



Auroville International

UNITED KINGDOM



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There is no longer a fee for membership of AVI UK although you should contact us to confirm your interest and inform us of your contact details or any changes to these. This newsletter is now also provided free of charge. If you wish to receive a digital copy, please send us your email address. If you wish to receive a free paper copy, please confirm with your postal address and a telephone number in case we need to contact you.

However, we would appreciate any contribution to cover our costs (currently £500 per annum for printing 2 issues of the AVI UK Newsletter and postage). A contribution of £5 is suggested for those wishing to receive a paper copy. See how to donate at end of Newsletter.

If you wish to unsubscribe, please email to our secretary, Angiras Auro - info@aviuk.org

New Savitri Circle

AVI UK has set up a 'Savitri Circle' meeting at the Auromira Centre in London (126 Whitton Avenue East, UB6 OPY). The first session was held on 7th November 2015 and led to an intense immersion and widened understanding of Sri Aurobindo's masterwork. All are welcome to join the Savitri Circle.

Upcoming Meetings

Meetings to be held on the fourth Saturday of every month starting July 24th, at 11.30am. For additional information please contact the Editor.

Chandra

Thanks in part to your generosity, Chandra managed to get the funding she needed to take up her place at Kings College Cambridge where she is reading modern languages. She partly succeeded in raising the funds by recording and releasing a beautiful CD of her playing the flute, with music inspired by the twelve qualities of The Mother. Hariprasad Chaurasia, the renowned flute master and her teacher, also performs on her CD!



Chandra with Auroson in Kings College chapel.



Chandra with Vikas at Kings College, Cambridge

Recent Developments in Auroville

Auroville's Population

The overall population last year increased by 55 to a total of 2,455, which is an annual growth rate of a shade over 2%, almost one percentage point less than last year. Almost two thirds of the increase is due to an increase in the populations of our two most populous nationalities, Indians and French, which added 19 and 15 nationals respectively. The Indian proportion of the whole is slightly down, at 42.5%, but Indian, French and Germans still make up two thirds of our total population. The Spanish saw the biggest percentage rise (10%). The Dutch also added five, the Italians four, the Koreans and Canadians three, the Ukrainians and Japanese two. The male/female ratio for adults is also virtually unchanged from last year, at around 50.5%/49.5%. The British are ninth in the table with 46 people.

Sustainable Livelihoods Institute

As reported in our previous issue, the Sustainable Livelihoods Institute continues to support an innovative programme in the Auroville Bioregion, and is forging new long- term partnerships with the Government of Tamil Nadu. It is hoped this model may be replicated in other parts of India. The livelihoods in rural India have been under severe stress in the last decade due to international competition, increasing cost of resources and lack of quality and affordable manpower. The National Rural Livelihood Mission was set up by the Government of India to identify and provide support to rural livelihoods. As part of this, several priority areas have been identified and schemes have been drawn up and executed over the last few years. Each state has a State Rural Livelihood Mission which designs and implements locally relevant livelihood enhancing and supporting schemes through

community organizations across the state. However the sustainability of these livelihood programmes is a huge challenge where the government finds itself with very little capacity. The Tamil Nadu State Rural Livelihood Mission also has this problem and in response, it has taken a farsighted step to launch a Sustainable Livelihood Institute that would equip the State Government functionaries as well as the rural communities to think and work from a sustainable paradigm. It has invited Auroville to be its partner in this venture and develop the SLI as a joint venture.

The Swadharma Program

The SWADHARMA program in Auroville responds to the need for an education for our times.

It offers young seekers – aged 18 to 28 – the opportunity to embark on a semester long, transformative learning adventure, with the goal of self discovery. The program is based on the idea that helping young people discover who they are and what brings them alive is not only meaningful at an individual level, it is also essential for building a socially just, sustainable and awakened future.

Starting in September 2016, participants will spend four months encountering a broad range of learning experiences in Auroville. With the support of an international team of faculty mentors, they will be guided to explore different dimensions of themselves as well as their relationship to society and environment. The program will draw upon an experiential inquiry method based in Integral Yoga, the founding philosophy of Auroville. Through this unique blend of self inquiry and experiential learning, participants will develop the understanding and commitment needed to discover and claim their unique gifts and life purpose, or swadharma.

The permanent university will be the key to Auroville's reason for being. It must be a leap forward; so that it can hasten the advent of the future, of a world of harmony, beauty and union.

The Mother

Green Acres - An Update

Purchase of land in the Green Belt is the most urgent at the moment. Many plots are being offered for sale and the funds are not there. The Green Belt is the area most preferred by developers. In the city, most of the missing plots are quite isolated (i.e. surrounded by Auroville land), and are less likely to be developed, but in the Green belt, there is considerable demand for private houses, guest houses, hotels, as well as housing estates. We have already lost considerable areas that way, but are also negotiating for others – but we need the funds.

We have a short but informative video produced by A4A. It can be watched online at <https://vimeo.com/143531655> I hope we can try and inspire donors to give to this project. It is vital to Auroville's future and quite urgent.

For donations, please specify "Acres for Auroville" or "GreenAcres" when donating through AVI UK.

The National Knowledge Network

The Integrated Communication and Information Technology Infrastructure for Auroville has just begun implementation of a fibre optic link to the National Knowledge Network of India, allowing a new potential for video-conferencing, online learning and telephone communication within Auroville and the world outside, and better security within Auroville itself.

Health and Wellbeing

Most allopathic doctors tend to define health as an absence of disease, and that is also the dictionary definition. But Auroville's is a positive definition which includes the whole being. It's a balance and harmony between the different planes and levels of the being. In Santé there is far more space: now there is the potential to have five practitioners from different healing modalities working at the same time. To integrate the different modalities they need to meet regularly, so there is a common tea-room and a meeting room where they can meet and discuss common and chronic cases, and watch educational videos together.

On a practical level, this collaborative approach means that every practitioner working there has access to the same patient records. And they will have regular patient care conferences where the practitioners discuss complex cases, and hear about exceptional results or discoveries.

The next step will be to create individually-tailored plans for patients. One of the important things is that the patient must become part of the healing process. It's no longer the doctor who is God and the patient merely the passive recipient. Fortunately, in Auroville we already have an environment where the people who are seeking health are ready to take responsibility for themselves, cooperate, learn and change.

In Santé, the patients will be able to choose which primary discipline they want because they will have all the major primary disciplines – allopathy, homeopathy, ayurveda, acupuncture, bodywork – under one roof.

Auroville and the Major Floods in Tamil Nadu in 2015

Auroville did not suffer death or destruction in the recent flooding, probably because it has constructed check dams and bunding of the earth



The new Santé Clinic

to ensure that water retained by the land can recharge the aquifers and the extensive planting of trees encourages absorption of the water. Despite the unfortunate flooding, it has been an honour for Auroville to participate in the effort of setting up an emergency radio station in the district of Cuddalore, where Aurovilians had brought some needed equipment and along with the combined efforts of Government, Local Bodies and Civic Teams, succeeded in launching a radio station which broadcast on 107.8Mhz in all of three days! This was an unprecedented accomplishment of communication management in a disaster affected area. Auroville also started a fund to help local communities and villages suffering loss and destruction. While other NGOs and individuals in the area focused on distribution of food and other materials, it was decided that resources could best be directed towards water, hygiene and sanitation, given the pressing need for this type of intervention. This made Auroville's effort unique and highly valued by the communities where AVAG (Auroville Village Action Group) was working. It included the dispersion of Effective Microorganism (EM) in living spaces affected by water stagnation as well as the distribution of the innovative and ecologically produced water treatment sachets from Auro Aquasafe to provide safe drinking water, and the distribution of 'Nilavembu Kudineer,' a poly herbal formula that controls all types of fever associated with body ache.

Traffic and Mobility Within Auroville

The Working Committee brought the topic of internal mobility and traffic matters to the AV Council, which in turn created a task force to find practical solutions for public transportation for Auroville.

Moving from individual to collective transport with free mini buses or shuttles in continuous slow movement. Ideally, these buses would be free of charge for Auroville residents, and preferably electric or alternative energy fueled vehicles. People would be able to hop on and off at designated stops. Further study is required of funding, economic sustainability, route maps and timetables.

1. Pedal rickshaws or light transportation would circulate from nodes such as the Visitor's Centre, for visitors who want to move inside Auroville. This is intended to replace the free circulation of motor traffic from the outside.

2. A detailed study is to be initiated for the pilot project of an electric tram. This new study will take into account all relevant existing studies that have already been done. Collective parking at entrance nodes and a secondary collective parking node like the one in the Visitor's Centre would house the majority of our motorized vehicles,

especially 4 wheelers. Free bicycles, electric mopeds, public shuttles should be available in proximity of the parking. Possible source of funding could be that each Auroville taxi service contributes one electric car or shuttle.

3. 100 cycles are already available for daily/weekly rental at Visitors' Centre. A buy-back scheme is in place for those who want to have a cycle for more than a month - buy a new cycle from Aurovelo, and Visitors' Centre will buy it back from them when you leave. This set-up needs to be expanded, also to Guest Houses, and cycling must be encouraged as a preferred mode of Auroville transport.

A rental fleet of electric mopeds should be established, that will effectively replace the culture of TVS moped rentals with electric ones. Since electric mopeds do not require registration or insurance, this is one way for Auroville to eliminate the practice of illegally renting bikes.

4. Two major check-posts for Auroville will ensure control over incoming traffic. One at Certitude is to be added, and the one at Visitor's Centre can continue. Feasibility of such an operation must be studied in collaboration with the neighbourhood. New check posts may be considered at Courage, CSR, Kottakarai, allowing in vehicles with AV stickers only - all others to pass via Visitor's Centre check post.

5. It is clear that traffic safety is one of the key areas of concern while discussing mobility. Presently, we have developed a culture of creating speed breakers that have been out of use in much of the rest of the world since a couple of decades. A study needs to be put together taking into account the innovations of the world with respect to slowing down traffic and bettered in implementing them in Auroville. An example of an alternate way of slowing traffic is the "Shared Space" model. A small stretch of the Crown, perhaps the present Solar Kitchen-Sante stretch, should be converted to a shared space to demonstrate how mobility could work differently in a densely populated and multi-functional zone.

6. Road Service must be mandated to develop and maintain cycle paths and given a budget for this. Instead of paving all our existing roads to suit motorized traffic at a higher speed, more cycle paths need to be created and maintained so that cycling becomes a pleasure and therefore the ideal choice of transport.



Village education

UnLtd Tamil Nadu

UnLtd Tamil Nadu is a social change incubation program. They offer 12 months support to early stage social entrepreneurs. Their unit is called SEA (Social Entrepreneurship Associates) and operates under the Village Action Trust. They have supported Auroville ventures such as EcoFemme, WasteLess, Komali MediClown, Sankalpa, Upcycling Studio and Pitchandikulam spin-offs such as Amirtha Herbals and Evergreen Spirulina.

Here is what happened recently to one of their social change makers called Logammal - a village school teacher working on child parliaments across Tamil Nadu got a call from a group of school pupils in a far off district asking her to teach them about democracy. She replied that she had no budget, so the kids said they would add up their savings and pay for her bus fare and accommodation. No NGO handholding, no government, no adults involved. One is struck by the eagerness to learn of these 14 year olds in rural India, and that too about a topic as abstract as democracy and governance!

From March 2015 there were 9 projects from across the state that completed their year with a final presentation. From Sept 2015, 7 projects are still receiving support. Check out the 9 min video (by Yatra Multimedia) for more details and testimonials. Together these change-makers have impacted thousands of lives and are continuing to attack underlying causes of poverty, exclusion and exploitation. On average each social startup becomes a job creator for 30 people, raises 14 times the amount of money we help them with and impacts 6,000 lives.

The sectors they are active in include

education, girl empowerment, involving youth in village governance, emancipation of tribal and nomad communities, changing people's attitude towards waste and environment, education for the learning disabled and holistic health care. They are now open for applications for 6 new projects starting in July 2016 (see <http://www.unltdtamilnadu.org>)

After 3 years of running with short term interns they now have a very strong team of professionals. They have re-invented themselves as a Taskforce based organisation which helps everyone on the team manage their own sub-projects very transparently and accountably. They completed a Procedures Manual streamlining all their activities. They are now upgrading their support program to include a printed syllabus and corresponding E-learning curriculum covering everything from strategy and finance to Human Resources, Marketing and Mechanical & Electrical.

Their Challenge: As mentioned, they are maturing from a volunteer to a professional team, which will allow a shift in quality and reliability. They are now looking for "friends of UnLtd Tamil Nadu" to support them with a recurring donation through AVI UK. They are grateful for any amount of help. They will keep you updated with behind the scenes looks into the reality of social change in the Auroville bioregion and share many more uplifting stories like the one of Logammal.

They need funding to seed the start-ups, so any donations are welcome. Contact them at: Auroville, Tamil Nadu 605101, Ph: +91 99438 20241, gijs@auroville.org.in. Give via AVI UK for the donations to be eligible for Gift Aid.

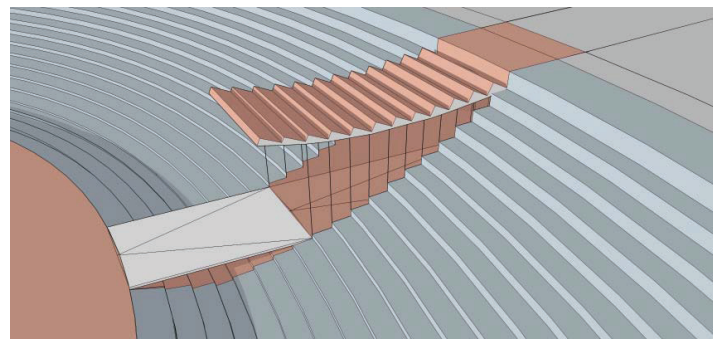
Matrimandir Gardens - Recent Work and Proposals



Garden of Consciousness long granite boulder to be used as seat



A conceptual painting of the Garden of Perfection



Proposed Amphitheatre steps passageway from Green Room

Volunteering In Auroville

Visitors should be aware of Indian Law regarding working in India, and abide by it.

1. Indian nationals may volunteer in Auroville without restriction.
2. Foreign guests, visiting and residing in Auroville, holding a tourist visa, are welcome to participate in Auroville workshops, training programmes and activities. The Auroville Guest Service (upstairs from Solar Kitchen) will show them what's available.
3. Foreign guests with a tourist visa, staying more than 2 months and wishing to involve themselves in Auroville, to "experience Auroville", need to go to the Entry Service (Town Hall) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from 10a.m. to 12 noon. They will be registered as "Prospective Newcomers" and will receive all the information needed at the desk. This registration does not hold them to any commitment.
4. Foreign nationals can volunteer in Auroville, if holding an Entry Visa. They can make an application for volunteering through the Auroville Volunteering Service, SAVI, at the Unity Pavilion, which will assist them in obtaining the required letter of recommendation for an Entry Visa.

New Tourist Visa to India

People wishing to make a brief visit to Auroville and India on a tourist basis can now obtain their visa by an online application at **indianvisaonline.gov.in**

The visa costs about £60. Beware of other websites offering access to the same visa application form but for extra cost.

Auroville's 48th Birthday Dawn Meditation



Dawn Fire and Meditation at the Amphitheatre, 28th. February 2016 – Auroville's 48th. birthday. At least 5000 people attended this event, with a really large number of local Tamil people participating.

It [the city] will be built by what is invisible to you. The men who have to act as instruments will do so despite themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger Forces. Nothing depends on human beings – neither the planning nor the execution – nothing! That is why one can laugh.

The Mother, September 1969

Dick Batstone Passes



Dick Batstone

Dick Batstone passed away quietly on Saturday the 2nd April after a long illness. Dick, from the U.K., was a seeker from a young age. He stayed in the Ashram between 1959 – 60 and wrote a beautiful little book – *Passage to More than India* – about his experiences and meetings with The Mother which were a turning point in his life. He sent soil for the inauguration of Auroville and visited in the early 1970s, returning a number of times afterwards, latterly with his wife, M.E.

In the 1970s, he was one of the founder members of Auroville

International U.K. He gave many talks about Auroville and organized events to raise funds. At a critical time for the community, he was one of the first people in the West to come out in support of the Aurovilians in the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society. For many years, he was also the U.K. distributor for Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's works and related books on the Integral Yoga.

Dick loved books, at one time he was a bookseller and his house was full of them. On his last stay in Auroville, he visited the new library. In a wonderful gesture, he decided to donate thousands of books from his precious collection to the library. After a nerve-racking journey by sea, in which they seemed to visit most of the ports and customs-houses of the world, they finally arrived in Auroville over a year ago, and are now on the new shelves specially purchased for them.

Dick was an original – quiet, urbane, with the quizzical, understated humour of a man who has deep compassion for others and a lively sense of the beauty of the world. A man with whom one could spend a comfortable evening, the companionable silences stretching through the hours – for Dick often seemed most comfortable in other, rich, interior worlds – or broken only

by simple remarks that would reach deep into the soul.

He was a gentle, modest soul who touched everybody who met him with his devotion to The Mother and his unswerving support of Auroville. In later years, he and M.E. were always happy to welcome Aurovilians to their beautiful house in Malmesbury, England.

Dick was almost the last of an older generation of U.K. devotees who were touched by Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and what Auroville represented for the world, and who brought an indefinable Englishness – polite, refined, yet very deep – to their sadhana.

Dick was also a poet. After his first meeting with The Mother, he wrote about the experience:

*This is what time has led to -
A chair set before a patterned cloth
And a still, frail woman
Who smiles and has the eyes of God...*

Those who knew him well will miss him very much.

Alan Herbert

Stepping into the Adult World of Auroville

Usually going to Auroville is simply going home for me. I go home every 2-3 years to recharge my inner batteries, and socialise with my family and friends. I left Auroville at 21, having just finished my studies and heading off to university. Now, in my capacity as Secretary to AVI UK, I was asked to go to Auroville for the larger international meeting that is held there every two years. It is the first time I have had to step into the adult Auroville – the Auroville that, as a child, always seemed fraught with tension and strong vocal personalities clashing. And I was pleasantly surprised by how much Auroville has moved on. It was also a lesson on choosing what to focus on.

Before leaving the UK I realised that it was the first time I would be flying on my own for several years and that I would be sitting next to a stranger on the plane. I put a request out to the universe that I wanted an empty seat next to me, I really didn't want a big fat man (apologies for the lack of political correctness). And I found myself focusing on the fact that I didn't want to sit next to a big fat man. When I got on the plane it looked like my wish had been granted and there was an empty seat next to me, but as the doors of the plane closed, a big fat man came rushing in and took up that empty seat!

The time in Auroville began with four straight days of presentations from a variety of groups providing updates and information with requests for support. There were many: some inspiring and some raising questions. We had presentations on the new Entry Process; on the Housing situation; the Land and Water situations; several campus initiatives which tied into the International Zone; and plans for Auroville's 50th birthday celebrations.

Despite the deep concerns around land and water (which we have covered in previous editions of the newsletter), and the long-standing challenges around the entry process, visa issues and the lack of housing, what struck me most was the level of passion and dedication that people have towards Auroville, the Divine and making The Mother's dream a reality.

As all of these presentations were taking place in the Unity Pavilion, as well as the AVI Board two-day retreat, I spent

rather a lot of time there. And therefore managed to spend quite a bit more time with my Auntie Jaya and found out about the inspiring work she is doing with The Mother's symbol, the Matrimandir Gardens and The Mother's Flowers and Their Messages.

She is creating a framework for a new way of organisation in Auroville using the twelve qualities of The Mother's symbol. The first eight are to do with our attitude towards the Divine and the last four are our attitude towards humanity. They used this framework to select the last two Working Committees and the last Auroville Council, and particularly this second round was very successful and freed the process up from internal politics. To work in this way requires a personal meditation and collective collaboration.

We had a chance to experience how this can work on the AVI Board retreat and allowed the Board to reflect meaningfully on how to move forward with particular aspects of its work. We created a short experience of this process at our recent Open Meeting in Birmingham.

My specific task when in Auroville was to see how AVI UK can communicate with UK people who visit Auroville in order to build relationships with them and increase participation in UK based activities. At present Auroville doesn't collect basic contact details, or stay in touch with its guests and visitors except on a personal and individual level.

I had several meetings with relevant people and was relieved how easily they could see the need for a more organised approach to keeping in touch with the guests and visitors. There are several relevant projects that are planned for Auroville's 50th celebrations, particularly the Welcome Hub project.

And it is here in these meetings that some of Auroville's biggest challenges come to light – that of communicating effectively to achieve an outcome that is acceptable to all. And communicating with different ideas, personalities, nationalities, languages and cultures, as well as individual workloads and other commitments, to arrive at an integrated decision is no mean feat. And yet it is often in these moments of conflict that

we have opportunities for our biggest growth, both collectively and personally: to be more sensitive to the other's point of view, to be prepared to compromise our own firm opinions, to work together for the collective good. Auroville is getting so much better at this.

The project of collecting visitor and guest data will go ahead under several different strands and will hopefully, if the funding comes through, be ready for Auroville's 50th.

My last few days were filled with more personal activities, and being present in the incredible, powerful energy and Divine Grace that exists in Auroville. I attended JV's three day Pranayama course. I attended the dawn bonfire on the 28th of February attended by hundreds of devotees from around the region. On the Golden Day, 29th February, I went for dawn chanting at the amphitheatre and that evening there was a tree planting ceremony at Sacred Groves in memory of several people with long associations with Auroville, including Joy and Edith who founded AVI UK.

I took part in a dinner with a difference at the Unity Pavilion. It was a silent dinner, served by waiters in traditional Far Eastern clothing. Following the dinner, we remained in silence while we listened to Aster Patel share her memories of being in the Ashram at the time of Sri Aurobindo's passing, followed by readings from Nirodbharan's memoirs. Overall it was a lovely time of sharing and understanding and provided an insight into how we could keep cultural traditions alive in the International Zone.

For the flight back to the UK, having learnt my lesson, instead of focusing on what I didn't want, I focused on having an empty seat next to me and it worked! I had a very comfortable and uneventful flight home. And so too, I learnt that in Auroville, as in anywhere in the world, if we focus on the difficulties we can easily find them and create them. If we focus on a positive outcome, then no hurdle is insurmountable and we can stride towards The Mother's vision, because the city of Auroville is being built and is happening now.

Angiras Auro

Impressions of a Visit to Auroville, February 2016



AVI Board Meeting



Angiras presenting an update of her Database project

I visited Auroville in February 2016 as one of AVI UK's representatives for the annual meeting of the AVI Board. I will not attempt here to report on Auroville in an objective way. These are the subjective impressions of someone who lived in Auroville for about ten years in the 1970's and I will draw on my recollections of those early days as a way of trying to understand how much Auroville seems to me to have changed in the nearly 50 years since its founding in 1968.

In 1971 when I discovered Auroville, it was possible to turn up in Pondicherry, make a few visits to Auroville to check it out, apply to join and after the Secretary had shown your photo to Mother for her approval, move out and join the small work force. I offered what little money I had to Mother and in accepting me, she provided for all my needs, which were simple and basic, through an arrangement known as 'Prosperity'. I was given a room in the Matrimandir Workers' Camp where food was also provided. All I had to do was to be prepared to work. Those wishing to join now are subject to an interview with the Entry Group but the criteria for being allowed to stay are more onerous. Does one seem suitably motivated to make the Auroville experience? Does one have the appropriate visa? Does one have sufficient funds to support oneself and pay for some housing? From the

very start one is made aware of the predominance of money in the process and those without sufficient funds, however suitable from the point of view of their consciousness, will find it difficult to enter Auroville. Alas, this is not a new problem:

Mother on Auroville, January 30th 1969: There is a tendency to give privileges to money when the real problem would be to give priority to those with the highest consciousness.

Aurovilians are well aware of the problem and they are working to find equitable solutions. There are numerous contributing factors including a general decline in the Auroville economy, a dependency on the Government of India, reliance on donations consequent on the inability to achieve self-sufficiency, inadequate affordable housing, etc. The problems are essentially the consequence of the general level of consciousness still rooted in an 'I, me, mine' culture and the inability amongst us all to live according to the guidelines that The Mother gave particularly with regard to money. The answer seems clear – rise to a consciousness above that of the ego.

Although the population of Auroville is currently only about 2,500 people, it is becoming increasingly diverse. Aurovilians are working hard to find their unity within that diversity, which

is entirely appropriate for a place that aspires to become the City of Human Unity. When I joined, the nationalities of those coming at that time were mainly north Indian, American and French, with a smattering of other European nations. Now we have Russia and its former allies, China, Japan, Korea, Africa, South America, Israeli and many more. But the unity that is trying to establish itself is not merely dealing with national and cultural diversity, but with a diversity of people's personal preoccupations and priorities, such as green work, health and wellbeing, architecture and planning, etc. and of course, the change of consciousness. Auroville, although still quite a small town, is becoming much more representative of the whole world and the diversity of its problems. It seems evident that in struggling to find the answers to its core problems, Auroville has worked its way through a whole succession of changes of system, only to discover that the only solution that really works, the real work of the Aurovillian, is to change one's own consciousness, to rise above the lid of mind and see things in a more universal way and to learn to open one's heart in one's dealings with others. To be vast.

During our stay, the AVI international Board were given presentations by various Auroville groups to learn what



Opening of the Seminar room at Nandakupam

progress had been made in their activities and to be made aware of any funding needs. For me, the most impressive projects were the rural development work being undertaken at Nandakupam in Tamil Nadu, which is in the Auroville Bioregion about 25 km. from Auroville and its associated work in the Sustainable Livelihoods Institute (SLI), both initiated and inspired by Joss Brooks from Pitchandikulam.

The approach is truly holistic, involving an integral education including information technology, sustainable land use and agriculture, re-afforestation, rural employment, sustainable agriculture, women's self-help, healthy living and eating, the cultivation and use of medicinal plants, spirulina, alternative energy, recycling and re-use of wastes, water management and so on. Both projects receive financial support from the government of Tamil Nadu and draw upon the experience, expertise and involvement of Auroville consultants and teachers gained from fifty years of applied research in Auroville itself and using Auroville as a campus. The success of the work is evident from the joyful faces of those we met. In the early days, Aurovilians were so busy planting and nurturing trees, establishing small communities, building Matrimandir and learning how to survive in a testing climate and environment that there was little energy left for working in and for the uplift of the local villages, so to see such an emphasis on rural development now was truly heartening.

We also had a presentation about the Auroville Campus Initiative (ACI). This is concerned with establishing

Auroville, the whole town and all of its people, as a learning society, and is an extension of the work of SAIER, The Sri Aurobindo Institute for Educational Research. The aim is to make learning a lifelong and joyful experience, covering all aspects of Auroville's activities, experience and research and reaching out to share it with India and the world.

Auroville is now culturally rich and a very exciting place to experience music, theatre, art and even cuisine. There is always something being presented at this time of year. One can enjoy performances of traditional Indian devotional music, a sure way to immerse oneself in the atmosphere which is conducive to connection with one's inner being. During our stay, I also participated in the OM choir at Savitri Bhavan. There must have been about 40 – 50 of us. After warming up and a brief introduction, led by Narad, we simply sang OM. The experience was extraordinary, as no matter who sang what note, it all blended into a unity. At the Amphitheatre we were treated to a performance at sunset on the Russian Bells by Vera. There's something utterly timeless about the Amphitheatre and the bells take one to another space and out of time. Sometimes the bells are joined by the chorus of birds joining time with the timeless. These are the magical treats that make the Auroville experience something truly unique in the world.

We also experienced a deeply moving presentation based upon Nirodbaran's account of the passing of Sri Aurobindo, featuring Norman Bowler, an English actor who in pre-Auroville days had appeared as a soap star



Spirulina tanks at Nadukupam

on British TV. Norman really brought Nirod's vivid account alive.

Springing up all over Auroville are new restaurants and cafes serving a rich diversity of cuisines. Although food in Auroville is predominantly an excellent, healthy simple vegetarian



Norman Bowler

fare with salads, one can now get vegan, chicken and fish, north and south Indian cuisine, pizzas, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, central-European and Mediterranean and more, but so far no British! There are several bakeries and in Auroville and the bread is really superb. Aurovilians can cater for themselves obtaining their food at PTDC (Pour Tous Distribution Centre), the organisation which provides Aurovilians' food and basic provisions. It is purely voluntary to join, and from initially around 100 members there are now around 1000.



Top: Signboard showing all the innovations and activities at the School
Btm: Michael from Findhorn with Sonia of AVI UK and Joss from Auroville at Nandakupam, with children from the local school

We were also given updates on planning and housing in Auroville and experienced the latest developments. L'Avenir, the planning body, is in process of negotiating terms for a Tamil Nadu based regional planning authority called NTD (New Town Development Agency). Whilst it allegedly holds the promise of providing a means of controlling and limiting unwanted commercial housing and commercial developments on Auroville land, it also limits or could even exclude the participation by Aurovilians on the decision-making committee despite being based upon an approved master plan. The Housing Group presented us with their current

proposals, which include an attempt to ensure that housing is of a minimum standard in terms of construction, energy use, and space standards. Some of the proposed housing developments are quite luxurious and expensive, but the sad consequence of the Housing group's policy are that potential newcomers are unlikely to be able to afford even the least expensive of the housing options on offer. This is despite the fact that the Government of India provides funding for some housing in Auroville. This is an unacceptable state of affairs for which many in Auroville are trying to find an answer.

For many years there existed in Auroville a rigid, almost fundamentalist adherence to the original Galaxy concept and the target population of 50,000. But partly because Auroville's population only grew by 2% last year and much encroachment by villagers onto unused Auroville land occurred, there has been a softening of the planning policies to the extent that temporary buildings are not only being allowed but encouraged, to ensure that the land is brought into occupation and use. It will be interesting in the long term to see how this change of approach works out. It is generated by genuine need but temporary

buildings have in my experience a tendency to be retained long after their originally envisaged life span.

In Auroville there is still a lot of construction using conventional concrete and similar 'modern' materials. By contrast, Sacred Groves is an experimental housing project being constructed with manually mixed earth reinforced with straw and using other locally-sourced or recycled material. The labour force seems to be largely Indian architectural students having practical experience and enjoying a liberating collective living/working adventure, offering their labour for free. It very much reminded me of the spirit and appropriate technology that pervaded the manifestation of the early pioneering communities of Auroville, although its progress has been hampered by limited funds.

Whilst we were in Auroville, the French inaugurated their pavilion in the International Zone, constructed using a prefabricated steel-framed

and crinkly-tin roofed modular unit solution.

These structures are relatively cheap, quick to erect, reasonably well-designed, demountable and can be assembled connected to each other to form little groups. Expect to see many more of them in the near future, serving all kinds of uses including housing and offices. It is likely that our first manifestation of a British Pavilion will use one of these units and AVI UK has started a fund to collect donations to make this happen. It will, most likely, be located as part of a group of north European Pavilions not too far from the Visitor Centre. Appropriately, the first function of a British Pavilion will be to provide a tea room where Brits can meet and put the world to rights, although such a manifestation magically appears nearly every day at a table in the Solar Kitchen. The International Zone is the focus of a great deal of planning activity at present so, expect to see something of substance when Auroville celebrates its 50th birthday in February 2018.

Near to Santé, the recently opened multi-disciplinary Health Centre on the Crown Road, is a new facility where Aurovilians who have died can be viewed prior to burial or cremation. Perhaps what is still missing is a dedicated care facility for the elderly, but a new facility is to be built soon with the help of funds from AVI UK.

At the other end of the age spectrum, it was heartening to see the emergence of Auroville youth in involvement with Auroville activities. The 'Youth' are between the ages of 20 to 35, have grown up in the atmosphere of Auroville and seemed to be very familiar with the spiritual and philosophical ground on which Auroville is based, yet they approach their lives with an unspoken, a lived spirituality, a reluctance to be involved in the existing governance structures but leading lives based upon action in the true spirit of Auroville. Their concerns are focussed not just on Auroville and its issues, but the Bioregion and the world beyond. It gives hope for the future of Auroville.



Top Left: Sacred Groves workers morning meeting Top Middle: Manu, the architect Top Right: The stabilised mud construction Btm: Temporary French Pavilion, which has rooms for meeting, library, kitchen, bathroom and Caretaker accomodation

On Money

1969, June 29th: Excerpt from a correspondence of Mother with Shyam Sunder:

In a truer world, in the realisation towards which the creation is moving, money ought to be one of the earthly forces put at the disposal of the Divine Consciousness for its work on earth.

The first step towards this realisation is the abolition of the sense of property. Each individual is not the possessor of the money put at his disposal – he is the user and distributor of that money; and that leads naturally to the next step: those who have the widest and truest

vision and knowledge ought to be the distributors and users.

The processes for reaching this result should be worked out and made effective, depending on the need and the opportunities.

Q.: Doesn't the sense of property belong to the ego?

The sense of property is certainly a habit that is natural to the ego; but in spite of its blindness, it doesn't have a sense of owning, the air it breathes, the water in the river or the rain that falls.

Comment by Bertrand, an Aurovillian (from Auroville Today, April 2016)

Auroville has reached a state of development that requires it to reinvent its relationship to money. Auroville needs to create a sustainable economic model that will allow it to meet its structural needs and sustain its residents in the future. The goodwill of all those concerned with financial issues, the competence of the few and the support of the community will be needed to manifest a community where "money would be no more the sovereign lord".

Main Recent Donations to Auroville via Aviuk

Approximate figures	£
Water	1,300
Pitchandikulam Tree Planting	9,000
KST Scholarship	6,400
New Creation Aikyam School & Boarding	1,600
Land purchase	2,000
Elderly Care	10,700
Farewell service	2,400

Fundraising for the British Pavilion

AVI UK is fundraising for the British Pavilion in the International Zone in Auroville. Initially we need to raise £5000 to make a start.

Please visit aviuk.org/fundraising/donate in order to make a donation.

AVI UK Open Meeting

You are invited to join an extended open meeting on the weekend of 13/14th August to explore how we can create a deeper connection with our Auroville community within the UK.

If you are interested in participating please email info@aviuk.org for the location and more details. A variety of activities are proposed including meditation, team building, workshops, readings and videos. It is a chance to share in our collective love for Auroville, The Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Live in and be the Truth you aspire to.

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