



Auroville International
UNITED KINGDOM

Words That Make a Difference

In this Newsletter readers will find the life story of Vijen Manek, founder of the Auromira Centre and, with his generous and ever hospitable family, a great friend of AVIUK over many years. We also appreciated the well chosen quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that were circulated by email, and with the permission of the Auromira Centre we would like to bring these to a wider public through our Newsletter. Our own experience and that of many others has shown that such words often prove to be a life-changing force in their effect. We therefore invite readers to share with us their own choice of words that have made a difference or inspired and helped them through a difficult time. Contributions will be published in subsequent issues of the Newsletter - Editor

"One tries to take, accumulate, accumulate, accumulate, but that is impossible, one can't accumulate. One must identify oneself. And then, the little bit one gives, one wants to get back; one gives a good thought, one expects some recognition; one gives a little affection, one expects it from others... for one doesn't have the ability to become the good thought in everything, one doesn't have the ability to be the affection, the tender love in all things. One feels just like that, all cut up and limited, and fears to lose everything, fears to lose what one has because one would be impoverished. On the other hand, if one were able to identify oneself, one would no longer need to pull. The more one spreads out, the more one has. The more one gets identified, the more one becomes. And then, instead of taking, one gives. And the more one gives, the more one grows."

The Mother

The Great Adventure – A Diary for All Times p. 210

Vijen Manek

(5/3/1930 – 25/1/2014)

Vijendra Manek was born 5/3/1930 in Lugazi, Uganda. After completing his education, Vijen travelled all around India for three years from the age of 22, seeking something higher and more profound than simple religion and rituals. It was on one of his train journeys that he came across some writings of Sri Aurobindo and decided to go to Pondicherry, where he stayed for several months and worked in the Ashram accounts department. He met The Mother on several occasions and was granted permission to remain there as an ashramite but chose to return to Africa where he worked as an accountant in Kampala and Uganda, until Idi Amin's expulsion of the Asians in 1972. On coming to the UK, Vijen worked as an insurance broker in the banking sector, retiring in 1995 at the age of 65. He had a stroke three months into retirement and saw this as a sign from the Divine to stay put and build a centre.

In the UK, the centre first took shape in the form of daily evening prayers but began to flourish when speakers from India, including Pondicherry, gave talks at the centre. It was named Auromira in the early 90's. Sri Aurobindo's relics were enshrined in 1998. In 2000, Vijen put forward the idea of developing a like-minded community living in an environment of harmony, peace and collective aspiration, which he called Matrugoda (The Mother's Lap). This carries on in the form of aspiration, and through regular meetings to study and discuss the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.



Vijen

He saw this as a means to cleanse the mind, vital and body and to bring forward the psychic.

Vijen was a remarkable man. One had the impression that he was a soul that was fully aware of why he was on earth at this time. He had a quality about him of warmth and knowledge and the awareness of one who has seen and is seeing this life 'from above the lid', from a deep sense of the eternal.

His creation of the Auromira Centre was an act of extreme generosity, something that only someone who was a true Bhakta and has achieved considerable mastery over the vital could do. Although an intensely private man, he accepted to open his private world to the inevitable mixture that comes from the trampling of common humanity through one's front door. And yet he was always gracious and sweet in his dealings with those of us from AVI UK. This is only possible from one who has given himself wholeheartedly to the Divine. He lived a long life, a good life, lived in truth. He was an example to us all, a man who lived in and was the truth he aspired to.

Land Purchase and Incursion into the Auroville City Area



Dinesh Tea Shop, Cool Corner (top right) and Aurama Gardens (btm right) private developments on land within the Auroville City Area

Professor Ms. Mary E. King: Former Adviser to US President Jimmy Carter, currently Professor of International Politics and Special Adviser to the Rector, University for Peace, United Nations, recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation international award for promoting Gandhian values outside India, former member of the International Advisory Council, Auroville Foundation.

"Of great concern is the state of rising pressures on the land adjacent to, surrounding and within the Auroville township area. ...Market forces are creating strains of such a magnitude that they threaten the actualization of this most remarkable experiment in international unity."

David R. Brower: Co-Founder of the environmental movement, founder of Friends of the Earth, founder of the Earth Island Institute, recipient of Blue Planet Prize, Tokyo, nominated thrice for Noble Peace Prize.

"Auroville is unique not only as an environmental project but also as a living model for a new form of relationship between nature and urban development. In this regard, I have been troubled to learn that the integrity of this valuable experiment is being jeopardized by the encroachment of private developers buying up parcels of land within the Auroville area. This not only creates a serious threat to Auroville and its planning process as an integrated model, but it even leads to an uncontrolled spiral of inflated land prices, making it even more difficult for Auroville to acquire lands necessary for a unified plan."

Acres for Auroville

One of the major challenges Auroville is facing today is to secure the required lands for the future township.

Over the years, Auroville has secured half of the lands for the planned township, which consists of two major components, the City (or the urban area) and the Green Belt.

In the City, Auroville still needs to purchase 200 acres or 16% of the land required. In the Green Belt, the situation is less advanced with nearly 2000 acres or approx. 55% of lands still to be secured.

Would you like to contribute? Would you like to help Auroville meet this essential challenge?

Acres for Auroville is a special land fundraiser in defence of the heart and centre of Auroville. Our objective is to acquire targeted acres of urgently-needed land located around the Matrimandir and in the International Zone in order to:

- Protect the Matrimandir area
- Develop the International Zone
- Consolidate the heart of Auroville
- Build unity around our common goal

Acres for Auroville will be different from general fundraisers in that it will target specific, critically important plots of land that will be designated for the campaign. 25 acres of land in the City Zone are in negotiation this year, and our goal is to secure 30% – 8 acres for Auroville! These acres will be chosen for their importance in consolidating and protecting the Matrimandir area and the International Zone. All the money that is raised will go into a special Acres for Auroville fund, dedicated to buying these specifically targeted areas.

How to Send Your Donation

In the UK, and to take advantage of 'Gift Aid':

- Via our website www.aviuk.org Click on 'Donate Now' and follow the instructions.
- Send a cheque to our treasurer at 7 Cubb Field, Aylesbury, Bucks HP19 7SJ.

Please make any cheque payable to 'Auroville International UK' and specify 'Acres for Auroville'.

There are other ways of donating, i.e. using 'Payroll Giving'. Please contact your employer for details.

You could also leave a legacy to our charity. If you are interested in this method, please contact our Treasurer, John Mulrey at 7 Cubb Field, Aylesbury, Bucks HP19 7SJ.

AVI UK receives and passes on donations to a variety of projects in Auroville. As a registered charity we qualify to receive 'Gift Aid' on donations, provided the donor is a tax payer. This means we receive an extra 25p for every £1.00 donated and it does not cost the donor any extra.

May 1970.

The lands for Auroville
are to be bought and
can be bought.
The money is needed
will you help?



A Conversation with Sri Aurobindo on Giving Money to the Divine

An extract from 'Talks with Sri Aurobindo' Volume 1 recorded by Nirodbaran 22 February 1940:

Nirodbaran: ... (quoting Dilip): "Whether a man is a Bhakta or not can be judged only by his dealing with money. Money is the test. If you can't offer money to the Divine, your sincerity is not genuine."

Champaklal: There are plenty of people who are Bhaktas, but when the money-question comes, their Bhakti disappears. (Sri Aurobindo was enjoying the talk.)

Dr. Manilal: If money is the test, then robbers also are Bhaktas. Some of them rob people and offer part of their plunder to their god. Is that Bhakti?

Sri Aurobindo: Why not?

Dr. Manilal: How can it be, Sir? They get the money by robbing others and offer it as a bribe. Is that true Bhakti?

Sri Aurobindo: What is true Bhakti? There is no true or false Bhakti. Bhakti is Bhakti. Commercial people rob others and give offerings to God. Is it not Bhakti?

Dr. Manilal: But somehow I can't accept it, Sir, that a robber or murderer who offers money obtained by doubtful means does that out of Bhakti.

Sri Aurobindo: Is a robber worse than a conqueror? A conqueror does the same thing. Where is the difference? A robber too may be brave and noble. When Rama on the battlefield prayed to Durga for help, it was not out of Bhakti he did it. What you say is an ethical or moral point. It has nothing to do with spirituality. The question is whether one feels the Bhakti and, if he feels it, it is quite genuine.

Dr. Manilal: According to Jainism (great laughter) only that is true Bhakti which has no motive in it and only an offering acquired in a pure or virtuous way is a real offering. The robber is neither motiveless nor is his money acquired in a virtuous way. He offers a small sum of money as a bribe to God.

Sri Aurobindo: I don't understand the point about motive here. There are two kinds of Bhakti: Sahaituki and Ahaituki. Sahaituki Bhakti is that type which may have a motive but it does not mean it is not Bhakti. Ahaituki is, of course, without motive or demand. If the Divine were to accept offerings only from virtuous people, it would be a hard outlook for the world (Laughter)...

The European Area of the International Zone



Rededication ceremony in the International Zone
February 2014

The Ceremony for the Rededication of the International Zone of Auroville, February 2014

One of the natural interests of members of Auroville International around the world is the development of the International Zone in Auroville. The Mother invited us to seek to *“become aware of the fundamental genius of the nation to which we belong and to bring us into contact with the way of life of other nations so that we learn to know and respect the true spirit of the countries of the world”*, and this zone of Auroville is dedicated to that purpose. She wanted governments of the world to become actively involved in the development of the zone, and AVI groups from around the world have naturally taken up the challenge to become involved. The zone is at present largely undeveloped, with national pavilions for India (Bharat Nivas) and Tibet the only ones yet existing, although other developments in the area include the Visitor's Centre, Savitri Bhavan, and the Unity Pavilion.

In a series of meetings in Berlin and Lausanne over the last few years, European AVI groups gathered together to discuss the possible collective European involvement in the International Zone, and it is from one of these meetings that the idea for a rededication ceremony for the entire zone originated. The idea was to have a ceremony rededicating the zone to the purpose outlined by the Mother, where Aurovilians and members of AVI could focus on Her vision and stimulate new energy for the development of the zone.

After much intense planning a number of connected events took place in the zone in February 2014, with the participation of members of the International Zone group in Auroville, AVI members, interested Aurovilians and guests. The events started with a morning walk to see recent developments (see below). In the late afternoon we gathered around the Inuksuk (a symbol of Canadian culture standing in the International Zone) which had been beautifully decorated with flowers and candles. Quotations from the Mother were read out in many different languages and then Vera gave a beautiful performance on the Russian bells, later inviting the participants

from around the world to play the bells together. When the sun set and the full moon appeared at the Eastern horizon we gathered around a bonfire, and each one was invited to speak about his or her aspirations towards further International Zone development. A beautifully concentrated atmosphere developed. The rich day ended with a pizza dinner at the Unity Pavilion, which had been organized by the Canadian AVI group.

Following an intense morning workshop in the Unity Pavilion using the twelve qualities of the Mother's symbol to express our visions for the next steps in International Zone development, there were discussions in the afternoon which led to very positive and concrete action by AVI.

First B, an old Aurovillian, explained the water situation, the one issue that had been blocking different projects from evolving. He gave an estimate of Rs 3.5 Lakhs (around £3500) for a well to be drilled at the site he had indicated the day before, which could be connected both to the African site and Krupa's place, and feed water to many more projects in the area. Individual AVI members and one AVI Centre quickly

offered to fund the project, including a generous donation from a Chinese participant who had been inspired by the ideal. So the drilling of the well could actually start some days later and additional money was also there for infrastructure.

These events appear to have stimulated a renewed interest in the development of the International Zone, with a flurry of activity taking place in the weeks and months which have followed. The well has been dug

and pipework connected. A further European meeting has just taken place in Cork in Ireland, and there are now more concrete plans for collaboration in the development of a common European area not far from the new well. The work continues....

“Only a synthetic organization of all nations, each one occupying its true place according to its own genius and the part it has to play in the whole, can bring about a comprehensive and progressive unification which has any

chance of enduring. And if this synthesis is to be a living one, the grouping should be effectuated around a central idea that is as wide and as high as possible, in which all tendencies, even the most contradictory, may find their respective places.”

The Mother, “An International University Centre” – read out at the rededication ceremony for the International Zone



The newly drilled well for the International Zone is capped and ready for connections



Dedication ceremony for the new well in the International Zone



Rededication ceremony at the Canadian Inuksuk in the International Zone

An Overview of Other Recent Developments in the International Zone

- The young African group has cleared a space close to the existing road to the Visitors Centre and started building a first pavilion module – a tree house. Unfortunately they are not connected to a water supply so far, so nobody can actually live there for the time being.
- The Indian artist Krupa has started developing and fencing an area close to the Canadian Inuksuk and has built a “container house” there, and a second one is planned. She wants to live there once a water connection has been established, and start teaching arts classes to village children.
- The new Centre of Indian Studies is under construction, close to Bharat Nivas.
- Also close to Bharat Nivas, the Tamil Heritage Centre, a place to honour the Tamil culture, is under construction.

- A new Language Lab is under construction, using ecologically sound building techniques such as EM (Effective Microorganisms) for the lime plastering.
- At the site of the German Pavilion (a lone tree, planted by the German pavilion group some years ago) Kireet (an Aurovilian water conservationist) has started to create bunds and smaller water catchments.
- Bordering the Bharatipuram village area, the Aurocreation compressed earth bricks workshop, has been constructed. Their activities are a very good initiative, not only for manufacturing sustainable building blocks and providing local employment, but helping to prevent further land encroachment from the village onto Auroville land.



A Master Plan for the International Zone?

It may be premature and indeed, from previous experience of Auroville's growth, perhaps not the best way to proceed, to have a grand master plan for the International Zone. Perhaps, what is needed at this stage is rather a conceptual framework for the organic growth of the IZ. We have seen, both from Auroville's growth and from the example of New Towns in other parts of the world, particularly in the UK, that a preconceived master plan tends in many ways to become unworkable over time, as the assumptions upon which it is based are swept aside by other unforeseeable developments, and that the grand master plans often lead to a sterile and lifeless environment by contrast with those places we all love because they have grown and evolved organically and are living. This is what has informed our approach to how, at least the European area of the IZ might

be manifested. As John Lennon said 'Life is what happens when you have made other plans'

An Integral Approach

As none of us is blessed with the kind of consciousness 'above the lid' which can see the whole picture, maybe what is required is an approach that tries to take the best, the essence, the truth from each of the concepts that have been previously developed and particularly Mother's statements about the International Zone and pavilions as developed in Roger's Galaxy Plan, and later proposals such as that for a European Agora and for a University campus.

We are seeking to find a synthesis of what we consider these true and essential elements are and

let that inform how our proposed development framework should be organised.

AVI Europe's proposal

AVI Europe members at their recent meeting in Cork all agreed that we should locate a point in the IZ that would be the centre of the European area. This would be the point from which the area would grow. It is interesting to ask ourselves whether the national pavilions could really be manifested exactly as Mother proposed them in the late sixties and early seventies, before the advent of the digital era. Would Mother, who was always so flexible in Her approach, have kept rigidly to the way She described them prior to all the profound changes that have manifested and now affect the ways

we access information, how we learn and communicate? What still remains is the essence, that one should be able to sense the atmosphere and essential character of a nation, through direct contact with its people, language, culture, food, flora and products. One can start in a very simple and humble way to establish a base from which the national character will emerge and manifest itself. From there, what is needed will grow organically as the needs and the means manifest themselves.

Within the central area we might see an amphitheatre or a play zone with a labyrinth, areas to sit and meet in the shade of trees, perhaps share a drink or meal. One proposal saw the central area as being defined, but not totally enclosed, by buildings and spaces serving as national pavilions or shared meeting or functional areas, e.g. conference rooms, general meeting rooms, lecture theatres, music pavilions, studio theatre, etc. The precise means by which such buildings may be funded and later maintained need to be worked out. Another proposal saw the European area manifesting in the form of a 'Europe House' which would include all or most of the national pavilions as rooms within the house.

It is essential that the International Zone respects the existing land and geological features and takes those as the starting point for siting the buildings and creating the landscape, as well as being aware of existing settlements and the pressure for their growth, what we call the existing ground realities. The disposition of the buildings and the arrangements for accessing and servicing them is critical, as it has to be considered both with a view to what can be implemented now, and how the buildings and the zone will change or grow. We would, in any event, favour a form of development that was in keeping with the Galaxy concept without being rigidly bound by it.

The concept of the whole IZ being part of an educational campus seems to us totally appropriate, but we resist the idea that it should be anything like a traditional campus or University, or that it should be part of a rigid preconceived plan imposed upon and limiting the organic growth of the individual elements. One interesting idea is that perhaps the educational campus could be rather like the traditional Oxbridge campuses, partly using the national pavilions as 'colleges' and the general functional buildings (and not just those in the international zone) as faculty or educational workshops or laboratories. It may also be that by treating individual buildings as part of an educational campus, the project may be easier to find funding for, but this has to be carefully managed so that there is no obligation to tailor Auroville's development according to the funder's requirements and vision, and so that Auroville retains control.

Of course, there are the normal practical issues that need to be taken into consideration, as they should be with any competently designed building or development. The buildings and spaces should be 'accessible' (permitting wheelchair and other disability ease of access) and of course the whole project should be sustainable and even hopefully zero-carbon in both construction and use. Consideration needs to be given to how the buildings and spaces are serviced, and also to the disposition of elements that are lively and possibly noisy, being located away from areas where one might require silence or quiet.

AVIUK's Proposal for a Starter British Pavilion

We believe that by starting, hopefully soon, with a very simple first manifestation we can establish a meeting space which will permit the essential British qualities to emerge and establish themselves. From this, the British Pavilion can grow organically as the needs arise and the means to manifest present themselves. Our concept would start with a humble British tea room, probably bordering onto and blending into the central European open area, part sheltered, part open. Tea is so British. It is taken as the means for dealing with many a crisis! Gather together two or three British people with a cup of tea and you have an instant British pavilion. The talk and the humour begin to manifest the culture. The tea room would have a small kitchen and might have within or attached to it a small library and a digital media room. These are 'seed spaces' that can grow as the need arises. For the first essential built spaces there should be an apartment for a caretaker and perhaps a couple of guest rooms with shared or ensuite bathrooms together with a public toilet.

The Pavilion needs to have a garden around it that can manifest, so far as is practicable given the climate, the qualities of a British garden. Space for future growth needs to be considered, together with the means for accessing and servicing, but almost certainly the 'Pavilion' will initially have something of the feeling of a house. Growth needs to be anticipated and managed so that each of the parts can be allowed to grow into larger versions of themselves. The tea room may become or be added to by a larger restaurant.

Probably the first manifestation of future growth will be more rooms for visitors who might be students who will, by staying in the ambience, make contact with the essential qualities of Britishness. The location of bedrooms or a hostel needs to be screened from the potentially noisier central meeting space.

Let it grow naturally from there. We also feel that, as growth organically presents itself, one should not be too attached to the precise form of the building, or even be prepared to demolish the first built forms, to let the new or expanded form happen according to its own requirements.

The Water Situation in Auroville

Our proposal to open a fund to deal with it

After having studied all the parameters in this field, David Stein (a US water expert who surveyed Auroville's water resources) comes to this conclusion (even more relevant after 2 monsoon failures and receding aquifers):

We have about 5 to 10 years maximum until all the water in this area turns saline (saline intrusion is irreversible unless:

- Rainwater harvesting is being into a top priority
- Town planning respects the land-areas with maximum percolation capacities to be completely protected
- Drilling of bore wells near the coastline is drastically controlled
- Water consumption of all existing bore wells is controlled thorough education plus regulation
- The lake around Matrimandir (or any other lakes on artificial hills for that matter) can be filled with rainwater as catchments only — the idea of filling it with groundwater is plainly absurd

The idea of operating desalination plants (despite the cost, energy bills and carbon footprint) and sending the water through places like Peryarmudaliarchavadi, Kalapet or Bommyapalayam once the water there has turned saline is unreasonable. It is extremely naïve to think that the water-starved population will not access the pipelines somehow.

Any solution for Auroville cannot be realised without considering its unity with its surrounding area and this involves engagement with the bioregion. Research and development is already underway into the possibilities for implementing desalination. It is important for us all who love Auroville and want its material manifestation to succeed, to realise that without fresh water, Mother's project will wither and perish. We are starting fundraising for this. Please see the directions on giving funding for Auroville under the 'Acres for Auroville' section, and make any cheque payable to 'Auroville International UK' specifying 'Auroville Water Project'.

To the Auroville Community

We would like to bring to your attention the urgent water situation currently facing us. At this moment, wells in the following communities are drying up: Discipline (almost dry), Auroshilpam (water level at minus 68m!), Silence, Sincerity, and Samasti. It has also been noted that many wells in the Residential Zone are showing weakness. In Samasti, water pressure coming out is half of what it usually is. In Auroshilpam, they are replacing pipes and installing the pump deeper. In essence, after two years of drought, and countless years of over-extraction from our underground aquifers, we are now feeling the consequences.

This issue demands our immediate attention on all levels. At the community level, we are calling a meeting of the AV Water Board. At the individual level, we are encouraged to become more conscious of our daily habits and water use.

Ing-marie

12 Apr 2014. Extracted from AV Net

Aurohost

Aurohost is a new and much needed facility created by a member of AVI USA. It is a homestay network meant for the people of the Auroville community, Auroville International (AVI) members and close associates. It is a safe and easy way for potential travellers to connect, by email, and possibly stay with other Auroville-related people around the world.

The basic purpose of AuroHost is to provide a semi-secure way for Auro-Travellers to plan their journeys by connecting with AuroHosts in order to stay with them

in their homes for short periods of time. The larger purpose is to foster relationships among Auroville-related individuals throughout the world.

Hosts are expected to provide a bed (or couch) and breakfast to a Traveller or Travellers for a minimum of 2 nights.

If you are inspired by this and would like to participate, go to www.aurohost.org. Please write to us at info@aviuk.org if you need any help with the process.

How do You Introduce Auroville to the World?

A letter received from Girija and Senje, two participants at our AVIUK public meeting

Thank you for hosting an informative and enjoyable meeting at the Auomira Centre in Greenford. It was very interesting to see the films - which gave some idea (especially to my friend who has never visited Auroville) about things being done by individuals there. It is great to get 'living' updates and insights like that.

I thought I would send our other feedback, in case it is useful: It was a good question that Martin raised - *how would you introduce Auroville to others?* I did not answer very clearly at the meeting, but what I say is this: Auroville is an amazing spiritual city, created for people to understand human unity and, while it is situated in India and is given some support by the Indian government, it belongs to the world and is seeking support from all the governments of the world. It has also been recognized by UNESCO as an essential experiment in human unity and peace. I would also mention the Ashram and say that I stay there and visit Auroville from there. The Ashram is where Auroville's founder (The Mother) was based.

I like to tell people that Auroville is a project of UNESCO, because to many 'worldly' people that means something special and significant. It places Auroville in some kind of special category as a recognized and serious endeavour, not like any other environmental, free living commune. One other thing I have done recently might be of interest - I bought gifts from Auroville for my work colleagues. I have not always got on well with them but when I was in Auroville I felt love for them and wanted to take them a token from Auroville. I bought blue coasters made from paper made by one of the Tamil women units for the men, and scented pouches for the

women. I tell you - those gifts touched my colleagues, and the atmosphere in the office was WONDERFUL and loving that day. The gifts gave me a chance to talk about Auroville, as my colleagues were all curious - even the most hard-nosed of them. So the introduction to Auroville came via talking about the women's unit and then I went on to tell them about the City. Because of the gifts, there was love and friendship in the Atmosphere..... there is no other way I could have spoken about Auroville in my workplace. So, perhaps sometimes it is just good to GIVE something.

Feedback from Senje, the friend who came with me, is quite interesting. He really liked the discussion started by an older person present who was asking about links between the Ashram and Auroville. Senje, being from the advertising industry, appreciated this gentleman's question: how does Auroville project itself to the world in order to raise funds? In a way it is the same question as Martin's - *how do you introduce people to Auroville?* It is a great and pertinent question, in my view, and also beautifully practical.

What we thought was this: to consciously get support for Auroville (and equally to project Auroville's unique influence outwards to the world), Auroville needs to have a recognizable identity. How can you introduce one person to another if that first person has no identity? And how can someone care about you if they do not know and understand you? If people are asked to give money for a cause, they will not be moved to do so unless they can identify with it. If we say: Auroville needs X facility otherwise it will be a disaster.... that does not move people. There are so many places in the world needing money for essential things. We give to countries facing civil war and famine because tens of thousands are being killed or are dying.

To care about Auroville, people need to be made aware and feel for its mission on Earth and its importance to the Earth; to understand that it is something much more than an environmental experiment. They need to feel love for it, to be moved by it, to feel they can be a part of it even where they live, and to see how Auroville's principles and work can benefit them and their children... to be able to say 'At last, a place that supports what I believe in: love and peace, a place of really exciting endeavour! Yes! I support this! I vote for this! I want this!

I do think the older gentleman's approach today was useful because he did manage to bring out both the spiritual and the material aspects of Auroville. Auroville is not just one or the other, it is equally both. He was very straightforward - talking about Mother's Agenda, the descent of the Supermind, the Life Divine, Savitri. This is indeed the foundation and the heart and soul of Auroville. It is the Height from where Auroville was born. Why shy away from it and by thus doing, block it out? By blocking it, you block the very thing that makes all of us identify with Auroville and care so passionately about it. This spirit is what will bring people to love and care about and identify with Auroville.

Anyway, that is our feedback. Sorry it is long, but I guess it is only once a year! Maybe this would be a good article for the newsletter - how do you introduce Auroville to the world?

Children could also give their ideas, which would be fascinating.....

Girija (and Senje)

We propose to have a 'Letters to the Editor' item in each issue of this Newsletter. We welcome feedback from our readers and from all of those who attend our meetings. We would also welcome contributions from children. Please send your contributions to a.vickers.arch@ntlworld.com.

Poppy and Karoki's Auroville Experience



Our hut at Sadanah Forest where we spent 10 days

My husband, Karoki, and I, with our 2 children, Ayesha (six) and Willoughby (four) arrived in Auroville on a beautiful morning in September 2013. It was to be our home for the next eight months.

We probably mirror a lot of middle-class families in the West - rushing from pillar to post, juggling the never-ending commitments of work, school and family.

But where was it all going? What were we learning? What were we contributing? Whom were we benefiting? How were our children's impressions of this life going to manifest. These were some of the questions that racked our brains when we had moments, all too rare, to stop and think. We decided that whilst the children were still young we should take the opportunity to explore an alternative to our lives here, to have a family adventure. We wanted a

community. We wanted to work in areas that we'd never tried but were interested in. We wanted to have the space to explore our spiritual path. We wanted to turn away from the incessant rush and excesses of the consumerist society we're part of.

We're aware that we should and can be doing this anywhere & to a certain degree we naturally have been, but when you open your front door to the rush of so many lives headed in different directions it can be hard to sustain your own, particularly when you're not altogether sure what it is you want.

Auroville had been on our radar for some time. Karoki grew up in North India and his parents have friends who eventually settled there. So in March 2013 we took a brief trip to Auroville to check it out and see if this could be what we were looking for. With only

four days we needed to get to see more than just the trees, the Visitor's Centre and the Matrimandir, which to many tourists is what their impression of Auroville is. So with friends of friends' connections we were serendipitously introduced to Aran, an Aurovillian who's been part of the community for many years. He gives tours that help visitors get to the heart of what AV is about. We stole him away for 2 days and on both foot and motorbike we got to scratch beneath the surface.

Aran was inspiring. He showed us schools, work units and homes, introduced us to a number of Aurovillians, whilst all the while weaving a story of the spiritual and material development of Auroville, its achievements as well as its problems and challenges. He left us wondering if this experiment in human unity through divine consciousness could really be achieved? Is it a community where

everyone's needs are met? Could a community really reach a level of harmony above politics? In those four days we got a glimpse of something that really drew us in - of a community of international people who appeared to have a feeling of belonging and a shared aspiration towards a better way of being.

On that sunny September morning we began to settle ourselves in at Gratitude guesthouse. Within two weeks, the children had started school at Nandanam and we had found ourselves volunteering roles.... We also started looking for more affordable accommodation for the remainder of our stay. It was in dealing with this issue that we began to discover perhaps one of Auroville's biggest problems – that of not enough affordable accommodation for young people, families and volunteers that is so crucial to sustaining the on-going experiment. In fact, in time, we came to realize that this issue was a window into some of Auroville's wider problems of governance, bureaucracy, finance, town planning and, yes, corruption.

We, perhaps foolishly, took the matter into our own hands and sought accommodation without the help of the Guest Service. We did find somewhere, cheaper than a guesthouse though still expensive for Auroville standards, but importantly within AV land. This meant attaining the advantages of being registered with the Financial Service, which in turn meant having an AV card, a big benefit, for things such as eating at the Solar Kitchen and having (limited) access to the Matrimandir.

Things that matter a lot on a day to day basis. Fellow volunteers had been unsuccessful in finding affordable accommodation within Auroville, and had opted for staying in a local village. Far more affordable but forgoing the AV card. This meant they couldn't take advantage of some of the community life that they had come to experience. They also felt their worth as volunteers was not being recognized.

We became neighbours with an Aurovillian family who were to become great friends. Through Adhi & his family we witnessed an amazing example of how simply a family can choose to live in the community. Working for the community and taking what it needs from the community. Adhi worked hard and in return felt his needs were met. They themselves were generous in spirit, without ever asking for anything more than they needed. Through that amazing community spirit we saw how emotionally rich their lives were. It was a joy to experience, and made us very conscious of how we behave. How we have many shackles to break off, if we're to give to a life of community and human unity. They made us see that one can live a much more effective and happy life if one is ready to simplify life, to give and to share and to have faith in the Divine.



Poppy at work in the AV Bakery

Of course though, Auroville is made up of people from very different cultural backgrounds, with different histories and so one can only expect that there will be clashes of interest and understanding. And yes, we came across people with frustrations and anger. We learnt about disputes that stall the development of Auroville. But here too, in this city of experiments we learnt about how Auroville is trying to work through these issues. We really felt there is a sense of pride in Auroville as a project. People have given up so much to live there, they've moved away from their homes and families, and these Aurovillians really want to make it work.

Although there is so much going on in Auroville, we found life can be lived at a much more realistic and manageable pace. With everything and everyone so close, and with so many events pulling the community together, one always feels part of the life of Auroville. Importantly we felt there was a very supportive base for spiritual work. It's a subject that is shared and alive, talked about and supported. In fact, so many things are discussed with passion that one is constantly developing and learning. In eight months I think we've both been challenged and inspired, stretched and informed. I think something inside us has been awakened and if we continue to listen to ourselves we can continue on the emotional & spiritual path that has been ignited.

Poppy and Karoki



Safety in numbers....!
Our neighbours, Adhi, Savitri, Devashri & Sudhir.

Taxi Ride to Auroville – a true story

I had arrived at Chennai airport very early in the morning, after a long flight from London. It took a long time to clear Customs and Immigration and change some Pounds for Rupees. When I came out of the airport at about 4am. I was met by my taxi driver. He showed me to the car, an old Ambassador, and indicated that I should sit in the rear seat. However, noting the absence of a seat belt in the rear, I was moved to ask him to let me sit in the front next to him. He looked tired, and told me he had worked the

previous day before coming to the airport to pick me up.

We started off towards Auroville in the darkness. After about an hour, out in the open countryside zooming along the East Coast Road, my driver started to show signs of drowsiness at the wheel. Because my body clock was still on UK time and having dozed on the flight, I was wide awake. Noticing the driver's head drooping forwards as we approached a bend in the road, I was moved to grab the wheel

and steer us safely in the direction required, possibly avoiding an accident. The driver woke up and was full of apologies. We quickly drove to a tea shop and took some refreshment and a little break. After that the driver was fine and we completed our journey.

A small sequence of critical actions maybe, but I palpably felt Mother's protection and Grace and spent the whole of my visit in a wonderful state of gratitude.

Vikas

Sri Aurobindo's Humour

In the beginning, it was you (not the human who is now complaining but the central being) which accepted or even invited the adventure of the Ignorance; sorrow and struggle are a necessary consequence of the plunge into the Inconscience and the evolutionary emergence out of it. The explanation is that it had an object, the eventual play of the Divine Consciousness and Ananda not in its original transcendence but under conditions for which the plunge into the Inconscience was necessary. It is fundamentally a cosmic problem and can be understood only from the cosmic consciousness. If you want a solution which will be agreeable

to the human mind and feelings, I am afraid there is none. No doubt if human beings had made the universe, they would have done much better; but they were not there to be consulted when they were made.

From 'Letters on Yoga' Part One
'The Supramental Evolution'

We welcome contributions from readers to make this a regular feature of our Newsletter.

Works Of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Readers may like to know that they can download Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's books at:
www.sriarobindoashram.org/works/
and at www.auro-ebooks.com

Next AVIUK Open Meeting

September 13th at 11am

at The Manor House, Bygrave, Hertfordshire SG7 5EE.

Live in and be the Truth you aspire to.

Editor: Vikas, 44 Leat Close, Sawbridgeworth CM21 9LZ
01279 723829 vikas@aviuk.org

For correspondence please write to our Secretary:

Angiras Auro, 65 Trinity Road, Stotfold, SG5 4EQ
01462 835131 angiras@aviuk.org



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UNITED KINGDOM