

## The housing crisis



Conceptual design of the cost-effective Humanscapes project

Two of the major challenges facing the community at present are a fragile economy and a severe lack of low-priced accommodation. Clearly, the two are interlinked. However, while the economy has faced serious stresses in the past – the decision of the Sri Aurobindo Society to cut off funding to the community in the mid 1970s precipitated our first economic crisis – the housing crisis has crept up on us. In the early years, finding accommodation was not difficult. The accommodation tended to be very simple, but this was the ethos of those times, and nobody seemed to feel disadvantaged living in a temporary ‘capsule’ under keet.

Of course, there were also more ‘luxurious’ houses in places like Certitude and Auromodele, but this form of permanent housing did not become the norm until the late 1980s, when settlements like Samasti and Surrender began to be built. This coincided with a new push to build the city, and Auroville’s town planning service underlined the new approach by forbidding new keet constructions in the city.

Inevitably, the costs of constructing accommodation rose steeply. This had a number of consequences. As most individuals had to pay substantial amounts for constructing ‘their’ houses, it encouraged a more ‘proprietary’ attitude, and the ability of Aurovilians to move freely between houses and communities, which had been a feature of the early days, disappeared almost completely. Again, the increased time it took to build a ‘pukka’ house (a keet capsule could be put up in a week; new houses took a minimum of 6-9 months) as well as a more complicated process for getting construction permission meant that less accommodation was being built, even though the population continued to grow.

### The housing squeeze had begun

In 1995, the first Newcomer units were built. While Newcomers could officially only live in these units for a maxi-

### KALPANA HOUSING, AUROVILLE



Conceptual design of the more expensive Kalapana apartments

mum of two years, it gave them a breathing space to explore the community and find ways to resolve the accommodation challenge. However, there were never enough units and it did not solve the underlying accommodation problem, which was a mismatch between the quantity and types of accommodation available and the financial resources of many Aurovilians and Newcomers.

To underline this, the present price of a studio apartment in new developments is around 20 lakhs rupees (\$30,000), which rises to between 38-54 lakhs for a 3 bedroom apartment. Today, apparently only six Newcomers can afford a house above 20 lakhs, and none of these are young people. One consequence is that out of 71 Newcomer units, 47(64%) are occupied at present by people who did not move out when they became Aurovilians because they could not find another place to live.

An Aurovillian recently made a calculation of how long it could take a young prospective Newcomer living in France to save 20 lakhs, which is the minimum price for many current housing projects. His answer? Eleven years. Actually, it could take longer because this optimistically assumes the young person on a basic salary could save 200 Euros a month, and 20 lakhs does not include the cost of a visa, plane ticket and all the initial expenses associated with living in Auroville. These can be quite steep, which is why 20% of Newcomers over the past three years have left Auroville because they were unable to find work to support themselves.

But the accommodation problem does not just impact Newcomers. At present, 95 adults and 52 youth are on a waiting list for housing. Many of these do not have sufficient funds to ‘buy’ the housing on offer.

The housing squeeze is amplified by the fact that people without adequate resources continue to join the community (this year, there will be forty new people

joining Auroville who have limited funds for accommodation), and by the fact that housing tastes have changed. Keet constructions are now allowable once again in the city area, but there is hardly any demand for them as many people now prefer a higher standard of accommodation that, inevitably, is more costly.

The Entry and Housing Services are the most exercised by this issue. One of the conditions specified by the Entry Service in the past for becoming an Aurovillian was that a Newcomer should have found permanent housing within Auroville. But this has become increasingly difficult, both because of the lack of available housing and because some Newcomers who initially declared they had money for housing declare, after a year of living here, they have no more resources or no longer want to invest in their housing. A few years ago, the situation was so bad that the Entry Service decided to close Auroville for some time to new applicants because there was insufficient housing (The new Entry Policy, see AV Today number 322, no longer specifies an automatic linkage between having housing and becoming an Aurovillian, but it is still unclear how this will be worked out in practice.)

It’s a quandary. Auroville wants to develop, and to do this it requires many more young people, but they cannot pay the costs of the new houses or many existing ones. In fact, we are creating a

situation where only people of a certain economic level (which generally means middle-aged or older) can join the community, while Newcomers and volunteers are pushed to seek cheaper accommodation in the surrounding villages.

### The response

Of course, attempts have been made to find solutions. For example, the number of Newcomer units have increased. There have also been Government of India funded projects, like Inspiration, that have allowed the community to provide free accommodation to some Aurovilians. Meanwhile, Mitra Hostel provides low-priced accommodation for volunteers and interns. Other projects, like the Botanical Gardens, also provide simple accommodation for volunteers who work there.

There has also been an experiment in which the Housing Service rented a guest house outside Auroville to provide temporary accommodation for Newcomers and volunteers. However, this was not successful.

Then there are experiments in low-cost ‘demountable’ housing. These include La Maison des Jeunes [see Auroville Today # 307] and the Pony Farm experiment, where six temporary housing units have been constructed by the Housing Service at a unit cost of between 3 – 10 lakhs. Also, two new plots for low-cost housing have recently been approved by L’Avenir where semi-permanent housing will be provided for fifteen individuals and six families.

At the same time, there have been various attempts to control housing costs. For example, the Housing Service attempts to lower the cost price of units by serving as the project holder for some projects, as well as by directly employing an architect who works for a maintenance rather than for a percentage of the total cost. Also, the 14% fraternal contribution for housing (levied on the total cost of the construction) has been lowered to 9%, with 0% contribution for constructions that cost less than Rs 18,000 per square metre.

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### New housing developments

Status	Apartments
Sacred Groves (new community) under construction	20 (1st phase)
Sanjana (new community) under construction	21
Sunship (new community) under construction	42
Invocation (extension) completion within 1 year	12
Swayam (extension) completed	8
Kalpana (new community) starting phase	42
Serenity (new community) starting phase	12
Courage 3 (extension) completed in 3 months	12
Humanscapes (new community) under construction	38 (1st phase)
Pony Farm (extension) completed	6

In addition, there are two more projects in the pipeline for staff quarter apartments by SAIER in the Cultural Zone.

New low-cost apartments of the Maison des Jeunes type are also happening in the International Zone and further low-cost housing projects are planned in the Greenbelt, Rêve area and International Zone. There is also a project for a Home for Assisted living (for senior citizens) next to Arka with 8 apartments planned for the first phase.

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## The housing crisis

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Meanwhile, of the 186 new housing units slated to be completed between 2016 – 18, 52 will be either provided free or subsidized by the project holder or the Government of India. These include 36 units for young people in the first phase of the Humanscape project.

There is also the possibility that two 100-bed hostels will be constructed with government funding for young people.

All this would appear to be radically easing the housing situation. However, there has been criticism regarding the quality of some of the housing projects [see *Auroville Today* # 319], partly because of the high maintenance costs they may incur. Then again, as many of the planned new apartments will be high-cost, in the range of 20 – 45 lakhs (some of these apartments will be partially or fully furnished), even the provision of partial subsidies will put them out of the reach of many Aurovilians and Newcomers.

### What has to change?

Clearly, adequate housing needs to be provided for everybody who wants to put their energy into the Auroville project, irrespective of their financial status. But how?

The mandate of the Housing Service includes providing decent housing for Aurovilians and Newcomers but it does not receive sufficient funds from the community to do this. With its present budget, it can only repair and maintain existing housing; it cannot provide any new accommodation. Given the present costs of housing in Auroville, its present annual budget of 34 lakhs would have to be greatly increased for it to begin doing this.

Other funding possibilities include units which have spare resources allocating them for housing the Aurovilians or Newcomers working there, or allocating a portion of the funds the community receives from the Government of India for housing, or even taking banking loans to construct much needed accommodation [see accompanying interview with Hemant].



Houses in the upcoming Sanjana community

Of course, reducing the costs of building should also be seen as a priority. Here more encouragement should be given to architects to experiment with cost-effective housing. Other ways of reducing costs could include setting up a centralized Auroville purchasing service for all construction projects; creating an Auroville architects service where architects work for a maintenance rather than a percentage of the overall cost of the project; and employing volunteers and Newcomers/Aurovilians in construction rather than outside external labour.

It has to be said, however, that creating an architects' service and employing volunteers or build-your-own enthusiasts has already been experimented with, but with little success.

Team member Sauro points out that while L'Avenir does support low-cost and innovative housing projects, he is not convinced that low-cost housing is a long-term solution, partly because it may incur higher maintenance costs in the long run.

Moreover, as Sonja from Housing Service points out, some people do not want low-cost

housing. "Many Newcomers and Aurovilians want single standing houses with at least a quarter acre of garden around. This is what they see old-timers have and what they feel is now the norm."

In any case, there are limits on how much the cost of construction can be lowered. Construction costs have soared all over India in the past 25 years, which is why Sauro believes that the real solution to our housing problem lies in strengthening the Auroville economy. Clearly, a weak economy impacts the housing situation. For example, potential accommodation for young people without resources is being converted by some Aurovilians into rented accommodation as a means of supplementing their income.

And then there is the question of where to build. There is not much scope for lower-cost experimentation in the city at the present, where the main emphasis is upon constructing more apartment buildings, although L'Avenir has recently allocated two city sites for such experimentation.

Proponents of more affordable housing want new areas opened up – for example on land that needs protection from encroachment – where experimentation in constructing simpler forms of accommodation can take place.

Ideally, of course, there would be proximity to existing infrastructure for this would lower costs. In this context, building in existing communities would seem an obvious option. However, of the 169 communities of Auroville, it seems that only four (Samasti, Fraternity, Auromodele and Aspiration) welcome new people to build. And when existing accommodation does fall vacant in a community, many communities impose restrictions like no children, no pets or, as in some greenbelt communities, a need to be engaged in a specific work.

And here we approach the core of the problem. For while it is easy to blame the administrative trioka of the Entry Service, Housing Service and L'Avenir for the present housing difficulties, we all have some responsibility for the situation. Whether it is individuals refusing to allow somebody to build in their community, or fencing off acres around their house, or converting rooms for high rent; or architects and contractors favouring expensive, high-end projects; or the Auroville community failing to prioritise the need for affordable housing by putting significant resources towards achieving this, the undeniable consequence is that we are making it harder and harder for young people with energy and idealism, but with limited means, to join this community.

Perhaps the real question is whether we want new people at all. But if we are serious about building this city, all of us will be asked to let go of something – of proprietorial attitudes to 'our' houses and estates, of planning dogmas, architectural egos, or buffer funds put aside for a 'rainy day' etc. – in order to create space for new energy and new ideas.

Only then can we begin actively working towards the day when the community will provide all housing free, on the basis of need, for all those who want to give their energy to the manifestation of Mother's Auroville.

Alan

# Tackling the youth housing problem

**Hemant Lamba, a member of the Working Committee, has for many years been concerned about transforming our housing situation, particularly to meet the needs of youth.**

*Auroville Today: What do you see as the biggest blockage to Auroville's growth?*

The lack of fresh influx of young people who have the energy, creativity and enthusiasm to jump into an experiment like Auroville. We are an ageing community: the average age is over 40 while the Indian average is less than 25 years. We need to lower our average age by at least ten years. To do this we must create a fast-entry lane for youth who have the required skills and energy to come and work in Auroville, either as volunteers for a limited period or permanently.

And they want to come. Young people in India and abroad are looking for something different to do with their lives, and Auroville provides a fertile opportunity. But our present volunteer, entry and housing policies make it very difficult for them to join. Volunteers have great problems finding temporary accommodation and, on top of that, need to pay a hefty volunteer contribution.

Newcomers have to contribute around 4 lakhs to become an

Aurovillian, which includes an advance for their future housing [see *AVToday* May 2016, page 2, ed.]. But housing has become very costly and often unaffordable for young people. An apartment now easily costs Rs 20 lakhs upwards, an amount which is not available for many youngsters. And our town plan has made it difficult to start low-cost housing communities, such as Aspiration in the early years of Auroville, within and even outside the city area, even though Auroville has plenty of unutilised lands.

We need to reverse the current trend. Joining Auroville must become simpler and easier.

*You have been speaking about 'a bed for work'. What does this mean?*

When somebody joined Auroville in the early years, they would get a bed, a mosquito net, a place to work and free food from a communal kitchen. I'd like us to return to something like that, which is why I coined this phrase. The idea is that any young person offering to work in Auroville would be given the basic amenities

free of charge. The bed space can be a capsule, a tree house, a stay in a hostel, or a room in a service apartment for young adults who have a small family. To achieve this, we need to prioritise the building of these spaces.

To make Auroville more welcoming to youth, I would also abolish the financial contributions that volunteers and Newcomers have to make at present. These policies have become outdated and are now blocking our development. In fact, I would go one step further and create an Auroville stipend system, giving young people who want to work for Auroville not only accommodation and free food, but also a stipend or maintenance.

*Does Auroville have the resources to do this? A recent report by Manuel and Henk Thomas suggested that Auroville is in a dire economic state.*

The Thomasses were talking about the stagnation of Auroville's businesses and the insufficient carrying capacity of the economy, the inability of the Auroville economy to support the Aurovilians. You find this reflected in the insufficient monthly maintenance which the community makes available to its residents. But many Aurovilians seem to have other sources of income to make ends meet, which was not included in their study.

But if you look at the macro development of Auroville, you see that Auroville has grown substantially, particularly if you take the small size of its population into account. Not many communities with a comparable population size can afford the roads we are building and the public buildings that we have. Our income from donations and grants, such as from individuals and from the Government of India, has made these developments possible.



Hemant

*But how do you convince our policy makers to prioritise funds for youth accommodation?*

There is a lot of inertia in the system at present: it affects our planners, developers, and those in policy-making and finance. We must change the status quo. The policy makers, for example, could decide to allocate a major part of the Government of India grants to the building of youth housing, and put a 3-5 years moratorium on the construction of new public buildings. Even if only 50% of our annual grant was used in that way, over five years we could allocate 25 – 30 crore rupees for such housing.

A step in this direction is now being made in Humanscapes, a low-energy, cost-effective project. The first phase, now under construction, will provide accommodation for 36 young people. The total project aims at providing 500 more beds in Auroville.

SAIER too has shown interest in creating more youth housing. They want to construct a 100-bed hostel. And another 100-bed hostel, the

Golden Jubilee Hostel, is planned for the 50th anniversary of Auroville.

These are all good developments, but they are not enough. The Housing Service has a list of well over one hundred Aurovilians without proper accommodation, and they too need to be accommodated. More money will need to be made available for housing.

*All the projects you mention are government-funded. Is it wise to rely exclusively upon Government of India funding for creating new housing?*

Government grants are one possibility. There are other ways, but they will require a lot of community discussion and support. For example, Auroville's Unity Fund has a cash flow of between 20 – 25 crores. This money is deposited in the bank to earn interest; it is a major part of the community's monthly income from which we pay our services, maintenances and so on. Can we use a small percentage, say 25%, for the creation of 50 to 70 additional beds for young people?

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Low-cost house in Pony Farm community. The walls are styrofoam-cement sandwich panels



## Tackling the youth housing problem



Experimental low-cost housing at Pony Farm community

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Another way might be to look at the savings of some of Auroville's service and commercial units. Can they be used in part for the construction of houses or staff quarters for the Aurovilians working in those units?

A third way would be for Auroville to obtain a bank loan to construct housing, to be repaid in instalments. An additional in-kind maintenance of between Rs 6,000 – 7,000 could be provided to those living in the new accommodation to service this loan. The extra money could be provided from services like Matrimandir, Solar Kitchen and Visitors Centre, all of which have sizeable surpluses, or from commercial units.

A fourth option is renting houses in the villages, where accommodation is much cheaper than in Auroville. Many young volunteers are already doing this. But here, too, the question is how people would be able to pay the rent from their monthly maintenance.

Then again, we are subsidising consumption by providing free electricity but we don't put resources towards hosting youthful human energy. If we use the more than 1 crore provided to Aurovilians at present for free electricity to build free housing for youth instead then we will unblock a huge resource. The kind economy should begin by taking care of essential needs, like providing free food and basic housing.

*Do young people require the same type of housing that is now being constructed in Auroville?*

No, they don't. They have a variety of needs. Many young people are simply looking for a bed to crash in and a place in which to interact with each other, while youth in their mid 20's upwards look for more privacy and independent spaces like a studio or a small apartment.

As we grow older, we tend to forget how simply we could live when we were young. When I first saw the La Maison des Jeunes housing experiment at Citadines [see Auroville Today no 307], I was appalled: I thought they were chicken coops. But then I learned from the people who were living there that they were very happy.

There is a group of young Aurovilians who have between 3 – 5 lakhs rupees to spend on housing. The Budget Coordination Committee has said that it would be willing to provide Rs 3 lakhs to each of them to build a simple house, which could be similar to those at La Maison des Jeunes or in Pony Farm. These non-permanent houses could be set up on outlying lands that are threatened with encroachment; or in places in the city where 'dismountable' housing has



Experimental low-cost housing at Pony Farm community

already been approved, like at the Pony Farm.

Another option could be to build expandable 'start up' houses. A basic unit of 25 to 30 sq.m. could be provided freely or at a low cost and the residents would have the choice to expand the unit as their needs grow.

*The community, over the years, has built youth housing and has experimented with low-cost and even build-your-own housing. Was it a success?*

The youth housing projects, I believe, have been a success. We have Kailash for Auroville youth up to 21 years, and for older youth there are the WDK, Muerchi and Mir collectives. The International House in the International Zone is another successful example.

The recent build-your-own attempts have not been very successful. Realization, which started with the enthusiastic participation of young volunteers and

Newcomers, had ultimately to be built by hired labour when the youthful energies ran out of steam, leading to a cost price per square metre comparable to ordinary housing. For these and other reasons, another experiment in low-cost housing, Sacred Groves, is no longer low-cost.



Two units at La Maison des Jeunes, Citadines

*Some people look upon dismantlable houses as second class accommodation. Is there not a danger that we create cheap housing that is sub-standard or ugly?*

I am confident that what we build will not be substandard. We have to define minimum standards of cleanliness and workmanship – we don't want people living in cow sheds – and give very specific briefs to our architects.

*Do you feel there is enough collective will to start constructing youth accommodation on a large scale?*

Today, I think there is maximum agreement in the community that new, young energy is required in Auroville. Look at how many young people are being welcomed into our working groups, and the support given to youth activities like YouthLink. It is now imperative that our policy makers meet together to find solutions to the youth housing problem.

From an interview by Alan

## Voices of the floating youth

The experiences of youth without permanent housing

Suha



My parents separated when I was about 9 years old and ever since, my brother Satya I have been missing a place called home. During my parents separation, we bounced back and forth from staying in the farm house where my dad stayed (until our keet roof collapsed because the Farm Group didn't give the Housing Group the permission to help us financially to fix our keet roof and so we were forced to move out) and at my grandmother's house in the village and in friends' houses. I stayed in Kailash for about a year during my teenage years and ever since I have been staying with my mother or house-sitting. Being brought up in Auroville and having only one parent earning just an Auroville maintenance and no other income from outside, it's been a tough road to get to a place called home. My father still lives in his tiny (when I say tiny I am not exaggerating) pump house where the rice fields are. With my maintenance from Visitors Centre (I work in Le Zephyr) and the small income I make from my start-up (making beachwear

and surfboard bags) I will not be able to afford a house unless I leave Auroville to go work outside, which I am not interested in as this is my home and I choose to be here in this beautiful place.

I am 24 and still house sitting and staying with my mother sharing a room with my brother if not house sitting. I am aching for that warm feeling of being at home again, a space I have to myself, where I feel secure and happy. I miss it since my parents separated.

Muna



After my family was asked to leave Utility, my parents bought a piece of land that we turned into a community called Happiness. When Auroville approached us for a land exchange, my parents left me in charge and returned to Europe. Since then, Happiness was evaluated and I was promised a sum of money large enough for me to start my life somewhere else. Unfortunately, I have been fighting to get the funds that were promised me. Besides being

homeless I felt so frustrated and tired about all the meetings I had to attend, and having to explain my story over and over again to different people. Not having a home in Auroville has meant that now I'm even staying outside of Auroville because I could not find something that suited me in Auroville. I felt really disappointed when I didn't get the help and support I was promised. After a long time, I now have the funds for infrastructure as well as a piece of land on which I can start building. I haven't had a home since so many years that it almost feels like a dream now. I hope that I manage to keep it all within the budget, since it is common to have extra expenditure beyond the estimate or Bill of Quantities.

Inge



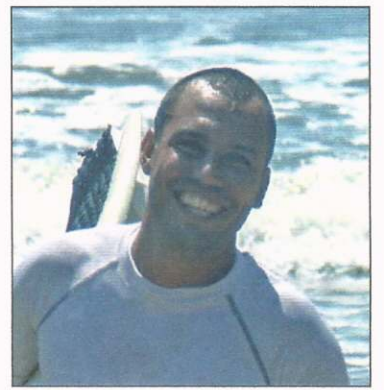
When my family and I moved to Auroville in 1999, we stayed in various places before settling down in Surrender. After having gone out for a few years, I returned to Auroville in

2013. Naturally, the family house is where I initially stayed. It has always been a landing point for my siblings and I. No matter what happens, we can always end up there. And, Auroville in general feels like a home. When it became clear that I wanted to stay permanently, I started looking for a 'home away from home within my home'. I did some house-sitting in a few places but eventually ended up in the family house in my old room for another 6 months. My search for a permanent solution has not yet yielded anything concrete, but in the meantime my partner Samai and I are grateful that Courage has youth apartments where we can reside for a few years, during our search.

The situation of housing in Auroville is already a desperate one for those who have some funds. But for those who choose Auroville as their home at an early age, the dream of having a place is a difficult one to materialize. We all agree that an Auroville maintenance is never going to build you a house. So how do we accommodate our youth? Well, we trust that a solution will come. We believe that if you work for Auroville, Auroville works for you.

But in between the trust and the good thoughts, the little voice inside says 'I really miss having a place that I can call my own'. Even adding a shelf in my apartment makes you think, 'Is it really worth it? Can I do without it? ... We are anyway not staying long.' In the end, you feel in limbo. And whether it's house-sitting or living in temporary apartments, there are always conditions attached, and it never really feels like home. Even though you're still inside your home.

Nico



I am 36 years old, have been living in Auroville since I am 15. I used to have a house in Quiet that I had built with my own funds. Sadly, it was destroyed in the tsunami and I found myself without a place to stay, and all my belongings gone. My ex and I were offered a house in Sincerity through tsunami relief. Some years later, I left Auroville to see the outside world and left the house to my ex. Before I returned to Auroville my ex had left, and I was told by the Housing Board that I could not stay there anymore. So, I've been house-sitting and staying with friends for 9 years now. Sadly, I don't have the circa 25 lakhs that it would take me to build another house of my own. The sad part is actually that if I were to go out of Auroville for long enough to earn that money, I would lose my Aurovillian status. It's a real catch 22, and not having a home to stay in means that I constantly feel like I'm floating and don't feel grounded.

Inge van Alphen



# Apprenticeships for youth

**A**urevan, Suryamayi and Kavitha are part of an enthusiastic team working on developing apprenticeship and internship programmes for Auroville youth.

**Auroville Today:** Over the past year, much energy has gone into developing an apprenticeship programme for youth. Why?

**Aurevan:** The general trend of education in Auroville has been concentrating more and more on education of the mind, an education that is not necessarily focussed on Auroville but follows a system that has little to do with what is happening here or what we are doing here. We need to create different educational possibilities, of which apprenticeships can be one example, something that teaches you skills and a way of approaching life that is more integral than the education offered at present.

**Suryamayi:** It's important to diversify the educational models and opportunities that are available here so that people have the opportunity to connect with the education that they want.

**Kavitha:** It is important to provide students with the opportunity to leave Auroville and study elsewhere if they so wish: I certainly benefitted from this. This is why the academics came in. But what was missing in my education here was an opportunity to explore in a deeper sense why I am in Auroville and how Auroville works.

What excites me about one aspect of this proposed programme is giving people the space to look at Auroville more deeply.

**How did this programme start? How has it evolved?**

**Suryamayi:** Apprenticeship possibilities always existed. If somebody wanted to follow an internship or apprenticeship in a particular field and had enough willpower to find someone in the community to help them, they could do it. More recently, it began to get more organized. For example, Vikram has been working with Future School students on a case-by-case basis to find placements and apprenticeships for them in Auroville.

The Budget Coordination Committee, on the initiative of the Human Resource Team, has also allocated seventeen maintenances for apprenticeships. Currently, four young Aurovilians are receiving such maintenances.

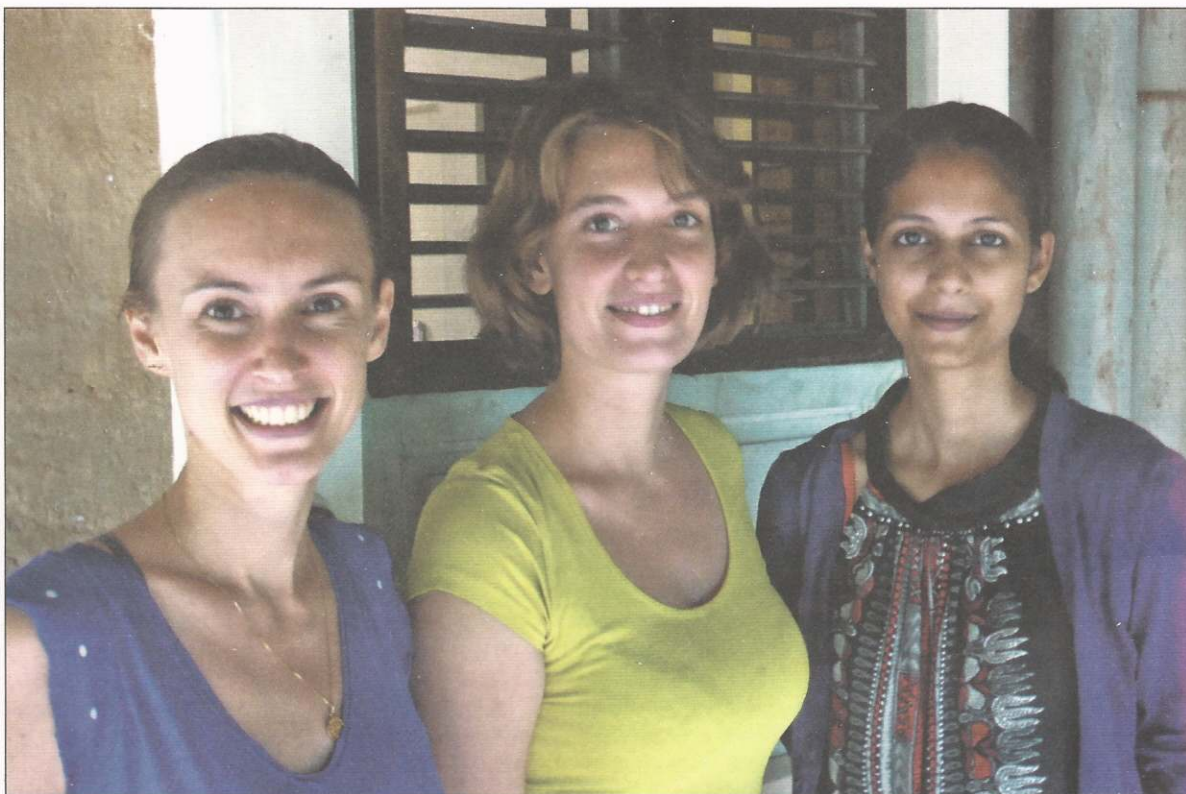
**Kavitha:** Before the Retreat, which happened in March, 2015, Jesse and Vikram initiated a series of conversations with young Aurovilians. The topic of higher or further education came up, and that's when we started discussing apprenticeships. It was further highlighted in the goals of some of the groups during the Retreat.

Angeli, who worked with us in YouthLink, very strongly resonated with those goals. As a young girl she had been looking for alternative forms of training where the process of learning what she wanted was more vivid and motivating to her. She wanted the youth in Auroville to have more opportunities and to bring people together to create more possibilities for further learning in Auroville.

**Aurevan:** I met Angeli, who was full of enthusiasm about this programme. However, she was leaving and she said nobody was picking it up, so I agreed to help.

I began working with Mike from Auroville Campus Initiative, which had also decided to work on an apprenticeship programme. We began by focussing upon one apprenticeship topic – forestry – to learn how to construct such a programme as a model for other apprenticeships. It was a little trying because people are busy with their work and it hasn't always been easy to find the foresters in the forest. Once found, great enthusiasm always followed. It was very rich because I met people who I had known when I was very little and suddenly I heard their stories and their dreams.

Then Shandra joined us. She said we should not focus on programme development until we found out who the potential apprentices might be and what they wanted from such



From left: Suryamayi, Aurevan and Kavitha

a course. She went to the various schools, spoke to the students, and asked what kind of internships or apprenticeships they were interested in.

**Kavitha:** When Suryamayi had stepped in, she really brought an energy to widen the conversation and include all stakeholders concerned. Her efforts to initiate deeper contact with all schools, teacher trainers, apprenticeship trainers and, most importantly, the youth themselves, has helped shape the vision for our work. I am personally very grateful to Suryamayi for bringing this topic of apprenticeships to the community at large.

**Suryamayi:** At a certain point, it became clear that we also needed a core programme that everybody – apprentices and interns – would participate in, irrespective of their choice of topic, where they would learn basic essential skills. We identified four key areas – leadership, communication, applied maths and computer skills – and began contacting people to take up different aspects of this programme. Very importantly, the core programme would also include an introduction to Auroville's ideals and organization as well as an opportunity for apprentices and interns to share their experiences of the programmes.

Deepti from Last School and Heidi Watts gave some valuable advice. They both told us not to plan the whole core programme but to start with a group of students and find out what they are interested in and what they want to learn from such a programme. Different people may have very different needs, so always give them a choice. But make them choose, because then you compel a certain engagement; you compel people to be active in forming their own education.

So we really want to serve what the youth want, not to create programmes based on our ideas of what we think they want or need to learn.

**What is the difference between internships, apprenticeships and fellowships?**

**Suryamayi:** Internships are short-term (1–3 months) work experience opportunities in Auroville units and services. Apprenticeships are long term (6 months – 3 years) hands-on trainings and studies in Auroville units and services. Fellowships are opportunities to gain skills and experience in Auroville's working groups.

One of the things that emerged strongly from a survey we did is that very few young people are willing to commit to an apprenticeship right away. Many would like to do a number of internships first. This way they can explore the different areas and get a sense of what they want to do.

The idea for what we term "fellowships" came out of a conversation with the Governance Action Group in which they said they wanted to see more youth involved in the working groups of Auroville. Fellowships could be for those youth who already have gained experience, either academic, work or

apprenticeship-based, in a field that is relevant to the working group.

\* In the last phase of an apprenticeship the individual would carry out a project that would draw upon everything they had learnt. For the fellowship programme, we want to encourage youth to take up a research project related to the group. It would give them an opportunity to bring something to the group that is their unique contribution.

**What are the programmes that are on offer at present?**

**Suryamayi:** We know from Vikram's database that there are a huge number of Aurovilians who are willing to offer internships in services or units. Because the internship is short-term and often part-time, it allows people in services or units to offer something without the pressure of having to train someone.

There are also several apprenticeships possibilities. Lilith Fashion school offers 3 year fashion design apprenticeships. There are others taking place in units, like Sunlit Future or Aureka, and some in services, like the Electrical Service. Some, like Electrical Service and Auroville Bakery, include a job offer at the end if it all works out.

**Aurevan:** We are also trying to develop a second type of apprenticeship in which the apprentice would not just be working with one individual or unit, but with different individuals and units in the same field to create a more all-round apprenticeship. We are trying this with forestry, farming and with cooking.

**How much interest has there been so far?**

**Aurevan:** We have more than ten people who want to do internships over the summer and six people interested in starting apprenticeships in August

**What is expected of the mentors?**

**Kavitha:** There will be different types of mentors. The ones teaching a particular apprenticeship skill will be 'trainers'. Then there will be a separate pool of mentors for the more academic aspects and resource people for the core programme. There would also be a younger group of peer advisors. These are people who have already gone through apprenticeships, either in Auroville or outside, and who will be able to advise and support the students on the basis of their own experience.

**How do you ensure that the trainers and mentors have the ability to communicate their skills or knowledge to the youth?**

**Suryamayi:** Heidi Watts pointed out that these people, who are our most precious resource, will also need support. As a first step, we are providing the core programme so that trainers, for example, don't feel overburdened by having to teach skills they may not

have the time or aptitude to teach.

**Kavitha:** Auroville's Teachers Centre has been catering to teachers from our schools but it could eventually include the mentors and trainers in these teacher-training programmes.

**Aurevan:** I think we should focus on getting a diversity of mentors and trainers rather than focusing on educating them. The idea is to get as wide a group of individuals together as possible who can cater to different aspects of a topic in their own way, and let the student integrate this input.

**Have you thought about getting outside recognition for the Auroville apprenticeships?**

**Suryamayi:** Yes, but as yet we don't know how these will be received across the world. One hopeful example is that Anna, a graduate of Lilith Fashion School, has just been accepted in one of the top design schools in Berlin on the basis of a portfolio she made of her apprenticeship

here at Lilith.

So, for many of the apprenticeships we'll have a portfolio process, modelling it on the professional portfolio which is a recognised form in architecture, art education etc.

**Aurevan:** As more of our apprentices go out and prove they are made of solid stuff, hopefully, the Auroville apprenticeship programme will gain wider recognition and acceptance. Creating recognition for Auroville education in general has been a long time dream and is a need for the community if we are not to fall prey to curricula and standards which limit us, and often do not reflect the values, dreams or quality of excellence which Auroville aspires to. Hopefully, apprenticeship programmes could be a step in acquiring recognition for Auroville education at large.

**Kavitha:** The Global Eco-village Network inspired Gaia Education, which is a member of the UNESCO global action programme. It runs a series of different courses. One of them is a short four-week programme that looks at a locality or community through the lenses of ecology, social, economy, and worldview.

We are going to run such a course in Auroville later this year for youth in Auroville, the bioregion and from further afield. In future, if this UNESCO-backed qualification is included in addition to the portfolio it could give our apprenticeship qualification more weight.

**Do you see these internship and apprenticeship programmes as part of a larger movement you would like to see happening in Auroville?**

**Aurevan:** Yes. I realise that many of the kids I've grown up with are doing jobs they don't enjoy because they need a maintenance. Education in Auroville should allow a child to find out what he or she is passionate about. Perhaps internship and apprenticeship programmes can create a platform for that.

**Suryamayi:** My hope is that these programmes could be another opportunity to engage with the concept of integral and unending education. I believe in creating spaces that allow people to explore our ideals on the ground, to concretise them, and I see these programmes as a possible platform for that.

**Kavitha:** At the Retreat, a group of young people decided to address issues affecting their generation. They defined the three major issues as housing, education, and employment. Now it has come to a point where education has manifested as this larger community engagement for apprenticeships and internships. For example, the apprenticeship programme is supported by the high schools and creates a possibility of connectivity between the high schools which has not existed in the past.

My joy is in seeing the engagement of the youth themselves in designing unending education-inspired programmes.

From an interview by Alan



# How to protect a name?

The Auroville Express (sic), train 16116 – Pondicherry to Chennai Egmore, leaves Pondicherry daily at 05.35 to arrive at Egmore at 9.30. It returns as train 16615, leaving Egmore at 18.10 and reaching Pondicherry at 22.00 hours.

Though the official website of the Indian Railways calls the train the Puducherry-Egmore or Egmore-Puducherry Express, you'll find the timings of the Auroville Express (indeed, misspelt with one 'l'), on various website. Who coined it, nobody knows. But though it is flattering that a train would be named after Auroville – even if it is a very slow one – it is in fact improper.

For, since 1999, the name and symbol of Auroville are officially protected under the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act 1950 which says that the use is prohibited except by the organisation to which the name or emblem belongs. This means that nobody in India is authorised to use them without permission from the Auroville Foundation.

Cases of unauthorised usage are rampant, as can be seen from a simple Google search. It is not just a local affair. All over the country, even in Dehradun, a city north of New Delhi, apartment buildings have come up that use the name Auroville. Evidently the name 'Auroville', in the mind of many people, is linked to 'green' and 'beauty', to something attractively unique. But they use it without any approval from Auroville.

What is being done about it? The Working Committee and the Secretary, Auroville Foundation have made considerable efforts in the past to resolve such incidents



A housing block development in Dehradun, north India, bearing the name 'Auroville'

and an Auroville lawyer, Vinodhini, has been tasked to solve these matters. She found that most people are not aware of the name protection. Usually, she first engages with the person or organisation in an informal conversation. That is well-appreciated. She found that most people who used the name Auroville did so out of their love or regard for Auroville and that, once they understand the issue, people usually agree to an out-of-court settlement and cooperate fully to

remove the name of Auroville from their establishment or website.

This approach, she feels, has more in common with the ideals of Auroville where we want to find mutually acceptable ways of resolving issues, rather than just imposing the law. If the other party refuses to properly respond, the issue is brought to court.

Identifying and dealing with improper usage is quite a task. A group of six concerned Aurovilians called NASA (Name and Symbol of

Auroville protection group) have now come together to help Vinodhini and spread awareness that the name of Auroville cannot be used without permission. Its immediate focus is the surrounding region, including Pondicherry. The group also scrutinizes the Internet to identify cases of new unauthorised usage, and invites the public to report improper usage to [nasa@auroville.org.in](mailto:nasa@auroville.org.in)

Carel

## The Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act 1950

"Notwithstanding anything contained in any law for the time being in force, no person shall, except in such cases and under such conditions as may be prescribed by the Central Government use, or continue to use, for the purpose of any trade, business, calling or profession, or in the title of any patent, or in any trade mark or design, any name or emblem specified in the Schedule or, any colorable imitation thereof without the previous permission of the Central Government or of such officer of Government as may be authorized in this behalf by the Central Government."

**Schedule 23.** The name and emblem of the Auroville consisting of two concentric circles; the inner circle is joined to the outer circle with five equidistant radial lines to form five petals; one of the radial lines is oriented vertically downwards. An inner dot is placed at the center of the symbol. The petals may be shaded in orange or any other colour, or may be unshaded. (Inserted by notification no. S.O.593 (E) dated 22nd July, 1999.)

## ROADS

# Round and round we go



Auroville has its first roundabout at the Solar Kitchen crossing and it has been heavily criticised. It has been pointed out that it is too difficult for larger vehicles to navigate, the raised and cambered inner lane is dangerous for motorcycles in the wet, the signposting is inadequate, the angles are "all wrong", and the design makes it easy to avoid the roundabout altogether when turning right.

From a recent Auroville Radio interview we learned that the roundabout had not been designed for big vehicles like large buses, in order to deter them from using the Crown Road, and that the raised inner lane was intended to slow down vehicles that wanted to speed

straight ahead.

However, with construction activities along the Crown in full swing the idea of discouraging big vehicles doesn't appear to have been thought through. Concrete-mixing trucks and lorries loaded with sand, steel and bricks are using the roundabout and the Crown to go to the new Kalpana and Habitat housing sites, as well as to the new sites along the Vikas radial, and they will continue to do so for years to come.

It is also unlikely that those used to driving fast or cutting corners will be deterred by this particular design, while the cambered inner lane will be a challenge for everyone on two wheels to negotiate during the monsoon.

In fact, on the first wet day in

May an Aurovillian skidded over on this inner lane. The next day the community received a mass bulletin warning them that the inner lane was "dangerously slippery" and advising road users to avoid it. Subsequently, the Working Committee announced that the inner lane of the roundabout would be closed while modifications are to be made to increase safety.

The essential problem is that roundabouts require a radical change in driving behaviour but there is no adequate provision for ensuring that that will happen. 'Give Way' signs and direction arrows alone cannot transform local driving habits which, depending upon your point of view, are either refreshingly intuitive or downright hair-raising.

Alan

## Roundabouts and yoga

On a lighter note ...

It is not generally understood that the roundabout is actually a powerful tool in the yoga, and that this is just the latest example of the Auroville Road Service's quiet work to hasten the spiritual transformation of Auroville's inhabitants.

One Aurovillian has taken up the onerous task of writing a user's manual for roundabouts. Here is an extract from chapter 215 where he elucidates the link between roundabouts and yoga.

Roundabouts can help develop two important yogic disciplines: learning to resist immediate gratification and taking into account the needs of others.

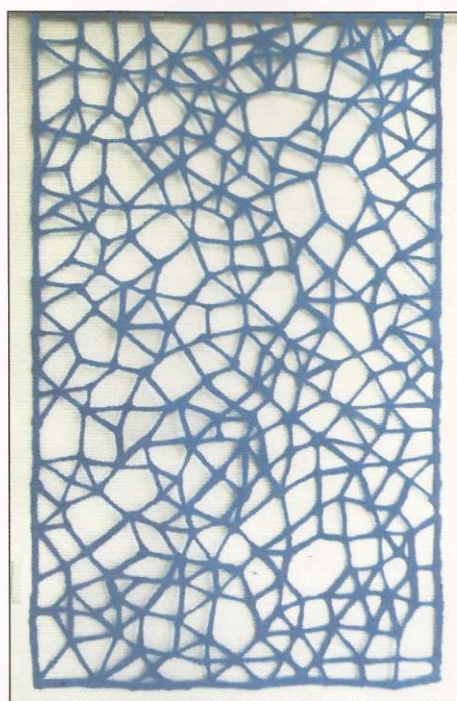
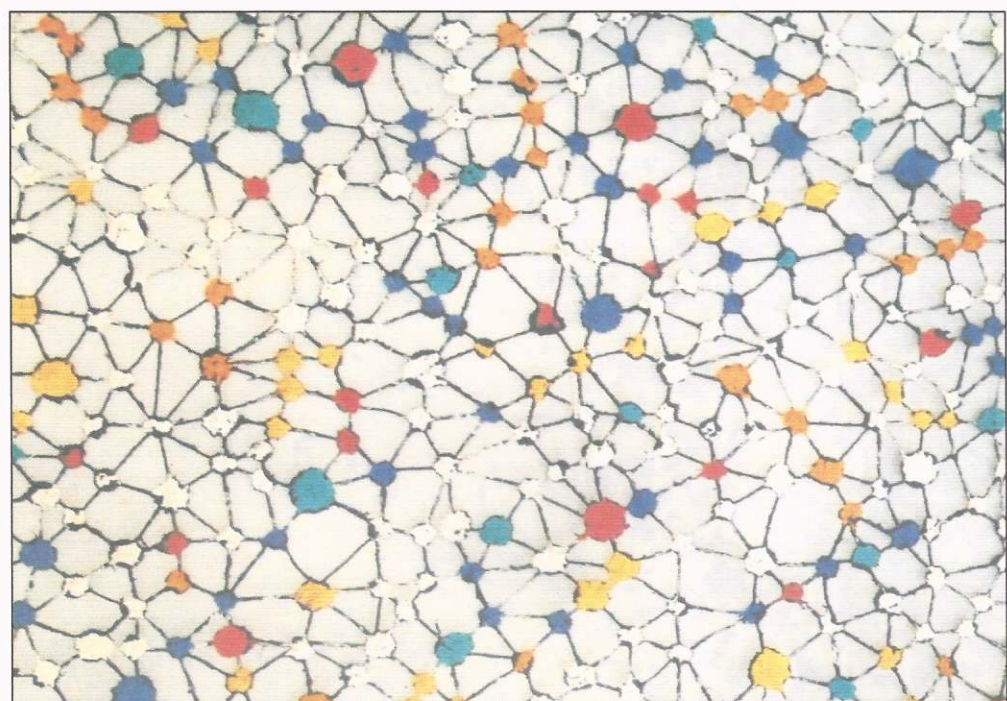
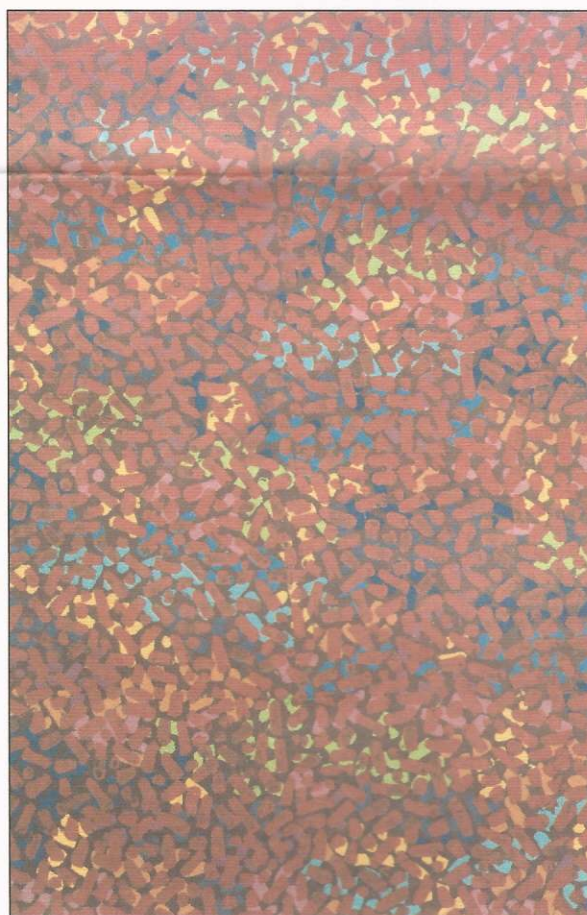
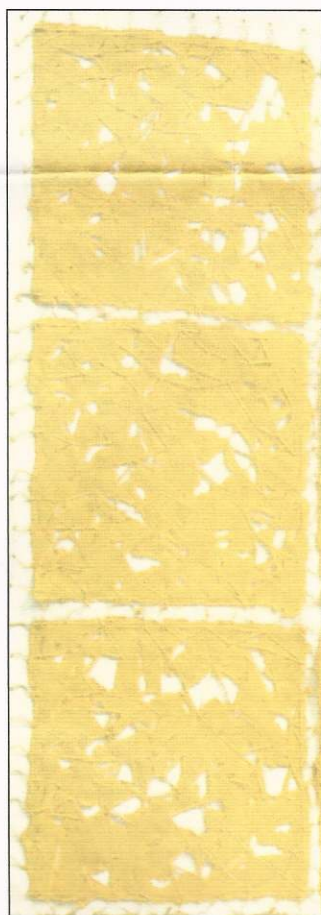
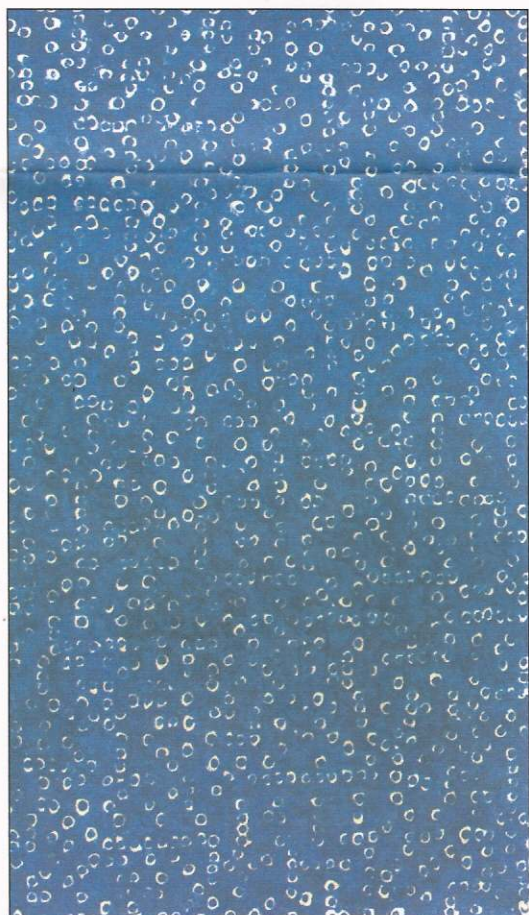
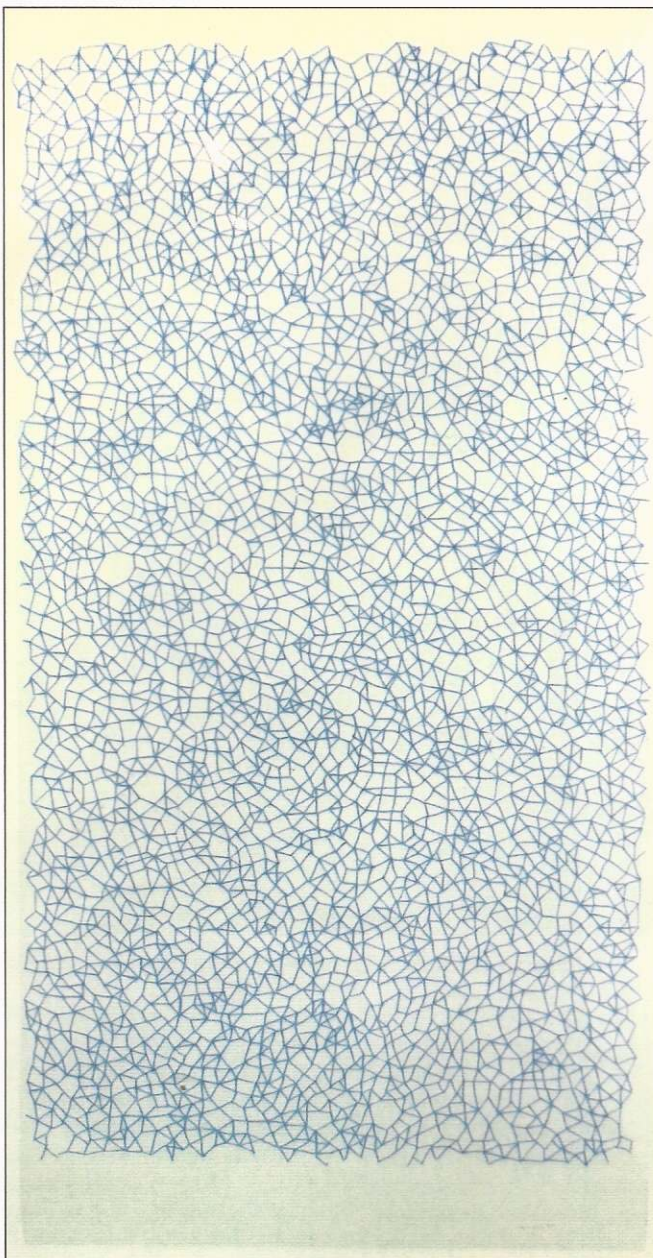
1) Resisting immediate gratification. The average Indian road user is engineered to seek the quickest path to his/her destination. This often involves cutting corners, flattening pedestrians, going the wrong way up one-way streets etc. Roundabouts in India, if properly used, require a different approach. If, say, one approaches a roundabout and wants to turn right, one is required to begin by veering left before completing a clockwise route to one's destination. At first, of course, this is a horrifying experience, seemingly in absolute contradiction to the established laws of nature. But if one perseveres – and isn't yoga all about perseverance? – one can begin to enjoy the circulatory path to one's destination and use the extra time taken to meditate upon eternity and one's place in the universe.

2) Taking into account the needs of

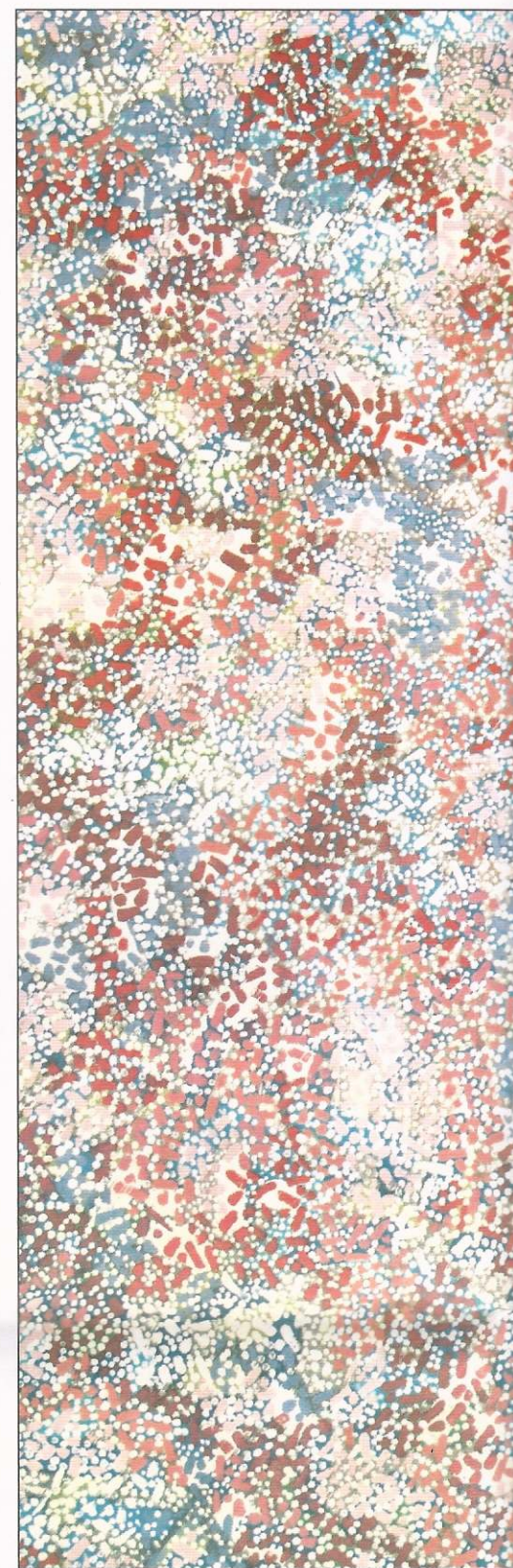
others. This consciousness is even harder to acquire for the average road-user used to bullying their way along the road and forcing others to eat their dust. But, here again, the roundabout emerges as a useful yogic tool. For drivers approaching a roundabout encounter a novel sign: 'Give way'. What on earth could this mean? Well, hard as it is to believe, it is telling you to stop and wait for other drivers who are already circling the roundabout before entering the roundabout oneself. Of course, it doesn't make sense at first. But as you make progress with roundabout siddhi number one (resisting immediate gratification) you will understand that allowing others right of way is a useful way of reining in your pesky vital while expanding your consciousness to encompass the needs of all beings. Moreover, observing others yogically circulating that mound in the road can be a powerful way of releasing the cares of the day and returning you to your essential Self (but don't wait too long: there may be a queue behind you). **Warning.** Don't try this at home: these skills are not easy to acquire. However, the Road Service has a list of accredited Roundabout Instruction Officers (RIOs) who will be running introductory courses (guests Rs 12,000, Aurovilians Rs 500) over the next few weeks. Within two months, everybody using the new roundabout will be required to have a Roundabout Proficiency Certificate (RPC), in addition to an Aadhaar card.

Alan





## The path of P



**Y**ou discover some interesting things when you join the Auroville adventure. For example: “*You want terrestrial results? Well, become conscious of your cells. Very small things, movements of consciousness in Matter, truly astounding. Only if you observe in a most tenuous way do you notice them.*” (The Mother in *Mother's Agenda*, 20 November 1963).

It was only after a drastic experience at this “tenuous level” that I felt the need to explore it through Art. The miracle has happened. And it is the only thing that concerns us most intimately and the only thing we should be concerned with. (*Mother's Agenda*, 20 October 1957)

How to arrive there? The first experience happened quite ‘by chance’ without any clue, discovering the action going on all the time. Everywhere. Like a minuscule, infinitesimal, twinkling infiltration. It is the miracle of the earth. (*Mother's Agenda*, 25 March 1964)

That is how it started. I have followed an ‘alertness’ to these moments for the last thirty years: watching, listening, taking notes of the micro-changes of mood, atmosphere, ease or contraction. A little like making a weather report of what is going on all the time.

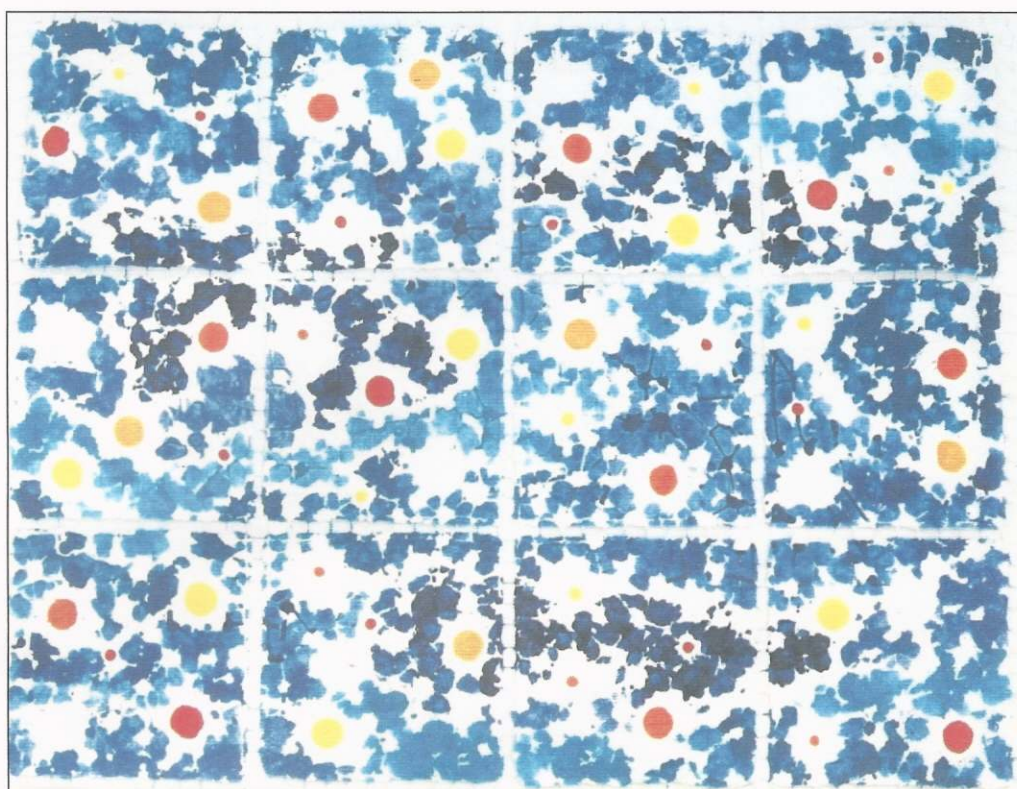
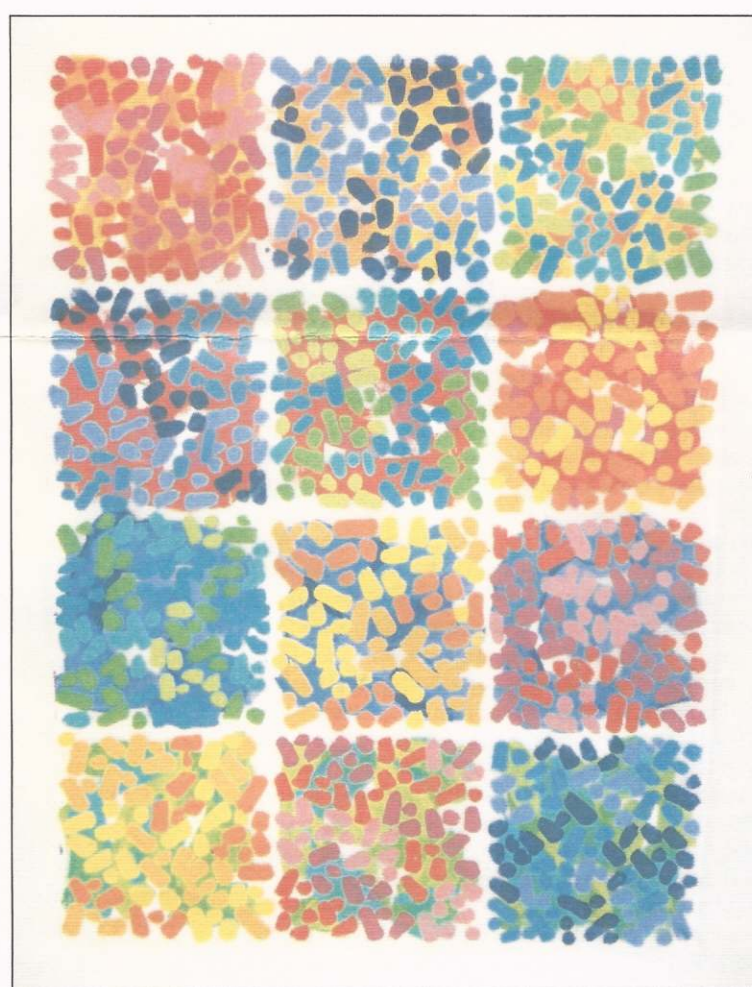
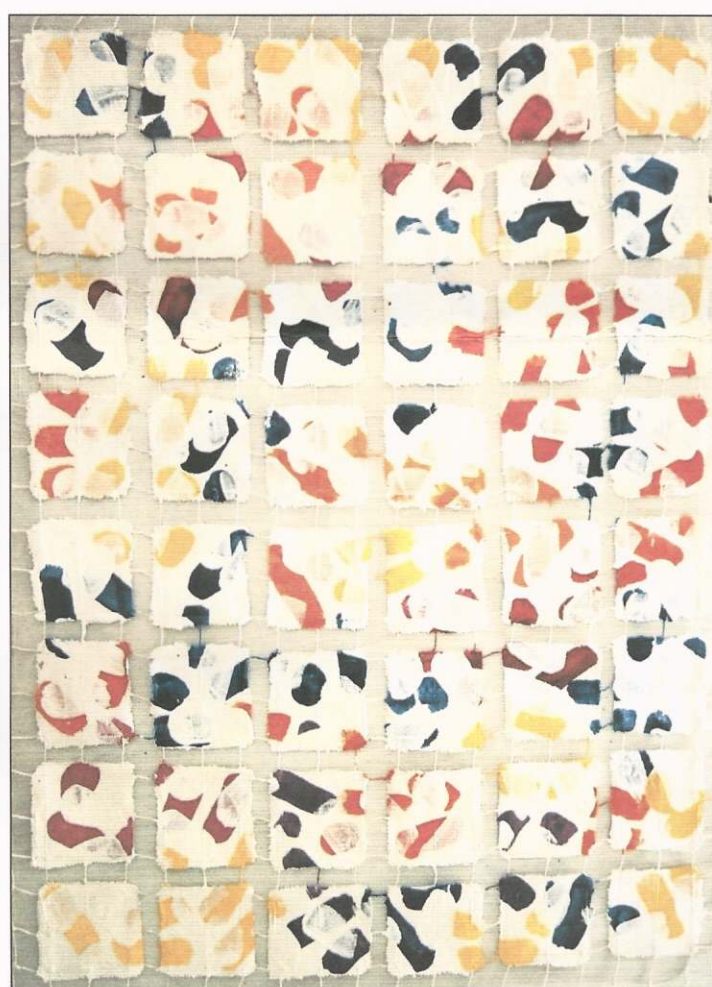
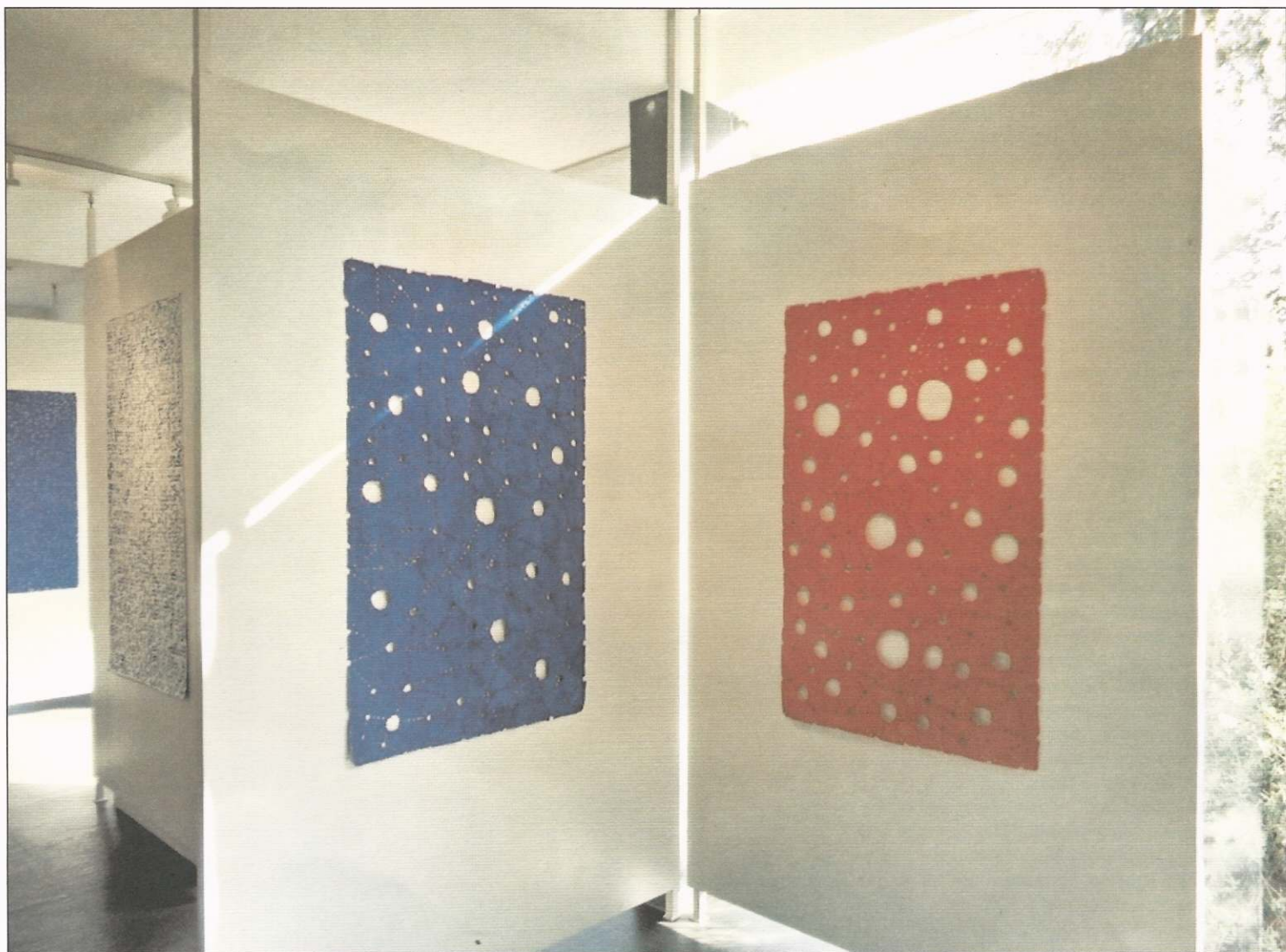
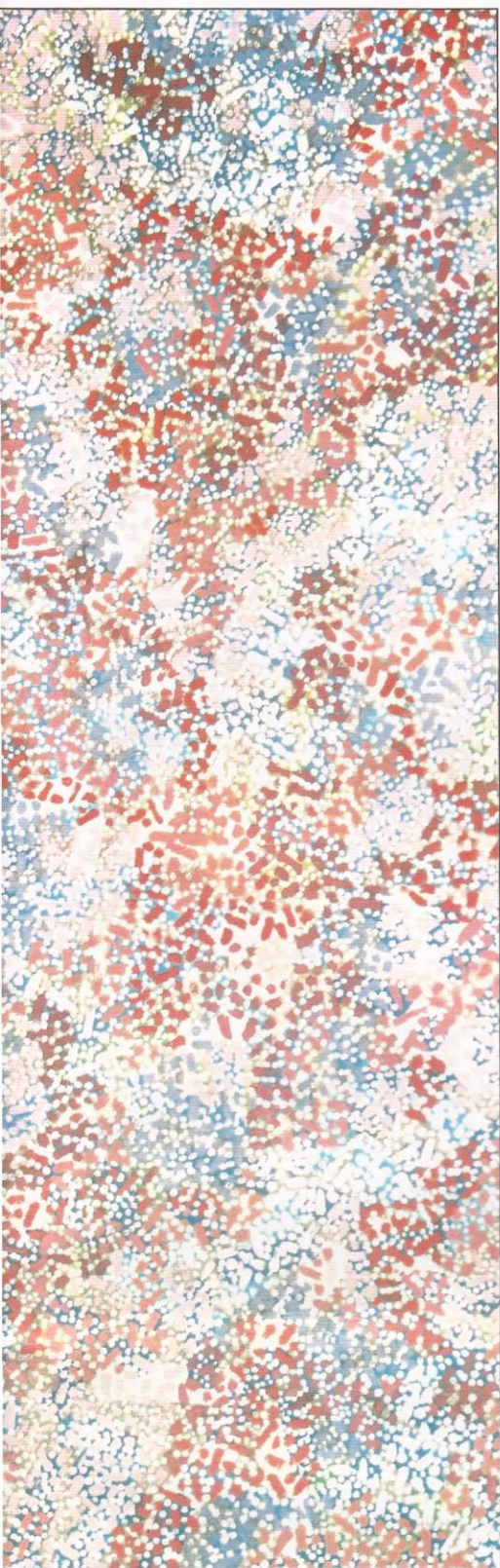
But how to express this? New forms are needed to express a new consciousness in Auroville, it is said. What are these new forms?

For some reason I have been drawn to a very specific path among the infinite possibilities offered by contemporary art. I focused on the concept of ‘field painting’ - which has no composition, no up, no down, sometimes even no recto or verso! It allowed pure vibratory fields and seemed to me the most appropriate way to ‘catch’ these experiences.

And then, one day, looking at the leaves of a tree, watching their different shapes, different shades of green, super-positions, dark and light areas, densities of foliage, all undulating gently in the breeze, I saw endless new patterns. And there



# Pierre Legrand



was a correspondence between what I was seeing and an inner experience a few days before. These correspondences occurred again, watching ripples of the sea in the sunrise, hearing the cry of birds, in the play of the clouds, children playing at lunchtime, people speaking together at the Town Hall, or in the Pondy traffic: One thing, one Unity, expressing itself multitudinously all the time.

What is abstract? What is figurative? Nature is nothing but a huge repository of images, shapes, colors, patterns, movements, rhythms ready to be harnessed for this impossible task of expressing the invisible.

Of course, just copying them or painting them like an impressionist translation won't do anymore. The experience is the conjunction of many things: leaves, sun, wind, sound, colour, textures, but above all, the inner contact that goes through them all, its merging porosity and joy. It is only after subjecting the 'support' to a number of operations that a satisfactory result emerges. My workshop sometimes feels like a place of alchemy.

But Auroville is a place of alchemy, where you feel your body dilate with a quiet and infinite joy that undoes your doubts and difficulties. Perhaps, one day, these experiences will undo the catastrophe of the world. A new city for a new society will hopefully express a new kind of Art. Something that will carry the contagion of truth and beauty wherever we go.

The adventure goes on, each work calls for the next one, so different periods occur: full colours, monochromes, small formats, big ones, perforations, installations. In recent years, there is a movement towards simplicity, minimalism, silence.

How far can minimalism go? How to express the most with the least?

Just waiting for the call of a certain flute ...

**Pierre Legrand**

For more info visit [www.pierrelegrand.in](http://www.pierrelegrand.in) or read the book 'Light Matter: Atelier Pierre Legrand' available from [amazon.in](http://amazon.in)



# The healing paintings of Marie-Claire Barsotti

The subtle abstract art makes me stop in my tracks, and I stand still, quietly observing and letting the glow wash over me. There are blue and yellow hues, intermingled with crimson red and violet. I sense a warm feeling, like cosy velvet, and I observe a quiet ripple of peace and beauty. Time stands still, I feel perfectly in the moment.

A visitor on seeing Marie-Claire Barsotti's paintings at Pitanga

Her is not a well-known name in Auroville artists' circles. "I've always been a part-timer," explains Marie-Claire. "I always felt that my creativity should be at the service of units that bring money to Auroville. For some years, I was involved with design. Then I did holoeenergetic healing [a healing method developed by Dr. Laskow, eds.], gave holistic astrology consultations, and did teachers' trainings. My feeling echoed that of the community that doing art was not serving the community, but only a self-centred occupation; and that being a full-time artist was egocentric."

That feeling changed recently. "Last year, when I came back from a holiday, I decided to do more community service by taking part in a working group. But it didn't make me happy. I worked hard, but felt discharged and, soon, exhausted. I got sick, and had to go for treatment. I realised that this was not my work."

"But then, what? I attended a Monica Sharma workshop. The question was asked, 'What is it that you like doing most, what brings you joy?' Suddenly, I had tears in my eyes, realising that my answer was 'art', and that I hadn't allowed myself to do art because I wanted to be a goodie-goodie Aurovilian. The workshop changed something: I became aware of my true calling, that my 'swadharma' is art, and that art is my way to nourish and connect to the Divine. I continue teaching and giving astrological and healing consultations, but my focus has now shifted. Art is predominant. I've built up the self-confidence that allows me to dedicate myself fully to art, and that through art I also can be of service to Auroville."

It led to her first solo exhibition in Pitanga, where her sculptures and paintings were well-received. "Pitanga is kind of a 'safe space', a space for your Auroville family," she says laughing. The next plans? "Now that I have allowed myself to be an artist, I have started working for my next exhibition, which will take place in Auvers sur Oise, France, the small city where Van Gogh was painting his sunflowers. This will be followed by an exhibition in Paris, and then I'll see again."

Asked about the source of her inspiration, she says that it is changing. "Earlier, it was more a mental construct. Now, it is no longer a mental decision. I often start in a kind of trance, in an aspiration to let the Divine in, to open to what wants to manifest. Sometimes I concentrate for hours in front of a blank or unfinished canvas, not knowing what is going to be next. That process of active meditation brings deep joy. Then I let go. I look at the colours and see which one is calling me. I welcome what is coming – it's more welcoming than choosing. Then, reciting mantras inwardly, and sometimes outwardly, I start working. It is very much done as an offering and a process of self-transformation."

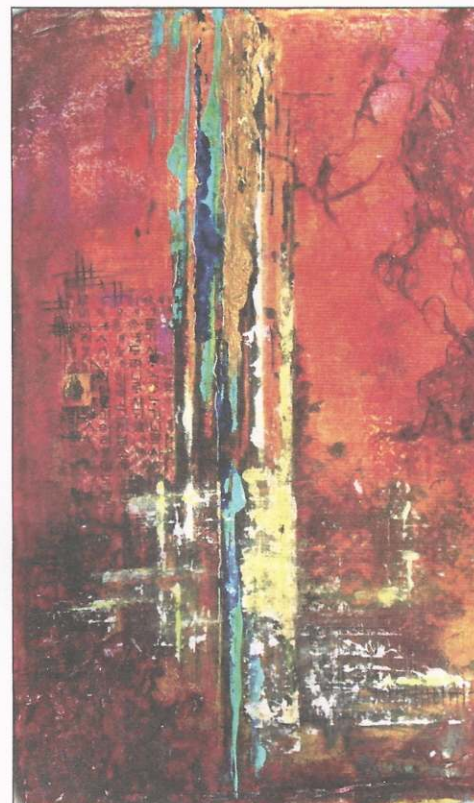
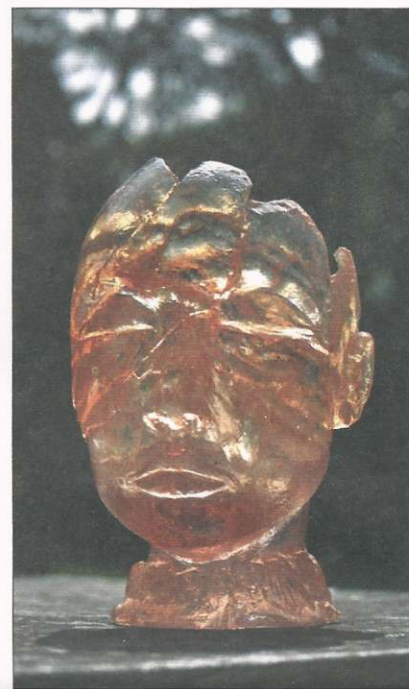
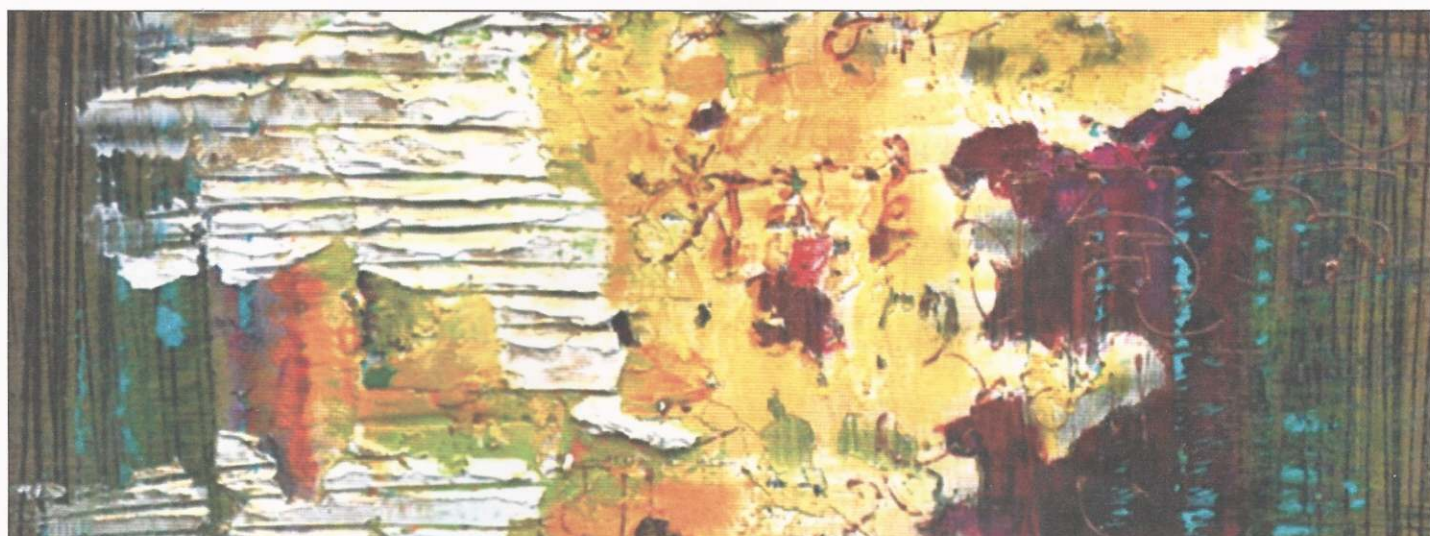
The public, she says, feels the atmosphere of the paintings. But she was surprised to hear the opinion of a visiting shaman. "She kept going from one painting to the other and back, making 'oh, wow' noises. Then she explained to me what she saw: that my paintings are 'healing paintings.' 'This one,' she said, 'is connecting the heart and the brain; that one is opening the heart, and that one is acting on the solar plexus.' But there was nothing like that in my mind when I created them – I just tried to let the inspiration come through." But did she 'feel' in her paintings the energies which the shaman felt? "I have been working with healing energies, so the concept isn't strange for me. But I lacked the self-confidence to 'feel' them in my own paintings, and I didn't want to make ego-statements. But if someone else is telling you, then that is a pleasant confirmation."

One of the exhibition's most impressive paintings, which was almost immediately sold, is a red-dominated abstract with gold at its centre. "That one took almost a year." Will she make another similar one? "That's a challenge," she says. "Up to now I was working for myself, experimenting, not working for an exhibition. But now that I have started preparing for an exhibition, it is tempting to repeat what I know will sell. I need money for my living, which is a good financial reason. But if I did that, I would trap myself, I would no longer be open to the inspiration. Every artist must have the courage to break the inner moulds, to get out of his or her comfort zone, shatter his or her fixed conceptions so that 'the new' can come in. Otherwise one's work grows stale. That's the courage we need. That's the yoga."

Soon, those who visit the Progress Landscape's new office in the Old Last School compound will see Marie Claire's first work of public art. It consists of two large black granite pillars, like totem poles, inlaid with streaks of gold leaf. "It came to me that these strong granite totems, with their golden lines, will also emit a healing energy!" she says.

Carel

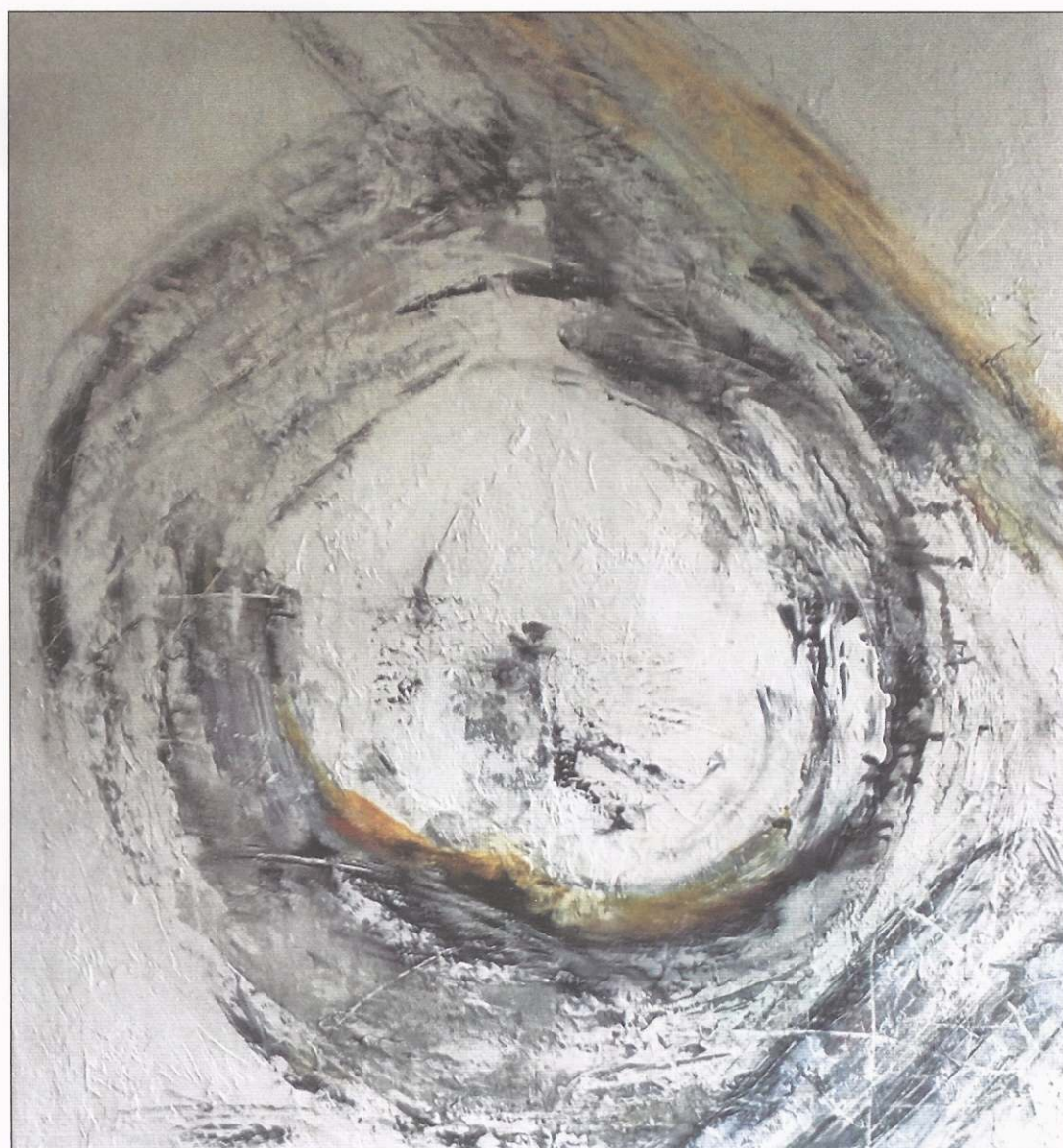
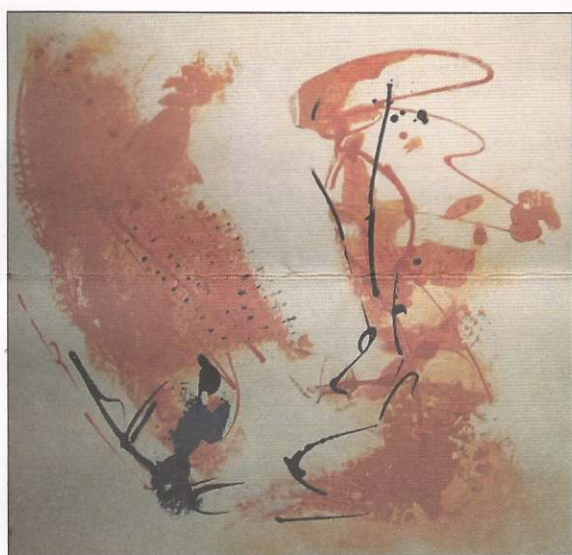
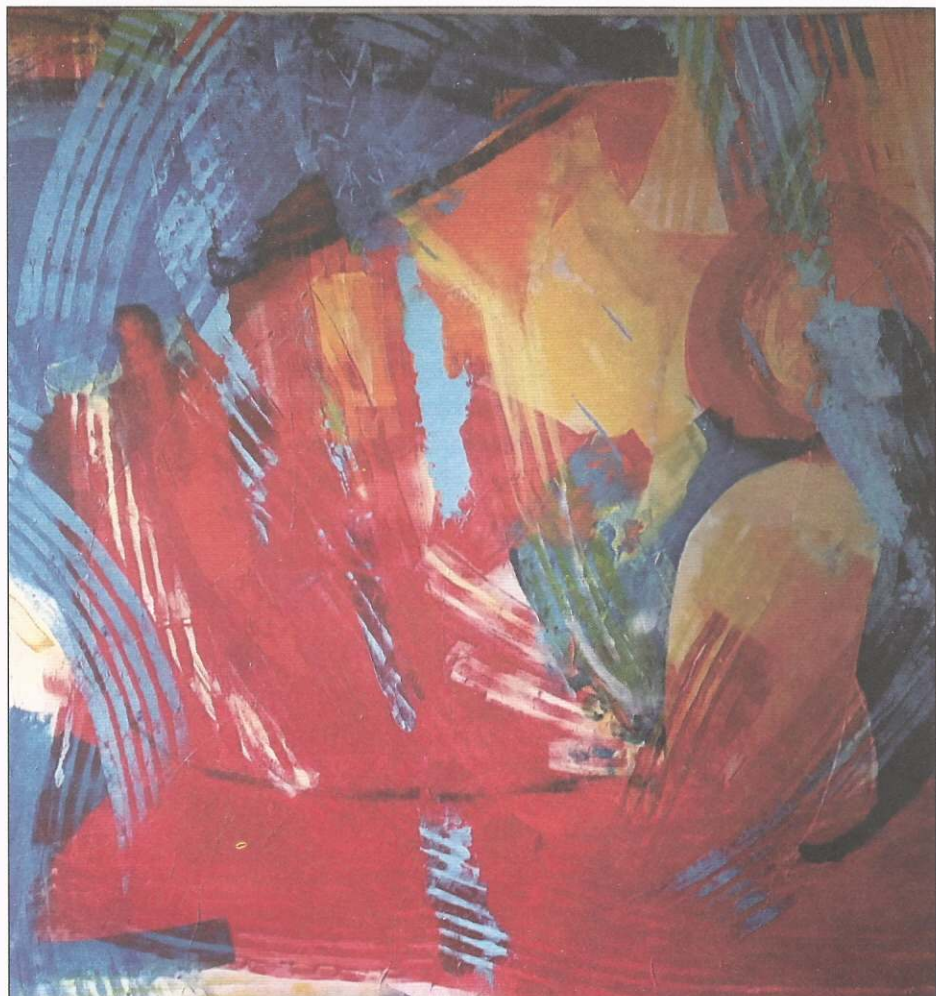
For more information visit  
<http://www.marieclairebarsotti.com/>





# The abstract expressionism of Nele Martens

*Light, balance and transparency are the guiding principles.*



“My last works were on the theme of circles,” says Nele, showing paintings dominated by strong expressive brushstrokes. She explains how she starts with a concept, a theme, and over a long period, sometimes extending to a year, does innumerable drawings and paintings on that theme, over and over again. “The repetition helps find a balance between mind, technique and intuition. In the end, the brushstroke is one concentrated but effortless and fluid movement. It has to be right like that; it cannot be corrected.”

She reflects. “One could say that there is a lot of chaos in the beginning, and that out of that chaos I attempt to produce some order.” She clarifies that her art is not a mental construct but “an interwoven action of the ordered mind and intuitive force, leading to the right colours and stroke and size. Everything then gets its own expressive meaning.” It is a question of allowing something to flow through and make the particular choice and movement, she says.

“You feel and know when a painting is perfect. Those are the moments of true happiness. You can’t recreate it. These are the moments when everything is in its right place, when you feel you have touched a glimpse of truth. Invariably, these paintings will be the first to sell. The public picks up what is behind.”

Nele calls her art ‘abstract expressionism’. “But it’s never the same. I often dream that I go some place and touch something and it transforms itself in a transparent, permeable matter, perfect light and perfect order – everything in its right place, changing always, but keeping the equilibrium. That’s the guiding energy behind my work.”

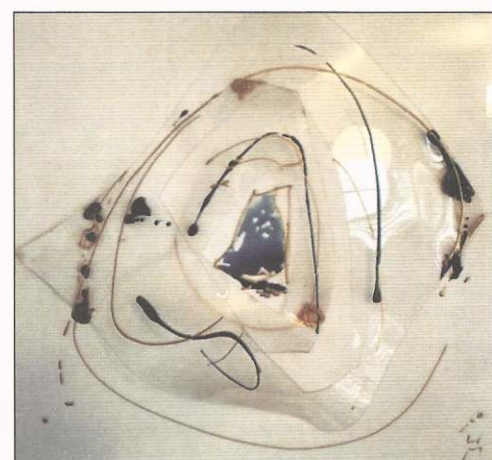
As if to underline her words, a golden mobile dances in the morning sun, catching and reflecting light throughout her garden. Nele had made it for her mother Rika, who passed away before it was finished. “Light and balance,” she says, “are two of my core tenets.” The third is transparency. Nele has been painting a lot on Plexiglas, which she bends to enhance its light filtering aspects.

At present she experiments with digital art. “The iPad is a wonderful tool. I paint in it, then print the painting in large scale, and then use real paints on the print.” Is it satisfying? She laughs. “It’s a lot of fun, but I’m not yet there. The iPad allows you to paint with light, but once the painting is printed, the transparency is no longer there and opaqueness takes over. I am trying to resolve this by painting the print with acrylic paints or oils. Something very different is emerging out of this, but I am still a beginner here.” Projecting the painting on a wall is another possibility she is working on. “There is an exhibition planned at the Citadines Art Gallery in Auroville. It has a space where such projections would be very much possible,” she says.

Asked about the connection between art and Auroville, Nele replies, “Auroville, for me, is a space to grow. I am in Auroville not because I am an artist, but because I am Nele. I came here out of an inner call and I do art as that is my way of expression. I have the urge to create harmony and beauty and light around me. Spirituality is a difficult word for me – I am on an exploration of connectedness and on a search for something true. And I do that through art which is an expression of an inner offering and aspiration.”

*In conversation with Carel*

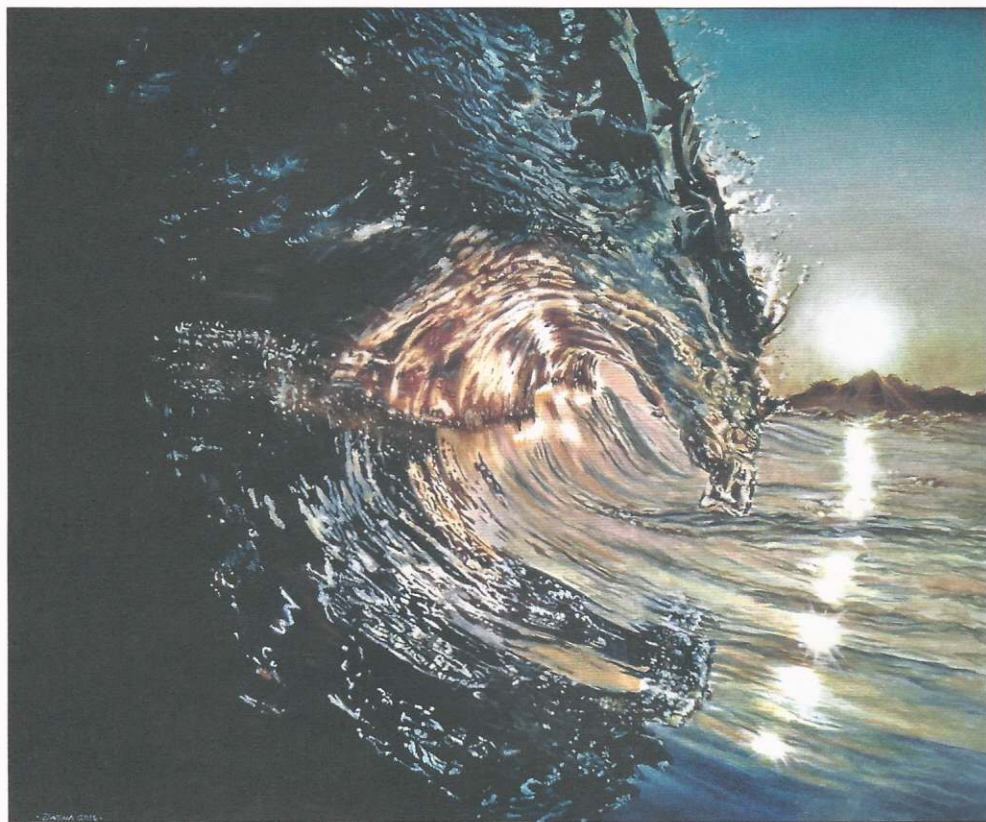
For more information visit  
[www.nelemartens.net](http://www.nelemartens.net)





## Beyond Realism

Dasha came to Auroville when she was just one year old, and has been living here ever since. She is a self-taught artist who paints as a hobby and because she loves it.



Whether it's at home or at work, the people who meet Dasha regularly often see her drawing. For many years, Dasha has been surprising her friends at birthdays with amazing portraits of them that she has either sketched in pencil or, more recently, done in charcoal. "My friends sometimes give me a photo that they really would like me to draw, but mostly I choose one that I would enjoy sketching from their selection on Facebook. This way it's also a surprise for them," she says. "She captures an element of life and of the person that goes far beyond what can be done with a camera," says one of her friends. Her artwork albums on Facebook and Instagram (two social media sites) are gaining rapid popularity, and now she has gained a dedicated fanclub. "I started casually drawing when I was 10. It became more regular when I was still living in Kailash, maybe 8 years ago. I was in Future School, and I remember that Miro (art teacher) explained to me how to do shading. So I learned that there are some tricks one can use. Luckily, I've improved a lot since then. Now my drawings are more realistic," she says. The progress she has made has caught the attention of many, even of some of her friends in Europe who are also eager to get a custom drawing. Besides portraits, she also creates custom artwork on surfboards made by Auroville-based Indi Surfboards.



Dasha

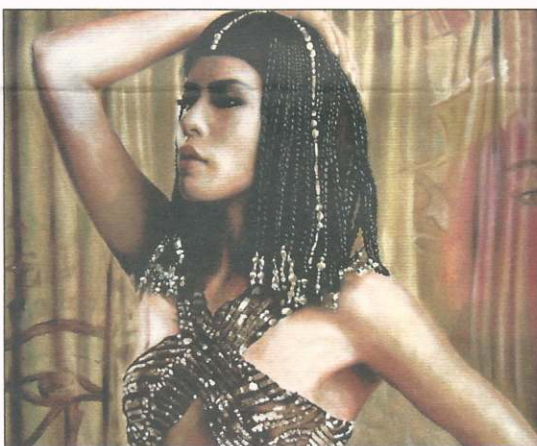
Although Dasha started off by drawing, the world of paint always seemed like the logical next step. She says: "Initially, I was inspired by my aunt Shakti, and she helped me a lot. She explained some techniques, and also gave me the motivation to continue." But, besides that initial impetus, Dasha is completely self-taught. She spends countless hours watching YouTube videos and tutorials, and closely follows the work of some of her favourite artists. "I love seeing how creative some people are, and their work really inspires me to do better."

Recently, her paintings reached a new dimension. Her two recent time-lapse videos that she put up on Facebook have received scores of comments that highlight how fascinating it is to watch her paint. "As soon as I began experimenting with oil painting on large canvases I was hooked," she smiles. "When I paint I'm in another world, I forget about everything else, and only focus on the moment. My main interest is drawing or painting people, faces, and especially portraits. And I always use a reference photo. So my style is close to realism, close to what it actually looks like."

Her references come from a folder on her computer in which she collects things she likes. "I don't have the intention to paint them all, but once in a while I go through the images I save and see if something speaks to me. Then I paint it." Her most recent painting portrays a black and white dancing ballerina. Its simplicity yet depth makes it extremely captivating. Although she says that art is in the family – her mother also painted while she was in Auroville – she doesn't know yet what the future will bring. "Right now I'm just painting. Once I have enough of them to hang in an exhibition then I'll do that. And down the line, maybe I'll get to exhibit them in an art gallery to make some pocket money."

Inge van Alphen

For more information visit <http://goo.gl/EQwSNG>



Clockwise: The wave; charcoal drawing of Tina; oil painting of Cleopatra; The Ballerina

## Sri Aurobindo and J.S. Bach – a personal experience

More than half a century ago, I left Egypt, at the age of twenty-one, to pursue graduate studies in Germany. The memory of how Europe impacted me I have included in an autobiographical short story titled "Preparing for the Winter Journey." I am using a small part of these memoirs as a backdrop for the following experience:

Soon after my arrival in Germany, while leisurely turning the dial of my radio, I discovered Western classical music. Immediately, a whole new world opened for me. Music soon became the haven in which I took shelter at the end of days filled with technical and mental work. As a student, I had the good fortune of renting a room in an apartment owned by a lady of some culture, who encouraged me to buy a piano and allowed me to practice on it in her living room. She introduced me to a pianist of some renown who agreed to teach me from scratch. He did not believe in the efficacy of finger exercises, and started me immediately on the C-major Two-part Invention of Bach. This short invention, my first piece ever, I practiced for hours every day over seven months without ever tiring of it. It was the beginning of an "addiction" to Bach whose music had triggered the first psychic opening in me.

At about the same time, I came across the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (the story of how these writings have impacted me I have published under the title "The Encounter.") I was extremely mentally lopsided in those days and, for a long time, I had to inch my way patiently and laboriously into the world of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother until they ultimately became the centre and the circumference of my life. Amazingly, my entry into the world of music happened almost instantly, though I cannot claim any inborn musical talent.

Since these early days, half a century ago to this day, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been my "staff of life," while Bach has remained my main emotional-vital support. Strangely, during all this time, I took this happy arrangement for granted and was not aware of any special link between these great masters fill-

ing my life. Recently, one such link dawned on me through a remark made by the French philosopher G. Deleuze in a talk he gave in 1978 titled "What is the Creative Act?" Here is an excerpt from this talk:

"...there is a fundamental affinity between a work of art and an act of resistance... What is this mysterious relationship between a work of art and an act of resistance when the men and women who resist have neither the time nor sometimes even the culture necessary to have the slightest connection with art? I do not know. Malraux developed an admirable philosophical concept. He said something very simple about art. He said it was the only thing that resists death. Think about it... what resists death? You only have to look at a statuette from three thousand years before the Common Era to see that Malraux's statement is a pretty good one. Bach's music is an act of resistance, an active struggle against the separation of the profane and the sacred..."

For Deleuze, Art plays the same role yoga plays for Sri Aurobindo. Both art and yoga resist the paralysis of the soul under the weight of unconsciousness. Deleuze's call ties well with the one Sri Aurobindo sounded sixty years earlier: "... the soul, the inner being, its powers, its possibilities, its growth, its expression and the creation of a true, beautiful and helpful environment for it (is) the one thing of first and last importance."

The unification of the Sacred and the Profane is the cornerstone of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother who always maintained that "All Life is Yoga" and who dedicated their lives towards establishing the Life Divine on earth. In this context, one is also reminded of the many instances in which the Mother emphasized the deep affinity between art and yoga: "Art is nothing less in its fundamental truth than the aspect of beauty of the Divine manifestation. Perhaps, looking from this standpoint, there will be found very few true artists; but still there are some and these can very well be considered as Yogis. For like a Yogi an artist goes into deep contemplation to await and receive his inspiration. To create something truly beautiful, he has first to see it within, to

realise it as a whole in his inner consciousness; only when so found, seen, held within, can he execute it outwardly; he creates according to this greater inner vision. This too is a kind of yogic discipline, for by it he enters into intimate communion with the inner worlds. A man like Leonardo da Vinci was a Yogi and nothing else. And he was, if not the greatest, at least one of the greatest painters – although his art did not stop at painting alone. Music too is an essentially spiritual art and has always been."

While listening to Bach's cantatas and passions, I often wondered how, in scenes describing Christ's sufferings, his music can be so full of an infinitely tender sorrow and, at the same time, of a sublimely divine joy. In fact, some of his movements are so joyous as to qualify as an invitation to dance (for instance, the 'cum spiritu sancto' of the B-minor mass). Instead of lamenting, Bach celebrates Christ's consummation of his mission in much the same way as Sri Aurobindo does in the following lines from His epic Savitri:

"It is finished, the dread mysterious sacrifice,  
Offered by God's martyred body for the world; ....  
He has trod with bleeding brow the Saviour's way.  
He who has found his identity with God  
Pays with the body's death his soul's vast light".

In her last years, the Mother spoke increasingly of vibrations tying the whole universe together. One can only marvel at how a common divine vibration acted across space and time and moved the Avatars of the Supermind Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and "the immortal god of harmony," Bach, to elevate life and resist death with such irresistible power and mastery, thus helping humanity on its way to the Life Divine.

Zackaria Moursi

Zackaria Moursi has visited Auroville several times since 1997 and was a Newcomer in 2002-2003. He finally settled in the USA where he is now one of the members of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, a community dedicated to the practice of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga in Lodi, California.



# A pyrrhic victory?

Bindu gives her opinion on the recent ruling against the Puducherry Government by the National Green Tribunal (Chennai branch) on the Karuvadikuppam dump site.



The Karuvadikuppam dump site in 2011

Aurovilians were no doubt thrilled by the fact that after four years of legal wrangling, the case against Puducherry Government for mismanagement of waste at Karuvadikuppam, the dump site close to Auroville, was brought to a close with an injunction from the court that stated the following: a) existing inorganic waste, namely "plastic and other inert materials like glass and ceramics" be removed; and b) "all necessary steps for afforesting the site with suitable tree species [be undertaken] so that the site is totally reclaimed" (Court Order of April 5 by Hon'ble Shri Justice Dr. P. Jyothimani, Judicial Member). But a closer look at what we asked and hoped for and what we got belies our sense of victory.

To begin at the proverbial beginning, it was almost a decade ago that Aurovilians started to petition the Puducherry Government for better waste management of its municipal solid waste that it was dumping at Karuvadikuppam. In the seventies and eighties, people were not particularly bothered by the Karuvadikuppam dumpsite because the waste being dumped was almost totally organic. Plastic, especially the ubiquitous plastic bags that are choking India's landscape now, were almost non-existent. With the globalization of the Indian economy in the nineties and subsequent increase of consumption of fast moving consumer goods, over 300-400 tons of unsegregated municipal solid waste started to be dumped at Karuvadikuppam, with 10% of it being plastic waste.

When waste is unsegregated, the organic matter decomposes and produces the highly inflammable gas methane, which autocombusts and sets the plastic component of the waste aflame, producing toxic fumes. Open air burning of plastic creates some of the most deadly toxins known to science – dioxins, furans and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) – that are released into the air, soil, and water and ingested by all.

In the summer months, with the change in the direction of the wind, Auroville and the surrounding villages used to get smothered by dark, acrid smoke

emanating from the dumpsite. In 2007, the villagers filed a case in the Chennai High Court against the Puducherry Government for mismanagement of waste. That case was eventually thrown out by the court. But subsequently, in 2012, on the basis of a petition signed by over 3,000 villagers and Aurovilians, concerned citizens (including Indian Aurovilians) filed a more strongly-worded case on the same issue with the National Green Tribunal of India. In the four years that the case dragged on, with statements and counter-statements, affidavits and counter-affidavits, rejoinders back and forth between the petitioners and the defendants, Aurovilians supplied evidence to the court that the dumpsite soil was contaminated with a high level of mercury and requested that bio-remediation of the soil be undertaken and the use of Karuvadikuppam be stopped once and for all.

Neither of these requests has been sanctioned in the closing order of the case. Bio-remediation of soil is still a discipline in its infancy, but already in India, there are documented cases of successful bioremediation of soils contaminated with heavy metals. In Kerala, volunteers associated with Mata Amritanandamayi's Ashram successfully remediated a historic landfill over a span of few years to the extent that now the land (which once had high concentrations of heavy metals including lead, arsenic, and mercury) can be safely used to grow food crops. In a planned process, the volunteers used specific plants such as vetiver grass (*Chrysopogon zizanioides*) to induce phytoremediation of the soil and two species of earthworms (*Eisenia fetida* and *Eudrilus eugeniae*) that had a proven ability to transform contaminated soil. By merely ordering Puducherry Government to remove inert waste and plant trees in a span of just eight weeks, the court has absolved them from the duty of restoring public land to a state of health.

From the wider perspective of a citizen concerned with social and environmental justice in India, this court case, as with so many court cases filed in the interests of the public, is emblematic of the problems that arise when, due to poor govern-

nance, the judiciary takes over the role of both the executive and the legislative arms of the government. It was only in 1979 that the Supreme Court allowed for Public-Interest Litigation (PILs) to be filed by a third-party for the protection of the public interest. Prior to this landmark ruling, only aggrieved parties had the right to approach the courts for justice. The Supreme Court cited "executive inaction" as the reason for introducing PILs, stating that the laws enacted by Parliament and the state legislatures for the poor since Independence have not been properly implemented. With pleas to the government for appropriate action often falling on deaf ears, the common man quickly seized public interest litigation as a principal legal remedy.

Since the eighties, court ledgers have been overflowing with PILs clamouring for social justice and, increasingly, environmental justice. Indeed, there were so many environmental cases filed in the court that in 2010 the Supreme Court instituted the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to expedite the resolution of these cases. The problem with the judiciary taking over executive roles is that, as exemplified above with respect to bio-remediation, the court often lacks the expertise required to execute an action properly. And as the court is the last resort for justice, there are no further avenues to pursue in the case of an inadequate ruling. Interestingly, however, it was a PIL filed in the Supreme Court against the Union of India filed by Almitra Patel in 1996 and settled four years later that led to the adoption of India's first waste laws, colloquially known as MSW Rules 2000. The Puducherry Government was and is still guilty of violating this law by not segregating organic and inorganic waste.

In other words, after all these years of litigation, we have gained nothing. The problem has merely been shifted from Auroville's backyard, Karuvadikuppam, to Kurumbapet where unsegregated dumping of waste along with emanation of toxic fumes continues. Many environmental activists feel that Kurumbapet is in an even more eco-sensitive zone given its proximity to Usteri lake and the resultant ecological habitat. Not surprising-

ly there is a PIL against the Kurumbapet dumpsite that is still pending with the NGT.

Nor, as mentioned earlier, do we have complete assurance that Karuvadikuppam will no longer be used as a dumpsite. When the case was not yet resolved, there was a stay order by the NGT on dumping at Karuvadikuppam, which is, of course, now rendered invalid. But, in 2012, the Tamil Nadu government prevented Puducherry dump trucks from passing over Tamil Nadu territory to access Karuvadikuppam, thereby effectively stopping dumping at this site. However, this move by the Tamil Nadu government along with the proximity of Karuvadikuppam to the Pondicherry airport, gives us some hope that this site will never be re-utilized as a dumpsite. The present ruling will also act as a deterrent. But given the magnitude of India's developmental problems and the quicksilver nature of its politics, such hopes can also be dashed in the coming years. And I, for one, am not holding my breath that the dumpsite will be afforested in the coming years.

What, then, do I celebrate? Perhaps this: not the end of a long journey, but the journey itself! I truly enjoyed the process of working with a motley ad-hoc group of Aurovillian volunteers which had no formal status, structure or hierarchy, but in the four long years of litigation, every time something needed to be done, someone or other volunteered to do this job. Also, for me, this was one of the few times when Auroville successfully collaborated with concerned citizens in its neighbouring areas (both the surrounding villages and Pondicherry suburbs) on an important issue. Last but not least, we were grateful for the support of the larger Auroville community. Apart from larger donations by some, many Aurovilians gave us a small monthly contribution out of their monthly maintenance, and these funds helped us to pay for the expensive soil tests, lawyers' fees, consultations with environmental experts etc.

We still have some funds left in the account, which will be donated to waste-management initiatives in Auroville.



The Karuvadikuppam dump site in 2016

## Luise Hansen



A few weeks before her 100th birthday, Luise Hansen left her body on April 21st in Kobe, Japan. Luise, originally from Linz, Austria, had come to Pondicherry in the late sixties and had some personal *darshans* with The Mother. Being inspired by the vision of the Auroville Dream, she supported its manifestation from its very beginning through generous donations to many projects like the land, Matrimandir, Animal Care, Dental Care, schools, farms, Vérité, Mohanam, Svaram and others.

Luise had lived in Japan for more than 70 years, arriving there during the Second World War after being evacuated from Indonesia, where she had worked as a child nurse, and she experienced the war and reconstruction years in a nation shattered by the atomic bomb.

Having joined the first study group on Integral Yoga in Japan around M.G. Patel in Kobe, she visited India regularly and had friends in the Ashram and amongst early Aurovilians. Having successfully built up, with a Japanese partner, a large company supplying medical equipment to Japan, she distributed all the wealth to humanitarian causes and for her beloved animal friends, receiving a high national award for her pioneering work in animal rescue.

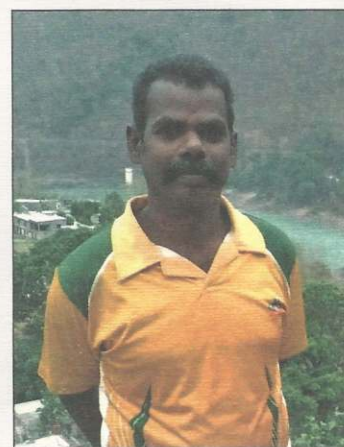
Luise was a shining example of keeping her physical discipline, having been active in sports, well into her nineties, and in spite of many falls and hip-and thigh breakages, she participated even in her late years in dance classes and preferred motorbike rides to bumpy taxis. Till her very last days she remained independent in her activities, keeping up with the daily news and happenings in the world and sustaining a vision of a new phase of human civilization and planetary future.

## Bomi Homawalla

Former Aurovillian Bomi Homawalla, passed away on May 23rd at the age of 86, in Baroda, Gujarat. Bomi, Perin and their son Michael lived in Promesse in the seventies (1970-76) and it was Bomi who started Service Farm (next to Aurobrindavan).

Bomi was known for his sharp wit and brilliant mind and played an important role in the struggle with Sri Aurobindo Society at the time. His deep knowledge of Zoroastrian cosmology combined with Sri Aurobindo's spiritual psychology was a unique combination that enamoured him to several western Aurovilians in the beginning of Auroville.

## N. Saravanan



N. Saravanan of Matrimandir Nursery passed away on May 28th at the age of 43 due to an accident. He was crushed under the 25 feet high chariot car of the Panchali Amman Koil temple at Thilaspeth. While the car was being dragged during the 'Theemedhi Vizha', the wheels of the chariot got stuck in a pit and the car collapsed on the road.

Saravanan, who originally came from Pondicherry, was one of the staunch Matrimandir workers even before joining Auroville in 1999. Recently he had started working for Gold in Glass, the Golden Tiles unit.

To enable Aurovilians to bid farewell, Saravanan's body was brought to Auroville's Farewell Centre and was afterwards cremated at the Shanmugapuram mandappam in Pondicherry.

## PASSINGS



# Aurovilians are winners in Indian championships

It's busy times for Auroville athletes in the swim and surf world! While the Indian Open of Surfing was going on in Mangalore with Aurovilian participants Perceval, Dylan and Samai, a lifesaving and swimming event was taking place in Mumbai which also included young Aurovilians.

For many weeks, a group of 12 young athletes from Auroville were intensively training in lifesaving and swimming skills. Those who frequented La Piscine swimming pool can testify to their endurance. The youngsters were preparing for an upcoming lifesaving competition held in Mumbai called 'Rescue INDIA 2016' National Pool, Beach & Ocean

Lifesaving Sports Championships, held from May 25th. During the four day event organized by Rashtriya Life Saving Society, lifesavers from all over the country came together to display their talents and meet other athletes. Some of the events they participated in included obstacle swimming, manikin carrying with fins, line throwing, beach running, beach sprint, 400 metre ocean swimming and an event called Beach flags.

The 7-member team that consisted of India, Manisa, Jasmine, Gregorio, Guglielmo, Zara, and Sita was well-prepared by their coach Tanja. She says: "This event has been happening for a decade and it is now the third time that Aurovilians participate."

"We first went to Mangalore, where we stayed at a farm called Varanashi for a swim camp. There, we were only allowed to eat healthy food, so no junk food and no ice cream. We trained about 8 hours a day and stayed in dorms with 30 others. Then, we flew to Mumbai. We stayed all 12 of us in a cramped room, woke up every day at 5 am and were back only at 8.30 pm," says Manisa, one of the Auroville swimmers.

The amount of training the team received prepared



Auroville swimmers paying attention to the instructions

them well. This became more and more evident as the medals they won kept increasing. Finally, the team of young athletes brought home a total of 38 medals – 23 Gold, 11 Silver, and 4 Bronze – distributed over 3 categories: under 12, under 14, and under 16.

Close by, in Mangalore, the Auroville trio of surfers fought it out against international and national surfers in the Indian Open of Surfing. Ultimately, Dylan made it to the semi-finals, and both Samai and Perceval won the event in their respective categories, the under-16 Groms and Open.

"I've been surfing for many years now, and

it feels amazing to win events in India. The competition is really tough, and the surf world is getting bigger every year thanks to the International Surfing Association and the Surfing Federation of India. I love surfing and I do it every chance I get, so it doesn't feel like training. But, competing is a whole different thing!" says Perceval.

Samai adds: "It was an awesome experience to be part of this competition. Winning it was just the icing on the cake! Hopefully more such tournaments will be organized in India, so that we can have a strong surfing future in this country!"

Inge van Alphen



Perceval's re-entry on a wave

COURTESY OF STOKED SURFERS' CLUB MANGALORE

## EDUCATION

# Growing food, growing children



The deeper vision behind Food Link, an activity of the Auroville Farm Group is to create community by linking the residents of Auroville to the farmers through educational initiatives. The efforts of the past, notably by Solitude and Buddha Garden, to make vegetable gardens in Auroville schools are currently being shaped into a more sustained initiative.

A few months ago, with some funds from Sri Aurobindo Institute of Integral Education and Research (SAIER) and with support from Food Link, Priya of Buddha Garden offered a year-long course to students at Udavi School in growing vegetables. In keeping with her ethos of 'farm to plate,' the original vision was that the vegetables grown in the garden would be used in the Udavi

School kitchen. However, this aim could not be fulfilled as the area under cultivation was insufficient and, as is often the case when people try organic cultivation for the first time, the bean crop was destroyed by aphids. Nevertheless, as depicted in the photo montage, it was a joyful learning experience for both Priya and the children!

This year, Buddha Garden plans to extend this educational initiative to other schools and to develop some educational material to facilitate learning. In response to a request from Deepanam students, Auroville farmers hope to offer a course in the cultivation and processing of grain (rice and millets). Food Link strongly feels that local issues, such as cultivation of food, should be part and parcel of the curricula in Auroville schools.

Bindu



First row: students at Buddha Garden; bringing granite pillars to make a bed; mulching with leaves; planting beans. Second row: sticks support the growing beans; making compost. Third row: watering the bed; weeding; showing soil transformation; eating beans.

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