already in my head. It will be the last piece for the exhibition."

Auroville architects and interior designers haven't shown much interest so far, but Robert expects that to change. "I didn't do any marketing as yet. I expect that, apart from Auroville, my market will probably be the Indian upper middle class. With prices substantially lower than in Canada, my works will be quite affordable. I've faith that everything will flow just the same way as everything else has flowed up to now."

In conversation with Carel



Robert l'Heureux

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Contact: Auroville Today, Samasti, Auroville - 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Phone: +91.413.2622572, avtoday@auroville.org.in.

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