

Auroville Today

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UNESCO's Director-General visits Auroville

On 12th January, the newly-appointed Director-General of UNESCO, Ms. Irina Bokova, visited Auroville. It was the second time – the first was the visit of Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow in 1986 – that a serving Director-General of UNESCO visited Auroville. She was accompanied by Mrs. Bhaswati Mukherjee, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of India to UNESCO, and the UNESCO New Delhi Director, Mr. A. Parasuraman.

Ms. Bokova and her team first visited the Matrimandir. Then she was welcomed in the Town Hall in Bulgarian by Bulgarian Aurovilian Tatiana, by Governing Board member Dr. Aster Patel and by Auroville-born Kripa who gave a presentation on Auroville's ideals and achievements. She then addressed the Aurovilians, followed by a brief talk by Ambassador Mukherjee.

Excerpts from Ms. Bokova's talk:

"I am deeply moved by this welcome which is so warm and so open and so hospitable. It's very difficult to speak to such an audience about values and spirituality, about purposes and where the world is going. I am extremely honoured that some of my vision for UNESCO that I had presented as a candidate, that some of my ideas have been so well accepted by you here who embody what UNESCO has been created for and for what UNESCO aspires – human unity. And with this human unity, of course, respect for diversity, tolerance, reconciliation, and aspiration for the human values which are so important in this globalised world.

"I am deeply touched by your aspiration to contribute to UNESCO's activities. As you know very well, UNESCO was part of how Auroville was conceived more than forty years ago. I'm very happy that last year was the 40th birthday of the establishment of Auroville. Dr. Karan Singh inaugurated a statue dedicated to Sri Aurobindo not far from my own office. I think it was a very good recognition on the part of UNESCO.

"Peace today cannot be defined as the peace we used to aspire for some twenty or thirty years ago. I think that peace and humanism today is about respecting and helping the marginalised and I do appreciate what you are doing for the neighbouring villages, and not only for the neighbouring villages but also through your contacts with NGOs and with other associations worldwide. Peace today and humanism is also reconciliation between men and nature. We all know that with climate change and everything that is happening around us we need to find a new balance and a new paradigm of how we treat nature. I think that you are a very good example of a new attitude towards nature.

"I believe that education should be about peace, about sustainable development, about tolerance and about the rights of every human being. So everything that is happening in this globalised world leads us to the idea that we cannot have a sustainable development if this development is not accompanied by moral and ethical values of respect for each other and your so beautiful ideal of human unity. So I feel extremely honoured and very touched by your hospitality, by what you have done. I know that it was a bare plateau here some forty years ago, it's incredible what you have achieved. I do believe that you can contribute to UNESCO's search for a new balance and for a new humanism in the 21st century.

"Thank you once again and I do congratulate you for what you are doing."



PHOTO IRENO GUERCI

Ms. Irina Bokova (third from left) with (from left to right) Pashi Kapoor, International Advisory Council member Dr. Mark Luyckx Ghisi, Governing Board member Dr. Aster Patel, Auroville Foundation Secretary Mr. M. Ramaswamy, UNESCO New Delhi Director Mr. A. Parasuraman, and Aurovilian Gajendran.

Ms. Bokova: "Auroville is spreading the message of UNESCO"

UNESCO and Auroville have been connected for 43 years. In 1966, the first resolution supporting Auroville was passed. In 2008, on the occasion of Auroville's 40th anniversary, UNESCO passed the most recent resolution. How do you see this relationship?

Ms. Bokova: I see this relationship as being a message of tolerance, peace and unity. The underlying vision and vocation of UNESCO is more tolerance, more harmony; it is about resolving conflicts and bringing more peace into the minds of people. The same message is behind the creation of Auroville, which is why UNESCO has been associated with it. It is this message of humanism that we share.

Apart from the resolutions, what concretely does the link between Auroville and UNESCO mean?

It is in 'ideas' and in the transmission of this message [of humanism]. Despite the technological progress in communication all over the world, despite the development of sciences, unfortunately we are witnessing more intolerance and conflicts in the world. By the same token, there are issues like climate change and the debate that it has generated; it is important to find solutions – like sustainable development, for example. These questions and many others need to be answered: what shall we do, in which direction should we move, how do we tackle development in a sustainable way, what are the ethics behind globalization and changing life-styles... All these issues are important.

How could a place like Auroville help in transmitting the message of UNESCO?

Certainly you can help: with your ideas, your publications, with the fact that you have many contacts with NGOs around the world. Also, by supporting the villages around Auroville you give a very good example of solidarity. You are spreading the message [of UNESCO]. This is a very positive sign.

You mentioned that we are living in world where money is all-important. Do you think that culture has a place in today's world?

I think that culture is a very important factor in life. Many times I have expressed regret that it is not taken into account when calculating the rate of development. If culture does not accompany development, societies will not be balanced. There will be a lack of moral and intellectual values.

During my election campaign, I promised that I would re-launch the debate on culture and development. I believe UNESCO is doing some very positive things in this area.

UNESCO gives a response to globalization by adopting conventions for the safeguard of the heritage of nations and by providing support to local communities in their search for an identity. It is an important part of our work in this globalized world. We also support cultural diversity.

I believe also that cultural industries and cultural cooperation are important for finding post-conflict solutions in many countries – by spreading knowledge and understanding about others. It is an extremely important factor of contemporary life.

You are the first woman to become Director-General of UNESCO, you also previously worked on gender issues. How do you see your role as a woman and as Director-General of UNESCO?

I am very proud to be the first woman Director-General. I think that it was high time to have a woman leading this organization, which promotes values and education, the sciences, culture and communication.

I am aware that there are a lot of expectations. I feel this enormous responsibility. For me, it is a larger responsibility because I am a woman. I take it with good faith. I am fully mobilized to work for the objectives of this organization, to convert it into a leading organization that is known for its competence. I believe also that multilateralism is an

important framework for finding responses in this complex world.

Secondly, I think UNESCO has an increasing role to play in a globalized world. In the wake of the economic crisis, we can see that education has been adopted as a response to the challenges of the crisis, both in developed and developing countries.

We see an increasing need for cultural values that unite people and create harmony amongst people. We see also, in issues like climate change, that science and the humanities should be given a priority.

Finally, it is important to respect human rights, freedom of expression and the liberty of people. It is one of the basic responsibilities of our organization. We also promote the message of more humanism and more respect for other human beings all over the world.

Do you think that women can change the world?

(laughing) I think that both men and women can change the world. I believe in partnership. I don't believe in a gender war between men and women. Rather, I believe that they should work together.

I mean, do you think that in emerging nations like India or poorer countries, for example in Africa, women have an important role to play?

Yes, of course. I think that is why gender equality is one of UNESCO's priorities. Unfortunately, women are subjected to a lot of discrimination in many places [in the world]. When it comes to education, we see that two thirds of the illiterates of the world are women or girls. Women have a much higher percentage of school dropouts; in some cases, girls are not sent to school at all. They form the large majority of the 75 million children who do not receive primary education. I believe that we can do a lot more in this regard.

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Fundamentalism and the yoga

Debashish Banerji is a former president of the East-West Cultural Centre and Sri Aurobindo Centre, Los Angeles and a teacher of Asian Art History and Indian Spiritual Culture at the University of Philosophical Research. He is also a founder and administrator of the blog-zine Science, Culture, Integral Yoga (www.sciy.org). Last September he was one of the organizers of a conference in San Francisco on 'Fundamentalism and the Future'. More recently he took part in a conference in Auroville on 'Spirituality beyond Religions'. *Auroville Today* took the opportunity to ask his views on the disturbing trends of fundamentalism among those who profess to do Sri Aurobindo's yoga.

What are the roots of fundamentalism?

It may be through innocent and unthinking means that the apparatus of fundamentalism gets established. For me, it begins with how identity constructs build up unconsciously. Often people pin their sense of self on a group identity. As a group develops, things may get done at certain times in certain ways and over time these characteristics get fixed in the minds of that group as defining that group's reality. This reality is reinforced by a theology or ideology – the fundamental yet invisible pillars around which identity is built – as well as parables, metaphors and stories, mythologies, which make the members of the group identify with the ideology at the personal, core level. Finally certain people start authorizing these characteristics as defining a movement and rigidly controlling what can or cannot be done or believed. As the characteristics of identity crystallize in a group, people seeking power gravitate inevitably to set themselves up as self-appointed controllers of the boundaries of the group.

The need for a clear self-identity is also fostered by 'othering', the feeling that "I am who I am because you are not who I am." In its most extreme form, the members of the group may see outsiders as evil, as not worthy of a place in this world.

All this may crystallize in what I call fundamentalism.

If we look at the Aurobindonian movement, do you see evidence of fundamentalism?

Absolutely, and that was partly the motivation behind the San Francisco conference. Some of us had been concerned and in dialogue about it for some time before the 'Molotov cocktail' created around Peter Heehs' book, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, exploded and everything erupted out of that. It takes events like this to make something which already exists actually articulated or voiced. This is how something that never had the intention of becoming a fundamentalist movement became one or, at least, acquired fundamentalist traits.

How would you characterize those traits?

In the Peter Heehs' case there was outrage not only that somebody could have written such a book but also because he was 'one of us'. So, evidently, the identity construct among those who took action against Peter is very strong: there is a notion that certain tenets are held in common and that these tenets have been violated. And then, of course, the whole thing is about God, the Infinite. This is another aspect of fundamentalism; the group identity stretches to colonize the invisible, the universal. It assumes this tremendous transcendental quality and literalises it in a set of tenets which have to be obeyed.

Did these tendencies already exist before the present controversy?

I think the roots can be traced back to the early 1940s when there was an explosion of numbers in the Ashram. So long as the Ashram had been a small community there was a sense of freedom and the inmates and the gurus were interacting with each other; there was a sense of intimacy. But the increase in scale changed the situation and, for example, certain types of quasi-rituals started establishing themselves.

Take the images. In the early years, sadhaks had photographs of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in their own homes, but there were very few photographs in public places. Some people were in the habit of putting flowers in front of one such public photograph of Sri Aurobindo, but Sri Aurobindo cautioned his disciples in letters against this, saying he did not want any public display of this kind.

These are the subtle ways in which something which is an inner practice becomes a public ritual. Over time these displays of public devotion grew and this other construct, this second-order reality which tends to religiosity and centres on certain ritual events, replaced the inner relationship. Of course, this is not to say that events like playground meditations, pranams and darshans were

lately the Managing Trustee, who has taken a clear anti-fundamentalist and progressive stance in the matter.

However, there are many ways of doing the yoga and you don't necessarily have to sign up for the tenets which these people are promulgating. Take the issue of the *avatar*, for example, the tenet that Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are the *avatars* of the modern age. I asked one of Sri Aurobindo's attendants, Nirodbaran about this towards the end of his life. Earlier he had written many letters to Sri Aurobindo asking for clarification on this point, but now he said the whole question of whether or not Sri Aurobindo and The Mother were *avatars* is "irrelevant" for those wishing to practice the yoga. In other words, it's not for someone to say but for one to experience. If you have that experience, fine, but if you don't it makes no sense to discuss it. It's certainly not a tenet of faith that you have to sign up for.

For those who want to redefine the yoga, the control of information is central to their purpose. Today the main body concerned with information – the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives – is partially staffed by foreigners, and there is a feeling among these people that the foreigner inhabits our secret domains and he is

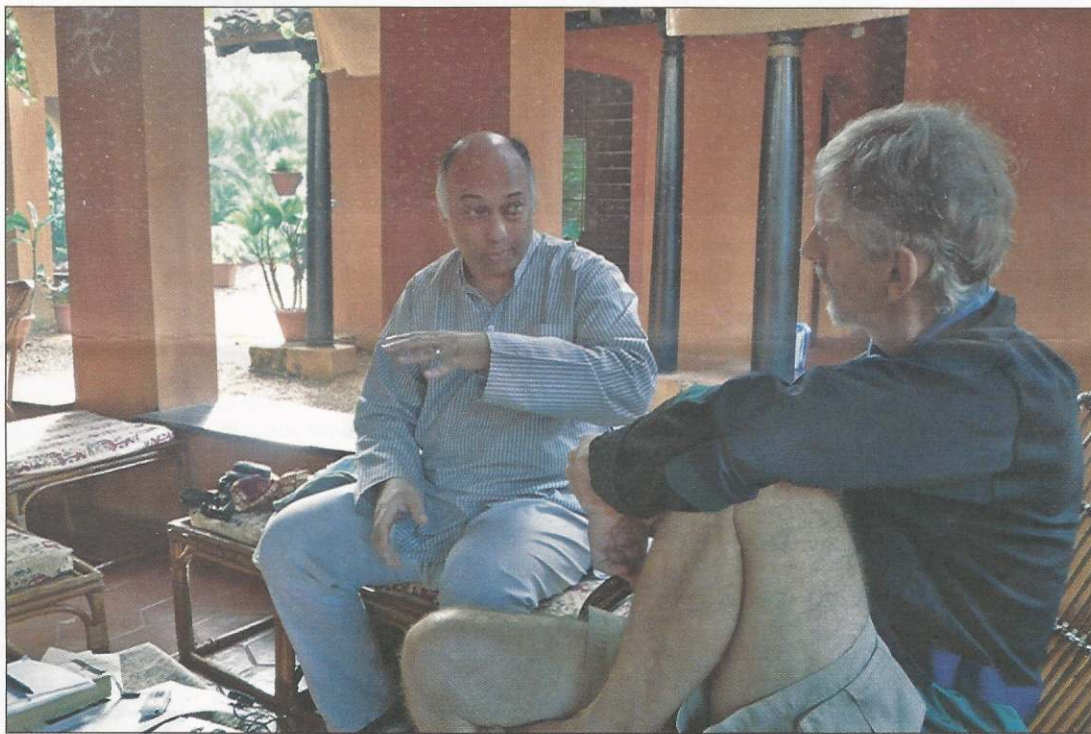
So what do you see as the way forward?

People may choose to follow Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, may see them as the embodiments of the spiritual goal, but the practice of the yoga should not be made into a dogmatic formula.

One can question what someone writes, but the questioning has to be at the level of dialogue, and not through attempts at ostracism, exclusion or eviction from the Ashram and from India, which is being perpetrated by some prominent spokespersons of the yoga today and which smacks of absurd fundamentalism.

Regarding the larger issue, I believe that both Sri Aurobindo and The Mother foresaw what is happening now in the Ashram. Towards the end of her life, Mother put a lot of attention on Auroville and perhaps one of the reasons why she insisted there should be no religion, no religious observances, in this new community is that she saw the cascading religiosity among many at the Ashram and she didn't want the same mistake to be repeated in Auroville.

So I think one of the ways ahead is continuous engagement with the idea of a spirituality beyond religions.



Debashish Banerji in discussion with Alan of Auroville Today

meant to be religious rituals when instituted by the founders. They were meant to be a means of spiritual exchange. But once Sri Aurobindo and The Mother left their bodies, for many these rituals took on a memorial quality. The exchange gave way to a living in the past or a living in the image of piety, an unchanging memorial structure with a fear of loss associated with it. And given this ritualistic structure and the power vacuum behind it, the people who wanted control necessarily came in.

Today, there is a certain kind of closed mind-set that has developed at large among many in the Sri Aurobindo community, a sense that they are the real repositories of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and that they are the ones who define what it is all about and how it should be done. In fact the situation today, as far as I can see it, is that some people are redefining the yoga and to do this they need occasions like the one offered by the publication of Peter Heehs' book. It's not only a knowledge but also a power event because it tries to establish a new definition of the yoga and to set up a new leadership in the Ashram, challenging the established one of the Trustees. Here, it is important to acknowledge that this representation of power has been admirably resisted by the Trustees of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, particu-

unqualified to do that, so he needs to be pushed out. And then, as far as Peter Heehs is concerned, there's a long history. For many years he has been investigating Ashram mythologies – like the one which says that the Ashram is on the site of Rishi Agastya's Ashram. And each time he has shown that a mythology is doubtful, he has punctured a little hole in the self-confidence of the group ego and so voices have been raised against him.

I remember asking Nirodbaran about Peter and the Agastya issue and he said that there is a need for people like Peter in any spiritual community, because over time it is inevitable that mythologies will grow, people will create these increasingly exaggerated images of the divine guru, and some people have to keep this tendency in check. It is especially necessary in this yoga because here we are talking about human beings treading the path to a new consciousness and the experiments towards this represented by the lives of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are the only ones we have at present to learn from. So it's really precious to retain the factual reality of how those steps were taken, to prevent it being lost under devotional mythology. This is what Peter has tried to do.

Are there tendencies to religiosity in Auroville as well?

Yes, in certain areas this is happening. But these tendencies are still fluid, they are not grounded in the consciousness of the community in the same way as the insistence upon no religions. But when these tendencies are noticed, it's important that they are brought to the front and dialogued about. Devotional attitudes and practices can very well be a part of spiritual practice, so long as they make no claim for exclusivity, or an attempt to define the yoga. An active field of dialogue can keep plural approaches to the same goal alive.

I think that dialogue is the hope for the future because dialogue with other seekers, even with non-seekers, prevents the creation of an exclusionary reality. For example, what Rich Carlson and I have been trying to do with the Science, Culture and Integral Yoga online forum is to push the boundaries of the yoga through dialogue with, for example, postmodernism. I think these kinds of dialogues, where you don't privilege the yoga and where you don't hold on to dogmatic positions, can help in mutual transformation.

Do you also see dialogue between the Ashram and Auroville as being a way forward?

I think that if the present Ashram mindset could come into contact with the way that the yoga is done in Auroville as well as in the outer world – including those people who are outside the Aurobindonian community but who may be approaching the same yoga – if dialogues could be opened up and new perspectives could percolate into the mindset of the Ashram, we would see change happening there. Auroville could also play an important role in making this possible. To some extent, this was started in the 1980s, with invitations to people like Champaklal, Nirodbaran, and Mangesh Nadkarni to meet and interact with Aurovilians. This movement has not grown in any creative sense. Today, the Ashramites who are invited to speak at Auroville are mostly restricted to those who represent the dogma of Aurobindonian identity politics. There are many others at the Ashram who are less prominent but much richer in their thought and consciousness. An active seeking and engagement proceeding from some discrimination on the part of Aurovilians could help this process a lot.

Are you optimistic that change will happen in the Ashram?

I don't know. Being Indian by birth and by culture, I have connections with lots of Indian people in the Ashram. I think the problem is many people there are concerned about the larger issue of religiosity but the systems for open discussion don't exist. For example, the higher education section of the Ashram school could have played a very important role in the present controversy, they could have initiated interviews, debates, conferences, etc. but they chose to close their eyes to the entire issue.

There are tremendous difficulties with the Ashram at present but I wouldn't say that the consciousness is not there or that it is incapable of change. At the same time, I'm not one of these people who hold that the Ashram is a 'destined' place of some kind. What happens to any institution rests largely on the consciousness of its members. On the other hand, I am optimistic about Auroville, not because of any great maturity of consciousness which it expresses, but simply because of the open-endedness one experiences here.

There are some people who hold The Mother was at least partially responsible for the growth of what you call religiosity in the Ashram. They feel she could have done more to prevent it.

I know a number of people who came to the Ashram fully prepared to stay after reading Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, but after one week of experiencing life there they fled and they've held it against The Mother ever since. However, I don't think The Mother was responsible for the religiosity or the fundamentalism. I believe that Sri Aurobindo and The Mother knew very well what was coming. And that, perhaps, opening the floodgates in the 1940s was an embrace of these very forces. They left it to humanity to engage with these forces, to understand and come to grips with them, as part of its growth in consciousness.

Today we don't know how it will all turn out. Maybe in the future we will say that we've learned a lot from all this and have emerged purified from dogma. Of course, for Peter at the moment it is very painful and completely unwarranted. The bid to evict him from the Ashram and the country is a sign of the depths to which the dogmatism of religious distortion has sunk at this time.

From an interview by Alan and Carel

"Auroville is spreading the message of UNESCO"

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You have this scheme of World Heritage Sites. Do you see a danger in this scheme? To take India's example, in some places they attract millions of tourists resulting in environmental degradation.

I am aware that the sites on the World Heritage list attract a lot of tourists. In most places it is welcome because it brings a lot of economic revenue to the area. However it is not solely a problem in India; it is one also in many other places: how to balance or reconcile the economic interests of a cultural site and the preservation of that site? I think that it is the biggest challenge that we have to face apart from other issues, such as archaeological excavations and preservation activities.

How do you handle it?

Well, we advise governments, but we do not discourage tourism and its

economic activities. We understand that for many countries they are very important. One of the basic criteria for being listed [by UNESCO] as a World Heritage Site is its 'outstanding universal value'. If millions of people want to visit such sites, it is a good and very positive thing. The World Heritage Sites unite us; they are also a message of intercultural dialogue, providing more knowledge and more understanding about each other and, at the same time, encouraging governments and communities to pay much respect to the environment and keep the authenticity of the monument.

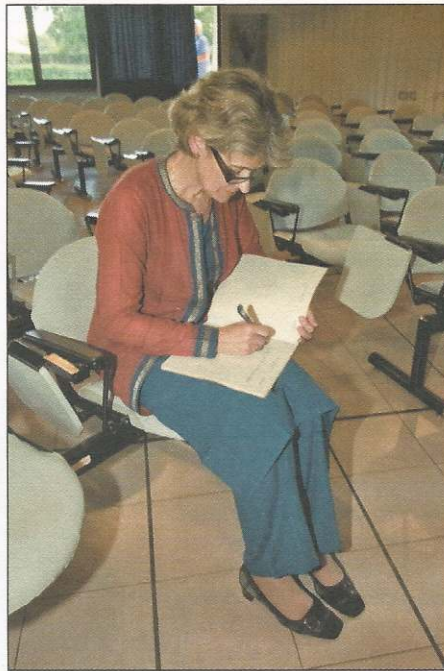
This trip to India has been one of your first official visits after your election. You will stay five days in the country. What is the purpose of your visit and how do you see the relations between UNESCO and India?

I have come to India to pay respect to this great country, to the great culture of India. I have come also to meet offi-

cial. I met Mr S. N. Krishna, the Minister of External Affairs, and Mr Kapil Sibal, the Minister of Human Resources Development, who is also the Chairman of the Indian National Commission for UNESCO. We talked about cooperation between UNESCO and India, as well as the comprehensive challenges in the field of education, although India has made huge progress in the fight against illiteracy and in primary education. I congratulated the Minister for the adoption of the Right to Education Act, which will now have to be implemented.

I delivered a lecture at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which is one of the largest Open Universities in the world. I was very honoured to be invited to the inaugural function for the 25th anniversary of this University; it was called the Silver Jubilee Lecture. I had also the opportunity to speak to the faculty and staff about the possibility of extending our cooperation by creating joint programmes and UNESCO Chairs in the areas of Technology and Communication. In this way, we will have cooperation with IGOU in the area of media and education. I am happy that they accepted.

Moreover, I have visited some of India's World Heritage sites. I will also be going to Bangalore to visit the Indian Institute of Sciences, as well as one of the large IT companies (Infosys) to see if we can work with the IT sector, which is booming in this country. I want to see how it is developing and if there is the possibility of synergy [with our programmes] in this sector.



Ms. Bokova writes in the Visitor's Book: "I spent an unforgettable time at Auroville, full of reflection about those things that bind people and not divide them."

Are you first a Bulgarian or a Citizen of the World?

(laughing) Yesterday I met in Delhi Dr Karan Singh, who is the Indian Representative on our Executive Board, and during dinner (Mr Kapil Sibal, the [HRD] Minister was present), a very interesting discussion took place on globalization and its impact on our identity. We all agreed that we have several identities. I consider myself to be profoundly Bulgarian, but at the same time I am a European because Bulgaria recently joined the European Union and because Bulgaria is one of the oldest European cultures. I consider myself also to be a citizen of the world.

Claude Arpi



Ms. Bokova being interviewed by Auroville Radio

Auroville: a World Heritage Site?

Many Aurovilians were taken aback when Kripa, in her welcome speech to the new Director General of UNESCO Ms. Irina Bokova, mentioned that Auroville is considering applying for the tentative lists of World Heritage "as a living symbol of mankind's aspiration for human unity" in the – not yet existing – category of 'World Heritage of the Future'. The Aurovilians were disconcerted because this issue has neither been discussed nor agreed upon in the community nor has the Governing Board taken a stand on it.

The topic became alive after the celebration of Auroville's 40th anniversary at UNESCO in October 2008. In her address to the Aurovilians, Ms. Bhaswati Mukherjee, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of India to UNESCO, said that after this celebration she had recommended to the Indian authorities that such status be given to Auroville and that she could not 'think of a better future heritage of humanity.' For according to Mrs. Mukherjee, Auroville has 'outstanding universal value' and would meet the criteria for recognition of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee.

World Heritage status

World Heritage status can be given not only to ancient monuments, but also to natural parks and wildlife sanctuaries as well as to 'modern heritage properties'. The third category was introduced in 2001. It aims to create awareness of the heritage of architecture, town planning and landscape design of the modern era, 'which is considered to be particularly vulnerable because of weak legal protection and low appreciation among the general public'.

In order to be registered as a World Heritage site, a government has first to place the site on the List of Tentative Sites. UNESCO only decides on the granting of World Heritage status to sites placed on the Tentative List. In India, the task of recommending a site for placement on the Tentative List rests with the Ministry of Culture.

In February last year, the Government of India introduced the National Commission for Heritage Sites Bill. If this Bill is passed by the Indian Parliament, a National Commission for Heritage Sites will come into existence which has the power to recommend sites for World Heritage Status, as

well as give binding directions on the management of World Heritage sites and levy fines if any of its directions are not complied with.

In India, 22 ancient monuments have been registered as World Heritage Sites, as well as four natural parks and one wildlife sanctuary. Nineteen properties have been submitted on the Tentative List. The most relevant for Auroville is the inscription in this List of the urban and architectural work of Le Corbusier in the city of Chandigarh. This was enlisted in 2006 as being of outstanding universal value, amongst other reasons because 'no change has been permitted in the urban core of Le Corbusier's Master Plan, which retains the authenticity of its original form and design, materials and substance, use and function as well as spirit and feeling'.

The benefits

The UNESCO website mentions as one of the benefits of being accorded World Heritage Status is having access to the World Heritage Fund of about US\$4 million a year "to assist States Parties in identifying, preserving and promoting World Heritage sites". Another advantage is that the Status would be "a magnet for international cooperation and the site may thus receive financial assistance for heritage conservation projects from a variety of sources". Yet another benefit would be that the site might benefit "from the elaboration and implementation of a comprehensive management plan that sets out adequate preservation measures and monitoring mechanisms." Lastly, World Heritage status would bring an increase in public awareness of the site, thus increasing tourist activities. "When these are well planned for and organized respecting sustainable tourism principles, they can bring important funds to the site and to the local economy."

Weighing advantages and disadvantages

It is questionable if Auroville would be able to avail itself of all of these benefits. While World Heritage Status might certainly be a help in fund-raising to manifest the city, access to the (extremely small) World Heritage Fund of UNESCO will be minimal in view of international and national competition. And an increase in the already considerable amount of tourists may not be a benefit at all.

A major disadvantage, however, might be that recognition of Auroville as a World Heritage site would bring outside organisations, such as the National Commission for Heritage Sites as well as UNESCO itself, into the planning and management of Auroville. Auroville is a town in making and its Master Plan is still very much a concept, likely to change. The Government of India has already constituted a special legal entity, the Auroville Foundation, to manage Auroville and plan the township. Is the entry of other organisations required? For that would effectively limit the powers of the Auroville Foundation. The National Commission for Heritage Sites would have the power to give binding directions on the management of World Heritage sites and levy fines if any of its directions are not complied with. UNESCO could withdraw recognition as a World Heritage Site if it found that a new development might interfere with the status. In other words, these outside organisations might limit the freedom of the Aurovilians to run and develop the Auroville Township.

These disadvantages are not theoretical. The monuments at Hampi, for example, almost lost their World Heritage Status when UNESCO contended that the construction of the new bridge near the Vittala Temple would bring increased traffic, and might be a threat to the stability of the monuments. UNESCO stated that the modern-looking bridge would disturb an otherwise ancient-looking landscape. The threat was only removed when a balance between the development of the local community and the conservation efforts was found.

This was not the case in Germany. The Dresden Elbe Valley lost its status as a World Heritage site due to the construction of a four-lane bridge in the heart of the cultural landscape. UNESCO judged that "the property had failed to keep its outstanding universal value as inscribed."

The ball for applying for World Heritage Status now rests in Auroville's court. If the community and the Governing Board, after obtaining the advice of the International Advisory Council, and weighing the strengths and constraints, decide in favour of this status, a request has to be made to the Ministry of Culture of the Indian Government to formally apply to UNESCO for inclusion of Auroville in its tentative Heritage Site list.

There is still a long way to go.

Carel

In brief

Padma Bhushan for Mallika Sarabhai



Governing Board member Mallika Sarabhai has been awarded the Padma Bhushan, the third highest Indian civilian award, given in recognition of her distinguished service of a high order to the nation in the field of the arts. The award will be conferred by the President of India at a function held at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Housing Service Development Branch

The Housing Service has proposed to create a Development Branch under its umbrella. This branch would manage a Housing Revolving Fund to help finance specific housing projects within Auroville and develop strategies to generate cash surplus to create housing assets available on a pro-bono basis. The target of the Revolving Fund is Rs 100 lakhs. For more information contact: housing@auroville.org.in

Auroville History Project

A project to write the history of Auroville has started. It will include chapters on the concept, the physical growth of Auroville, environment and land, Auroville and its neighbours, education, organisation, economy and business. For more information contact ecphillips47@hotmail.com

Mail server changed

The AuroNet Mail provider changed from Rediff to IndianNIC, located in the US without a hitch in the night of 24th – 25th January. The new provider has a dedicated team of customer support engineers in Mumbai.

New playground in Edaiyanchavadi

On Tuesday 26th January (Republic Day), the newly constructed playground for Edaiyanchavadi was opened. The playground is established on Auroville land near the Adventure community. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development provided the bulk of funds.

AV Architectural Services

About 10 Auroville architects and designers have decided to create Auroville Architectural Services, a unit which would solely work for Auroville and be supported by Auroville instead of through the system of percentages charged on the overall cost of a project.

2009 Culture review

An overview of cultural activities held in Auroville in 2009 shows that there have been two classical Indian dance performances; seven music concerts (3 Western classical, 2 Indian classical, 1 jazz, and 1 pop rock); six theatre plays; one Tamil poetry event; twelve painting exhibitions; three photograph exhibitions; two variety exhibitions; and four art classes – calligraphy, ceramics, drawing and Ikebana).

Many Aurovilians have been inspired by the video from Cuba "Surviving Peak Oil". It shows that in response to severe food shortages due to the American embargo, the enterprising Cubans not only created vegetable gardens in the countryside, but also in every nook and cranny of their villages and cities. Balconies blossomed with tomato plants and melon vines, waste grounds became allotments, and adults and children found a new companionship cultivating gardens. Today, 50% of Cuba's food comes from its small gardens, and 80% of it is organic. Quite an achievement.

Food sovereignty

There is a vision that Auroville could become a 'Garden City' with kitchen and herbal gardens at every house, with balcony and roof gardens in apartment complexes, and educational gardens at schools. It is based on a concept called 'food sovereignty' where people have the ability to grow their own food and feed themselves. With correct planting and care, and the use of recycled water, such gardens could produce food in profusion. There are now several groups in Auroville that can help us get started.

One of these is Buddha Garden, a 12 acre community farm where Priya Vincent and her team are passionate about growing food. "We are here in Auroville to experiment with new ways of being," says Priya, "and what better way to start than with matter in its most basic form – food. Especially now, when food security together with the availability of water may be our next big global crisis." Priya believes that a few years of droughts or severe floods could tip the world towards a global food shortage. "But nobody is ready to think about it till our backs are pushed up against the wall. Also we have all heard about future water shortages, but somehow it doesn't seem to register. The other day, someone in the Farm Group wondered aloud about the point of planning for farming as in 10 or 20 years there won't be enough water to cultivate any farms here!" The solution, according to Priya, is in home gardening.

Home gardens

Buddha Garden teaches how to create small vegetable gardens through its bi-weekly offerings of hands-on experiential sessions at the farm. People can drop in and learn about various aspects of vegetable gardening, like how to create raised plant beds using leaf litter, wood chips and soil, how to deal with pests, or how to make one's own compost and fertilizers.

"In this climate it takes 3 to 6 months for compost to get ready," explains Priya. "Many people buy compost from the villages assuming it is organic, but it often contaminated with plastic waste and rubbish like batteries, so it's better to make your own." For fertilizer, Buddha Garden relies on nature – the leaves of *Gliricidia*, a tropical leguminous plant. "*Gliricidia* grows easily and is drought-resistant," she says, "and its leaves make excellent manure when mixed with cow dung." She points to a large black plastic tub that holds the bio-fertilizer.

Buddha Garden also demonstrates container gardening. This method Priya explains is most suitable for small gardens with poor soil as one has to concentrate only on a very small area. Three large concrete rings lie ready for preparation. "These make marvellous containers and only cost about 450 rupees each. You can put one crop in one ring, or if you wish, divide it into sections. It can look rather spectacular with well-chosen planting."

Her helper Pierre shows a red plastic box about a metre long and half a metre deep, resting on wheels. It is an *Earthbox*. "The system is also known as 'Global Bucket'," he says. "It requires very little water and fertilizer. We want to start adapting them to the climate here. They can be used on apartment balconies and in any backyard. We want to offer them together with seedlings so people can begin their garden."

"All this is still a work in progress," says Priya. "But in a year we should be up and running as the one-stop centre for learning how to do home gardening and as a place to buy seedlings, plants and equipment to make it all fun and easy."

That the assistance of Buddha Garden is essential is shown at Udumbu. Here, Patrick from England and his Korean partner are establishing an edible garden. Patrick speaks of his initial experiences. "I arrived in the monsoon period and thought, 'anything will grow here'. Then in the summer months I thought 'nothing will grow here'. I now alternate between the two. This is my first experience of gardening in Auroville and it has been very strange. Everyone gives me completely different advice about everything. Some say, 'plant pre-monsoon'. Others say 'post-monsoon'. I now understand that within Auroville there are many completely different types of soil and almost as many different micro-climates." Patrick finally decided to grow an orchard. "But I found it very difficult to get fruit trees so went to Chennai. But the advice they gave me was very patchy. For those who wish to start gardening in Auroville, it would be most appropriate that they get advice from Aurovilians doing the work."

School gardens

In New Creation community, Aikiyam School is preparing additional raised beds for this year's planting. Last year the first school garden started, organized by Rajan, an English teacher. "There was a patchy lawn at the centre of the school that we decided to make into a vegetable garden based on permaculture principles," says Rajan. "We hired two bullocks to have the space ploughed and the whole school gathered around in a circle to watch the event." It was a huge success, on many levels.

"The children's enthusiasm is amazing. Seeing their garden grow right in front of their classrooms has been very exciting for them. We cannot keep them away from the garden. They are even here on weekends, weeding, mulching, and planting. We've also made many contacts and friendships with people who came to give advice and the children gained a lot of confidence from talking to these visitors."

"Community gardens like these could be created in corners all over Auroville. Once you know how to go about it, it is very simple and enormously satisfying. Our small garden here has inspired other schools to make gardens of their own and this is a good feeling." Pointing to some raised beds in a secluded corner Rajan explains: "We are now starting to construct a medicinal herb garden with help from Pitchandikulam."

A seed garden on gravel

Deepika and Bernard live off the Tindivanam Road behind Aurobrindavan. They have created a lush tropical vegetable garden – with no original soil! When they first came here 14 years ago they called their place ‘Pebble Garden’ as there were only pebbles on the lateritic wasteland.

“One can say we have become specialists in soil-building,” says Bernard. “We build soil without any input from outside, such as compost, earth or manure. We started to create soil by recycling the existing pioneer vegetation in various ways. For example, we built layers of acacia leaves and silt from a few small ponds into heaped, layered beds, and then left the work to the termites and earth worms. While the work of soil building continues each season, the garden slowly extends. “We now have 1,000 square meters of vegetable garden,” adds Deepika.

The purpose of this garden is not to grow vegetables but to produce seeds of hardy varieties of vegetables, root crops and medicinal and herbal plants which require little water. “Back in 1994, I was instrumental in organising the ‘Arise!’ conference in Auroville,” says Bernard. [see *Auroville Today* #75, April 1995] This has now evolved into the *Organic Farm Association of India*, an active group which does seed exchange. “We get interesting seeds from all over India. For example, we now have 15 varieties of organic Brinjal – and that is of great interest today as nowadays big companies are seeking permission from the Indian government to grow genetically modified so-called BT-Brinjal!”

Deepika points to the small and beautiful seed packets that she has made. “We distribute our seeds to gardeners in Auroville but also all over India. We go to Seed Fairs and display our collections and try to encourage people to grow their own garden.” Deepika and Bernard now produce about 3,000 packets of vegetable seeds a year. “This is for home gardens,” they stress. “Commercial farms should get their organic vegetable seeds from Annandana in Auroville.”

“We try to develop unusual plants that cannot be found anywhere else. We choose them for their robust nature. Many are endangered, rarely grown and their seeds are not easily available. We have now about 90 different varieties of plants,” adds Deepika. A minimum of watering is done through micro sprinklers, once every two weeks. She points at a huge-leaved plant. “This is *Taro colocasia*. It has a giant velvety leaf which is edible. We try to create beauty with utility.” Under the shade of banana trees, pineapples and turmeric plants grow in a profusion. It is truly a ‘Garden of Eden’.

A new aspect of their work is education and knowledge-sharing. “We started an experimental garden, to see if it was possible to grow food on severely eroded land; then we went into seed production; in the last few years, a small study centre has been added with facilities for a few students to stay here and learn for two to three months,” says Barnard. Adds Deepika, “It is yet another way to manifest our hope that one day there will be a garden for everyone on this planet.”

Ornamental gardens

One of the most beautiful ornamental gardens in Auroville is situated at Gaia’s Garden Guesthouse on the road from Kuiliapalayam to Bommaiypalayam. Its abundance of plants of diverse colour and texture is breathtaking. They have been planted with the artist’s eye. In between you spot statues of a reclining Ganesh or a dancing Shiva.

“I spend two hours each morning working in the garden,” says says Dutchman Kireet. “It is my great joy, and the guests, too, enjoy the garden.” But there were many trials and errors before it reached its present form. “This land was a cashew *tope* before I came and the soil was acidic and poor. It took years to get restored.”

Kireet began repeating the patterns of the gardens he had built in The Netherlands. “But I soon realized that this was not going to work here. I had to learn about tropical plants.” So for two years, he worked at the Matrimandir nursery and at *Shakti* nursery studying cultivars and indigenous plants. “I would join the seed expeditions to the scrub jungles or the temple groves to collect seeds. During these trips, I would collect plants and started experimenting with them, putting them at different places in Gaia’s Garden, seeing where they survive. Many died, but in the process I made discoveries and learnt a lot.

“A garden is never finished; it is always a work in progress. Now I am in the phase where I want to make it more detailed and create hidden corners or a ‘secret garden’ as it were. So there is the element of surprise, of the unexpected, and each time you visit it, another discovery awaits you! A garden takes time; but that does not matter because at every stage, it has this rewarding beauty.”

Zen gardens

Lastly, there are the Japanese-inspired Zen gardens. One, situated at Afsanah Guest House, is placed behind the dining hall. The garden, dominated by rock and sand, is surrounded by large trees which, in their own way, echo its innate tranquillity. “Our guests love this garden,” says Afsaneh.

It was designed by Poppo, who lives next door and has his own Zen garden at the back of his house. It is almost three times the size of the one at the guest house. Bamboo groves, mossy pathways, bonsai trees and *objets trouvés* surround this garden, creating an atmosphere inviting contemplation. Poppo who has never been to Japan but says “Japan comes here”, emphasises the enormous amount of time and dedication it takes to develop and maintain a beautiful garden. This is one of five Japanese-style gardens he has created in his years in Auroville.

“It started out as an instinct to create a garden, a small one, simply in front of our house in Promesse,” he says. “But it grew bigger and bigger and automatically led to a lifelong trip of landscaping.

“Start small,” he advises. “A garden is never ‘ready made’. Learn to really look at the plants. See where they are happy to grow. Then the potential is enormous – it grows and you grow at the same time.”

Dianna

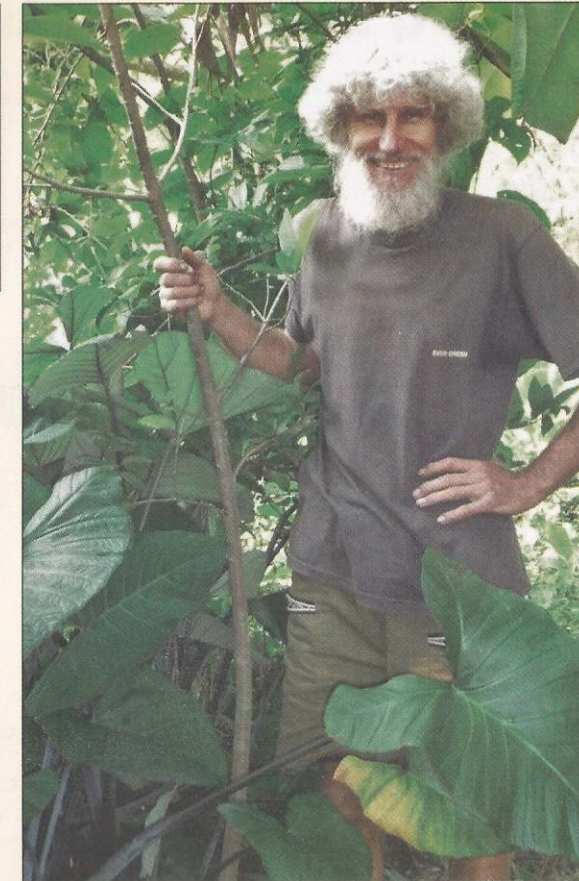


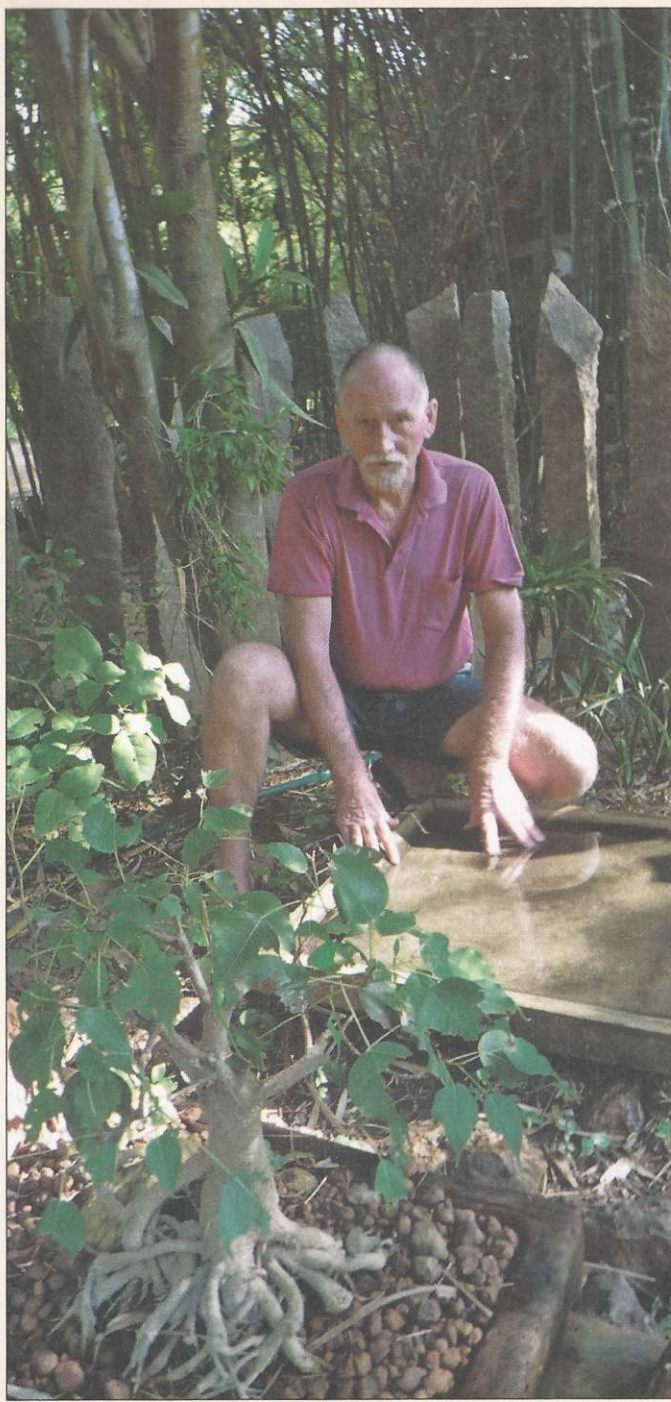
Gardens in Auroville

Ornamental gardens, vegetable gardens and even Japanese Zen gardens can be found in Auroville.



Clockwise from far left: Dawn at Buddha Garden; Deepika by a winged bean vine; a collection of Aurobrindavan seeds; Bernard shows the *Taro colocasia*; Kireet at Gaia's Garden; a landscaped pebble path at Gaia's Garden; Aikiyam school students with freshly harvested organic corn cobs; Rajan (back) and children at Aikiyam school's vegetable garden; Poppo with a 20 year-old nosai banyan; the Buddha Garden team (from left) Vivek, Priya, Selvam and Pierre; Japanese-style rock garden at Poppo's home.





Meetings of Governing Board and International Advisory Council

The biannual meetings of the Governing Board (GB) and International Advisory Council (IAC) of the Auroville Foundation took place in the first week of January. Prior to their meetings, GB members Ms. Ameeta Mehra, Shri B.V. Doshi, Shri Ajoy Bagchi and Ms. Aster Patel were informed about the status of the community process regarding the renewal of the management team of L'Avenir d'Auroville. A day later members of the community had an open interaction with the members of the IAC, Dr. Vishakha Desai, Sir Mark Tully, Doudou Diène, Julian Lines and Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi at the Town Hall.

The report of the IAC was, in accordance with its tradition, published soon afterwards. The report of the Governing Board has not yet been received.

The IAC report

The IAC recommended the progress made by the new Working Committee in promoting transparency and participation of the community and expressed its belief that the devolution process of the Governing Board empowering the Working Committee is very positive. However, the IAC expressed the need for a list of all the committees of Auroville with their composition, mandate, job description and membership terms clearly specified so that the governance and decision-making processes in Auroville are clear for all parties concerned. It repeated its earlier stand that the term of the Working Committee be extended to 4 years.

The IAC criticised the plan for the International Zone. It found that the current layout [the plan made by the late Roger Anger, eds.] does not reflect the world situation and current trends,

and reflects poorly on Auroville's ideals (for instance the allocation of only 8 acres for Africa). It cautioned against distribution via print and PowerPoint of this model, stating that the key principle in this Zone should be that of universality and connectivity. It encouraged a re-examination of the plans.

Regarding visitors and students, the IAC observed that their large numbers is challenging the capacity of Auroville to handle them properly. The IAC recommended that a comprehensive plan be developed to handle the variety of visitors who come into contact with Auroville so that casual weekend travellers and deeper seekers can have an appropriate experience according to their interests. For engaged travellers, separate thematic trails could be developed (for example trails in architecture, art, eco-awareness, yoga, and healing which would give them an experience of Auroville). The Council further recommended the developing of more dormitory-style housing within Auroville.

The Council also looked into its own functioning. In order to make the IAC's advisory role more effective it decided to have a more focused relationship in key areas to allow for a more productive interaction between IAC and the community outside its meetings and a greater utilization of the expertise of each of the IAC members. Doudou Diène was assigned Education, UNESCO and Intercultural Relations; Vishakha Desai, Auroville's Face to the Outside World and the Visitor's Experience, especially internships and the younger people; Julian Lines, Auroville International Outreach and appreciation of Indian Culture and Fundraising; Mark Tully, the rela-



Members of the Governing Board (front row right to left) Dr. Aster Patel, Dr. B.V. Doshi and Ms. Ameeta Mehra as well as International Advisory Council member Dr. Marc Luyckx Ghisi listen to a presentation on the future of L'Avenir d'Auroville in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture.

tionship with the media and review of written materials; and Marc Luyckx Ghisi, Governance, Spirituality and the Auroville Institute of International Management. The Working Committee was asked to develop a process by which this work can be carried out. Each IAC member will prepare a short report on his or her

area of focus after a year and make their recommendations to the IAC.

The IAC fixed the date of its next meetings as April 1st, 2nd and 3rd and November 2nd and 3rd, 2010 and expressed the hope that its visits to Auroville will coincide with that of the Governing Board.

SERVICES

Pour Tous Distribution Centre progress



The Pour Tous Distribution Centre

Reflecting on its 3 1/2 years of activity, the Pour Tous Distribution Centre (PTDC) expressed "to feel simply grateful". Thanking all those who had united their aspirations and efforts to make it happen the PTDC stated that the Centre 'had become a wonderful space for interaction among Aurovilians, and an important experiment in more ways than one'. The PTDC started in March 2006 with 124 members (109 adults and 15 children) and a monthly turnover of Rs. 3.5 lakhs. As of December 2009, there are 573 members (523 adults and 50 children) and the monthly turnover is Rs. 10.35 lakhs.

At the time it started, the Economy Group very cautiously allocated a first budget for the maintenance of the service. This allowed it to function purely on an at-cost basis for the products distributed, without charging an extra margin. The Economy Group had difficulty believing that the system would work and had questions about collectively supporting a service which would benefit only those who agree to join as participants on a fixed monthly contribution.

Now, three and a half years later, the experiment is still developing and progressing, learning and adapting, but there is always a positive balance – both financially, as well as in terms of people's participation and support.

The Centre collects a fixed part from the monthly maintenance allocated to Aurovilians for their personal needs, as well as contributions from those Aurovilians who maintain themselves. Every month these contributions constitute a collective pot from where the food, toiletries and home items are purchased, and subsequently displayed and distributed over the month. The participants are responsible for taking goods according to their needs and for keeping their 'usage' in balance as much as possible with the budget allocated for each of them. On average, about half of the participants will exceed their budget while the other half will underutilize it (this naturally varies a bit every month). Generally things even out at the

end of each month and, at times, even a small amount is left over which will be used to cover stock adjustments and for the benefit of participants by doing some small improvements. Many people consciously under-use, or live very simply, allowing others with less flexibility to utilize more. There are quite a few participants who because of their increased family needs could never manage before and who now can make ends meet.

No prices are shown on the products and no bills are given. Updates of the usage of each one's budget are thrice a month posted at the PTDC notice board, so that participants can be aware of their general usage pattern. Sometimes a participant has to be reminded about his/her usage of the

service and how the system functions, but over-use is rarely a serious issue. Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages to this system. We cannot claim to have found a perfect solution; money still plays some role in it. However, it does give the possibility of participating in a material sharing in a more fraternal and money-detached economic system, and in which solidarity plays a key role. Moreover, keeping one's needs within a monthly budget helps one to be more disciplined and learn to discern what one's real needs are.

The Centre is managed by 7 Aurovilians maintained by Auroville's maintenance fund. It is open from 10:00 am to 5:30 pm, from Monday to Saturday. The items distributed are carefully selected with preference given to Auroville goods and produce, to organically and environmentally friendly produced food and products wherever possible, and all at the best available price. These make for a range of products that cover the average basic needs and some extra necessities. There are no invitingly flashy packages or sales promotional advertising, so indicative of a consumerist approach, and no luxury items are distributed. Feedback on goods and services is constantly invited and welcomed. The cost of all goods is the exact cost as charged by the supplier, and efforts are being made to get discounts as much as possible. Nothing extra is charged.

The Centre also offers ready-made, nutritious meals that participants can pick up in their tiffins and bring home to eat, quietly, without the hassle of preparing it. The kitchen has been preparing these 'home made', simple and tasty, international and innovative lunches, sauces, drinks and snacks, and functions until now entirely on volunteer support. A good number of Aurovilians offer their help in cooking on a regular basis, many times assisted by guest volunteers. The sweet kitchen is enormously appreciated and its atmosphere always joyful.

*The PTDC team
(from the News and Notes)*

REFLECTIONS

The maps of our mind

Once upon a time, not so long ago, I was a bright-eyed newcomer discovering Auroville on an old Indian Atlas cycle. Close to the end of my Newcomer period, while trying to get to Johnny's house, I got hopelessly lost in the meandering paths of the greenbelt. Luckily for me, Tine, who then served in the Entry Group, drove by. I waved her down for directions only to be told, "You can't find your way in the greenbelt? We'll have to extend your Newcomer period!" Before she sped home-wards though, she did tell me to bear left at the double palmyra trees, and to again turn left where the banyan hung its roots by the edge of the track.

It is a story worth retelling as we zip around today in our fancy cars (air-conditioned or electric) and huge hulking bikes through an Auroville that is neatly sign-posted and thus predictably boring. Auroville, like the eco-cities of China, can be built (and is being done), practically overnight, by bureaucrats. Auroville, can also be aesthetically designed (as is again being done) in environmental-friendly ways by creative town-planners. But without us connecting to the slow-paced rhythms of this ancient land, building Auroville, eco-friendly or not, would be no more than implementing the stale maps of our own mind.

We human beings are at the curious juncture of evolutionary development where we have the possibility to either dominate the world with our rational consciousness, or to surrender that very same ability in order to enter into a deeper and more intimate identification with the so-called inanimate world. The rhythms of the land and the rhythms of the body are different from the cognitive whirrings of our mind. And how we choose to move our bodies through time and space largely dictates how we perceive and know 'reality'.

Our tribal ancestors knew how to navigate the land, their primary reality, by walking on it. It is said that Australians aborigines, who are among the oldest human cultures still in existence, successfully navigate the harsh deserts of Australia by using "songlines" as maps. Songlines are auditory route maps, usually written in couplets to match the beat of a person's footfalls. The lyrics of the songs correlate to actual physical features of the land and thus bind the human singer intimately to the land. Such a relationship between the land and an individual is perhaps similar to the way Tine guided me through the forests by using distinct species or shapes of trees as sign-posts. In both cases, it requires an immediate awareness of the natural world that is devoid of human artefacts. It requires a direct encounter with the land itself, a discovery of the bio-region at a primal level – an experience that is denied to newcomers and tourists today given the ubiquitous road-signs.



Cosmologist Brian Swimme drives the point home when he asks us to take the "local universe test." The test simply requires one to give directions to another person by describing the way without referring to any human artefacts. Instead one uses natural features of the land itself as sign-posts for guidance. The point of such an exercise, as Swimme himself says, is not to suggest a return to a romanticized tribal past, but to expand our consciousness so that we can consciously choose to come into direct contact with the world.

I recollect that the Mother once affirmed the perception of an Aurovilian that the very land of Auroville aspires for something new. And, I think, in order to truly build the city the earth needs, we need to learn how to unite with that aspiration of the land itself. We need to slow down. We need to be able to take a deep breath in (without inhaling the dust and fumes of the motorized transport that has come to dominate our roads) and to engage our mind, body, and senses to integrally connect to Auroville itself.

Auroville, the inner Auroville, the idealistic Auroville of our dreams, is a metaphoric city that depends on each individual's subjective discovery for its manifestation. Discovery, being the key element here. For building Auroville is a yoga, one of the many ways of uniting with the Divine, and this way is a sunlit path meandering through the woods that has to be traversed by each individual, and not an express highway.

Bindu

The artworks of Agnus and Henk

Savitri Bhavan, in its cool, clear lines, is already something of a sculpture in itself. But now its classical façade and luminous interiors are enhanced by an exhibition of sculpture and paintings by Henk van Putten and Agnus Gastmans.



A view of the exhibition at Savitri Bhavan

Agnus's paintings shimmer off the cool, white walls, drawing the viewer into their depths. While the pointillist 'Orb' palpates quietly, in 'Kindle your Light' an ascending, increasingly luminous column is touched at its apex by a descending triangle of light. The curves and oranges in "Like a violet Trace" give a feeling of warmth and wholeness, yet the violet trace hints at something else: an intervention from another plane?

Henk's works are a perfect complement. He is fascinated by form and balance, by how planes intersect and interweave, and much of the pleasure of his best work is derived from the perfection of the finish allied to the complexity of the form. It's not surprising, then, that his favourite composer is Bach. In fact, one of Henk's most interesting pieces "Contrapuntus no. 14, a completion", an aluminium sculpture in which planes and dimen-

sions weave in and out of each other, is Henk's interpretation of the 33 missing bars of one of Bach's last great fugues. But Henk also enjoys the purity of simple curves. "Stargazer" is simply a circle of painted plywood rising to a gold-leaf tipped point, yet it is oddly moving as a representation of the human spirit which, bound to the earth, is always reaching skywards.

Perhaps the greatest revelation, however, is how well Henk and Agnus's work complements the ambience of Savitri Bhavan. Nothing disturbs, nothing clashes. Rather, it is as if the white corridors and rather severe amphitheatre have awaited these images and forms for their own completion. In this sense, Savitri Bhavan provides a perfect base and springboard for artists who celebrate form while hinting at its ambiguities and the possibilities beyond.

Alan



'Like a violet Trace' by Agnus



Henk's sculptures displayed outside



'Contrapuntus no. 14, a completion' by Henk

Pangea – One World

A photo exhibition by Lisbeth and Ribhu at Pitanga.

PHOTO LISBETH



'The girl in the mask' by Lisbeth

Worlds witnessed through the camera lens is what mother and son, Lisbeth and Ribhu, presented at Pitanga this January under the name 'Pangea – one world'. Though the images were captured during independent journeys, the common thread that linked the images was striking: that of stillness and tranquillity. Moments of deep connection with land and beings, human and otherwise, that evoked a feeling of oneness and wholeness.

Lisbeth's portraits are piercing and intimate – an elderly lady's face under a straw hat glows like a carefree damsel on a summer day; a little girl tightly wrapped in her sarong shivers in the North Sea breeze; a teenager shows an open gaze – the images reveal the soul of the subject with such an openness and trust that the viewer can be nothing but open and vulnerable in response.

Ribhu's photos are poetic and mysterious. He writes he is "obsessed with perspectives", but magic seeps into his images. A poignant moment as a father in the Amazon embraces his children, a wild stallion caught in the twilight, or haunting landscapes, all revealing the rare beauty of the world we inhabit.

Priya Sundaravalli



'Dreamscapes': at Lencois, Peru by Ribhu

PHOTO RIBHU

WEATHER

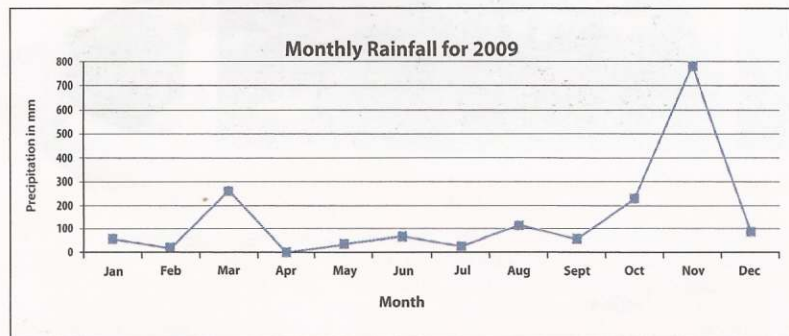
Record rains in 2009

Going by the rainfall data from the meteorological station at Auroville's Water Harvest, 2009 was a very wet year. There was a record precipitation of 1774 mm while the yearly average stands at 1227 mm. While the number of wet days – 65 in all – was close to the annual average of 62 days, excessive precipitation in the months of March and November contributed to the record figures. The heavy rains in March also affected the cashew flower blossoms leading to a decrease in the cashew nut harvest in summer.

For the farms, the year 2009 was in general, good. Below are some comments from two Auroville farmers.

Tomas (Annapurna Farm): "Although the distance is not so far, weather in Annapurna is often quite different from Auroville. Probably the influence of the sea is pretty strong near the coast but less in the interior. Annapurna's total for 2009 comes only to 1344mm.

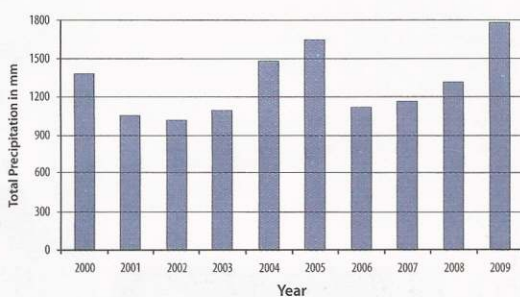
"The Auroville farms enjoyed beautiful sunny and dry weather during the harvest of 2009 in January and February. The start of the rainy season in August / September was good for sowing and weeding of millets and other grains. October was dry and difficult; the millets were suffering and rice at Annapurna had to be transplanted with water from a deep bore well. The heavy rains in November delayed the cultivation of vegetable seedlings such as salads, greens and herbs. The rain in the middle of December helped irrigate the rice but wiped out part of the sesame crop and flattened the first flowering rice. Auroville vegetables will be late this year – some farmers were washed out, others waited till the end of December to sow seeds."



once and caused flooding. Having raised beds helped us a bit but we lost quite a lot of produce. Miraculously though, many of the plants survived, particularly pumpkin and basil for which we grow our own seed. Some Auroville farmers lost crops that they planted after the first heavy rains, hoping and expecting that the monsoon was almost at an end. Unfortunately it wasn't and the next lot of rain destroyed them."

Priya Sundaravalli

Total Rainfall - 2000-2009



Priya (Buddha Garden): "The worst thing about the rain last year was that it was very unpredictable and when it did come, it came all at once and was very destructive. The so called 'summer rains' didn't really happen although there was enough to make the local grass grow – which seems to have the capacity to grow quickly whenever there is any rain.

"The north east monsoon was delayed and when the rains did come in November, it came all at

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Deep ecology with John Seed

In December, rainforest activist John Seed led a two-day workshop in Auroville which focused on healing the separation between nature and ourselves.

"We are part of the Earth and the Earth is part of us", was how John Seed introduced the central idea of Deep Ecology. Deep Ecology, according to its founder, Arne Naess, is about asking deeper questions. The main concern of Deep Ecology is to move beyond the individualism and anthropocentrism of Western culture, or human-centredness, which is the consequence of the thinking that came from Judaism and Christianity that says only Man was created in God's image and that only human beings have souls. As this perception shifts, there is a transformation in our relationship to other species and in our commitment to them.

As John Seed put it, "We need to understand there is not the environment – ie everything that is not us. We are environment, there is no disconnection. We are part of everything that lives and has ever lived. Every cell in our body speaks for an unbroken chain of being going back 4 billion years."

Naess believed that ecological ideas are not enough to change the world. We need an 'ecological identity'. For two days, through rituals, exercises and poems and songs to Mother Earth, the participants tried to contact this identity, this ecological self. One such exercise was the Cosmic walk, in which participants paced out the relative distances between the sun and the planets. "The cosmic walk exercise made us realize how small we are and how we are not the centre of everything; it made us realize that we are a small part of a huge cycle!" said Hugo Otto, one of the participants.

Another insight was that we all know what is happening in the world because we read about it in the newspapers each day, but we don't feel it enough to do anything about it. As John Seed put it, "only the correct balance of thinking with feeling will lead us to right action".

However, even though the workshop involved many different exercises to understand and connect deeply with nature, it didn't fulfill the expectations of some of the participants. They felt it was aimed at people who had little or no contact with nature in their daily lives, whereas most of the people who attended this workshop are Aurovilians or live and work in the community and already have a special connection with nature.

One Aurovilian participant appreciated the emphasis upon the interconnectedness of all living beings but missed what she called the 'vertical connection', humanity's aspiration to exceed what we are now. Another participant felt that the workshop was more about connecting to other people. In this sense, it was a success, as it established deep connections between the participants and created a network which may be the foundation for building a more conscious future together.

Deborah Penna



Litter-Free Day!

We'd been warned! For weeks posters and t-shirts had been appearing around Auroville preparing us for the big event – Litter-Free Auroville (LFA) 2010. The big day, Friday, 29th January, arrived. From early morning, groups of Aurovilians and schoolchildren could be seen picking up plastic, glass, food wrappers, old chappals and other assorted litter and waste (which included a complete toilet) from roadsides, fields and building sites and stuffing it all into sacks. After an hour or two, vans appeared to pick up the sacks and then all the litter and all the people streamed towards Certitude.

They arrived to find numerous stalls and knowledgeable Aurovilians ready to explain how the mantra of the day – Reduce, Recycle, Reuse – could be put into practice. 'Cowboy' B. stood beside his waste-compressed blocks, explaining that if the 100 kilos of unrecyclable waste which the community generates each day could be made into building materials like these, there would be no more need for an Auroville landfill. Next door, Herve was showing some excited schoolgirls that wastepaper could be made into beautiful papier mache objects, like the waste basket he held in his hand.

Just before lunch the much-awaited Great Waste Puppet Theatre of Auroville premiered before hundreds of kids and adults, the waste robots gyrating to techno and Bollywood pop.

And all the while the vans kept bringing in the sacks and quietly, inexorably, the waste mountain grew and grew.

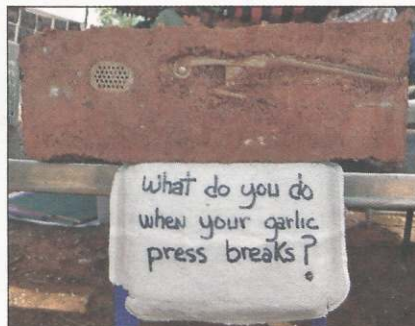
Come evening and everybody flooded down to the Visitors Centre. There was a buffet and all the Auroville bands were going to play, but the really big attraction was the 'Trashion Show' where 27 Aurovilian designers, amateur and professional, were to show their latest fashion creations made only of trash and unrecyclable materials. Beautiful young people sashayed down the catwalk tastefully adorned with CDs, cement sacks, bubble wrap and coffee powder wrappers. Accessories included Tetra Pak boots and woven cassette-tape handbags. It all looked great. There was even a sensational wedding dress made up of shredded plastic.

Finally, Aurovilians and visitors danced under the stars to the brightest and best of our home-grown musicians.

The young organizers of LFA 2010, Soma Waste Management, had wanted to make this the biggest community happening since the inauguration of Auroville in February, 1968. And they succeeded: over 1600 people attended the festivities. But, more than this, the professionalism of the organization and the enthusiasm and idealism that permeated it showed that a new generation is ready and capable of leading, in their own unique way, Auroville into the future. A litter-free future, of course.

Alan

**REDUCE
USE
CYCLE**



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