

'Breaking Ground'

Four Auroville ceramic artists showcase their works in India's first Ceramics Triennale called 'Breaking Ground'.

Jaipur, August 31st. "On behalf of the Jawahar Kala Kendra, (JKK) I welcome you to *Breaking Ground*, India's first ever Ceramics Triennale," said JKK's director general Pooja Sood to the large audience. "The JKK aspires to be a centre of excellence across the arts. This Triennale is an expression of ceramic excellence, showing projects from 47 artists from India, Korea, Japan, France, UK, Australia, USA, Germany and Israel."

How it all began

"It all started way back in China in 2013 when a number of Indian ceramicists were working to manifest the Indian Pavilion of the Fule International Ceramic Art Museum in the city of Fuping," says Ray Meeker, the co-founder of Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry. "A few of them started thinking of an Indian ceramics biennale, something which is common in countries such as China and Korea but which has never happened in India. But it wasn't till summer 2016 that I got a call from one of them, Anjani



From left: Saraswati, Rakhee, Adil and Priya

thousands of ceramic artists, there is not much public ceramic awareness. There are no galleries dedicated to ceramics, there are no ceramic shows and, contrary to other art forms such as dance, there are no professional critics. We want to show that ceramic art is a full member of the fine arts family, and help viewers see ceramics in a different context. We aimed at scale – many of the works that are exhibited are huge – at diversity, and at a variety of material usage, showing both unfired and fired works." The organizers hope to instill awareness that ceramics can contribute to beautifying the environment, whether as non-functional art objects or as façades and murals of buildings, as is done in many other parts of the world.

The selection

"The artists' selection was a mixed affair," recalls Ray. "The curatorial team compiled a list of some 100 artists and shortlisted 50 of them on the basis of their portfolio and their proposed installation. But then it was decided to make an open call, and that brought in an entirely different group of people, with some artists who were completely unknown. A new shortlist was made and the team finally settled on 35 artists from India, including four artists from Auroville. As funding was a problem, only 12 foreign artists could be invited, those who had managed to secure their own funding. We were lucky that we got a fantastic group of foreign artists – but if we had funds, we would have invited many more."

Are Aurovilian ceramicists 'special' since there is such a high participation from Auroville? Adil Writer, one of the selected Auroville participants, shrugs off the question. "In a highly curated exhibition like this, nothing matters except your portfolio and the work you are proposing for it. I am pretty sure more

Aurovilians would have been selected if they had chosen to participate," he says.

The future

Adil's feeling about the exhibition is that it is "stunning. I have been invited to many biennales all over the world, and this is at par with anything I have seen. This is not a show about normal ceramics; it is literally breaking ground. It is going to put ceramics and art on the world map, just as the Kochi Biennale is doing."

Rajeev Sethi, India's leading design professional and art critic, praised the exhibition as an eye-opener for ceramic art. "This event has great potential and, like the Kochi Biennale, can become an international calling card and grow as big as the Venice Biennale," he says.

"A major question, right from the beginning, was if we should go for a biennale or triennale," says Ray. "There was general relief when there was a unanimous decision to go for a triennale – if we had decided on a biennale, the working committee would have to start organising the next one right away – so the next one will be in 2021, perhaps at a different location."

"The next one may be completely different, says Peter. "The definition of ceramics is broad and we may include not only fine arts ceramics, but also archaeological finds and technological and scientific use of ceramics. But all that will be seen in future."

Breaking Ground, the first Indian Ceramics Triennale, can be visited from August 31 to November 18.

Carel

The works of Adil, Priya and Saraswati will also be displayed on auroville.com on August 31.



Ray Meeker with his work *Rio Stella. America First!*

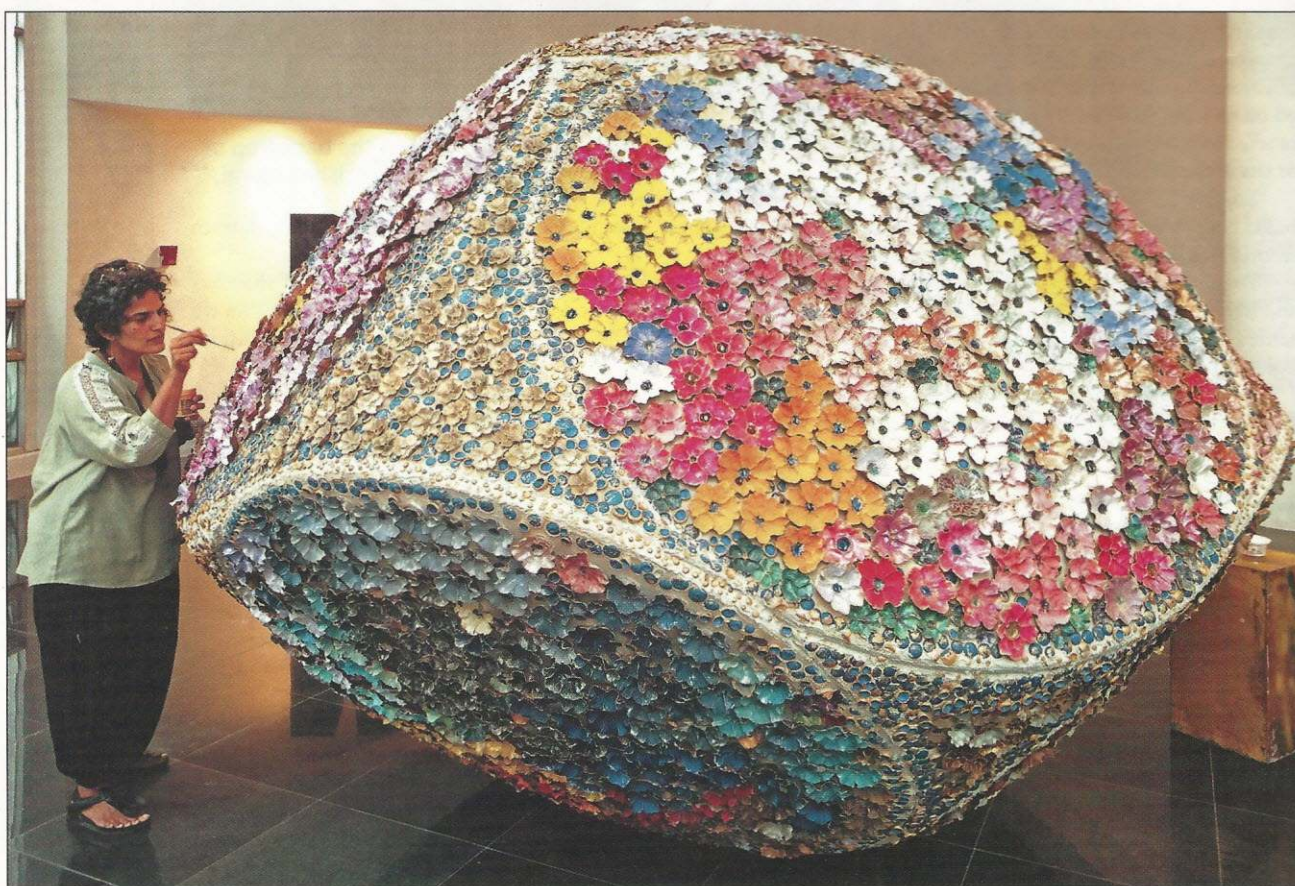
Khanna, that they were going to do a ceramics biennale at the JKK. Could I be an advisor? I agreed, and together with the other advisors, Peter Nagy from New Delhi's Gallery *Nature Morte* and Pooja Sood, we have been supporting the six-member working committee cum curatorial team, which, incidentally, mainly consisted of my former students."

The purpose of the triennale

"We did not want to pay homage to history but instead show contemporary ceramic art from India and abroad," says Vineet Kacker, one of the curators. "Though India has

Six more shows

Simultaneously with *Breaking Ground*, six more exhibitions of contemporary ceramic art were organized at different locations in Jaipur, showcasing the works of more than 100 ceramic artists from all over India. AnanTaya organized *Handle It*, in which two Auroville ceramicists, Supriya and Julietta, participated. The Juneja Art Gallery hosted the exhibition *Woven Together*; the Samanvai Art Gallery hosted *Tree of Plenty*; Gallery Art Chill hosted two exhibitions, *Into the Box* and *Just an Illusion*; and AKFD Story hosted *H20*, where two more Auroville artists, Sabrina and Nausheen, exhibited their works.



Priya putting the final touches to her work *Blossoming - Being all of them, She stands there*

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Adil Writer: The deserted bar code

The idea of the bar code started several years ago when I was in China. I was thinking of what to make to symbolize a connection between China and India. I realised that when we think of China, we think of consumerism and that everything on the market, from the cheapest to the most expensive products, carries a bar code. Hence, I decided to make a bar code. I started making one in clay, which didn't work out, then finally settled on a 20-piece bar code installation, each piece made from canvas wrapped around wooden frames and painted with acrylic paint. It was colourful and it travelled to various exhibitions. But then it had its day. Over the last 6 months I converted it into an unfired canvas-clay piece, with stickers on it saying 'please touch'. I want people to become aware that clay doesn't need to be fired, that it can be left unfired. This piece was selected by the organizers of the Triennale as they wanted to show another expression of clay.

The title of the work, 'The deserted bar code', is a play on words. I love to see the night sky, something which is still possible in Auroville and in the desert, but not in the big cities. I was trying to bring that out. So the bar code became black on the top and yellow at the bottom as an image of the desert with the night sky, using locally sourced clays. The black clay is the Thanghar clay we use every day in the studio, which fires white. The yellow is bentonite and the flashes of red, Auroville earth. The raw unfired clays have been fixed using an adhesive, which also acts as a cracking agent, and the surface later stabilised by a matt varnish.

The installation can be assembled in various ways: as a bar code, or mounted horizontally on a wall, or as a gateway with verticals spanned by a horizontal bar.



Saraswati: Anti-Gravity



I do not have a formal education in the arts, but there was an intense homeschooling process as my family was fully involved in a life of art community. I got a degree in Russian language and literature and worked as a journalist for nine years before coming to Auroville. But since my childhood I was involved with clay, as it was the preferred art medium of my mother. It was my escape, my secret garden, but I wasn't really sure if I wanted to become a full-time potter. When I moved to Auroville, I started working at Auromode, designing silk accessories, and taught ceramics at the White Peacock studio run by my mother, who had joined Auroville a few years earlier.

Then, about 10 years ago, there was an inner conversation with The Mother, and it became clear what path I had to follow. And that was ceramics. Today, if I don't work with clay, I get sick very fast. I am only joyful after a day of work – when something has been completed or is in process. I learned that Lakshmi only comes when Saraswati is there. Only if you work every day will the inspiration come. That led to my participation in a show in Goa, to a solo show in Auroville, and I was member of the team that worked at Toranagallu in Karnataka.

I wear three hats today. I do my art work, I teach clay to children and I make ceramic jewelry to be able to fund the materials, equipment and other costs that come along with the ceramic media. I think I found my balance between giving and getting, moving in and spreading out, being alone and enjoying the larger family of Auroville.

The work that was accepted for the Jaipur Triennale is called 'Anti-Gravity' and speaks about the fragility of everything in life, how fast life goes. The installation consists of 12 house-like objects made of porcelain, 11 are standing and one is suspended. The structures represent living spaces as well as human characters. My work process is rather a spontaneous flow. I start with a sketch, but I am always happy to abandon it. When I work, the piece unfolds: I find the rhythm and discover the balance of the work, and so it grows, not logically, but by following an inner sense which the piece dictates at each step. And I try to keep the mind empty. For if one sticks to one's own ideas, the divine has no way to enter.

Rakhee Kane: Shifting identities

When I learned that I had been accepted to exhibit at the Triennale at the Jawahar Kala Kendra (JKK), I started pondering what to show. As I have a special connection with Rajasthan, I felt that my piece had to resonate with Rajasthan. Rajasthan is known for its intricate stone lattices or *jaalis*, which act as a space divider, as a veil and provide privacy. Another source of inspiration was Jaipur's famous sun dial, the Jantar Mantar, where the sun's shadow shows the time of the day. I decided to make an L-shaped *jaali* of 9 x 9 feet and 9 x 3 feet in a contemporary form, positioned in such a way that a play of light and shadows is projected on to a wall. 170 *jaalis* were made, each one different from the other, from which I selected 120, and constructed the structure *in situ* at the JKK.

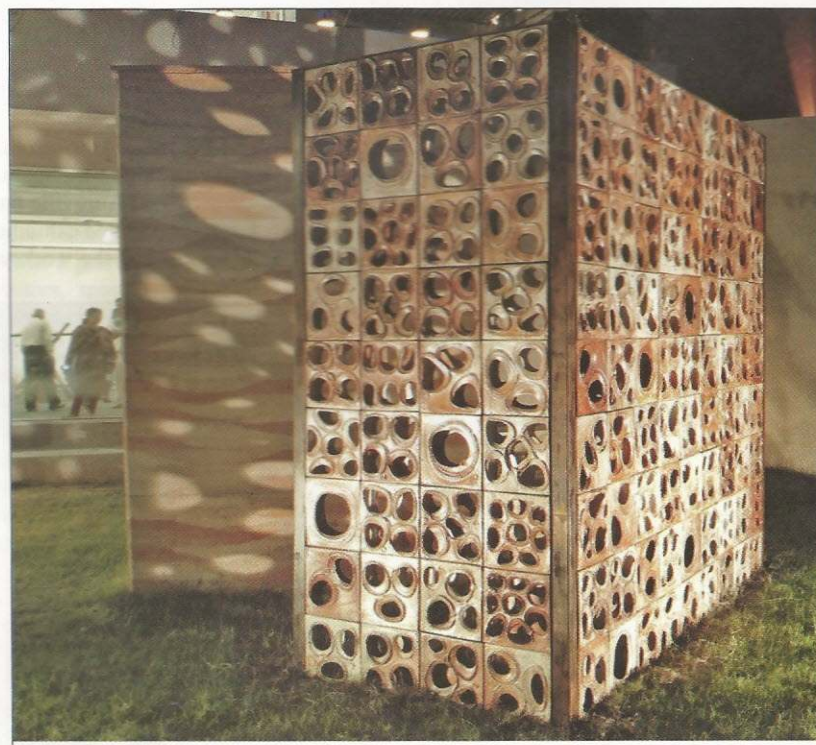
To give an architectural dynamic to the piece, a wall had to be built. I decided to make this in rammed earth with soil in different coloured clays sourced from Rajasthan. A team from Auroville travelled to Jaipur and put it all together.

Together with my husband Dharmesh, we identified two locations at JKK to get the optimum play of shadows and light. The best location would have been the entrance lawn, but this was not possible for technical reasons. So we settled for the second place, where the sun strikes the installation only for 3-4 hours of day. In the evening, artificial lighting provides the dramatic shadows.

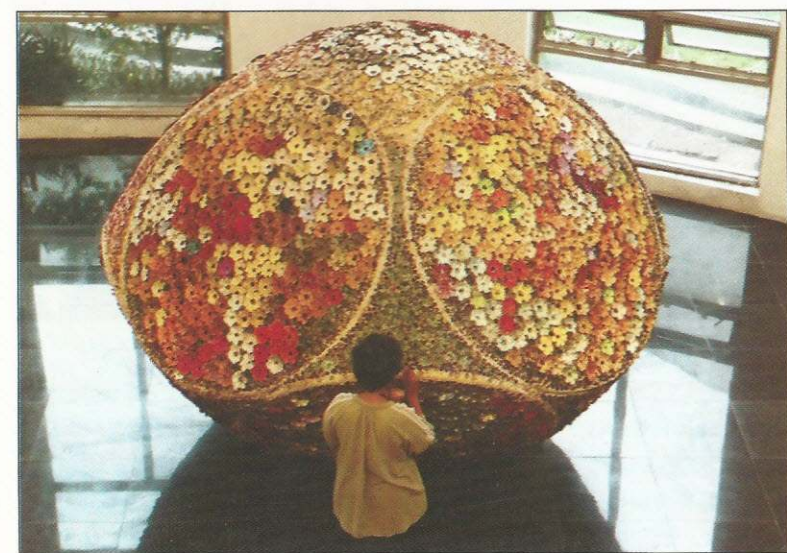
In many ways, this installation is also breaking ground for me. This was the first time I have been playing with shadows and light and combined architectural high-fired ceramics with rammed earth. I quite enjoyed it and I hope to continue doing things like this.



The installation against the backdrop of Charles Correa's iconic Krishna mural.



Priya Sundaravalli: Blossoming – Being all of them, She stands there

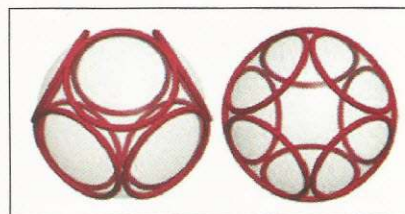


The portfolio I had sent the Triennale curatorial committee contained a picture of a 4-metre high piece I had made at an art residency at the Jindal Steel Works in Toranagallu: a steel valve clad with hundreds of ceramic tesserae. They asked if I could make "something similar, something big" for the Triennale. But where to find such a base? The big disc in Toranagallu had come from the scrap yard of JSW's steel factory. I did not have the finances to order something like that.

The solution came on a walk around the Matrimandir, when I saw some fibreglass discs standing outside a workshop. I was told they were early test discs, no longer of use to the Matrimandir and I could have them.

That brought the second challenge – to find a way in which these discs could be harmoniously grouped. Extensive internet search led to a solution, when I found a 'circlesphere', a word coined by an American sculptor Kenneth Snelson, which showed how circles could be put together into a 3-D form. Then, with the invaluable help of Aureka, Auroville's metal workshop, and the enthusiastic support of its executive, Palani, we managed to combine the eight discs into a single installation, with the gaps between the discs filled with locally-made fibreglass membranes.

At my workshop I had meanwhile started to make and fire the thousands of flowers in various sizes and colours. Then followed weeks of composition, glueing, leading to this installation. My inspiration for the title of this work came from *Thiruvaimozhi*, a collection of Tamil hymns by the 9th century Alvar saint, Nammalvar. In one of these hymns, he praises the Divine who is present in all – *Being this man, that woman, and those things, being all, She stands there.*



8-circle anti-prism

Nearly 100 Projects Funded by Special Grants for Auroville's 50th Anniversary

The 50th anniversary celebrations of Auroville began many months back with high-profile events such as the Auroville Expo in New Delhi in November 2017 (*AV Today*, issue 341) and the Prime Minister's visit to Auroville shortly before the 50th anniversary on 28 February 2018 (*AV Today*, issue 344). It might seem that the 50th anniversary is behind us, but celebrations and works connected to our anniversary are still ongoing thanks to special grants from the Government of India (GOI) for our 50th year.

In October 2017, the GOI sanctioned a special grant of Rs. 10 crores (or Rs. 100 million) for 'capital' projects to accelerate public works in Auroville and create more physical assets for the community. In February 2018, an additional grant of Rs. 4 crores (or Rs. 40 million) was sanctioned by the GOI for 'general' projects such as cultural performances, festivals, and films. These two grants are specifically for 50th anniversary projects and are separate from the regular annual grant from the GOI for Auroville.

As of August 2018, 40 projects have been funded under the capital grant and more than 50 projects under the general grant. Many projects have been concluded and many more are still in progress. Here we present a small selection of the 50th anniversary projects funded by the capital and general grants. Auroville residents can read status update reports of all the projects on Auronet.



The roof under construction at the New Creation Stadium, one of the large projects funded by the 50th grant

Public works

Sustainable Resource Centre

This building will provide a collaborative space for three organisations in Auroville – EcoService, Upcycling Studio, and WasteLess – that address waste-related challenges through recycling, art and design, and education.

Multimedia Centre

The popular Multimedia Centre has been upgraded with a new porch, sound system, air-conditioning system and new chairs.

Bharat Nivas renovation

Many buildings in the Bharat Nivas campus were renovated before the 50th anniversary and three buildings are being re-purposed.

Street lights

Street lights now illuminate the roads along the western and northern sides of the Matrimandir, and a separate project is underway to install street lights in clusters elsewhere.

Education

Greening of schools in the bioregion

This project was initiated to encourage students at 55 schools in the Auroville bioregion to plant and safeguard trees for a healthier environment.

The Great Adventure (a film)

A general purpose introduction to Auroville. The film can be viewed online at: <https://vimeo.com/278984507>

Auroville Seed Festival

The second Auroville Seed Festival was held in July 2018 and attracted more than 1000 visitors. The seed stalls and lectures by invited speakers were the main highlights of the festival.

Educational nature path in Shakti Forest

This path winds in a loop of about 1.4 km along the perimeter of the forest, passing by some special trees. The path is open for visitors and guided tours can be arranged.

Cultural performances at Bharat Nivas

A variety of exhibitions and cultural performances have been organised at Bharat Nivas, for example, the dance-drama *Savitri* and the exhibition *Auroville, India and The Earth*.

Sports

Covered stadium at New Creation

A roof is being installed over the open basketball court at New Creation so it can be used in all weathers for a variety of sports events - not just basketball but also badminton, volleyball, table tennis, gymnastics, kabaddi, etc.

Aspiration sports ground

The Aspiration sports ground is undergoing major improvements: resurfacing of the basketball court, fencing around the ground, a play area for children with special needs, etc.

Football and volleyball tournaments

Football and volleyball tournaments were organised, and they attracted several teams and hundreds of players from the Auroville bioregion.



Renovated space at Bharat Nivas

Events and exchanges

Journey of Auroville Festival

Began with the Auroville Expo and other events in New Delhi in November 2017 (*AV Today* # 341). Further editions of the festival are planned to take place in Baroda, Kolkata, and Tamil Nadu.

The Bridge: A Collaborative Research Encounter

Held over six days in February 2018. Researchers from Auroville, India and beyond came together to explore four themes: conscious collectivity, harmony from diversity, unending education, and creative progress.

Soul Encounters for the Auroville Soul

In this 90-minute event on 17 February 2018, more than 100 performers representing 11 performing arts disciplines dazzled a huge audience in the Matrimandir amphitheatre.

Sangamam Festival

This festival brought together Aurovilians and people from the local villages. Around 8000 people attended the Sangamam this year, which had a special focus on the first 50 years of the Auroville Journey (*AV Today*, # 345).

Integrated Transport Service (ITS)

The ITS office-cum-workshop has been set up opposite the Solar Kitchen as a central point to encourage and integrate sustainable transport in Auroville. It is beginning with a fleet of electric scooters which are available for the Auroville community.



Waste bins for the Eco Service



New digital storage at the Auroville Archives

The work of the 50th Anniversary Organisation Team

From October 2016, when the 50th Anniversary Organisation Team was formed, much of the work involved reviewing proposals from prospective project holders. Now that nearly all of the funds have been allocated, we are focusing on the progress and completion of projects: we discuss the status of ongoing projects, address queries and requests from project holders, review amounts disbursed and utilised, make site visits, and so on. Once a week, we meet as a larger group called the Monitoring Committee, which includes the Secretary and Under-Secretary of the Auroville Foundation.

Documentation is another area of our work. We request formal updates from project holders once every two months and we prepare status update reports for the Auroville Foundation and the community. We published the first status update reports of all the 50th projects on Auronet in July 2018, and we have just prepared the second version for the Governing Board meeting in September 2018.

We are full of gratitude for the creativity and dedication of the project holders to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Auroville and take us forward. In the coming months, we look forward to offering them the support they need to complete their projects.

Ravi M.
for the 50th Anniversary Organisation Team

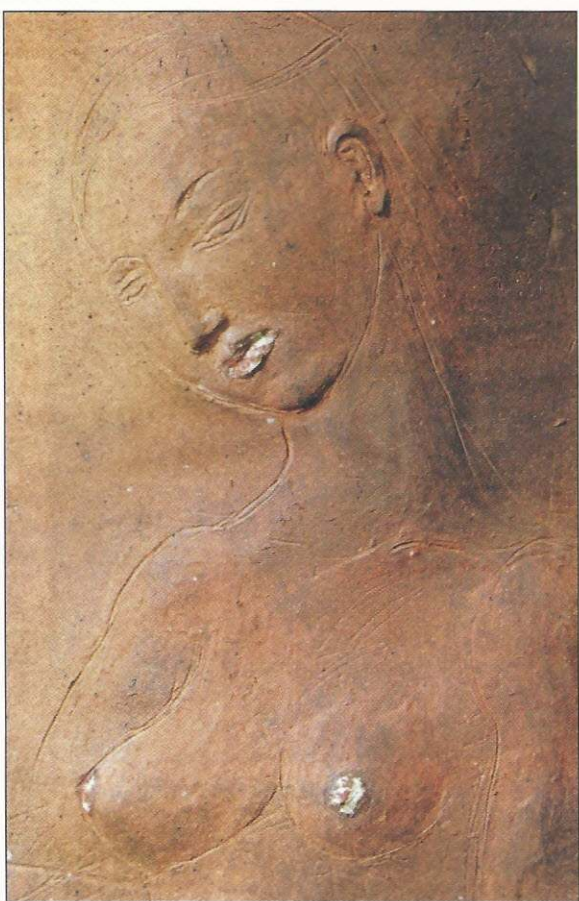
The art of Kratu

As part of the 'Art for Land' initiative, for the past month there has been an exhibition in Unity Pavilion showcasing the work of two artists, Aurovilian Kratu and the late Usha Patel of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. All the works have been generously donated for the purchase of land in Auroville.

Kratu was an "expressionist" painter before turning to ceramic sculpture. The large selection of ceramic sculpture in this exhibition gives a good overview of his ceramic work over the years. Here are the striking heads he is best known for, as well as vases and free standing sculptures, bas-reliefs and line drawings of predominantly female figures.

"I like the female form very much," says Kratu, "I am fascinated by the movement of the human body."

Sometimes Kratu's forms seem to be moulded at that very moment; they seem warm from the imprint of his fingers. At other times they seem to be mysteriously emerging from the clay itself. In this sense, they are somewhat reminiscent of Michelangelo's unfinished bodies emerging from the rough, unshaped marble. Indeed, while Kratu laughingly dismisses any kind of comparison, his method of working is sometimes akin to that of the



great Renaissance artist. "Sometimes when I see a piece of clay, I see the beginning of some-

thing inside, which shapes itself into the sculpture," says Kratu.

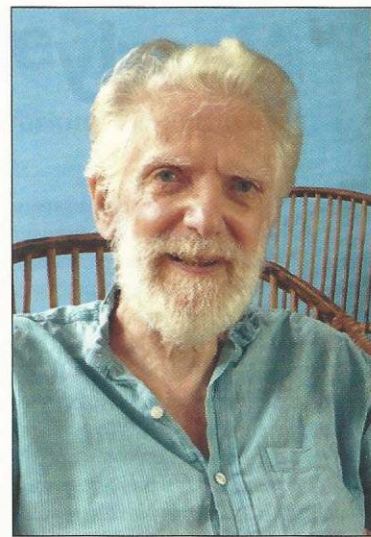
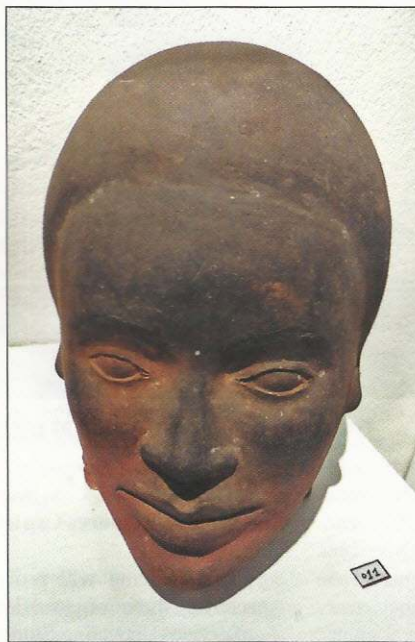
Kratu spent 17 years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram before coming to Auroville and while he painted little during this period, it clearly had an important influence upon his art. "In the past I used to paint large canvases on bright colours with tormented dramatic figures. But now I would like to express something more from within, a peace, a calmness," he explained some years ago.

"My aim in sculpture, whether dealing with human body, groups or faces, is to express something deeper than the outward form. When I work extensively on single faces of varying sizes, I am trying to convey in them the profundity of the human soul which is always present under the surface and through time."

Indeed, there is something timeless about his archetypal figures

and heads, something echoing the timelessness of classical Greek sculpture and certain forms of African art.

Indian art is a particular inspiration. "I love the inner quality of Indian work. The best of Indian art and sculpture expresses an inner spiritual truth and this is what I try to depict in my work. It is soft, expressive, but the expression is sometimes inside."



Kratu

Kratu favours simplicity both in execution and materials. Much of his work has the natural texture and colour of earth. "I like wood-firing very much because wood gives the natural colour which we don't get with the gas kiln. I don't use much colour and I don't use glaze much because it is thick and you lose the details." Indeed, some of the most expressive work in this exhibition employs just a few lines which suggest a face or form against a plain background. As he puts it, "I like simplicity but at the same time a kind of expression that is subtle and inner".

In other words, this is an art that doesn't trumpet itself; rather, it asks you to still yourself before seeking it quietly on its own terms. It's a rewarding adventure.

Alan

REFLECTION

1968 and onwards

The goal of a revolution is to reject (by force if necessary) an existing malfunctioning order of things and replace it with a new paradigm. Has there ever been a revolution that has succeeded? Why do they almost never seem to succeed? Even if we change the *modus operandi*, what is to stop things reverting to their pre-existing state? What is to stop one overthrown despot being replaced further down the line by another?

I was in my early twenties in 1968. I was still fully concentrated on passing my examinations to become an architect. Meanwhile, things were stirring in the world. There was a palpable Force at work at a more global level than just in France, which was compelling change and rejection of the old order and vision. In Paris that May, students had occupied the University and taken to the streets, not merely in protest against the existing educational system, but in revolt against the whole existing state of things. The more the authorities tried to suppress the protests, the more virulent and widespread the protests became. The workers across France joined the students. In the end, did French politics and governance change? Was there a fundamental social change?

When The Mother was asked to comment upon what was happening in France, she said, *It's clearly the future which is awakening and trying to drive away the past... It's the higher power COMPELLING (sic) people to do what they must do... It's clearly (not in the detail of it, but in the direction of the movement), clearly a will to have done with the past and to open the door to the future. It's like a sort of revolution with stagnation.*

But, she saw it only as the very first step, and warned, *There must be no violence; as soon as one indulges in violence, it's the return to the past and opens the door to all conflicts...*

And, of course, there was violence in France. This is why we are justified in asking ourselves whether France had really changed. Certainly French youth seemed at the time to believe that they had inherited the spirit of the original French Revolution of May 1789, whose social and political changes were made concrete by Napoleon. And yet, despite the

violence, despite the tendency at a societal level to progressively relapse into a consumer-centric mentality, there was a new vision and the sense of something different at work.

In the USA, the 1969 music festival at Woodstock became the focal point of a countercultural movement of change, described as 'the Summer of Love'. For what? Something else. But what?

*"I'm going to try and get my soul free
We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden"*

Joni Mitchell's song "Woodstock" attempts to capture the aspiration of the moment. I believe that 'back to the garden' had a wider sense than a return to living and working on the land.

*"Well maybe it's the time of year
Or maybe it's the time of man
I don't know who I am
But life is for learning"*

Joni later commented that Woodstock was "a spark of beauty" where half a million kids "saw that they were part of a greater organism". A paradigm shift.

Why did the change promised by Woodstock not then sustainably materialise itself in the society at large? Is it because, in part, in our hippy dreams, in being encouraged to 'tune in, turn on, drop out', to indulge in 'sex, drugs and rock'n roll' we mistook the liberation aspired for as a licence to indulge in all of our desires, rather than for the true liberation from our egos that is a freedom from all desires and slaveries, and without which true love and peace cannot establish itself among us? Nevertheless, it was a seed for something else.

I felt the hopes and shared the dreams of love and peace with an unaccustomed intensity. By the time I had completed my studies and started working, the sense of dissatisfaction with the existing value-system and the structures it had created had begun to strike me. Half way through my post-graduation work experience, I stood one day outside my

huge London architectural office (over 1000 architects, engineers and surveyors!) and realised that in all the office blocks surrounding me, the Shell Centre, etc. there were armies of workers, including myself, passing around bits of paper about realities, real life situations, they never actually experienced at first hand. In my case, we were designing housing for London's poor without being exposed to or having any understanding of what it meant to live in the buildings we were designing (unless we unofficially made efforts to visit the area and engage with the people affected). Such was the mindset of the time that the homes we were designing were referred to as 'housing units', a description still widely in use even today! I resolved there and then to quickly save enough money so that I could travel and seek for something to become involved with that was more real, more true. It had to be something beyond this unreal world for which I had been educated and groomed. I had also by then commenced an inner search, unknowingly seeking Reality with a capital R. I sensed that I might find the 'something else' that I yearned for in India.

On 28th February 1968, on a barren plain in South India, the Auroville project was inaugurated. Auroville's objectives somehow embodied the core and essence of the revolutionary spirit and hopes for a global change not just to a new vision, a new world order of things, a new kind of society, but to a new consciousness and even physically, to a new kind of being, which might make such a fundamental change possible. For to change the order without essentially changing the consciousness has always been the reason for the downfall and failure of all revolutions. And to change the consciousness requires that the individuals constituting any collective change within themselves then work together with others at a community level, eventually (hopefully), leading to a societal change. Not easy, unless the individuals can see, not just with their eyes and in their minds the necessity of change, but feel its need in their hearts with a need as great as the need to breathe. And that they are prepared to undertake the necessary discipline which will firmly root the change in the whole of their being. As I discovered in my own inner journey, such a colossal change

cannot be achieved instantly, and certainly not quickly at a collective level. It is too often a case of three steps forward followed by two or three steps back.

Auroville's pioneer phase saw its first potential citizens as having come endowed with the spirit of Paris 1968 and the Woodstock generation. Without these rebels and pioneers, Auroville would arguably not have been settled. Certainly the Indian spiritual aspirants, even the younger ones, seemed to me to feel more comfortable with a life of clean white dhotis and the comfort of the Ashram with its rituals, order and stability. Some of the Western pioneers saw out the pioneering stage of Auroville's development, planted the 2 million trees that changed the face and microclimate of the proposed 'city' area and its surrounding region, and then started leaving as Auroville moved through its struggle for self-governance and independence from the rule of the old order into a more settled but eventually more bureaucratised and staid society. Perhaps it became a society resembling in many respects the old order it had hoped to eradicate. The early pioneers were also having to make a choice between a life with its libertarian sense of freedom, with either a Club Med or a hippy *laissez-faire* atmosphere and the more demanding atmosphere of yogic discipline. Did some of them, in the process, also lose the fire of their original hopes and dreams?

Revolutions, then, are seeds planted in a society whose general mass is not likely to have the will to change if it means losing its comforts and patterns of habit. Transformation among the mass of a society can only happen gradually and has to be preceded by an inner change of vision. It is only when enough people deeply feel the necessity for change that anything begins to change, and that often requires that a state of profound discomfort with the existing order of things becomes widespread, even unbearable. But the seed has been planted. Its growth is inevitably resisted by all that feel the existing order is under threat. In Auroville, after 50 years, when characteristically such utopian and idealistic movements would have imploded, it is still growing.

Vikas, 30.07.2018

Resilience and Auroville

Dave Storey is an Aurovilian with a background in humanitarian and development aid. Recently, he announced that he was planning to run a course with Auroville Consulting on the theme of 'Towards Resilience in a Messy World'. What does he mean by this? And why does he think the idea of resilience is important for Auroville?

Auroville Today: 'Resilience' seems to be replacing 'sustainability' as a key concept for the modern environmental movement. Why, and what is the difference?

Dave: The concept of sustainability does not seem adequate to address the threats the world is facing today. It implies long lasting stability and a desire to stay the same, to resist change. Resilience, on the other hand, is about accepting change and learning to adapt to it, not only to be able to deal with challenging circumstances but also to come up with transformative solutions for the future. Resilience accepts that the present world situation is inherently unsustainable, so we need to figure out how we are going to live in this new context, and how can we grow.

What does this mean practically?

In my profession of disaster management, the first thing you look at is prevention. If this is not possible you consider your options for mitigation and preparedness, which means avoiding or minimising the potential impact. Then, in the context of resilience, comes adaptation, or learning from the experience so the next time it happens, you will be able to respond or learn to live with the new situation better.

Today, while we have become better at keeping people alive, many more people are chronically vulnerable, "living on the edge".

So, for instance, while proportionately fewer are dying of starvation today, India has a huge number of people who are chronically malnourished. This may mean, among other things, that their mental capacities are reduced and this is a huge loss to the nation. At the same time, there are many aspects of India which are incredibly resilient, including the ability of people to reinvent themselves according to their circumstances. So we need to build upon this, to help the most vulnerable to recognise their strengths and adapt and learn.

How resilient is Auroville?

Well that depends, resilient to what? Firstly, we need to identify the challenges Auroville may have to deal with. These include the increased threat of extreme weather events brought about by climate change, the lowering of water tables with a gradual increase in salinity, as well as accumulations of solid waste and pollutants.

Then there is the threat of economic unsustainability. If our collective and individual incomes continue to increasingly rely on a few outside sources, like government funding, it's putting all our eggs in one basket. Then there are socio/political challenges, like our inability to make collective decisions, our blueprint approach to planning, our rather poor relations with our neighbours, and the ever-present possibility of intervention from the Government of India.

A resilient community is able to respond to such challenges in a positive way, and is able to

maintain its core functions as a community despite those stresses.

So how do we do that?

Rather than relying on external interventions, we need to build upon existing capacities that promote resilience. These include not compromising our environmental achievements, like the fact that a relatively high proportion of our land area is under vegetation; our local ecosystem is rather diverse and becoming increasingly so, with an emphasis on indigenous, relatively well adapted species; we have the basis for effective water catchment through traditional and new methods; and our initiatives in alternative energy, organic agriculture, solid waste management, waste water treatment and green technologies, etc.

On the social side, we have basic services in place and basic needs are met; we have a flat and networked governance model which doesn't rely on only one or two individuals; public participation and awareness is relatively high and feedback is strong; and systems of conflict resolution and basic behavioural and communication norms are gradually emerging.

Crucially, we need an approach that considers us as a part of (rather than apart from) our ecosystem as well as our surrounding social and political context, so that, for example, we balance our lifestyle choices with protecting our environment as well as the needs of others. We also need to ensure that our policies can more effectively cope with, adapt to and shape change, and that we strengthen our social networks. Also, that we create a more diverse and innovative economy.

Diversity is a key element in resilience, implying that we have to learn to embrace our differences. It is about acknowledging that other people have other ways of looking at the world and that it doesn't have to make our life miserable if somebody has a different belief. In one way, of course, we are all fundamentalists because there are certain things we strongly believe in. However, this can make us less resilient to changed circumstances. We need to be better at choosing our battles and recognising that being able to compromise can be a strength and not a weakness.

But you could also argue the opposite; that having a core belief enables one to deal with change or adversity better. For example, some of the Holocaust survivors say they survived because they had strong fundamental beliefs.

I agree, some of the Holocaust survivors even flourished subsequently because they took something important from that terrible experience. I completely understand why people need those fundamentals because it's about identity and we all have a need to know what we stand for. I think having fundamental beliefs is okay as long as we understand they are only tools and that is not how life really is. Life is in multiple shades of colour. Most of our beliefs are really just about us putting

on some lenses to try to understand things better. But to be resilient we should be ready to change those lenses when the situation changes, and change is happening all the time.

So another important aspect of resilience is understanding that it's all about change. If I am still learning, what I find true for me today may not be true for me tomorrow. It's all about learning to deal with life as flow rather than stasis.

Like surfing a wave?

Yes, and being ready to move off that wave in case you see it is taking you towards a wipe-out!

But how can you build a community upon flow? One assumes there is a need for certain basic agreements if a community is to be held together.

I think having a plan and actively moving towards it is very important for resilience, even if you must change the details of the plan at some point. I believe that in Auroville we have a very clear vision and mission and that's why we survive, because even though we feel we are far from achieving that, it is still something which is bringing us together.

In your course outline, you associate resilience with knowledge of interconnectedness. Why?

Holistic or Systems Thinking is a different way of looking at the world based on the understanding that nothing exists on its own, without reference to something else. So rather than focussing, say, on the individual plants and trees in a forest, it focuses on the relationships between them. I think looking at connections helps build resilience because it gives much more insight into a situation, and shifts our attention to where the action is, allowing one to adapt better to changed circumstances.

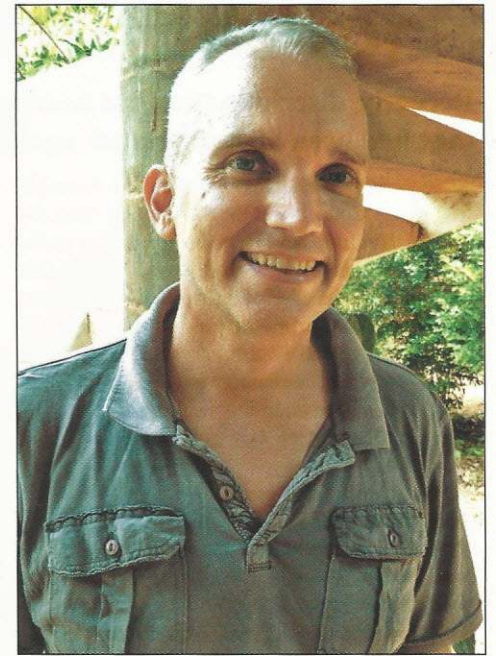
We need to understand that the way we divide things up into different things, like trees or academic disciplines, is all in our heads. Everything is boundless to some extent but we put boundaries around stuff to understand it, which is perfectly fine as long as we are aware all the time that those boundaries are artificial.

What I am trying to say is that we need a more developed sense of the complexity of context, one that involves all of the disciplines, emotions, cultural symbols and personal memories.

Are you saying that we need to learn to live with the fact that the world is much messier, less clear-cut, than we normally assume?

Absolutely. Resilience is about acknowledging that we live in a messy world and it's not going to get any less so. So, one way or the other, we have to be okay with the mess.

But there are a number of ways in which we can become better at being okay with messiness.



Dave

This is largely to do with how we choose to see the world. Can I accept responsibility for my own role in creating my view of the world? And can I choose to see the world differently by challenging my own assumptions, my own perspective and continue to engage and move forward?

However, I agree that 'messiness' can be very scary. For example, the way I am planning this course is very challenging for me because I cannot give any easy answers, even if it would make my life easier.

This touches upon a personal motivation you have in running this course.

Yes, and this is the hardest part to talk about. Although my whole life has been about changes, the last 10 years have been a period of huge personal changes for me and that's been really difficult at times. For example, at present I don't have a home of my own, and I can no longer work with 'my' trees that I planted in the forest.

I have had moments of sheer panic. On the other hand, it's been really amazing because I've learned that at some point you have to jump in and have faith.

The thing in my life that has probably been the most challenging for me is that my parents were missionaries, so Auroville for them is not comprehensible. My whole life I pushed back against the religion / spirituality thing, but what I'm coming to now, seeing how messy and complex the world is, is you can never know what's going to happen or what is connected to what, so at some point you have to jump in and have faith.

After all, almost anything we do now will have an environmental, social and spiritual impact, so there is no turning back. We must keep moving forward. This is a very important aspect of resilience because that's how you learn. And unless we keep learning we will not survive, or, at the very least, as a community we will become irrelevant because the world will move on.

So do we really have a choice?

From an interview by Alan

For more information contact dave@auroville.org.in

REVIEW

Chronicling Auroville

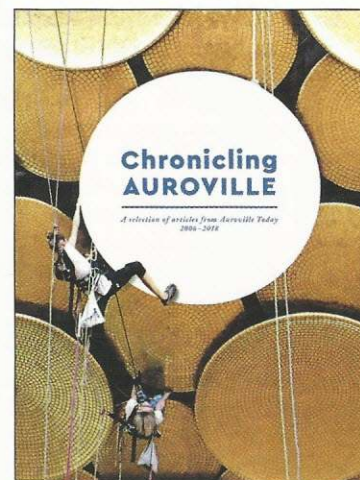
For the last 30 years, the monthly periodical *Auroville Today* has been documenting and interpreting events in Auroville for people all over the world, including Aurovilians. This is no easy task, as Auroville has many dimensions and is not an easy place to understand. As the editors state in their introduction to this new compilation, Auroville remains "very much an ongoing voyage of discovery, a field of numerous experiments by, let's face it, some fairly extraordinary people." For the publication's writers, this can be a gift as well as a significant challenge.

This compilation of almost 200 articles, chosen from issues of *Auroville Today* over the last 12 years, represents a broad spread of the publication's output during that time, and reflects the rich diversity of the Auroville experiment. The items have been edited down from their original versions to an easily digestible length, and are interspersed with vibrant colour photos and humorous illustrations. Although no author names are attributed to the articles in this collection, it is interesting to note that over the past twelve years more than 100 writers have contributed to *Auroville Today*, as well as 24 photographers and 10 graphic designers.

Much of the content is grouped into prevailing themes – such as environment, history, town building, education, arts, economy, commercial units, outreach, local culture, health – as

well as more amorphous topics, such as spirituality, people and reflections. Ranging from documentation to opinion pieces and satirical items, the articles give a taste of the challenges, frustrations and joys of trying to live an ideal "future" in a unique community. Visiting experts expound their thoughts on Auroville's progress, and guest writers praise or damn Auroville initiatives in a few hundred words. Pioneers reminisce about the early days and meeting the Mother, and Auroville youth put forward their contemporary perspectives. Some writers express despair at the community's dysfunction, while the profiles of individuals illuminate the many reasons people are inspired to join Auroville. Commentary on the lack of humour in Auroville is offset by humorous pieces, and reflections on human unity sit alongside a discussion on censorship and free expression.

In a refreshing contrast, the final pages of the publication are a selection of comments from first-time visitors to Auroville, drawn from public blogs. The responses range from those who see Auroville as "endeavouring to consciously



connect", "a sublime place" and "peaceful" to those who see it as a "weird" and "cultish" place that emulates an "exclusive country club" that should be "burned to the ground".

A commendable quality is the publication's honesty and willingness to air difficult issues, given the risk it sometimes runs of stirring the ire of Aurovilians and supporters. It may be easy for those close to the coalface – that is, those living in Auroville – to take such a publication for granted, and even to be cynical of its role. But for those of us, like myself, who have had to endure long periods away from Auroville at times, the publication has been a lifeline that connects us to our soul place, and an inspiring reminder of a place and community that aims to be 'more' than routine existence.

The editors remind us that the publication cannot cover everything. They state that they will have achieved their goal if they have "helped broaden people's understanding... of the diversity, depth, idealism and sheer adventurousness of this place." Without a doubt, this collection achieves that aim.

Lesley

Is there discrimination in Auroville?

Recently, discrimination has been a hot topic in Auroville. It was brought to the forefront by two Tamil members of the Working Committee who felt they had been 'discriminated' against by not being allowed to meet the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, on his recent visit.

The Working Committee, the Auroville Council and the Restorative Auroville group have been discussing this particular incident and, it seems, a certain understanding and resolution have been achieved. However, in the process it became evident that perceived discrimination by some in the Tamil Aurovilian community is a much larger issue and that has been churning away beneath the surface for many years. Consequently, the Council decided to launch a year long process, involving meetings, workshops, etc., to explore the topic and come up with practical measures to deal with it.

The first step was a cross-cultural dialogue organized by Restorative Auroville (see *Auroville Today* June-July, 2018). The two day workshop brought together 47 Aurovilians from different cultural backgrounds to express themselves, or to understand more, about the topic. For some of them it was an eye-opener as many Aurovilians from the local area gave examples of feeling discriminated against by Aurovilians from other nationalities and from other parts of India.

One of them said she had never been able to express her experience before and be deeply heard. Such instances of personal catharsis made this cross-cultural dialogue an important first step along the road. However, there was little examination of the causes of discrimination. Without this, it is difficult to come up with practical measures to tackle it at its roots.

What are the roots of discrimination?

Worldwide, there are many forms of discrimination. All involve some form of exclusion, rejection and assumption of superiority by one group over another. They include discrimination against others based upon gender, sexual orientation, religious or political affiliation and age. However, the form which has probably attracted the most attention is that based upon race and culture.

There are many theories about why one race or cultural grouping discriminates against another. They include economic and political motives. But a first step towards discrimination seems to involve the distinguishing of one's own group or culture from others as a means of defining one's identity. As the historian Bernard Lewis put it, "Most, probably all, human societies have a way of distinguishing between themselves and others: insider and outsider, in-group and out-group, kinsman or neighbor or foreigner. These definitions not only define the outsider but also, and perhaps more particularly, help to define and illustrate our perception of ourselves."

However, by distinguishing our grouping from others, we open up the possibility of conflict. Doudou Diene, an ex-member of the Auroville International Advisory Council who was United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance says that, in his experience, whenever two different communities meet there is always an 'identity tension'.

Diene noted that this tension may not necessarily result in discrimination or, in its more extreme forms, racism and xenophobia. "It's the way that this tension is handled that determines whether it translates into hostility and hatred or into attraction and love."

He concluded, however, that "the lesson of history is that, because of power issues, economic interests or religious ideology, diversity is generally instrumentalized into hostility and hatred rather than understanding and love."

Is there a solution?

How can we make diversity a means of expansion rather than of fear? How can we avoid turning suspicion or fear of 'the other' into discrimination and hatred?

If, as some research suggests, it is hard-wired in us, a possible hangover from a dangerous past when groups had to make quick distinctions between friend and foe, it is no easy matter. Anti-discrimination campaigners suggest that action needs to be taken at different levels: at a personal level, at the level of community and through sustained political activism.

At the national level, for example, the emphasis is upon promoting anti-discriminatory laws, as well as initiatives like affirmative action in areas where discrimination takes place, and supporting political parties that stand for social equity and justice.

This, along with other factors, has had its effect. For example, a multicultural city like London is less discriminatory and racist today than it was in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet discrimination and racism are

extremely difficult to stamp out. Just three days after the Brexit vote, where concerns about uncontrolled immigration into the U.K. were a decisive factor in the outcome, there was a 57% rise in racially-motivated hate crimes across the country.

Auroville and discrimination

Auroville is clearly not a racist community. There is no programme to deprive members of one community of equal rights and opportunities or to privilege one community above all others, as was the case in apartheid South Africa or the southern states of America in the first part of the 20th century.

But this does not mean that forms of discrimination do not exist. I have attended a number of cross-cultural dialogues in Auroville in which members of the local Tamil Aurovilian community have described in detail how they feel they have experienced discrimination from other nationalities or those from other parts of India. Rarely is it overt. It happens more in the subtle micro-interactions of everyday life. Those who experience it say it's like not being seen, heard or related to in quite the same way as people from other cultures, and as if they are viewed through the lens of a cultural stereotype rather than as individuals. "We feel we are treated as second-class Aurovilians", is how one of them bluntly put it.

As 'evidence' of this, they point out that while local Tamils comprise a large percentage of the total population, this is not reflected in their representation on major working groups (16 out of 91 on a recent count). They also complain about being referred to as 'Tamil Aurovilians', implying they are part of an undifferentiated group, when other Aurovilians are not demarcated by their nationality.

A further cause of resentment is their sense that Aurovilians from the local area get a bad press. They assert that when an Aurovilian from the local community is guilty of some misdemeanour, it gets widely publicised, often provoking the response that this is 'typical' of someone from their community, whereas the misdemeanours of other Aurovilians tend to be brushed under the carpet and not used to smear an entire community.

Finally, there is resentment that so few non-Tamilians have learned their language or explored the local culture. They feel this implies that non-Tamils do not think their language and culture is important enough to be studied and celebrated.

Some of these perceptions need to be treated with caution. It should be noted that they are not always accurate – discrimination can be confused with an innocent judgement about somebody's unfitness for a task, for example – they are not shared, publicly at least, by all Aurovilians born in the local area, and some of the accusations of discrimination may be politically-motivated. Moreover, as a number of high-profile financial misdemeanours have involved people from the local area it is more understandable, if not excusable, that others from the same community are sometimes tarred with the same brush.

However, the fact remains that, unlike other nationalities, concerns about discrimination are often mentioned by a diverse cross-section of local Aurovilians, and this makes it important that we take them very seriously.

What are the causes?

One of the most obvious factors is ignorance. When one doesn't understand the language or culture, it's easy to misread intentions or to judge people on the basis of superficial criteria, like the way they dress or speak. When one doesn't know somebody personally, it's easier to view them as a type. Those who have only limited contact with the local Aurovilians are more likely to elevate a negative experience with one of them into a condemnation of all; or to believe in generalisations like, "they all join Auroville only for material advantage".

Such generalisations are often based upon generalisations made about the villages like, "everybody in the village is only concerned to promote the welfare of themselves or their family", or "life in the villages is the law of the jungle where the most powerful always get their way". Those who have little contact with Aurovilians from the local area often tend to see them as villagers, with all the negative traits they associate with the villagers, rather than as individuals who may have taken a difficult decision to 'cross the road' because they believe in the Dream.

A personal experience

But there is another kind of ignorance, and that is caused by the 'baggage' that we carry from our upbringing and culture that unconsciously

influences our behaviour and perception of others.

I first became aware of my own baggage on a hot summer morning many years ago. I was new to Auroville and cycling on a narrow sand path in the Greenbelt when I met a villager on a cycle coming the other way. One of us would have to give way but we both refused. Soon we were shouting at each other and almost coming to blows. I forget how it ended. I think we were finally separated by other villagers.

Later, I wondered about what had happened. If it had been somebody from another nationality, would I have acted like that? Of course not. In the heat of the moment, I had been taken over by something that I had absorbed unconsciously from my childhood in the U.K. And that was an assumption, based upon books, history, films etc. about colonial India, that I was somehow superior to the 'natives' by virtue of my birthright.

And this unconscious assumption was reinforced by my first contact with the local villages which seemed primitive, dirty, uncared for. My Protestant upbringing which equated cleanliness and hard work to 'godliness' influenced me to view people who lived in such conditions as lazy, even of low moral status, something which seemed supported by the sporadic violence, alcoholism, and poor treatment of women.

Mother, of course, warned against such generalisations, pointing out, among other things, that the simplest villager is, "in his heart, closer to the divine than the intellectuals of Europe. All those who want to become Aurovilians must know this and behave accordingly; otherwise they are unworthy of Auroville".

I'm ashamed to admit to this ignorance now, and I hope, I very much hope, that I have outgrown such crude and fallacious assumptions. I'm happy to have many close friends in the Tamil community. But there is a suspicion that even today some form of this prejudice exists among some non-local Aurovilians, particularly those from the West, and that it spills over to the way they relate to Aurovilians who were born in the local area.

For Auroville is, in many ways, a predominantly western culture. Not only is the *lingua franca* English, but many of the values which determine the way we meet, take decisions etc., and upon which we base our perceptions and judgements of others are western-influenced. For example, as L'aura Joy pointed out in a recent issue, we have a tendency to equate efficiency and effectiveness with computer literacy and the ability to express oneself well in English. But these are only one way of measuring effectiveness. The people skills that enable someone to negotiate, for example, complex relationships in the village is another one, and one that most Westerners lack.

What can be done?

Is Auroville's situation an advantage or a disadvantage in working upon this complex and very sensitive issue?

On the one hand, as Manas pointed out in the last *Auroville Today*, the fact that many of us are settlers in a foreign land makes it more likely that discrimination will take place as, historically, settlers invariably discriminate against the local population. Moreover, the fact that this international experiment is situated in rural India means that the possibility of very different cultures coming into conflict through mutual misunderstanding is likely to be amplified.

On the other hand, our Charter enshrines the goal of human unity, and the fact that Auroville has such a rich mixture of races and cultures living and working in proximity means that the opportunity to learn about other cultures and, in the process, realize how relative are the values and assumptions of one's own, are immensely increased. There is also the potential of the 'propinquity effect', a theory that posits that we form closer bonds with those we encounter most often.

Whatever the advantages and disadvantages of our situation, what emerges most strongly from discrimination and racism studies elsewhere is that human unity, at least in the initial stages, has to be worked upon; it doesn't just happen.

And that work has to begin with the individual. Ultimately, of course, a genuine human unity is based upon each individual's spiritual realisation of our essential oneness. But until this stage is reached, many of the actions promoted by anti-discrimination groups elsewhere are relevant to us here. In other words, honestly examine yourself to see if you have prejudices and negative stereotypes of other cultures (take an implicit-association test to help uncover any bias you may have) and try to ensure that your

thoughts, language and actions do not imply or support discrimination; don't generalise, always relate to people as individuals rather than as undifferentiated members of a group; befriend people from different cultures and learn about their values and perspectives; learn the local language; embrace, celebrate diversity. And learn to be comfortable with yourself rather than needing groups to join or to discriminate against.

At the community level, it involves calling out discrimination whenever one sees it; educating people, particularly at a young age, about different cultures; ensuring that all Aurovilians, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to grow and express themselves fully; and demonstrating respect for the local culture by promoting proficiency in the Tamil language, by attending Tamil cultural events, and by ensuring that there are translations and translators at community meetings and for all documents requiring community input.

And we need many more opportunities, like the Matrimandir concretings of the past and ongoing sports programmes, for different cultures to work and play together. (It is probably this, rather than education, legislation or affirmative action, that has proved most effective in lessening discrimination worldwide.)

Quite a lot of this is already happening, but much more needs to be done. In the process, certain attitudes need to be guarded against. Firstly, of course, there are those who deny that any such problem exists. Conversely, there is the danger that almost everything is seen as discrimination, a tendency of Westerners who feel guilt-ridden about the colonial heritage of the West, as well as those from the local community who play the 'race card' for personal or political advantage.

Then there are those who say that by focussing upon the issue we will only make it worse. Finally there is the danger of relativising the situation by saying that since we all suffer discrimination in some form or another, why focus just upon solving it with the local Tamil population? "Aren't they as guilty as everybody else of discriminating against others and, indeed, even members of their own community when it comes to caste?", an accusation which, though it contains some truth, ignores the fact that no other nationality in Auroville complains so often and widely about suffering discrimination.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in making progress against discrimination is the need for personal honesty. We all need to relentlessly examine ourselves and our culture to discover any prejudices and preconceptions we may have about others, and then have the courage to own up to them rather than mask them for fear of being termed 'racist' or making ourselves unpopular. And we need to call out discrimination in other cultures whenever we think we see it happening. Only then can we get down to the real work of trying to dissolve it.

The scale of this challenge cannot be underestimated, particularly if Doudou Diene is correct when he states that all of us view other cultures through lenses 'tinted by prejudice'. But if 'human unity' is to be more than a tired cliché, it's a challenge we have to accept. And surmount.

Alan

CORRECTION

Dear *Auroville Today*,

I would like to bring to your attention a mistake in your recent article on the Garden of unexpected (*AV Today*, August 2018). On line 10, it is written "Roger Anger... invited submission for designs of the twelve Gardens (of Matrimandir). When none of the submissions were found acceptable..."

The above statement is incorrect. Roger received 14 garden concepts presented by 8 Aurovilians. These Aurovilians are: Soham who made a proposal for Bliss garden, Kireet (Bliss), Nadja (Bliss), Gnanavel (Wealth), Peter T. (Existence), André H. (Perfection), an anonymous one presented by Alain G (Bliss), Marc (Progress, Life, Light, Bliss, Power, Wealth, Existence).

Out of these 14 proposals, 6 were accepted by Roger for the second phase: Nadja (Bliss garden), André Hababou (Perfection garden), Marc (Light, Life, Power, Existence gardens). Some of them were built as real size prototypes (Bliss, Light, Power). A real size prototype was also built for Roger's own concept of Life Garden. But the garden development was interrupted by the then executives in 2007.

Much regards,

Marc

When Dr. Muthuvel Karunanidhi visited Auroville

Dr. Muthuvel Karunanidhi, a giant of Tamil Nadu politics who served five terms as Chief Minister and was the long-term President of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), died on 7th August 2018 at Kauvery Hospital in Chennai. He was 94 years old.

On October 28th 1973, while serving as Chief Minister, he visited Auroville. He was accompanied by Dr. Nedunchezian, Minister for Education and Tourism. They visited Auroson's home, Last School, the Aspiration cafeteria, an Auroville farm and the Matrimandir construction site, among other places.

At a special function, Dr. Karunanidhi also laid the foundation stone of the Tamil Nadu State Pavilion in the Bharat Nivas complex. The Education Minister, who presided, ended his speech by saying, "I am very happy indeed to be associated with this great endeavour to fulfil a great aspiration to establish this great city."

In his speech, Dr. Karunanidhi, who was also a poet, referred to some beautiful lines of an ancient poet of Tamil Nadu quoted by the Education Minister. "Not only in those ancient days, but today also the same voice is reverberating in the whole of Tamil Nadu. In many respects Tamil Nadu remains as a guide to the



Dr. Karunanidhi (left) at the Matrimandir construction site

world. Sri Aurobindo, born in Bengal and having had contact with various western countries, perhaps thought that any great idea to be accepted by the world must start from Tamil Nadu."

Upon learning that the Bharat Nivas would consist of separate state pavilions, each representing the unique and individual character of that state, and that all these pavilions joined together would be called 'Bharat Nivas' or Indian Pavilion, the Chief Minister said, "We are for this type of unity only – union of equals with equal opportunities for all to develop fully all their inherent capacities to a maximum."

"I came here in the morning and I have seen the various places and projects that are in the process of development. Certainly it is not possible to get the results of this work, a huge attempt over a vast scale, tomorrow or the day after but I am firmly convinced that there is a great future for this World City... There is no doubt that this city shall shine as the guiding light for all the countries of the world at large... We are prepared to give our full cooperation and support for the "lak-

shyam" (aims and ideals) of this city of unity. My best wishes for Auroville that it would shine in the world like a rising sun."

During the visit, it was announced that the Tamil Nadu government would give financial support for the construction of the pavilion of Tamil Nadu.

A beginning was made on this structure, but it was never completed. During the 1970's, Prabhat Poddar was put in charge of Bharat

Nivas architecture by his uncle Navajata. He started building structures for state pavilions which were so poorly built that the community subsequently decided not to continue with their construction. The Laboratory of Evolution presently is housed in a modification of what was Prabhat's Tamil Nadu Pavilion.

Today, a much larger Tamil Heritage Centre, designed by Poppo, is under construction nearby.



Dr. Karunanidhi (with glasses, middle) examining the design for Bharat Nivas

PASSINGS

Big Piet

On 14 August our long-term Dutch friend and brother Pieter van der Molen ('Big Piet') passed away at the age of 75 in his home in Holland.

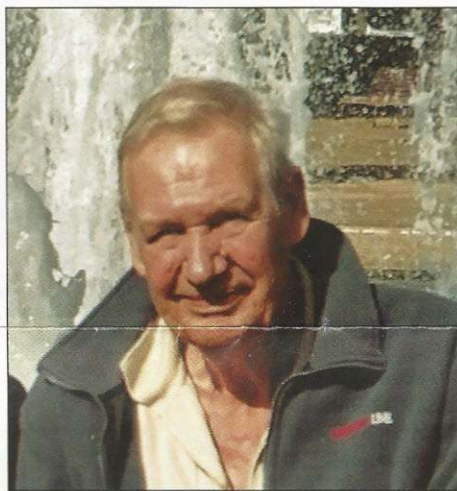
Pieter, who in the sixties was the top judo trainee of the then world champion judo Anton Geesink, had during a judo demonstration session a profound inner experience which left him in shock and in search for answers. Finding a work by Sri Aurobindo, and hearing about Auroville, he completely changed his life and came to Auroville in 1970.

Starting out in Aspiration, from where he transported goods and people to and from Pondy, he soon moved to Kottakarai where he started a fruit orchard, 'Angiras Garden', along with Judith. The couple had three children, Angiras, Bhima and

Aurama. At the time Piet started working with villagers, making leather bags.

In the eighties, Piet managed Abri workshop, repairing water pumps and motorcycles, and moved to Centre Field where he made paper lanterns with young villagers. His passion for the increasing birdlife in Auroville was remarkable; he painstakingly documented the growth of the handful of bird species in the early days into the 100+ different varieties of now and was often in contact with Salim Ali about the same.

Piet left Auroville in 1989, but has always kept contact with Auroville and a deep connection with Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He will be missed by his children Emanuel,



Angiras, Bhima and Aurama and his grandchildren with whom he developed a close contact, as well as by his close family in Auroville, Holland, Canada and Sweden.

Murugan

Murugan Adhimoolam left his body on August 11th at the age of 43. Hailing from Kottakarai, Murugan joined Auroville in 2007 and has been working with Michel in Dana's Flame Pottery. He lived with his wife Meena (who does the catering for Transition School) and their two children Adhavan, at college in Chennai, and Arthi studying in Pondy.

Apart from his work at the pottery, Aurovilians experienced Murugan's calm and friendly presence at various occasions, such as at Matrimandir duty, the organisation of the Marathons, Sangamam festivities and other such events. He also helped Celestine with her art work on Auroville's roads.

Murugan's remains were buried at Adventure's burial grounds on August 12th.



Nergez

Nergez H. Pesikaka peacefully left this world at the age of 97 on Wednesday August 22 in her flat in the Creativity settlement of Auroville. According to her wish, her mortal remains were buried in Auroville's 'Adventure' farewell ground the following afternoon, in the presence of her grandniece Ms. Parisad and a large group of Aurovilian friends who had gathered to say their last goodbyes.

Nergez joined Auroville in 1977 and became a very active participant in this growing international community. Amongst her many other activities and interests, from November 1994 onwards she became involved in the weekly group meeting to read and study Sri Aurobindo's mantric epic *Savitri*. We remember her energetically engaged in planting young trees and shrubs on the land allotted for the Savitri Bhavan project and a few years later taking the lead as the senior member of a group invited to Navsari in Gujarat for the first major fundraising effort for the planned complex. Once the first building was inaugurated by Sri Aurobindo's close disciple Dr. Nirodbaran, Nergez was an enthusiastic participant in all the expanding activities which developed as the project grew, until growing weakness began to confine her to her home from 2016 onwards. But she continued her custom of reading *Savitri* daily, for she found it to be a source of light and inner strength.

In October 2016, Nergez asked Shraddhavan to select some lines from *Savitri* to be read at her funeral. After the ceremony many people asked for them to be shared.



Although Death walks beside us on Life's road,
A dim bystander at the body's start
And a last judgment on man's futile works,
Other is the riddle of its ambiguous face:
Death is a stair, a door, a stumbling stride
The soul must take to cross from birth to birth,
A grey defeat pregnant with victory,
A whip to lash us towards our deathless state. ...
Night is not our beginning nor our end;
She is the dark Mother in whose womb we have hid
Safe from too swift a waking to world-pain.
We came to her from a supernal Light,
By Light we live and to the Light we go.

All that is made and once again unmade,
The calm persistent vision of the One
Inevitably re-makes, it lives anew:
Forces and lives and beings and ideas
Are taken into the stillness for a while;
There they remould their purpose and their drift,
Recast their nature and re-form their shape.
Ever they change and changing ever grow,
And passing through a fruitful stage of death
And after long reconstituting sleep
Resume their place in the process of the Gods
Until their work in cosmic Time is done.

A deathbound littleness is not all we are:
Immortal our forgotten vastnesses
Await discovery in our summit selves;
Unmeasured breadths and depths of being are ours. ...
A larger self ... lives within us by ourselves unseen. ...
A treasure of honey in the combs of God,
A Splendour burning in a tenebrous cloak,
It is our glory of the flame of God,
Our golden fountain of the world's delight,
An immortality cowed in the cape of death,
The shape of our unborn divinity.
It guards for us our fate in depths within
Where sleeps the eternal seed of transient things.

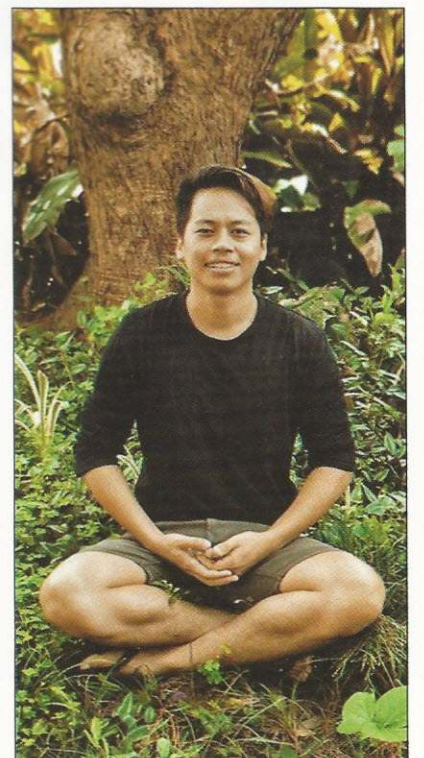
Thupten

On September 1st, young Thupten Landhen suffered a road accident near Pitchandikulam at 1am in the morning in heavy rain. He was 24 years old.

Thupten lived for 12 years with his sister, Aurovilian Dorjee in Douceur, and helped her out in the Bakery and in their Lhasa restaurant. The last two years he has been studying in Future School as well.

He was known as a very amiable, easy going person, always willing to help out, be it by making photos on special occasions, making folks familiar with their mobile phones etc. His love and skill for photography was apparent.

Before Dorjee took Thupten's body to their hometown Bailakupe near Mysore, it was displayed for one hour for a last goodbye at the Farewell centre. The huge number of shocked and grieving students and friends who attended bore testimony of how much this young man was appreciated and loved.



The Auroville seed festival

“What is necessary for a seed to sprout and create more seeds?” asked Bernard of a group of students at the seminar on seed diversity at the Annual Seed Festival held last month. “Water”, “rain”, “sea”, “clouds”, “sun”, “wind”, “earth”, the responses came cascading in. “So, what do you hold when you hold a seed in your hand?”

There are two ways to look at a seed, he continued. The first is to cut it into pieces and put it under the microscope and study its cells, chromosomes and genes. “In this case I can name the genes,” he said, “but do I really understand the seed?” The second is to plant a seed and watch it grow into a tree. Then we see that when we hold a seed in our hands we hold the sun, the water and the earth and ourselves as co-creators in this process. This is to deeply understand the seed.

This beautiful reminder of the interrelatedness of everything in nature encapsulates, in essence, the message of the Annual Seed Festival held in Auroville last month: to safeguard the integrity and diversity of our ecosystems is to nourish our communities and strengthen our socio-economic fabric. Organised by the Sustainable Livelihood Institute (SLI), the Seed Festival aimed to create a platform to revive and strengthen the seed diversity in this region by enabling the sale and exchange of indigenous seeds between farmers.

SLI’s festival is the latest addition to a growing network of seed festivals held across Tamil Nadu during the planting season of June and July. The first one, organised in 2006 by CREATE, a small group working on sustainable agriculture and consumer rights in Thiruvārūr district, involved farmers from ten neighbouring villages in efforts to save traditional varieties of paddy seeds.

Since then seed festivals organised at the district level have become the most effective mechanism for reviving seed diversity in the southern states. Whereas earlier farmers used to save and share their seeds on a regular basis, in the last couple of decades they have come to depend almost wholly on hybrid seeds from seed companies for their requirements. This situation was caused by the government’s policies since the 1960s to promote high yielding varieties of crops with the single aim of increasing productivity. Over the years this has edged out traditional food varieties that had been developed by farmers for different localities and seasons. By the 1990s and early 2000s traditional seeds had almost disappeared from farmers’ fields in South India.

Traditional seed varieties, provided and carefully selected over the centuries by nature, are much more beneficial for the farmer and the



Inauguration of the Auroville Seed Festival

ecosystem. They are hardy, pest-resistant, withstand unfavourable conditions in the area of their origin, and require less water and less nutritional inputs as compared with hybrid seeds. Intricately woven into the ecosystem and food culture of the region, the varieties of traditional staples and vegetables also provide a balanced and nutritional diet for humans.

Hybrid seeds, on the other hand, often have high water and nutritional requirements and are more prone to pest attacks and diseases. Besides being costlier, they cannot be saved or shared with any benefit to the farmers. In fact, even where improved varieties are not hybrids, it is usually illegal for farmers to save or share such seeds. The use of hybrid seeds not only makes farmers dependent on external sources for the seeds themselves, it also increases his expenditure on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Needless to say, chemicals and monoculture have wreaked havoc on local ecosystems, depleting the nutritional value of the soil, ravaging intricately connected food chains and poisoning our food and water. In this context, the SLI’s festival is a much-needed platform for raising awareness about the urgency of returning to a more sustainable, ecological and farmer-centric paradigm for farming.



Students learning to make seed balls

As such, this second edition of the Annual Seed Festival was a resounding success. Of the 1000 plus visitors, most were farmers from Auroville and the surrounding region and several had stalls dedicated to the exchange and sale of traditional seeds and organic produce.

It was also the farmer community that was the focus of the lively and energised Seminar on Seed Diversity. The aim of the seminar was not only to raise awareness about the need to re-establish and maintain the seed diversity of the region. Activists, experienced practitioners and scientists also shared perspectives, practical tools and methodologies used in traditional farming that are all but lost today.

Dr. Sultan Ahmed Ismail, renowned soil biologist and ecologist, shared his views on farming practices and the role of farmers in promoting best practices in organic farming. He motivated farmers and students to think out of the box to find solutions to their problems instead of depending on established practices and the education system.

Krishna Mckenzie, whose farm in Solitude is an expression of the philosophy of natural farming as taught by Matsuoka Fukuoaka, spoke of the soil’s health as the primary concern of the farmer.

“The soil should be our priority; it is our only credit as farmers”, he said. In order to heal the soil, we require a shift in perspective. Instead of thinking about what we can get from the soil, we need to, like our ancestors, worship it. He suggested 3 steps: return all organic matter back to the soil to restore its nutritional value, honour the gifts of Mother Nature by eating the whole diversity of locally-grown food, and celebrate and honour the community through festivals and the arts. “Tamil culture has formed in direct relationship to the soil... When we value crops only for their economic worth, there is a cultural erosion.”

Mr. Pamayan, organic farming scientist, also described the deep connections between farming and culture in Tamil Nadu. In Tamil literature, for example, the landscape is divided into five distinct types, each of which has its unique farming models and tools. Crop patterns in each area are connected to soil, climate and water. The advent of monoculture erased traditional distinctions along with seed diversity, and replaced them with uniform, income-generating models.

Mr. Britto Raj, Agriculture Engineer from Dindigul, encouraged farmers to think of ways that would add value to their activity and help them gain additional income. Returning to integrated farming and growing new varieties of crops can assist both in the health of the eco system and management of costs in running a farm.

Anusha



Over 30 stalls displayed traditional seeds and locally produced organic foods

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