



*Auroville International*  
UNITED KINGDOM

## Presenting Auroville

Those of us who have had the task of presenting Auroville to the world, are often faced with a dilemma: How to paint a picture which portrays the beauty, the ideals, and the aspirations, but at the same time presents the challenges, the difficulties and the present realities. For us the message is clear - or perhaps we would not have undertaken the task - somehow Auroville already exists in its finished form, somewhere in the mind or beyond, and it is this vision, Mother's vision of Auroville we seek to portray.

But what of the present reality? What of the troubles, the conflicts, the difficulties of everyday life? Perhaps we should remind ourselves that Auroville is a building site. It is the building site of a city - and of a new society, perhaps of a new man. And who can tell what magnificent structures will emerge from all the bricks and rubble, from the apparent chaos of scaffolding and holes in the ground, unless one tries to see beyond appearances. Who can tell also what kind of noble society will emerge from underneath the chaos of disagreements, of differing opinions and conflicting ideas, unless one holds the ideals and aspirations clearly in one's mind.

For me, the answer is to allow Auroville to speak for itself, to show the beauty - because there is certainly much beauty already, to show the impressive work being done, to present the ideals, and aspirations, but also to indicate - sometimes with caution, the difficulties being faced, and the challenges, that such an immense task presents. And there is so much to show. I always had the difficulty when setting out a presentation of Auroville of what to leave out! The activities are so many, with so much energy going into so many different fields of work. Is Auroville about ecology? Is it



View from the top of Matrimandir

about alternative technology? Is it a social experiment? Is it about helping the poor in the local villages, or is it a spiritual community, or even a "yoga centre" (as one writer described it)? Of course it is all these things and much more, and to present this diversity is quite a challenge.

But there is something else too to put across, and this often happens without pictures or words, and that is the beautiful and powerful force which is present in this place, a force of progress and of grace, which makes it possible for all the necessary progress to take place, despite the resistances, despite all the ideas and the opinions. But perhaps this is something that people need to experience for themselves.

We in AVI can only perhaps be a channel through which Auroville presents itself. We have nothing to sell (except perhaps a few packets of incense, or a book or two!), but there is a message to give. Auroville needs help and support for its work. It needs funds for its various projects, and it needs people, those who are inspired by the vision, who are prepared to give something of themselves to its realisation.

Martin

*I know it's not easy, but we are not here to do easy things; the whole world is there for those who like an easy life. I would like people to feel that coming to Auroville does not mean coming to an easy life - it means coming to a gigantic effort for progress.*

*For thousands of years we have been developing outer means, outer instruments, outer techniques for living - and in the end those means and techniques are crushing us. The sign of the new humanity is a reversal of outlook and the understanding that inner means, inner knowledge and inner techniques can change the world and master it without crushing it. Auroville is a place where this new way of living is being worked out, it is a place where man must begin to change his world by means of the power of the inner spirit.*

The Mother - Agenda

# AVI UK Exhibition in May in London

At SOAS (South Asia and African Studies), part of the University of London.

I have been Treasurer for AVI UK for 30 years and one thing I really enjoyed was an exhibition about Auroville we held at the Nehru Centre in London in 2008. Then most of the committee came together, worked together to organise this event. That was wonderful in itself but reaching out and telling people about Auroville just gave me a real buzz.

I was always desperate to have another exhibition, have that buzz again. I mentioned having one at some meetings but there was no energy for this idea, it just was not the right time.

But as the years went by I knew Auroville 50th birthday was coming up, so I knew that was a good reason to have a new exhibition.

Then in early 2017 someone at a meeting mentioned that some students from SOAS were going to Auroville as part of their course. My ears were on fire, I sent an email that same evening, and a few days later I was on a train to London.

Three more train journeys to SOAS in London, meeting different people, and eventually SOAS suggested a very small corner for a possible exhibition. This simply was not good enough. But help soon came, Martin and Auroskanda came to the rescue and improved my exhibition proposal and eventually we were given a decent space and a lecture theatre for an evening seminar.

Now what? I realised all I had was a venue but no vision. But Auroskanda, who was new to the committee, clearly had a big bold vision of having panellists at SOAS and other panellists Skyping from Auroville. So we rolled with his ideas. I knew there was a lot of work and was sceptical that we could make it happen.

Slowly though it started coming together. Auroskanda had the energy and contacts to back up his ideas. Angiras was pulling many things together in the background. Paul was



AVI UK exhibition stand, SOAS

working on holiday, designing leaflets, Nidhi was chipping in when she could, and Neeraj was volunteering to be on the exhibition stand more than anyone. Everything seemed to flow, we all seem to know our strengths, we all trusted each other, there were no disputes, just a feeling of we are going to make this happen.

As the date grew nearer there was an explosion of energy, early one morning I checked my emails and found emails sent the previous night around 11pm and replies sent around 7am in the morning. I was struggling to keep up but loving being part of the process, the buzz was building.

Then the big day came and the time on the exhibition stand gave me my buzz again. We told many students about Auroville and hopefully made them want to investigate Auroville more later on.

The highlight for me was when I gave one student a little factual summary of Auroville, she did not say very much then she suddenly turned, looked me in the eye and unexpectedly said "Is this place special?" I looked her in the eye back and said "Yes it is", she held my gaze for a few seconds, then she just walked away but I felt her question meant she had sensed something.

Apart from connecting with many students, the exhibition stand became a meeting place where ex Aurovilians, ex Ashram school people, previous AVI UK members came along, helped and mingled.

There were lovely and strange moments, one example being one ex

Aurovilian and a current Aurovilian who were re-united after 14 years, another being one lady who came wanted advice on how to start an AVI Uganda centre.

It was all very relaxed with plenty of humour, especially from Radha, and there was a lot of interest in the Maroma (an Auroville unit making incense, candles and beauty products) products on display.

The Friday evening seminar went smoothly with panellists on hand, others Skyping from Auroville, Bangalore and Spain, but there was disappointment that not many students came. We were clearly fighting the tide as that Friday was the end of examination week and the last place any students wanted to be was a lecture theatre. It was a miracle we had any there at all.

We had plenty of feedback, good and bad, the latter was accepted without offence and made us think how we could do things better next time. I felt we all knew that apart from all the time and energy we had put in, we had tried something different and created something that gave us new contacts and hopefully may have touched many people, perhaps even sowed a few spiritual seeds.

There was a lot of positive energy afterwards and there was talk about more exhibitions at Cambridge University, The London School of Economics, Sussex University and even going back to SOAS.

My youngest daughter joked – AVI UK is going on tour! Bring on the next buzz.

John Mulrey

# Back to the Grassroots

The Auroville Botanical Garden, situated on the main road near Edaiyanchavadi, was established in August 2000. In this article, we focus on the Garden's educational programmes.

## How the programmes started

The garden first focused on ten schools in the local area that had a good reputation and pro-active teachers known for their interest in environment. Arrangements were made for the teachers to attend an induction programme. "We explained what we do and what we wanted to do and the importance of this programme," says Satyamurthy, one of the teachers of the garden. The proposal was accepted. The teachers returned with their students and participated in the planned activities, recording their students' experiences and taking photos.

They then assisted Satyamurthy to write a feedback report for the Chief Education Officer of the Tamil Nadu Education Department. They were granted permission to invite more schools.

Now, over 3,000 students a year are experiencing the Garden's Education Programmes. A total of 120 government elementary schools are involved in the project.

Asked how they organised such a large number of schools to participate in the educational programmes, Satyamurthy explains that it is due to an informal teacher's network cooperative. "There are two to three teachers from each school who fully support our mission. Now I can share a message or an important letter by giving it to only one school. Those few teachers then assist me with the task of sharing the information.

## What is the main aim of the project?

The educational concept is quite simple. Satyamurthy and his team wish to raise awareness about the local environment. He says, "The students know about the kind of wild animals that can be found in the villages and houses, but they know nothing about

their habitats. The students want to learn about their habits and to understand how each insect and animal are interrelated.

"They also love to hear about the food chain: that a rat snake that lives near their house is not a danger to them, but that it protects their habitat by eating the rats and frogs and the scorpions that they fear. We teach them that if all the snakes are killed, then the other pests and vermin will increase."

"We also teach the difference between venomous and non-venomous. Snakes have the right to live with us without feeling threatened by humans."

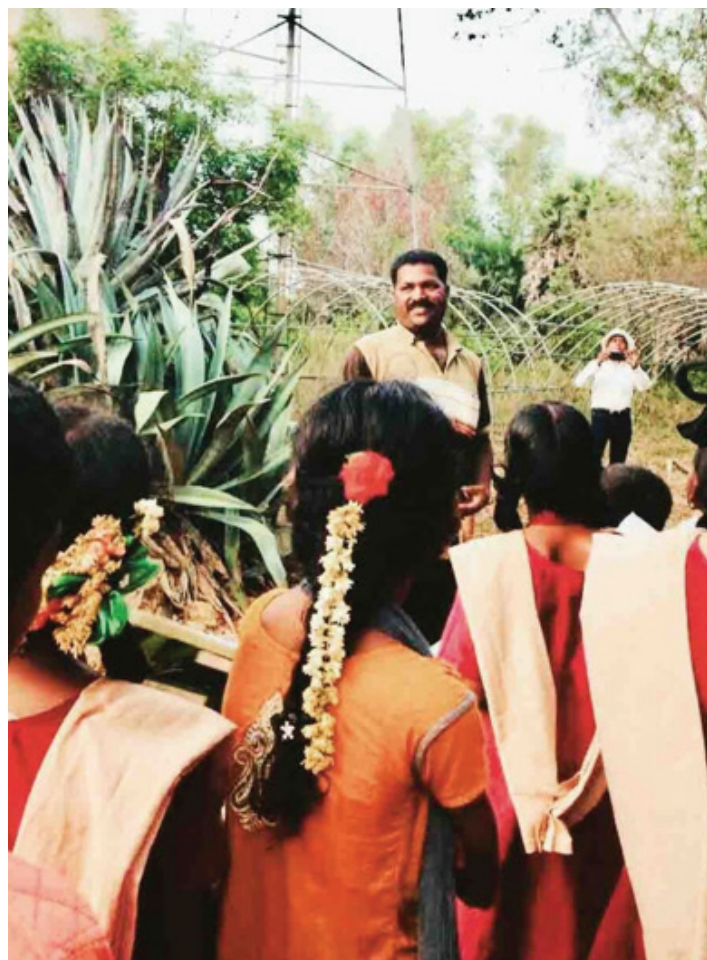
## Auroville 50th Anniversary Green School Project

At the occasion of Auroville's 50th anniversary, 50 schools have been chosen to be gifted ten trees of approximately eight-feet high. The Garden will install them in the school compound and fence them with quality steel mesh to protect them from the goats and cows. So far, 20 school campuses have been completed and the other 30 are planned to be commenced after the summer holidays.

The teachers and students are providing for the aftercare of the trees.

## The impact

Satyamurthy and Kamatchi, another Garden teacher, say that the programmes show good results. "Many schools use less waste. The children are collecting waste paper and plastic to sell for recycling. They even clean up their school after public



*Auroville Botanical Garden's Educational Programmes are teaching local students the importance of conserving our local biodiversity*

functions and make sure the campus stays unpolluted," says Kamatchi.

Many students take home the valuable environmentally-friendly practices they share. They have learned that vinegar and curd water and dosama kira can be used to clean the toilet. They have been taught how to prepare their own Effective Micro Organism (EM), and use Naturepest, a herbal extraction, to spray on the plants, instead of chemicals. Even tips of how to keep ants at bay without using toxic chemical sprays and chinks now reach the homes of families who have long forgotten their ancestral solution of using salt and turmeric.

Satyamurthy mentions that every year in March, he is inundated with invitations to attend the schools' Annual Day celebrations. Officials, teachers, students, parents and village elders congratulate and honour him and his team for their commitment and hard work to help nurture their children.



A teacher development workshop in progress in NESS

# Education

New Era Secondary School (NESS) was started with the purpose of having a more integral programme for village students and Tamil Aurovilians who wanted to study for their 9th to 12th grades, so being able to pass their National Certificate Examinations and being able to enter Indian universities and professional courses.

The school became affiliated with the CBSE in 2008. The primary purpose of taking this direction was to raise the level of learning for the students of Ness and Aikiyam (a companion school for lower grades), and Tamil students of Transition School, by adopting one of the best educational programs available in the country.

Over the years the question below has been raised, which Manas (a qualified educationalist who has recently joined Auroville) tried to answer, in this article taken from Auroville Today (Dec 2017).

## Is assessment contrary to Integral Education?

*"In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones."*

These words of The Mother, from A Dream, often form the basis of an

argument against examinations and certificates. Does this affect the status of New Era Senior Secondary School (NESS), affiliated with India's Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), as an Auroville school?

Started in 1992 as After School, NESS now serves 123 students in grades 9 to 12. Of these students, 28 are Auroville children. The school offers two academic streams – science and humanities – for grades 11 and 12. Apart from academics, NESS students participate in the daily Dehashakti sports programme as well as other organised sports, such as volleyball and football. Art and music are offered as co-curricular activities. Students participate in programmes on reproductive health, in debates on educational reform and in field trips on ecology and culture. All in all, NESS provides a fairly well-rounded education for its students.

The question of whether this education is "integral" or not is based on two assumptions. One assumption is that a CBSE school must, by definition, be a cram school. The other is that assessments are inconsistent with the idea of Integral Education.

While there may be shortcomings in the way the CBSE curriculum is implemented in many schools, the programme itself is based on an educational philosophy and approach that is holistic and child-centred. The key document that describes this framework is the National Curriculum

Framework (NCF) of 2005. Considered to be one of the most progressive educational policy documents anywhere in the world, it addresses the "deep disquiet about several aspects of our educational practice: (a) the school system is characterised by an inflexibility that makes it resistant to change; (b) learning has become an isolated activity, which does not encourage children to link knowledge with their lives in any organic or vital way; (c) schools promote a regime of thought that discourages creative thinking and insights; (d) what is presented and transmitted in the name of learning in schools bypasses vital dimensions of the human capacity to create new knowledge; (e) the 'future' of the child has taken centre stage to the near exclusion of the child's 'present', which is detrimental to the well-being of the child as well as to the society and the nation."

In Sri Aurobindo's writings, the first principles of a child-centred pedagogy were stated succinctly. 'The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. ... The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or the teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man's nature is almost always (in addition to his soul's past), his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed ... and from that then we must begin. ... The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit'."

The NCF provides comprehensive guidelines on stages of learning and subject-based pedagogy.

"At the early stage of learning, from pre-school to the primary school years, an important place must be given to language and mathematics in all activities across the curriculum. The division into subjects is not very significant, and the knowledge areas discussed above can be totally integrated and presented to children in the form of learning experiences of the environment. The upper primary or

middle school period maybe the place for the emergence of better defined subject areas, taking into consideration the above-mentioned forms of knowledge.

By the time children reach the secondary stage of education, they have acquired a sufficient knowledge base, experience, language abilities and maturity to engage with different forms of knowledge in the full sense: concepts, structure of body of knowledge, investigation methods and validation procedures. The NCF also addresses the question of assessments, which leads us to the second assumption that gives rise to the question of whether a school such as NESS can provide Integral Education – this is the assumption that assessments are inconsistent with the idea of Integral Education.

How does CBSE address the question of assessments? Of course, there is an end-of-school board examination. But there is great emphasis on Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE). The CCE Manual for Teachers says, “If properly understood, evaluation or assessment will not be perceived as something administered by the teachers and taken by the learners on the conclusion of a period of learning. When evaluation is subsumed into teaching-learning, learners will not perceive tests and examination with fear. It will rather lead to diagnosis,

*School is just a preparation to make the students capable of thinking, studying, progressing and becoming intelligent if they can — all that must be done during the entire life and not only in school.*

remedial action and enhancement of learning.” The Manual goes on to say, “The major emphasis of CCE is on the continuous growth of students ensuring their intellectual, emotional, physical,

cultural and social development, and therefore it will not be merely limited to assessment of a learner’s scholastic attainments.”

Reading the NCF and the CCE Manual, it becomes quite clear that NESS, if it is able to implement the guidelines from these documents, can be a school that provides valuable education. And its affiliation with the CBSE might actually provide a scaffolding for the school to become a centre of true Integral Education.

What challenges will NESS face in its attempt to become a centre of educational excellence? Perhaps teacher quality and funding will be the most pressing challenges. But if these are solved, it is not impossible to imagine that the combination of Integral Education, the Auroville context and the CBSE structure might even help NESS influence change in the larger educational context of India.

“School is just a preparation to make the students capable of thinking, studying, progressing and becoming intelligent if they can — all that must be done during the entire life and not only in school.” The Mother



Conducting a programme on reproductive health in NESS

## Appeal

NESS needs funds for its work. It receives a small grant from the Indian Government, but not enough to cover all its work. If you would like to contribute in any way, please either donate via the AVIUK website [aviuk.org/donate](http://aviuk.org/donate) or write to [ness@auroville.org.in](mailto:ness@auroville.org.in)



*View of Matrimandir from The Garden of Progress*

# Matrimandir Update

After the high level of activity that led up to Auroville's 50th Anniversary celebrations in the month of February, there was a certain calm on the site during the month of April. There had been a strong push to complete as much of the work as possible before February 28th. A thorough clean up of the site was

also undertaken. After the dust had settled as it were, one could look forward to the new projects lying ahead, making trials with some such as the upcoming rain water harvesting project, and for others, like the gardens construction, planning on how to move ahead.

## The Garden of Progress, the latest of the completed gardens

During the summer, the Garden of Progress, the largest of the Matrimandir gardens, has been brought very close to completion.

The 7 m x 7 m pool in its outer portion has been completed, as well as several details in the large central area which features an ascending line of granite stepping stones moving

through the three level terraced areas of the garden.

Multi-coloured Progress flowers are happily blooming there and the Lagerstroemia Speciosa trees, with Mother's significance of "Intimacy with Universal Nature" are showing their purplish blooms. Her comment on this flower was: "This intimacy is only possible for those who are vast and who are without preference or repulsion."

In the portion of this garden nearest to the Matrimandir, a curving pathway has been built, moving beside and above a narrow winding water body. The final feature of this garden, a low fountain at the base of the line of granite stepping stones, has also been completed.

Besides this development of the Garden of Progress, a separate design team has been very much involved with the planning and design of another large garden area on site.

This garden, not one of the principal twelve which surround the building, will be adjacent to the Garden of Unity, near the Banyan tree. Referred to by the Matrimandir's architect Roger Anger as 'Garden of the Unexpected', this garden will have in view not the adults who will come to visit Matrimandir, but will focus rather on children. It will present a range of features designed to draw the attention to another way of seeing.



*Matrimandir Garden - Bliss*

## On Building the Amphitheatre

The following article was written by Vikas (our previous AVIUK chairman, who lived in Auroville in the early days) after his visit to Auroville for the 50th Birthday Celebrations.

It was the early seventies and three of us, Alain Grandcolas, Rudd Lohman and I were given the task of designing and building the Amphitheatre by Auroville's architect, Roger Anger. The original amphitheatre was exactly as it had been at Auroville's inauguration on 28th February 1968. The original size and configuration was to be kept, but the sloping earth shape was to be replaced by a stepped arrangement to permit seating for up to 5000 for events, focussing on the eccentric-placed cone-shaped mound which was topped with the lotus-shaped urn containing the single earth of many earths from around the world.

As I had architectural experience, I was tasked with preparing a design. Firstly, I presented a proposal that would permit all sorts of events of an appropriate nature to be presented there – music, drama, silent meditations, perhaps movies even. The proposal would involve laying an infrastructure to house the technical and supporting elements necessary to make presentations and included an underground room for performers to get changed and prepare. I also proposed an underground public rest room for the use by visitors. These functions were

all approved by Roger.

The design also included a rainwater harvesting system with disposal to a large underground tank. The design of the tiered seating had the simple objective to allow anyone at any point in the amphitheatre to be able to see clearly above the heads of anyone in front of them. This basically meant that the resulting concentric ring form designed itself, or shall we say that Mother designed the Amphitheatre!

The three of us then arranged and directed the construction, with Alain masterfully devising the most efficient plan of work and supervising it with Ruud. It all went very smoothly and was a great joy.

In later years a different team took responsibility for completing the work under Roger's direction by installing

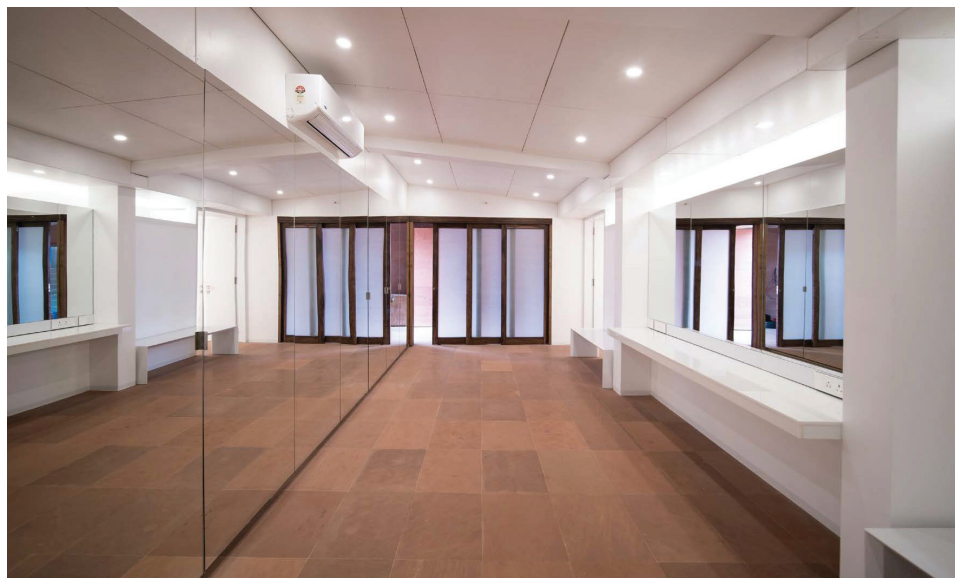
the ochre paving stones, and adding stepped accesses with marble benches to the outer rim. In 2017-18 the underground rooms were fitted out, with one as a 'green room' for performers including a direct access into the amphitheatre and the other intended to house equipment and tools.

Anyone who has attended events there in recent years can attest to the special quality of the atmosphere and ambience, the excellent acoustics and the sense of timelessness that the space evokes. And anyone who was among the 7000 who attended the 50th. Anniversary dawn meditation and water ceremony will have felt that very special quality where something is palpably touched by Mother's presence. It is thing of beauty.

Vikas

## Completion of the Green Room Gardens

One of the key work areas that called for completion well before February 28th was the Green Room, under construction beneath the rim of the Amphitheatre as a space where all performers could prepare themselves to offer their best in the Amphitheatre. It is a place for putting on costumes and makeup, a quiet space to wait before moving out via the passage through the Amphitheatre steps to the open space near the Urn.



*The Green Room, beneath the rim of the Amphitheatre*

# Celebrations of Auroville's 50th anniversary

From September 2018 to August 2018, more than 75 events have been held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of Auroville. These events – exhibitions, seminars, musical and cultural performances, and book launches have been held in Auroville, Dakshinachitra, Baroda, New Delhi, Kolkatta and in several countries with an AVI presence (e.g. France, USA, German, UK). Many Aurovillians, AVI members, friends and well-wishers have participated in these events.

During the “Birthday Week” from 21st February to 28th February, the following events took place in Auroville:

- The Mother's Birthday at the Matrimandir Amphitheatre
- The Bridge – a conference at the Unity Pavillion and other open locations
- The Trashion Show at Kalabhumi
- Performance by the Auroville Choir at the Matrimandir Amphitheatre
- Release of a commemorative postal stamp and commemorative coin at Bharat Nivas
- Visit to Matrimandir, Savitri Bhavan and Bharat Nivas by the Prime Minister of India and accompanying dignitaries
- Savitri reading around the world coordinated from the Savitri Bhavan in Auroville
- Water Ceremony at the Matrimandir Amphitheatre
- Human Chain, a live installation around the Crown Road, Auroville
- Celebrations at the European House, International Zone
- Launch of the new Visitors Centre Exhibition
- Auroville Poetry Festival at the Unity Pavillion
- Art Installations in the Matrimandir Gardens
- Auroville Sangamam – a community celebration with participation from across the bioregion

The week witnessed a very large participation by the Auroville community, friends and well wishers and many other events were held to celebrate the joyous occasion.

On 25th February 2018, the Prime Minister of India visited Auroville on the occasion of the golden jubilee. The Prime Minister was accompanied by other important dignitaries including the Governor of Tamil Nadu; Lieutenant Governor of Pondicherry; Union Minister of State (ministries of Finance and Shipping), Tamil Nadu State Minister for Law, Courts and Prisons; Tamil Nadu State Minister for Electricity; Chief Minister of Pondicherry and Chairman of the Auroville Foundation.

During the visit, the Prime Minister visited Matirmandir, Savitri Bhavan and Bharat Nivas. At Bharat Nivas, the Prime Minister released the commemorative postal stamp, addressed Aurovillians and recognized Auroville's achievements in various fields:

“The world has received positive vibrations from Auroville, in many forms, over the years.



*The Prime Minister of India and dignitaries at Bharat Nivas*

Be it un-ending education, environment regeneration, renewable energy, organic agriculture, appropriate building technologies, water management, or waste management. Auroville has been a pioneer.”

At Matrimandir, the Prime Minister poured water from three major Indian

rivers – Ganga, Kaveri and Narmada – into the lotus pond as part of the “Golden Jubilee Water Ceremony”.

In late 2017, a call was made by Auroville for a water ceremony to mark the golden jubilee. An invitation was made to friends and well-wishers of Auroville all over the world, to

bring or send to Auroville water from different water bodies of the world. The bringing together of water from all over the world in a symbolic ceremony at the centre of Auroville would not only mean a prayer for unity but also a prayer for this diminishing resource for the whole world.

After the early morning meditation on 28th February 2018, the Golden Jubilee Water Ceremony was held in the Matrimandir Amphitheatre - at the very same location where 50 years ago soil from 124 countries and 23 Indian states was brought to Auroville and placed in the urn along with the Auroville Charter by representatives from each participating country and state. Inspired by the original inaugural ceremony, the Golden Jubilee Water Ceremony brought samples of water from 321 water bodies from across the world. This water will be used for the future lake around Matrimandir.

The other event involving many Aurovillians and friends from across the world was “Savitri Around the World” - a remarkable feat in orchestrating a live reading of the 12 Books of Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem, Savitri, by volunteer readers across the globe. The reading began in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram after the stroke of midnight and the start of the 28th February. The reading continued in relay through India, Central & West Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, Oceania, Australia & New Zealand, East Asia and back to a closing reading in Auroville.

On 4th March 2018, Auroville and all its surrounding villages celebrated the golden jubilee by organizing a “sangamam” in honour of all those who have come together in Auroville with the spirit of community building over the last 50 years.

“Sangamam” in Tamil means a group of people coming together. A few previous “Sangamam” celebrations have been held in the Auroville bioregion by Auroville’s neighbours and friends from the bioregion, many employed directly and indirectly in Auroville’s projects and activities. This particular Sangamam was held to honour all the pioneers who came from the world over to transform the landscape in the true spirit of human unity. The event took place around the Auroville Visitor’s Centre and attracted over 5,000 participants from the Auroville bioregion.

The Auroville Foundation has also received a very significant capital grant from the Government of India to support various projects within Auroville to mark the 50th anniversary of the foundation of Auroville. The projects supported cover infrastructure development, cultural facilities, electric mobility development among other areas.



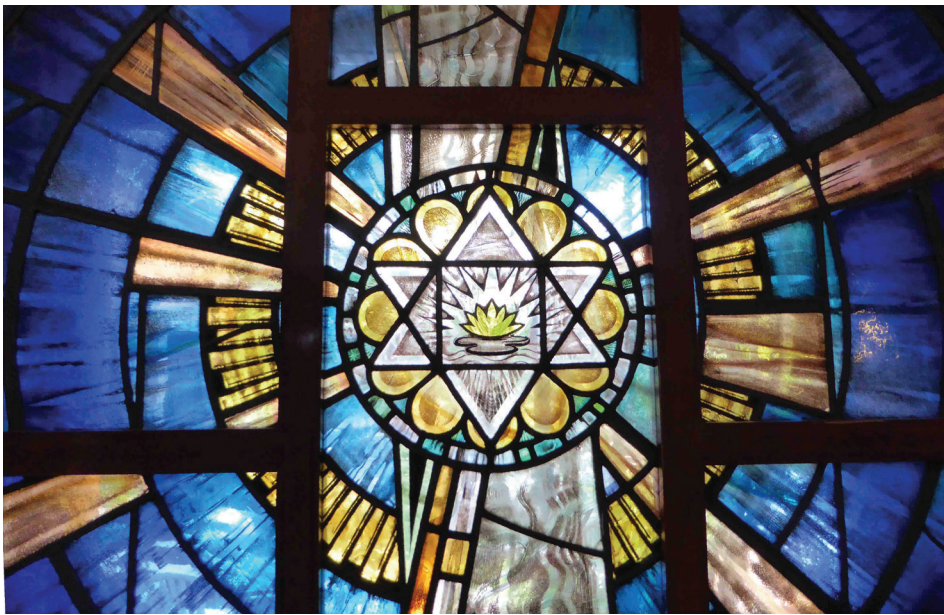
Golden Jubilee Water Ceremony, 28th February 2018, Matrimandir Amphitheatre, Auroville



Location of water bodies from which water samples were collected and sent to Auroville.



Map with locations that participated in “Savitri around the World”



*The stained glass window at the Solar Kitchen*

## An Irish touch at the Solar Kitchen

Many people will have seen and appreciated the stained glass window in the Solar Kitchen. Some have asked questions as to its origins. As it came from the UK, we would like to share this story, which first appeared in Auroville Today, in October 1997.

During the late sixties two English ladies, both of them deeply interested in spiritual matters, travelled through Ireland. Edith Schnapper and Morwenna Donnelly had both discovered Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's work; together they had created a study circle which met regularly in a flat near Cambridge in England. Their trip through Ireland was for leisure, strolling through the small cities and villages that dot the Irish countryside. In one of them they saw the shop of glazier, a master craftsman who specialised in stained glass windows. Admiring his work, Morwenna and Edith decided to ask him to design a stained glass window for their meeting room near Cambridge: a window where the symbols of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would be artistically combined, symbolic of their action on the world. Some days later, the glazier showed them his design.

Pleased, they ordered the work and had it installed in the flat where, for many years, it filtered the light for all those who attended the sessions. When the flat was no longer available, Edith moved with another friend, Joy Calvert into a country house called "Boytons". Morwenna had

the window dismantled and stored in the garage of her new house.

Years passed. The window gathered dust in the garage. Edith and Joy joined a circle of "friends of Auroville", which soon came to be known as Auroville International U.K. Those lucky enough to be invited for longer stays at "Boytons" soon discovered the loft; accessible through a trapdoor only, which served as a meditation place. It was after one such meditation that I chanced upon a photo of this stained glass window. Edith told me the story, adding that this photo had been sent to the Mother, who had returned it with her blessings, commenting that it was very beautiful. When I learned that the window was lying unused, I requested Edith to give it to Auroville. Edith approached Morwenna but the latter refused, saying that it should be kept in England.

Other Aurovilians staying at "Boytons" were equally struck by the photo of the window. "Couldn't a copy in Plexiglas be made for the Visitors' Centre that was just being built?", they asked. Edith and Joy thought that was a splendid idea and donated the money for it. Rolf, a German artist in Auroville, made a small model, but somehow the Plexiglas version never was made. In the meantime, the Visitors' Centre neared completion, and the possibility to have it installed there disappeared. Meanwhile, the original window continued to gather dust.

After Edith passed away, Joy moved out from "Boytons" to her family's estate

near Ockley, in Surrey. Shortly thereafter, Morwenna passed away as well. On one of my visits to her, Joy told me, "I sent my condolences to her husband, and, as an afterthought, added a postscript: 'What are you going to do with that window?'" By return mail I got his answer: 'I have no idea. If you want it, please come and get it.' The next day Joy and I took the car and went to see the window. We immediately agreed that it should be sent to Auroville." Auroville International UK ensured that the window was picked up, the wood removed and the stained glass pieces carefully packed and sent by airmail to Auroville. There, for a couple more years, it lay in a storeroom. Then, one day, a very appropriate place was found: in the new collective solar kitchen which was nearing completion. A wall was required to be broken down and some minor structural adjustments to allow for the installation of the window. But finally it was done, in time for the celebration of Sri Aurobindo's 125th Birth Anniversary and the first community breakfast at the new kitchen. Now the sun shines through the radiant coloured symbols of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a reminder of the Mother's words on 15 August 1972: "Sri Aurobindo's message is an immortal sunlight radiating over the future".

Carel, Auroville Today

## Martin Remembers

My mother was a close friend of Edith and a member of the study circle. One day as a teenager I was taken by my mother to the place where the circle met. It was in an old mill in a village near Cambridge called Pampisford. The mill is on the river Cam, and was, I believe part of a pig farm in those days. The flat was upstairs at the mill. We were invited inside and then later into the meditation room. I was surprised to see at one end of the room a beautiful stained glass window incorporating Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's symbol. This was the only light in the room giving the space a very special quality. It was the only time I visited the flat, as soon afterwards Edith and Joy moved to Boytons, a place where my family and I became regular visitors. I saw there the photograph of the window with the Mother's blessings written on the back. She wrote:

*"All this is quite correct and excellent. My love and blessings are with you.... signed"*

I was of course delighted much later to see the window again in its new space in the Solar Kitchen.

Martin

# André Tardeil

**Passing: 27/06/2018**

In the early morning of 27 June, André Tardeil, founder and father of New Creation, left his body at his house in New Creation after an extended struggle with cancer. André had just turned 77.

André came to Pondicherry in 1972, having worked with the Auroville Association in Paris for two years before that. Recently, recalling his experience of the first darshan on 21st February, 1972 he said, "You know, you can never tire of the possibilities of seeing The Mother, you were transformed. She infused in everyone who was there the will for change".

Andre spent five years in Pondicherry working at Auroshikha, the Ashram incense-making department. During that time he helped provide financial support to Auroville in its newly achieved economic independence from the SAS.

In 1977, he moved to Auroville where his prime focus has always been to create better conditions for the villagers and their children. As he put it, "We should stop considering our neighbours as a separate entity from Auroville. As soon as we will consider them as part of Auroville's future and give them all the support we can to help to manifest themselves as part of Auroville's development, we will have all their reciprocal support. We have to build real fraternity. This is the primary work we



André

have in front of us."

To help manifest this vision, in 1978 he started a school in Fraternity for village children, which in 1983 shifted to New Creation. Over the years, supported by his wife, Babu, and a network of friends and funders abroad, New Creation grew to include schools, a boarding facility for disadvantaged children, vocational training workshops and small commercial units, for André always stressed the need for practical training rather than just book learning: as he put it, "children learn what they live".

André's main aim in all this was to help the students, as well as the villagers, become self-reliant individuals. "Through training programmes and through helping them create their own handicraft enterprises, these people have the chance to grow and reach their fuller potential."

In this, he was very successful. As Alain Bernard put it, "His love for the local

people translated into many lives being transformed, particularly those of young girls and boys, through education, a cause into which he poured his energy, endlessly creating classes and boarding facilities. Today, I am sure, so many would say that what they have been able to become owes a lot to André's ceaseless efforts to sustain them."

All this, however, was not achieved without considerable struggle and some controversy. André felt largely unsupported by the Auroville community, which did not always appreciate his independent financial ways, causing him to rely heavily upon friends and donors abroad, as well as the guest houses and businesses he had set up to sustain his many initiatives.

But his dedication to his work, to his children and to a transformed future for all was never in doubt. Last year he wrote, "In fact we should be ready, to search, to fight, to keep faith in spite of all and to rediscover, now in this life, this enchanting smile, containing the secret of life... Difficult surely, but one day we will leave this world and all we did will not exist. Only will follow that second of true luminous Self, like a small light guiding us towards Eternity."

André's remains were laid to rest in Adventure's burial ground in the late afternoon of the 28th of June, with family and many of his friends attending.



Pieter

## Pieter van der Molen

**Passing: 14/08/2018**

Pieter van der Molen passed away on 14th August, at the age of 75 in his home in Holland.

Pieter came to Auroville in 1970 and eventually moved to Kottakarai where he started a farm, 'Angiras Garden', along with Judith and also started working with villagers making leather bags.

In the eighties, Pete managed Abri workshop, repairing water pumps and motorcycles, then made paper

lanterns with young villagers. He also painstakingly documented the growth of the handful of bird species in the early days into the 100+ different varieties.

Pete 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.

Two of his daughters, Angiras and Aurama are both current members of AVI UK.



Fiona

## A Determined Pilgrim's Impressions of Auroville

Fiona, a one time member of AVIUK, came to settle in Auroville one year ago, with her daughter Leah. She is now going through her 'newcomer's period', and shared her impressions with Auroville Today.

I knew that Auroville was my place the moment I read about it, now almost twenty years ago. The teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother resonated with me deeply, I loved the Auroville Charter and, even though I had grown up in the West, it was India that always felt like home. As a very young child I remember looking around at the world from my pushchair and wondering whether I had come to the right planet. It was clear that the human society in which I found myself was severely lacking in a few fundamentals: joy, wisdom and brotherly understanding for example, as well as a complete lack of what I would call natural law.

The resolution of this discrepancy between how the world is and the beautiful loving home that it could be, was too great for me to ignore, and so, like many of us at this point in time my *raison d'être*, my mission in this life, has been to 'be the change' I so dearly wish to see in the world – to the best of my ability. That change which, as Sri Aurobindo and Mother reminded us, is inevitable – as it is a Law of the Universe, is it not, that all and everything tends towards harmony, even though it may meander and diverge somewhat en route.

When I first visited Auroville in 2001, the ecologically ideal, ultra-conscious utopia I had envisioned in my rose-tinted imagination was not exactly what I found here. My first impressions were of the – dare I say it – junk food being sold in the Pour Tous Purchasing Service (PTPS) together with the toxic chemical laden cleaning products and personal care items

filling the shelves. Having been an organic obsessed eco-warrior for most of my life, I struggled with the reply I received from the sweet lady in the Pour Tous office to my question as to why these items were being sold in a 'conscious community'. She replied: "because people want to buy them". "Couldn't they go to Pondy?" I politely responded – to which she faintly smiled and raised her eyebrows. I felt a little disheartened, but rather than distancing me from Auroville it served only to fuel my determination to come to live here.

I was heartened to see the sign outside the PTPS which read: "Mobile phones are harmful to birds." My 'inner knowing' had always alerted me to the fact that high frequency microwave radiation is damaging to human, animal and plant biology, now well evidenced, so I was relieved that Auroville shared this awareness, or so I thought at the time.

My fondest memory of this growing township was the magnificent forested areas which were heroically created by those early settlers who transformed a desert wasteland into a lush green haven for humans and animals alike. For this I feel enormous gratitude. The forests are teeming with life, with prana, and so are very healing and nurturing, and extremely necessary to Auroville's wellbeing. I often feel that what trees give us is underestimated. I also remember the Matrimandir which in 2001 was only partially constructed, and feeling a sense of awe and excitement that one day it would be completed in all its splendour. Mother was clearly inspired in her understanding of the importance of creating such a sacred space in the heart of Auroville, a place of sanctity where the earnest resident or visitor can find solace and a peaceful vibration amidst our challenging worldly lives.

And so now, almost 17 years later I am back in this crazy, wonderful city in the making, this time to stay, to form roots and make my home here. So what has changed? Well, in PTPS, amongst the junk food, the wonderfully healthy, Auroville-made range of delicacies has expanded. The forests look to be thriving and the Matrimandir is quite magnificent

now, with the ongoing work on its surrounding gardens creating a delightful natural complement, just as Mother envisaged.

The sign warning about the dangers of mobile phones still stands in the same place, but surrounding it many people are absorbed in their smart phone conversations and text messages – seemingly oblivious to the silent message being broadcast beside them. As is the case in the world at large, cell phone towers and wi-fi are gradually infiltrating the whole of Auroville. In my humble opinion this proliferation of high frequency radiation throughout our community is having – and will increasingly have – significant negative repercussions. Pressure from society as a whole makes it quite difficult to avoid ‘being connected’ 24/7, and I know that some Aurovilians welcome this, seeing it as progress but others feel it to be a retrograde step. I’m sure all would agree however, that it is prudent to fully educate ourselves on this matter before marching headlong into a so-

called ‘smart. Techtopia! ‘On verro’ as the French say.

What has changed most though, in these past 17 years, is that I have changed. I am a little wiser and a little more capable of seeing the magic behind the more easily visible exterior which hit me in the face all those years ago. That magic lies within the multiple layers of Auroville, the enormity of the great work which goes on in the background on myriad differing projects, all inspired by the desire for a better world. I think my disappointment on first visiting Auroville twenty years ago was due to my own naivety, as perhaps all of our disappointments in life are caused by our own naivety. Wherever there is a centre of Light this attracts pure souls who wish to grow in Love, Truth and Freedom, but it also inevitably attracts those whose role it is to thwart the efforts of the well-intentioned. This is simply the nature of duality, and should not dissuade us in any way, from our noble endeavours.

When I reflect upon Auroville as a whole there is one thing I do know for sure, and that is that I love this place with all my heart and soul, and I care deeply about its future. And the most beautiful thing is that I meet others here who feel the same, and it is this true spirit of human unity and shared intent that will bring about the realization of Mother’s dream. The imperfections that may be apparent to us can be the impetus for action on our part to transform them into something great – and there is so much learning to be had in the process!

I will end with a quote from the well known German writer and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: “There is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, providence moves too. Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now.”

Fiona

## Premilaben Shirishbhai Patel

11/12/1936 - 07/10/2018



Premilaben

Premilaben, wife of Shirishbhai Patel (of “Crystal Patel” fame), resident of Old Malden, Kingston upon Thames, passed away on 7th December 2018 after a very short illness. She leaves behind her husband, daughter Anju, sons Atul and Vikram and four grand-children Dhruv, Mihir, Monil and Bhavi.

She was an ardent follower of Sri Aurobindo and The

Mother since 1963 and all her children were educated in the Ashram school between years 1963 - 68. She was a UK resident since 1967, having migrated from Kampala, Uganda.

Premilaben was a pillar of support to Shirishbhai. Matrimandir needed funds to install the Crystal Globe as ordained by The Mother. Shirishbhai came to know and

organised and contributed the necessary amount – last instalment in December 1987 –the last and final date to order. The crystal globe was made in Germany. That earned him the title of Crystal Patel! Both of them have been AVI UK members for many years and were active participants through 1990s. She attended many local and international meetings during those years.

At her funeral /memorial, Thakor Mistry read out a selection of verses from Sri Aurobindo’s “Savitri”, one of the passages is below from pages 600-601.

*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 Light we go*

One of her grandchildren, Bhavi, wrote a beautiful tribute in verse form in remembrance of Premilaben, her Grandma, an extract is below.

*You whisper to us  
And envelope us in gusts of love  
To comfort our heartache  
And remind us that you are with us always*

Premilaben was one of those quiet soft spoken souls that held enormous power and strength and supported many of the ventures of her family. She will be missed by all who knew her and lived in the light of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, over many decades.



# Auroville's Missing Land

A major challenge today is the securing of Auroville's designated but still-missing land – land that is urgently needed for completing the universal township's material base and for realizing the fullness of its vision. To date, Auroville has acquired about half of its designated land, with major pockets of acres still missing from the City Area and the Greenbelt. The City of Dawn now finds itself at a crucial junction where private businesses are in competition with Auroville for buying the township's unsecured land.

This situation is due to two phenomena which pose a danger to the consolidation of Auroville's material base:

- Nearby Pondicherry's rapid urbanization – which has caused the entire area's land prices to skyrocket

- Auroville's success – which has made its still-missing acres a target of choice for land speculators and the private for-profit business projects of outside developers

This new situation threatens Auroville's integrity, its coherent development, and the spirit of the Vision. Each unsecured acre is now in danger of being bought by outside interests and lost to Auroville forever. Today, purchasing the City of Dawn's designated but still-missing land has become an urgent necessity. Securing the missing plots is essential for:

- **Protecting the Matrimandir** – the soul of Auroville – and the surrounding gardens and land that safeguard its spiritual atmosphere
- **Unifying the City Area** – to manifest a dynamic central hub with coherent development, infrastructure & road access for its Cultural, Residential, and Industrial

zones, and for the International Zone with its focus on human unity & world peace

- **Consolidating the Greenbelt** – for ensuring Auroville's sustainability and strengthening its green sanctuary, which is the showcase for its environmental models and training that benefit the surrounding bio-region

Financial support is needed for purchasing the remaining land and for this now-urgent need, we call upon the solidarity of Auroville's friends. Auroville's land is its essential material base. With your support for Auroville's land, you help The City of Dawn's vision to manifest harmoniously and unfold to its full and inspiring potential!

# Art for Land

Art for Land is a non-commercial land-fundraiser to help secure the unified and harmonious physical base for Auroville. All art works are donated by the artists in the spirit of generous gifting for Auroville's land. In an action of flowing solidarity, donors make a land donation and receive a work of art in recognition of their generosity. All donations are used for securing the still-missing plots in Auroville's Master Plan area via the Acres for Auroville campaign.

Art for Land has a stunning collection of creations in various media by artists from Auroville, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, friends in India and the AVI centers abroad. Many of the artists enjoy wide recognition. Some works by artists from Sri Aurobindo Ashram are from an earlier time and have been seen and blessed by The Mother.



*Art for Land exhibition at the Unity Pavilion in 2017*

Art For Land Year 3 will be held at Auroville's Unity Pavilion from January 1st 2018 – February 15th. The 6 week long exhibition of the works will be complemented by a parallel fundraiser of donated rare photographs of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

More information and an online gallery can be found at the Art for Land website:

[land.auroville.org/campaigns/art-for-land/](http://land.auroville.org/campaigns/art-for-land/)



## Acres for Auroville Fundraising Campaign

Auroville International is proud to be spearheading land fundraising via the Acres for Auroville campaign, a collaboration of the AVI worldwide centers with Auroville's Lands for Auroville Unified. And this solidarity works – in 3 years, A4A donations have enabled the purchase of 29 plots (almost 40 acres) of land in Auroville's Master Plan area. But much more is needed, and the clock is ticking!

Your contributions are an act of solidarity for the Vision and its realization. Let's get the land the Mother envisioned for the City of Dawn! The need is great, and the time is now! Every A4A donation

is rapidly acknowledged and all contributions are used only for land purchase.

If you would like to contribute in any way, please either donate via the AVIUK website [aviuk.org/donate](http://aviuk.org/donate)

Alternatively cheques payable to 'Auroville International UK' can be sent to our Treasurer:

John Mulrey, 7 Cubb Field, Aylesbury, Bucks HP19 7SJ. Please make reference to 'AVIUK Newsletter'.

For online banking contributions: Lloyds Bank, sort code 30-90-86, account number 00110988.

# Wake up and Collaborate!

The only hope for the future is a change of man's consciousness and the change is bound to come. But it is left to men to decide if they will collaborate for this change or if it will have to be enforced upon them by the power of crashing circumstances. So, wake up and collaborate! Blessings.

The Mother

*The only hope for future is  
in a change of man's consciousness,  
and the change is bound to come.*

*But it is left to the men to  
decide if they will collaborate for this  
change or if it will have to be enforced  
upon them by the power of crashing  
circumstances.*

*So, wake up and collaborate!*

*Blessings*



# The Tree

*We publish again this poem by Vikas, which had appeared in our previous newsletter. Somehow, part of it was missing. We apologise.*

Always when I looked at a tree  
There was an I who saw and the tree which was seen.  
As a child, the tree was for climbing, to swing from,  
A place to cull crows or pick peaches.  
God was in Heaven  
Or He did not exist at all  
And yet when I cried from my very depths  
He was always there to hear and answer me.

In spring time sometimes there was an effervescence  
Flowers bursting from the tree  
Like champagne bubbles from my heart.  
The urge to be and the desperate need for light  
After all the barren cold of winter's gloom.

And now sometimes the tree, the ground, the brick walls  
And tarmac streets  
And I  
Are one single coagulation of fluid stardust  
Moving through these momentary forms in a dance of time  
To be unravelled and re-formed  
In the relentless onward thrust  
Of matter's search for a being that can know itself  
In every tiny atom, all at once,  
For no particular reason than the bliss of being.

Vikas (Alan Vickers) 2010

## AVI UK Exhibition

After the success of our Exhibition at SOAS University we are planning another exhibition at Cambridge University in late January 2019 / early February. Please visit [aviuk.org](http://aviuk.org) for more details.

For more news and information visit our website:  
[aviuk.org](http://aviuk.org)

For correspondence please write to our Secretary:  
Angiras Auro, 65 Trinity Road, Stotfold, SG5 4EQ  
01462 835131 [angiras@aviuk.org](mailto:angiras@aviuk.org)



*Auroville International*  
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