

The Matrimandir, the Lake and the Garden works: an update



Scale visualisation of the Matrimandir and its Gardens, surrounded by the Lake and connected by a bridge originating from the Reception Pavilion

The January 2025 issue of Auroville Today focused on the aftermath of Cyclone Fengal, which breached the Lego block dam separating sections 1 and 2 of the Matrimandir Lake. What has happened since? Auroville Today spoke with John, one of the Matrimandir executives, for an update on recent developments.

The Lake: A new approach

“We’ve been very busy,” says John, gesturing to two long rows of neatly stacked Lego blocks – the remains of the collapsed dam. “We used our long-armed excavator to remove over 4,000 concrete blocks. The lakebed is now cleared, but we’ve decided not to rebuild the dam in this way. The experience of the cyclone, and its aftermath, seems to have come as a sign, and an opportunity, to continue the lake construction in another way than had first been planned. The team now feels that constructing

the lake in segments with Lego block walls is no longer the way to proceed.” Instead, the plan is to excavate the entire lake in one go, then line it with HDPE and gravel, as was done for the first section, before allowing it to fill with rainwater.

Material and logistics hurdles

But progress has stalled due to regulatory changes affecting the import of German-made HDPE liner. Indian authorities have become much stricter on the import of materials which could also be sourced within India. “As a part of

this process they have even sent a team to inspect the German HDPE factories,” John explains. “Future lining for the Lake may need to be sourced from within India.”

Another delay stems from pending permission from the Tamil Nadu government to move the excavated earth to the northern Greenbelt of Auroville, for creating the hill envisioned by The Mother [see *AVToday* # 425, December 2024]. “We’re working on securing the necessary clearances,” John says. “Once granted, we’ll deploy the necessary fleet of trucks to move the earth swiftly.” Transportation of all the earth, says John, will hopefully be done within two years.

Regarding the building of the hill, safety and stability are the chief concerns. “After the Fengal incident, nobody wants a landslide,” John notes. Soil samples have been sent to German structural engineering firm LGA in Nürnberg, which is designing the 30 to 50-meter-high hill. The design will accommodate all excavated soil, minus what is currently being requested by ATDC for road shoulders.

Next steps in excavation

Once the earth mounds near the Administrative Zone – the area where the offices of the Town Hall, the Auroville Foundation, SAIIR and the Auroville Archives are situated – are cleared, excavation will begin in that section. The small hill with the miniature lake on top [see *AVToday* # 407-408 June-July 2023] will also be removed, as it partially overlaps with the planned site for the future Matrimandir Service Building.

Further excavation in other areas will have to wait until the ground is fully available. On the northeastern side of the Matrimandir gardens oval, existing workshops and support facilities

– all located within the lake zone – must first be relocated, which will only be possible once the new Service Building is completed.

On the western side of the Gardens oval, the road running from the Viewing Point gate to the Town Hall needs to be moved, as it also lies in the Lake zone, but this cannot be completely done until all necessary land has been acquired. For only the first stretch of this road, a piece about 300 meters long, the Matrimandir team is now preparing to create the needed diversionary road so that work on this part of the lake can proceed.

The Matrimandir Office area presents another challenge. It is home to several large, beautiful trees that the executives hope to preserve. One idea is to create a small peninsula – one of three originally envisioned by architect Roger Anger. “We’ve asked Shailaja and her team to design it,” says John. “Water specialists are concerned it could obstruct deep-water flow, so we’ve asked for gently rounded contours to minimise impact.”

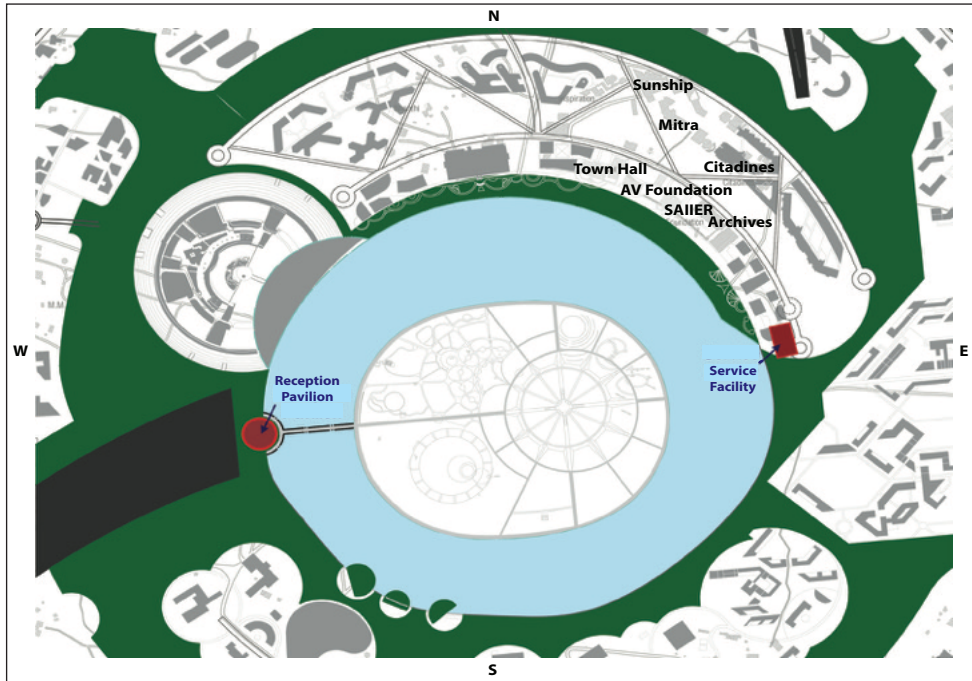
A new use for the Lego blocks

What will become of the salvaged Lego blocks? “We’re considering using them as the core of embankments on the western and northern sides of the lake,” John says. This would help protect the low-lying buildings in the Administrative Zone from potential flooding, as the lake’s water level will be 1.5 to 2 meters higher than the surrounding ground.

Garden work on schedule

While lake work is paused, garden development is flourishing. On 21 February, Mother’s birthday, the Garden of Wealth was opened to the public.

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Map of the Matrimandir oval surrounded by the Lake. In dark grey planned buildings, in light grey the existing buildings in the Administrative Zone.

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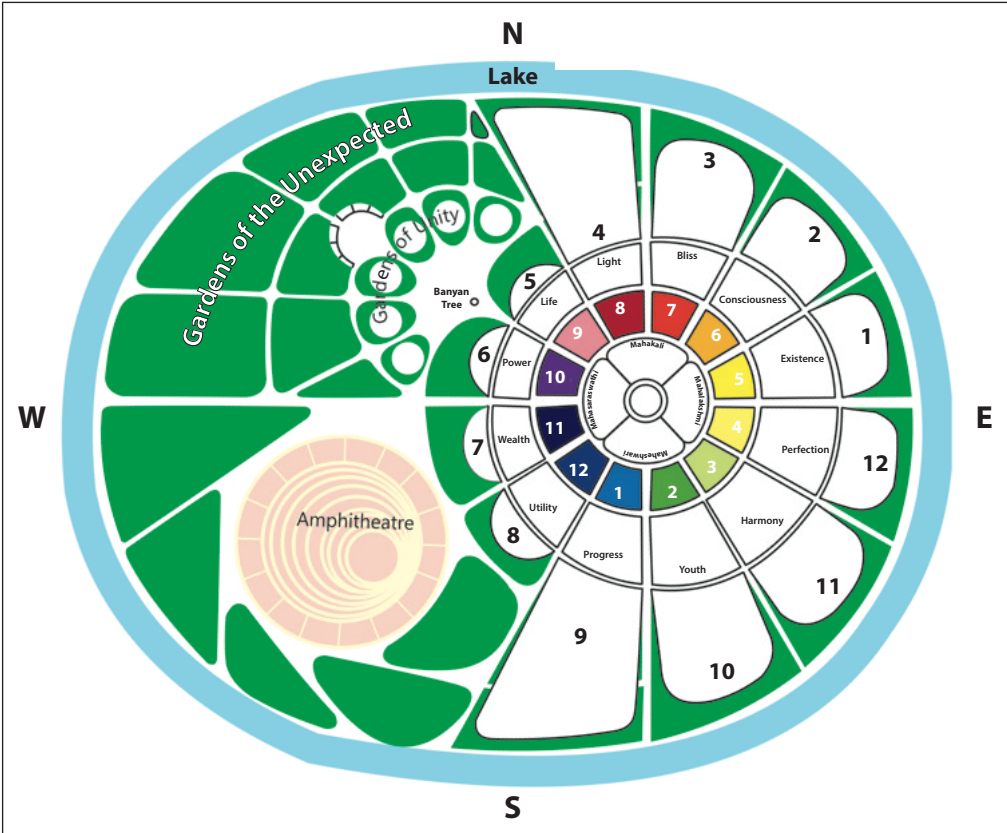
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Layout of the Oval of the future Matrimandir Island

The central circle indicates the Matrimandir with its four entrances: Mahakali (north), Mahalakshmi (east), Maheshwari (south) and Mahasaraswati (west).

The Matrimandir is surrounded by 12 petals, each having its own meditation room. They are named (1) *Sincerity*, (2) *Humility*, (3) *Gratitude*, (4) *Perseverance*, (5) *Aspiration*, (6) *Receptivity*, (7) *Progress*, (8) *Courage*, (9) *Goodness*, (10) *Generosity*, (11) *Equality* and (12) *Peace*.

The insides of the rooms are painted in different colours: *Sincerity* is pale blue, *Humility* and *Gratitude* have different shades of green, *Perseverance* is yellow, *Aspiration* is golden yellow, *Receptivity* is orange, *Courage* is red, *Generosity* is violet and *Peace* is dark blue. The other rooms have colours in between those mentioned above.

The Matrimandir and its 12 petals are in turn surrounded by 12 gardens. They are: (1) The Garden of *Existence* (completed), (2) The Garden of *Consciousness* (completed), (3) The Garden of *Bliss* (almost completed), (4) Garden of *Light* (completed), (5) The Garden of *Life* (completed), (6) The Garden of *Power* (completed), (7) The Garden of *Wealth* (completed), (8) The Garden of *Utility* (work has started), (9) The Garden of *Progress* (completed), (10) The Garden of *Youth* (work not yet started), (11) The Garden of *Harmony* (work not yet started) and (12) The Garden of *Perfection* (work not yet started).

The Gardens of *Life* and *Power* are bordered by the Banyan Tree – the tree at the centre of Auroville – and the Gardens of *Unity* (completed). The Gardens of *Wealth* and *Utility* are flanked by the Amphitheatre. North-west of the Amphitheatre are the Gardens of the *Unexpected* (completed).



The Garden of Wealth

continued from page 1
Its seven pools each feature water lilies in a different colour, symbolising wealth as interpreted by the Mother. A gently curving, granite-clad path runs through its centre.



The Garden of Bliss

The Garden of Bliss, with its central circular section having been re-designed by Auroson, is nearly complete. On 4 April, five white marble fountains were inaugurated, sending graceful curtains of water from brass-rimmed bowls lined with golden tiles.



The Garden of Utility

Work has since begun on the Garden of Utility, where left-over HDPE from the lake is being repurposed to line the new pools.

Concepts for the remaining gardens — Youth, Harmony, and Perfection — are beginning to take shape. “We had a great presentation last week by Mark and Meera on Harmony, which they’re keen to start with,” says John. Beneath the outer rim of the Garden of Youth, a large underground room will be built to store materials and machinery for daily maintenance. Once the lake surrounds the Matrimandir, efficient access to tools will be vital.

Service infrastructure

However, one single underground storehouse won’t be sufficient. Architects Sonali and Ganesh are designing the Matrimandir Service Building, to be located in the Administrative



3D model of the Matrimandir Reception Pavilion entrance

Zone near the Auroville Archives. It will house all the facilities needed to support the Matrimandir complex in the future. Administrative offices, laundry, catering, spaces for maintenance and repair of machinery, parking for tractors and electric service vehicles, and facilities for over 100 workers are included in the design. And how will the people and equipment reach the Matrimandir across the lake? “A service bridge will be essential,” John says, “but its design is still under discussion.”

Reception centre and public bridge

Roger Anger’s original vision included a Matrimandir Reception Centre as the final building of the Line of Force [see *AVToday* # 411, October 2023, page 5]. It would serve the planned population of 50,000 and all visiting guests. From this Centre, a 100-meter pedestrian bridge would lead to the Gardens and the Matrimandir.

Land acquisition challenges stalled the project for years, but with one plot now secured, design work has resumed. “We held a wonderful exercise,” says John. “Five architect teams were invited to submit proposals. After a quick-turnaround evaluation, we selected the design of PATH Architects, an Auroville architecture and planning studio led by Lalit and Shailaja, that best met our criteria. It’s now in development.”

The bridge will be elegant, pedestrian-only, with access for emergency vehicles. Tourists not registered for meditation or garden visits will be restricted to the viewing point.

Accessibility improvements

Improving access for the elderly and disabled has been a long-standing goal. The current system – four people carrying a visitor in a sedan chair – is inadequate. “We considered a glass elevator tube from outside but rejected it for aesthetic reasons,” says John. Handrails have since been installed on the main pillars,

and a stair-climbing wheelchair has been ordered.

Technology and structural upgrades

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras is working on reviving the long-planned automatic doors for the Matrimandir’s four entrances. The original ‘spaceship’ doors from the late 1990s were abandoned over safety concerns, but IIT is now engineering a safer version.

They’re also tasked with upgrading the heliostat – the double-mirror system that channels sunlight into the Inner Chamber. The current setup works, but is prone to failure due to outdated software and mechanical parts. One new design under consideration eliminates moving parts entirely, using a mirrored funnel beneath a dome to guide sunlight.

And the crane?

What of the long-idle stainless-steel crane atop the Matrimandir? “That depends on who you ask,” laughs John. “Some want it removed entirely. Others say it will be useful for future major repairs. But it’s in poor shape – its plastic parts, electronics, and hydraulic seals have deteriorated. We might not need it anymore. The crane used for removing the Lego blocks had a very long boom – it could perhaps do the job too. But for now, it’s not a priority.”

Looking ahead

The current executive team was appointed four years ago with a four-year work plan. Are they on track? “It has become a six-year plan,” says John with a smile. “We’re now aiming to complete everything we can, or have it well in motion, by 21 February 2028 – Mother’s 150th birth anniversary.”

In conversation with Carel



3D model of the Matrimandir Service Building

A basket full of grace

On 17 April, long-term Aurovilian Frederick Schulze Buxloh was informed that his application for visa extension had been denied. The decision sparked widespread concern, leading to a petition addressed to Indian authorities that garnered over 4000 signatures.

Now 86 years old, Frederick first arrived in Pondicherry and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1960, settling permanently in 1966. He was among the first individuals who were personally accepted as Aurovilians by The Mother and he collaborated closely with Her during Auroville's formative years. For more than six decades, he has lived in service of her Dream, dedicating his life to the ideals and growth of Auroville.

Frederick: The message that my application for a visa extension had been denied came after more than a year and a half of waiting. My application was complete except for one critical document: the mandatory letter of recommendation from the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation.

I was in the forest when the message came. It hit me like a thunderbolt – comparable only to the moment I learned that The Mother had left her body. The shock was so intense that physical symptoms followed immediately; my heart began to act up. I took it as a warning: “This is traumatic, but don’t let it settle into your body.” From that moment, I began focusing entirely on preserving Her protection around me.

On 24 April, the same date The Mother arrived permanently in Pondicherry in 1920, I had darshan in Sri Aurobindo’s room. There, I felt Her presence as powerfully as I did the first time I met Her at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Back then, She used to distribute prosperity from Her chair – in the hall where her bed now stands – handing out small baskets containing a razor blade, a towel, a piece of soap, an incense stick and much more that was beyond the material. I would leave overwhelmed, wondering what I had done to deserve such a basket full of grace. This time, the message was clear once again: “Don’t worry. Whatever comes, My protection is there.”

This experience brought about a profound inner shift. I no longer want to focus on externalities or assign blame. That would distract me from my true path. Life is no longer about friend versus foe, or black and white. People around me offer advice and strategies, but inwardly, I know that’s no longer my work. I want to enter a space where such dualities no longer dominate my thinking.

Have you accepted your fate?

Yes, I’ve accepted what has happened. In fact, I realised that the shock was necessary – it helped deepen my inner focus. According to the ancient Indian concept of the four stages of life, I understand I’ve entered the final stage: Sannyasa, the path of liberation. This is a time to fully dedicate oneself to inner and spiritual work, beyond the constraints of time, space, social expectations, fear, or pride. It is liberation.

I had undergone surgery at JIPMER Hospital some months earlier. I was, as they say, at death’s door. There was a moment on the operating table when my body went into a protective spasm. Then, suddenly, everything opened up. A deep sense of relief and gratitude filled me – Her protection was effective; the body had weathered the storm.

Yet mentally, the anguish sometimes returns: Will the cancer come back? Mine is a superficial type, but it is known to recur. Then something quiets my thoughts, and I am reminded again: let go of fear. Remember Her protection.

In your NEWS TV9 Live interview, you spoke of the pain of possibly having to leave Auroville.

Yes. I’ve been rooted in Auroville for most of my life. My children, my friends, my grandchildren – all live here. I have nowhere else to go. I’ve given everything I had to The Mother. I have no property, no money, no medical coverage. If the Government of India deports me, I don’t even know if the Social Welfare in Germany would take me in. They would ask, “Where have you been for 60 years? Why didn’t you earn anything? What is this Auroville? Who is The Mother?” Such thoughts are deeply

unsettling. But then I remind myself to get out of my head and into my heart – and trust that the right thing will happen.

Do you hold any rancour against the Indian Government?

Not at all! On the contrary, I have always experienced the Indian Government as extremely benevolent toward Auroville. Over the past 60 years, I have met numerous Prime Ministers – including Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, Shrimati Indira Gandhi and Shri Narendra Modi – as well as Ministers and countless officials. All expressed warmth and support for Auroville.

Please note, I have not received a “Leave India” notice. The instruction I received was simply that my visa extension was denied without the required documentation. I believe this was a technical outcome – an automatic response from the system after so many months of waiting.

I do sincerely hope that the government will review the situation and allow me to remain. I was deeply moved by the outpouring of support – thousands of people have signed a petition in my favour. And just a few days ago, during my 86th birthday at Certitude playground, over 500 people came to celebrate. I’ve never been hugged and kissed so many times in one day.

But I don’t think this was just about me. It reflects a broader concern that foreign Aurovilians should not be expelled arbitrarily or because they express disagreement with the actions of the Auroville Governing Board or its Secretary.

You didn’t receive the letter of recommendation. Why do you think that happened?

Unlike previous Secretaries who followed the advice of the Working Committee of the Residents’ Assembly when issuing letters of recommendation, the current Secretary appears to have taken it upon herself to decide who should be allowed to stay in Auroville.

Assuming this is indeed her prerogative – and opinions differ on that – I honestly don’t know why the Secretary denied me. I have never knowingly offended her or the Governing Board, violated visa conditions, or disrespected Indian laws or values.

I’ve received no explanation. I remain in the dark. And if I have caused offence, I would be happy to express my sincerest apologies – verbatim, and from the heart.

In her interview with NEWS TV9 Live, Ms. Sindhuja speculated on what might have led to the denial.

Yes, but those were her personal views. What matters here are the actual reasons held by the Secretary. I haven’t been informed of any allegations, nor have I been given a chance to respond.

I’m not claiming to be without fault. I’ve made mistakes. And being German hasn’t helped – we are known for having rigid spines, which doesn’t always translate well in India. I could have been more flexible. Still, I am prepared to offer unconditional apologies for any missteps.



More importantly, I hope we can rise above personal conflicts and come together to build Auroville. I believe reconciliation beyond the conflicts is possible.

You said the shock helped you refocus. Were the shocks received by other Aurovilians in the past three years also necessary?

Yes, I believe so. We were stuck. The Secretary’s actions, though painful, forced us to confront that stagnation. But let me be clear: I’m not saying it was well-handled. I don’t sanctify what happened. The Board and Secretary could have acted more harmoniously instead of acting like being the bosses of Auroville. And yes, some Aurovilians acted in ways I found insincere or devious. Auroville is meant to be at the service of Truth. That’s inscribed on the metal band around the Banyan Tree near the Matrimandir. I’m not claiming we hold the truth and others don’t – but I do believe some have strayed far from Auroville’s original spirit.

A comment circulating online said your denial was purposeful, to show that those in power can remove anyone from Auroville. What’s your view?

That perception isn’t entirely wrong. It seems that dissenters are being labelled as obstructionists or as “old baggage” standing in the way of progress. I strongly disagree with that view. It opens the door to authoritarian decisions and that, in my view, contradicts Auroville’s founding ideals.

What are your next steps?

On 27 May, I received notice that I have to leave India in five days. I will comply, and then let us see what unfolds. I continue to hold faith in Her protection – and in the possibility of understanding and unity.

In conversation with Carel

Fred’s short video on YouTube and social media platforms which gained more than 100,000 views and over 500 comments can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfgmzQAXob0>. The NEWS TV9 Live interview can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91rDgwwJs78>.

REFLECTION

The danger of depersonalisation

Michael Sandel, the Harvard professor, believes that many of us now live in a ‘market society’ where market values have supplanted other forms of human value like fairness and justice.

This tendency is seen in the increasing ‘commodification’ of human beings, of them being viewed simply as sources of profit. One example of this is seen in big tech companies sweeping up human data to enable more effective marketing. People are depersonalised when they are only represented by data, and depersonalisation makes it easier for those in powerful positions to exploit and manipulate them without moral scruples.

Auroville seems to be a very long way from being such a market-oriented, exploitative society. The ideal held before us is the transformation of consciousness, not the maximisation of personal or collective profit. And what I’ve

always found most refreshing about this place is the fact that here people are appreciated on the basis of who they are and the values which they hold rather than on their wealth, status or education.

I wonder, however, to what extent the conflict of the past three years has begun to change this. For what often happens in polarised conflicts is also a form of depersonalisation. This is because when people strongly disagree, they tend to stop interacting with each other. As a result, they lose the cross-cutting ties which allow them to disagree on one thing and agree on something else, and so lose the sense of the other as a whole, complex person.

This often leads to them characterising those from the other party in simplistic, one-dimensional terms: ‘dogmatics’, ‘extremists’, ‘eco-terrorists’, ‘city-blockers’, etc. And this depersonalisation, along with the belief that the other party represents some kind of existential threat to

Auroville, allows them to say things about them, and to do things to them, which they would never consider doing if they were still on speaking terms and relating to them as real people.

This tendency becomes even more dangerous when there is a religious or spiritual dimension. For when people are convinced that they hold the spiritual truth and that others are acting in a way that is threatening that truth, it allows them great latitude in causing harm, which is why religious persecution is the most horrible form of all.

I’m not suggesting that we have any home-grown Inquisitors who would willingly burn heretical Aurovilians at the stake. But there is a danger that those who fervently believe, for example, that Mother herself had formulated the Master Plan (as was stated recently in a Governing Board meeting) may justify using anything and anyone in their efforts to materialise it.

However, depersonalising and misusing people to achieve a spiritual end is surely deeply contradictory.

Let us by all means disagree, but not to the extent that we abandon our sense of our common humanity. For, as Hannah Arendt put it, “The death of human empathy is one of the earliest and most telling signs of a culture about to fall into barbarism.”

Empathy does not mean that one necessarily agrees with another’s stance: we are still called upon to discriminate. Empathy means that even if one believes that somebody else is embodying a destructive force which must be resisted, one never abandons one’s humanity by descending to hatred and one never ceases to relate to them as human beings. For one understands that none of us is immune to being used by the immense forces which cluster around a world-changing project like Auroville.

Alan

50 Years of Collaboration: A Journal of Integral Yoga in America

Once upon a time a very long time ago, deep in the woods at the bottom of a mountain — Mother's Mountain, mata-giri — a six-page newsletter called *Collaboration* came into being. Eric Hughes, cofounder of the Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center near Woodstock, New York, USA, created *Collaboration* in 1974 in response to a growing national interest in the thought of Sri Aurobindo. Printed in blue ink and stapled in the upper left-hand corner, *Collaboration* featured writings from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother along with news of the Ashram, Auroville, and the USA Integral Yoga community.

Over the years, interest in Sri Aurobindo's thought continued to grow, and so did *Collaboration* — from a modest newsletter to a journal of 32, 64, and occasionally 80+ pages. A succession of four managing editors, sometimes helped by associate editors and layout assistants, took up the work Eric began, and five decades after its inception, *Collaboration* is still going, both online and in print. Today more than a dozen team members collaborate remotely from different time zones to produce the journal, practicing a novel form of collective yoga.

Collaboration could be seen as a logical development, for as we might imagine, after the supermind touched down at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in February 1956, it began streaming out in plumes and solar rays, first to Auroville and then around the world, carried by radioactive vectors of consciousness-force till it reached the shores of America, where it began working secretly and incognito — for here in the United States, notwithstanding the bright awakenings of the 1960s, we lacked the ample tradition of spiritual practice that underlay the ground of being in India; here we were steeped in a materialist frame of mind that valued positivist science, objective rationality, and sense data. Americans, it seemed, had a predilection for forklifts, centrifuges, monster trucks, skyscrapers, space telescopes, aircraft carriers, factories, and punch clocks, but minimal metaphysical support for divine realization.

And so to plumb the depths of Integral Yoga, we first had to break through a carapace of physicalist agnosticism, popular suspicions that spirituality was for mysto navel-gazers, and a flaming mistrust of conventional and New Age religiosity. Indeed, if we mentioned that we were devotees of an Indian guru or a woman inexplicably called “the Mother,” a shadowy fear would creep into the eyes of friends who might think, but be too polite to ask, Are you in a cult? Have you joined the Moonies? Do you need to be deprogrammed?

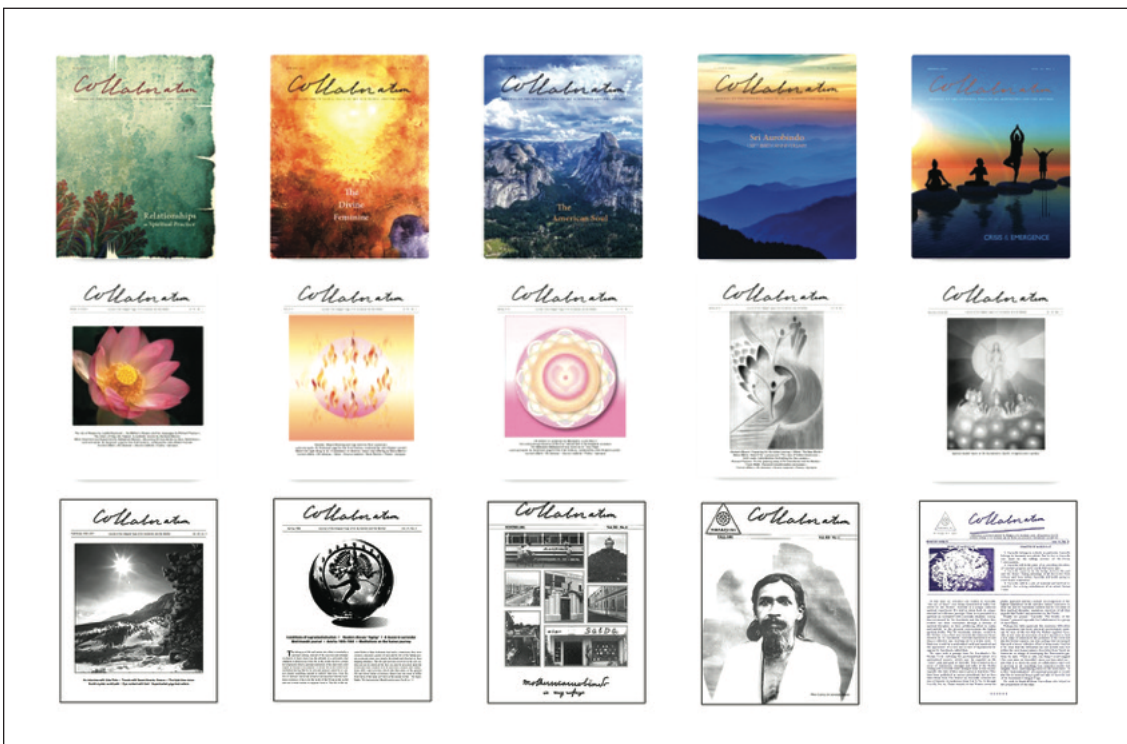
So we were pretty mum about the fact that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had demolished us with awe, love, and delight, and instilled in us an ineffable longing for God. We kept our cards pretty close to our chests — except in the pages of *Collaboration*. What a relief! Here we could commune with others who'd been similarly touched and changed forever by the compelling vision of Integral Yoga. These folks were hard to find. The U.S. was huge, we were separated by thousands of miles, and back then there were few Integral Yoga centres — “centres,” in fact, were mostly just people's living rooms. This of course was before the internet; we couldn't Google “yoga” or “posthuman species” and come across “supramental manifestation.”

And so *Collaboration* became our nexus — a source of yogic reinforcement and aspiration with distinctly American tones, e.g., a youthful willingness to experiment, an occasional irreverence, frequent doses of humour, and a stress on individual autonomy.

We were curious. We asked questions. What exactly was Integral Yoga? Was it still developing? Was the stricture against sharing experiences still valid? Was celibacy actually required for progress in *sadhana*? Could we start on physical transformation before psychic and spiritual transformation? Were forces emerging that might change the practice of the yoga itself? Might there be no single path, but a multiplicity of divergent approaches?

We pored over writings from Sri Aurobindo and studied commentaries on *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Savitri*, and *Essays on the Gita*.

We were captivated by narratives of people meeting the Mother in person, accounts of the early Ashram, and memoirs of notable *sadhaks* — Amrita, Nirodbaran, K.D. Sethna, and many others.



We followed Auroville news and updates, sent money for the Matrimandir crystal, and read about Americans returning after years in Auroville to the wild and woolly West.

We took an avid interest in personal stories about *sadhana*, surrender, subliminal states, descents of opalescent light, the witness self, the opening of chakras, the emergence of the psychic being, the importance of physical exercise, and grace.

We loved tales of yogic “bad boys” like Mickey Finn, a soldier, thief, con artist, and heroin addict whose discovery of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother changed his life; Ananta, aka Frederic Bushnell, who made Mother laugh and qualified for more than half the diagnoses in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders; and John Kelly, who had a vision of Sri Aurobindo on a WWII battlefield (“I saw a wisp of white smoke ... suddenly I see a mouth and a beard start to form, then the eyes, and the eyes sent out this light that hit me, and I fell back ... the voice says (low), “What is it you wish, my child?” It had the accent of a high Englishman. Here I am from Brooklyn. I said, “Oh my God ... God is an Englishman! What am I gonna say to God?”).

Collaboration traced the coalescence of Integral Yoga community in the U.S. via the evolution of conferences, organisations, and groups such as the All USA Meeting (AUM), the Foundation for World Education, the Sri Aurobindo Association, Auroville International USA, and centres and study circles that were sprouting up like sunflowers across the land.

And in article after article, *Collaboration* authors searched for the soul of America.

Meanwhile, the *Agenda* was being translated from French into English, one volume at a time; portions were published in *Collaboration* along with stunning accounts by Satprem of Mother's discoveries in “the yoga of matter.” This was breaking news, seeding in us a deep faith that a new creation was being built and imminent transformation was possible.

Then too, *Collaboration* chronicled the rise of the internet, when the physical wiring of ambient human awareness seemed to offer a glimpse into an age of harmony, unity, and mutuality. We marvelled at the first Integral Yoga website (miraura.org) and gleefully exchanged email addresses. The ease and speed by which we could telecommunicate over long distances promised a new era of global solidarity and oneness.

Much later, *Collaboration*'s documentation of yogic hope and techno-optimism would phase into a measured consideration of the Anthropocene metacrisis, the dark side of the internet, and the resistance of nature to the descending Force — balanced by the understanding that according to the Mother, opposition is a stimulus to progress and, as Sri Aurobindo says, “even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny” in *The Hour of God*.

Meanwhile, a new chapter for *Collaboration* began in 2020 when the Sri Aurobindo Association of America, its publisher since 1987, envisioned a new look and process for the journal: updating its utilitarian format to one with more spaciousness and beauty, and expanding production from a single editor to a network of contributors. Today a number

of teams are collaborating on *Collaboration*, aspiring to maintain a deep and consecrated field of fellowship and collective *sadhana*. From the start, *Collaboration* was a labour of love; and so it continues to be.

Here follow some article excerpts from the past 50 years of *Collaboration* that may give a closer glimpse into its undulating currents, tropisms, and treasures.

Lynda Lester

John Robert Cornell, from “Visionary Eyes on America: Sri Aurobindo and Mother on the Soul Qualities of the USA” (Winter 2012):

You don't appreciate how vast a land America is until you drive across it from coast to coast. It takes five days from California to Virginia at freeway speeds. You don't sense the intimately different qualities of wind, soil, animal community and birds until you get out and walk the land, or better, live its canyons and cities and ride its wild rivers for years, maybe lifetimes. Vegetation strange or immense, trees thorn-covered or thick as a snow-storm find community footholds in a succession of rainforest, desert, valley, mountain, prairie, alkali flat, meadow and crystal lake. Straggly bristlecone pines in western mountains here were already 2,000 years old when the Buddha was born. In the central prairie state of Kansas, one seems to ride forever across a flatness that never ends. The Rocky Mountains abruptly halt the westward-rising prairie. Ancient Appalachian shoulders in the east still stubbornly lift skyward after eons of wearing away in wind and storm. Joshua trees and saguaro cactus of the desert, the giant sequoias of the Sierra Nevada mountains, and the hardwood forests of the eastern mountains still find room to grow amid sprawling, buzzing cities and agri-farms.

The wide Mississippi rolls on south down the middle of the continent, gathering, gathering, gathering centuries of raindrops and snowflakes from its basin of 1.83 million square miles. The land itself rolls slowly towards the horizon — or falls abruptly in cliff or fault. Earthquakes twist a blacktop road into spaghetti or drop a ridge 50 vertical feet in a few seconds. And slowly, over eons, mountains rise and seas settle in, ice sheets a mile thick overlay and then wear away the rising mountains and volcanic flows. Sahara-like sand dunes gather across ages and then compress into rainbow-hued sandstone that sprouts yellow stonecrop and ponderosa pine and a bewildering ark of insects and animals.

Scattered all across this explosion of vastness and variation, red, brown, white, black, and yellow Americans find here something of home. And call ourselves Americans. Live inside a particular story, a story with untold individual and collective variations, many strands isolated and unconnected as yet, but nonetheless leaves and branches of one in-progress story-tree.

Devan Nair, “Towards the Great Turning Point” (Summer/Fall 1991), on meeting the Mother:

To this day I cannot explain what really happened when I stood in front of that frail old woman, seated humped in her chair. “Poor old lady,” was my first gentlemanly thought. Then my eyes fell on an extraordinarily radiant face with a vibrant, golden glow.

Words are totally, hopelessly inadequate, to describe what happened next. I will only say this. I presented the flowers, which she took, and suddenly found myself looking into a pair of the most incredible eyes I had ever seen. There followed a convulsive inner and outer movement. And suddenly, inexplicably, I found myself on my knees, with my head on her lap. I felt a soft and gentle hand on the crown of my head.

I got to my feet in a daze. Not a word was exchanged. She gave me a red rose, which I took, and I left the room. Somehow, I walked back to the guest house, and lay on my bed. I don't remember anything else, for I woke up only at seven in the evening.

Debashish Banerji, from “Living Laboratories of the Life Divine” (Fall 2020 / Winter 2021):

A new age does not start by astrological factors. It is not because it is written in the calendar that a new age suddenly begins. A new age is an act of consciousness. It is a powerful act of consciousness, willed by the human cooperators and assented to by the Divine. And this is the new age that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have inaugurated. It is a new age, first and foremost, of world yoga. It is a new age of yoga and of world-yoga, the accelerated process towards conscious evolution.

Prakriti, nature, has always been doing yoga. This is why in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo can say, “All life is yoga.” But the yoga of nature is a slow, semiconscious process. The yoga of human beings who wake up from within by the pointing finger of light that comes as a beacon showing the way is a conscious yoga. It is a conscious yoga that accelerates and quickens the process. It condenses into a lifetime or a few years what would otherwise have taken many lifetimes. It brings the future into the present.

This is exactly what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done on a cosmic or terrestrial level. They have initiated the earth into a new yoga. The ear of the earth has been privy to the mantra of a new yoga and has accepted it. That yoga has begun...

In a conversation of December 1938, Sri Aurobindo said that a few hundred people in the Ashram will not be sufficient to make the supramental effective for mankind. Thousands of people doing the yoga *sadhana* in many walks of life across the world would be needed for that. Individually and collectively, across America, across Europe, across Asia, across the world, we are all invited to be participants in the purpose of the supramental manifestation.

Lynda Lester, from “Napping with the Divine” (Spring 2021):

I'd been to Chicago O'Hare and learned there the airport protocol for exhausted wayfarers: pull up some floor and crash. So I staked out a spot between a pillar and a plate glass window, took my feather pillow out of my canvas bag, lay down, and drew my hat over my eyes...

And there on the cold carpet in the airport, my entire body aching with the pain of sleeplessness and middle age, I looked closely to see what was the truth of this moment.

What it was, was the Divine holding me in his arms. I was cradled in the arms of the Divine Mother, like a baby being rocked to sleep.

“Mr. Mushroom, Mr. Be A. Mushroom; Ms. Mental, Ms. Arlene Mental; Mr. Bread, Mr. Short Bread, please report to a white courtesy phone.” The voices I heard over the PA grew surrealistically comic as I drifted into a cozy, half-awake state.

Undereath me was the concourse, rumbling with the feet of hundreds of passersby; but what I felt most were waves of bliss beating up from the floor — like subatomic radiation, reverse gravity, convection: wave after wave of bliss carrying me like a little Wynken-Blynken-and-Nod boat on a sea galaxy of God. It was impossibly beautiful, impossibly full of peace and sweetness; it infused my aching cells.

And as I lay there crashed out on the floor like some despair-ridden homeless person, transcendence seduced and enveloped me, introduced me to infinity and immortality, brought me face-to-face with the timeless Eternal.

And that is how, cradled on the breast of the Divine, I found *shanti* and *ananda* on the floor of Denver International Airport.

continued on page 5

New textbooks for Indian school students

“Auroville will be a place of unending education”, says its Charter. The entirety of Auroville is envisioned by The Mother as an evolving educational campus encompassing all facets of life. Auroville’s educational philosophy and pedagogy, rooted in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, is known as Integral Education. It is a lifelong learning journey focused on self-discovery and the evolution of the soul. It strives to focus on an all-rounded development of the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual dimensions of the learner. Auroville has pioneered in its many schools several educational experiments among these lines.

But what about the rest of India? In 2021-22, India had an estimated 265 million students enrolled in primary and secondary education, that is, from grade 1 to 12. How can their education, the educational system and the learning materials, be improved? There is much criticism of the widely practiced “rote” learning; on the

mechanical one-way teaching methods of teachers; on the passivity of the student; on the overinflated syllabi; and on the overwhelming importance given to exams. It is a major challenge to introduce changes to a system that has persisted for long, and which affects millions of children and teachers in all corners of India.

The Indian Government is well aware of this gigantic task and has created various task groups to propose changes to the system. Michel Danino, a former Aurovilian and presently member of the Auroville International Advisory Council, is actively involved in one of these task groups. For over two decades, Michel, who is also guest professor at IIT Gandhinagar (Gujarat), has contributed to attempts to reform school education, including the development of a renewed educational vision, an overhaul of the educational programmes, and the creation of new textbooks that hope to reflect the new vision. Here he elaborates on his work.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY MICHEL DANINO

Michel Danino

The absence of political pressure

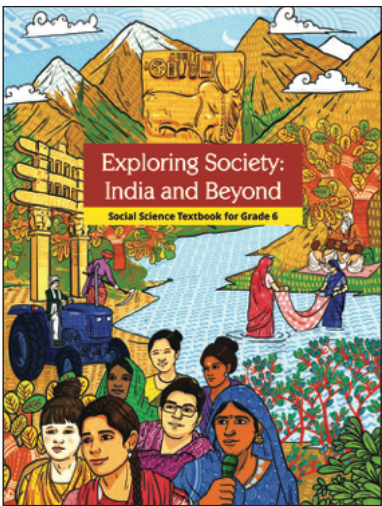
I’ve sometimes been asked if we were subjected to political pressure. I honestly answered: absolutely not. It’s well known that I’ve always tried to promote the deeper values of Indian culture, to give space to Indian knowledge systems, but it’s also accepted that I’m not a political animal, that I keep my distance from the political world. In any case, our team worked with complete freedom, accepting many useful suggestions and rejecting almost as many.

This work – a social science textbook for the 6th grade, to begin with – had to be completed in a very short time, around five months. It must be said that we were working on the syllabi and the textbook at the same time, because everything was new and we had to determine at what stage of schooling it was appropriate to introduce this or that topic. Especially since another fundamental principle of this new philosophy of education is precisely interdisciplinarity. It was therefore essential to ensure that it was integrated into the development of the syllabi from start to finish. Hence the constant back-and-forth: the book was revised as the syllabus was refined. We also made every effort to minimise the text itself and to use visual aids such as drawings, photos, maps, diagrams, etc., as much as possible. Although somewhat delayed, this textbook and those for the other core subjects were finally printed in July 2024 in a few lakhs of copies, in English but with a Hindi translation coming very soon.²

We are now trying to form new teams to work on the textbooks for the following years, starting with Grade 7. Obviously, there hasn’t been enough time to prepare teachers for the new approach; it will take them several years to fully absorb it. Until now, teachers in India have too often been content to simply repeat the textbook; now they are asked to assume their full role so that, gradually, the textbook loses its importance, which cannot happen overnight. Moreover, thousands of schools in remote corners of India have little access to anything other than textbooks, hence the importance of having quality books.

This effort to fundamentally reform school education in India therefore seems well under way, but it can only be a long-term endeavour.

Michel Danino



Cover of the textbook created by Michel’s team

¹ *Arthashastra*, an ancient treatise on governance, economics, and military strategy, written in Sanskrit. The work, attributed to Kautilya, is considered an exceptional monument of ancient Indian political thought.

² Part 1 of the Social Science textbook for Grade 7 was published in March 2025; Part 1 of the textbook for Grade 8 is due to appear in June 2025.

In 2020, a new National Education Policy (NEP) was published. It was the basis for a new approach to education. It concerned not only school education at all levels but also higher education. It’s a very broad document, but, as I often say, a magnificent car without wheels. Some people here and there were inspired by it, but there was no clear mechanism for putting the new approach into practice. This document was also supposed to streamline the complex and enormous mass of the numerous educational institutions in India.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education

Since 2021, I have been part of a committee called “National Steering Committee” and I participated in the development of a document titled the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE). This 600-page document, published in 2023, aims precisely to put this national policy into practice at the school level. It includes all sorts of practical aspects without ever losing sight of the vision formulated and the principles set out in 2020. Of course, this vision of education was based on a number of educational experiences, such as those of the Krishnamurti Foundation and, of course, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram’s Free Progress School (both of which are in fact cited in the document). In short, it is a schooling where the student ceases to be a passive receiver, ceases to be submerged under a mountain of disparate information, facts, dates, details to be learned by heart for the most part; the student becomes a full participant. It is an education that emphasises fundamental ideas, principles, or concepts, whether in social science, maths, art or science, with a much greater emphasis than previously on understanding and critical thinking. The examples or information – kept to a minimum – are chosen, as much as possible, to illustrate these basic ideas. We are also inspired by a great precept from Sri Aurobindo: to go from the near to the far, that is to say, to take as a starting point the world of the student. Finally, we are in India, and great educational visionaries, such as Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Coomaraswamy, among others, have insisted that India’s national education must have an Indian basis. This was not previously the case: until now, the implicit message of school education was that the only useful knowledge came from the West. There will therefore be a relocation to an Indian basis, which doesn’t mean that modern knowledge will be discarded, of course, but that, whenever possible, the Indian vision or approach will be presented.

Easy to say, but not always easy to achieve! Of course, in certain fields such as literature, the arts, or mathematics, areas extremely rich in classical India, it is relatively feasible, but in other fields such as the sciences or social science, how can it be applied? We know that this new approach was already partially advocated in the New Education Policy of 1986, whose architect was Kireet Joshi. There was also a National Curriculum Framework in 2005 which went in this direction, but which never really picked up in practice; the specific Indian contribution was limited to a few small inserts here and there, scattered and optional. Now, we are trying to integrate these contributions into the main text, as an integral part of the subject in question. In certain fields such as political science for example, it is entirely legitimate to speak of a vision specific to India, for example the principles set out in the *Arthashastra*.¹ With transitions, of course: in this specific case, we first introduce some general principles of contemporary political structures (many young Indians, even “educated” ones, have no idea what an electoral constituency is!), but then it’s important to talk about

the political and social organisation of ancient India, to show that certain ideas and practices are thousands of years old.

My participation: creating textbooks of social sciences

How did I gradually become involved in this work? I had participated in several educational experiments over the past twenty years, such as a survey of 11,000 schoolchildren and a very detailed special course on India’s cultural heritage for the secondary level. Then, four years ago, I was drawn into this National Steering Committee, where I participated in the development of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education, published in 2023. Particularly in certain chapters.

At this point, I was asked to take responsibility for textbooks of social science – a complex and delicate discipline in India, as it always gives rise to numerous historical, social, and other controversies. The aim was to avoid, on the one hand, the perspective of nationalist enthusiasts with often very limited views, and on the other, to avoid falling back into the old system which, inheriting colonial views on India, always ended up painting a dark portrait of Indian society with, for example, a constant emphasis on discrimination caused by caste. It is said that mountains are defined by their peaks more than by their valleys. Of course, these valleys must be noted, and there is no question of hiding anything. To continue with this example of caste, we will see that the curriculum for grades 6 to 8 will discuss them in several chapters. But in previous textbooks, the fundamental error (which many historians have made, moreover) confused the caste system as it originally existed with the current system. Yet, numerous recent studies have demonstrated that there is a huge difference between the two. The old system was much more fluid, for example, while the current system is the product of a dual rigidification: that imposed by the colonial powers (whose censuses declared all communities or *jatis* to be as many castes) and that created by the quota system for lower castes implemented by independent India. Discrimination is undeniable, especially in the last two or three centuries, but it is also a system that, in ancient times, effectively supported India’s economic power. Instead of presenting the caste system as an absolute evil, we will first try to understand its complexities and evolution, class by class. The same is true of other subjects, which must reflect the infinite complexity of India and avoid any simplistic judgments or stereotypes.

We have therefore formed several groups whose task is to develop new syllabi based on the National Education Policy, and to create appropriate teaching materials for science, math, social science, art, physical education, and vocational education (the last three are now separate subjects).

What I have often emphasised is that we must not use students’ minds as an ideological battlefield. We have received many suggestions, both from our group and from external experts, and have always decided on them as objectively as possible. If, for example, we are told that we should teach that the *Mahabharata* was written in the 2nd millennium BC, well, no, because there is sufficient evidence that it was written down from 300 or 400 BC onward.

50 Years of Collaboration

continued from page 4

Michael Miovic, from “The Story of Ebenezer: The Bird who Wanted to Walk” (Summer 1998):

As Ebenezer zoomed into that last, long curve of road before the beginning of all of Latin America, a Thing, a Monster, a veritable metal dinosaur on wheels came hurtling across the freeway and ran right over him. It was a Mack Truck. Eighteen wheels and 32 tons of steel and cargo came pounding down on little Eb’s back. You can imagine what became of him: He was smashed. Flattened. Crushed. Destroyed. Shredded. Creamed. Plastered. Pureed. Rubbed out. Ground to dust. Vaporized. Knocked back into the Stone Age. Smacked into oblivion. Blown to smithereens. Turned into a pancake, obliterated, decimated, liquefied, totally annihilated! Eb was pummeled

into a black-and-red road-pizza topped with two yellowish eyes! It was terrible, a tragedy. Of course it took Ebenezer a while to figure out what had happened. He was moving so fast when he was hit that his soul was knocked out of his body and kept on going.

Matthew Andrews, from “On the Brink” (Spring 2021):

As much as possible, our refuges during this time are hope and surrender. If we can hold onto the hope that a new dawn is approaching, and surrender our will to the greater will that holds the good of all, then we will pass this time with greater ease. Hope will nourish our hearts and keep us at the ready, and surrender will protect us from self-destructive inclinations born of fear.

We know how to do this. Hope and surrender are encoded into our deepest hearts. We just need

to look there, beneath the ideas and assumptions and predictions and strategies, into the silent vast within that holds immeasurable wisdom. A map for this traverse into the new terrain of the future will flow from deep within us. Guidance and direction will be spoken in the soul’s language of love and truth. The voices will ring clear, incapable of distortion.

This new day that dawns, this emergent future that requires us to transform in order to enter, cannot be seen by our mind’s eye, which is shaped by the past. It requires a new vision, an intuitive vision of the deepest heart that we will gain as we go.

We stand today in the midst of a million insoluble problems converging upon one another. And we stand in the midst of a million miraculous solutions inarmed with one another. Blessed be this holy moment, this space between breaths. We live on the brink of collective awakening.

For further exploration

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The Kailash Story: from foundation to summit

It all started in September 1998. Jean-François and I were at home when a group of teenagers, familiar faces from the Auroville schools, walked in with a quiet determination. They had something to say. They sat down with us and said they'd been dreaming. They wanted to create a place just for youth. A home. A space to live, not just to hang out.

At first, we were cautious. These kids were between 12 and 15 years old. We told them honestly: this would take time, and more likely than not, they might never live there themselves. But they had come to us, two social workers, not architects, not builders. That meant one thing: if we were going to do this, it would have to be from an educational angle.

We asked them, do you want to go as far as we can together? See where it leads? They said yes. We formed a team: Jean-François and I, along with Anne, a psychologist, and her partner Marc. And the youth who started it all: Kevin, Ladina, Ira, Jitta, Offa, Arian, Shandra, Chris, Arne and Satyavan. Together, we dove into the real work: what did they actually need?

Learning from the past

Their dream was inspired by Ami, a children's community that had existed in Auroville years earlier. Ami had been beloved, but had slowly transformed into a permanent adult residence. That shift, where a space meant for youth became fixed housing, was something they wanted to avoid.

So we reflected: what had gone wrong? How could we do it differently? We decided that we needed an age limit. A rule that residents move out, so space remains open for new youth. This had to be a living, evolving space, not one that gets stuck. It had to serve the needs of a specific age group.

They didn't want a youth club, nor an activity centre. They wanted a home, a safe and secure space where they could actually live. A small, community-based setting designed for them.

From idea to action

From there we began to write a project document, sometimes they wrote, sometimes we did. We sat through many meetings, shaping the concept from both a practical and visionary angle. We started asking hard questions: How much would it cost? How would we organise the space? How many people could live there?

To find those answers, we approached architects and others who could offer estimates. That process alone forced us to get clear: what kind of space were we really building? When the first drafts and estimates came together, we faced the next hurdle: fundraising.

At first, people gave money just on trust. But we realised quickly that trust needed structure.

We needed land. Approval from the Development Group. A way to receive and manage funds. So we approached SAIHER, and emphasised that this was not just a housing project, it was an educational initiative. People wouldn't be coming because they needed shelter, but because they were joining a community with a purpose.

That framing helped. The School Board supported it. SAIHER accepted it. And then, by what felt like pure grace, Gateway stepped in, offering to fund 50% of the cost. [see *AVToday* # 137 page 8, June 2000, eds] Suddenly, we were no longer just dreaming, we were doing.

Webs of solidarity

With Gateway's support, we gained momentum. I travelled to Europe. We spoke at an AVI UK (Auroville International) meeting. And all along, a web of friends and well-wishers began to support us in surprising, beautiful ways.

One colleague in France organised fashion shows, fundraising for Kailash. A friend got his company to allocate project funds to support us. People who saw the potential of this space, who believed in it, contributed.

That's how it began to manifest. Slowly, steadily, through trust, grace, and a lot of help.

Then came Mathias from Altec [see <https://auroville.org/page/mathias-871>]. Not an architect, not a contractor, a sound engineer, perhaps, but more importantly, someone with experience. He offered to build the project himself. He wanted to prove we could make something affordable and beautiful without everyone taking a cut. We said yes. His drawings were simple. The materials were humble: compressed mud blocks. But the vision was clear. He proposed a contract with a financial engagement between Altecs Construction and Kailash project holders. A very first, brave and true engagement.

With permissions in place and plans drawn, we started. But almost immediately, the

Development Group panicked. There was no licensed architect attached. So they created a board of architects to review and refine the project. What could have been a disaster became one of the most collaborative design processes Auroville had seen. No one architect had ownership, so everyone contributed freely. It was beautiful.

Piero and Gloria worked on the facade. Anupama rethought the angles and bathrooms. Aurostrem checked the technical side of the mud blocks. Everyone added something, neutrally, generously.

Even after construction began, the process remained open. Every Saturday, we held open community work mornings, inviting anyone to help. Youth came regularly. At each step, one of them would join us for meetings, an ongoing educational experience.

Some stayed deeply involved, others came and went. But the spirit of co-creation remained. It wasn't someone's building. It was ours, together.

A touch of grace

During construction, gifts kept arriving: Ange made a mosaic of the eyes of Kailash for the entrance. Erisa got and installed granite slabs for the walkway. Stefano offered to do the floor, and created an exquisite mosaic across the entire ground level. People just showed up and offered. That's the magic of Kailash.

We officially welcomed the first youth residents in September 2001, just after I gave birth to our eldest son. My first outing with my newborn was to walk to Kailash and see how it was all coming together.

Why "Kailash"?

In the early days, we brainstormed names. I wanted it to start with a K, just a feeling. When someone said Kailash, something clicked. Kailash, the abode of God. It just felt right.

Looking back, that moment mirrors so many others. The sense that something larger was moving through us. That we were instruments, responding to a genuine need, supported by timing, vision, and, often, a flow of grace.

One day, we didn't know how we'd pay salaries for the workers. I went swimming at Repos beach. Suzie joined me out in the sea, asked how things were going, and when I mentioned the shortfall, she asked how much we needed. She told me to go the next day, there would be a check waiting. And there was.

Another time at Solar Kitchen, someone asked what we needed. I mentioned we hadn't bought the door handles for the bathrooms yet. He handed me the money on the spot.

It was full of stories like that. Without making it sound too pinkish, it really was grace. It carried us through.

Building a life together

Once the construction phase was complete and the first youth had moved in, Kailash transitioned from being a project to being a living community. And with that, came new challenges, especially because it was located in the heart of Auroville's residential area.

Having a group of teenagers living at the centre of the city raised concerns. Getting the necessary permissions for the space had been difficult from the beginning. Some neighbors were not in favour. The community's response was often skeptical, even resistant.

Moreover one of the basic principles of Kailash is that no adult caretakers live in the building, to allow the residents to learn from the consequences of their acts and not because of fear of authority. They need to grow and progress freely with supportive guidance and learn from their own errors. When rules of life are understood from within, they are well integrated. While if they are arbitrarily followed, they are simply applied.

The fact that no adults live on the spot is to leave space for errors and internal co-regulation and support. Growing and learning from the mistakes we make in a safe and secure environment is the best way to integrate the understanding of consequences.

"According to what I see and what I know, and generally, after fourteen years of age, children must be left independent and they must be guided only if they request it. They must be aware that they are responsible for the direction of their own existence."

The Mother, 10 July 1968 (Mother's Agenda)

To reassure people, we had to attend several meetings, explain our vision, and offer guarantees. We made it clear that we were professionals, both

Jean-François and I had training and experience working with youth. Jean-François, especially, had spent years in France working in homes with teenagers. That background gave us a foundation to advocate for what we knew was possible.

At the same time, Auroville was engaged in wider discussions about its values and direction. Kireet Joshi, then Chairman of the Governing Board and of the International Advisory Council, was focussing on education and often repeated the idea that children should be placed at the centre of the city. That sentence became a kind of motto during this time, and it aligned perfectly with our effort to ground Kailash in the centre of Auroville, both physically and symbolically.

We reminded ourselves and others that placing children in the centre of the city didn't just mean caring for them, it meant actually situating their lives, needs, and homes in the middle of our shared urban space. Kailash, in that sense, became a way to walk the talk.

Of course, it also required boundaries. To ease concerns, we set ground rules: no loud music or disturbances in the evenings, and a general culture of care and consideration. It was a balance, between freedom and responsibility, between youthful energy and community harmony.

Jean-François took the lead in setting up the social rhythms of Kailash. For the first seven years, he was there almost every day, and, in the beginning, almost every night. He became a pillar of support, presence, and consistency. Over time, as the community matured, he stepped back slightly. But by then, the culture had been established.

As new youth joined, those who had lived there longer naturally began to pass down the unspoken rules. There was a sense of transmission, not just in responsibilities, but in attitude. It wasn't just about caretakers enforcing rules; it became a place where young people learned to regulate themselves, and each other.

A structured freedom

Daily life at Kailash was built around the idea that young people thrive when they are trusted and held to shared expectations.

One of the fundamental rules was that every resident must have a daytime activity: school, apprenticeship, volunteer work or a job. This requirement brought structure and rhythm. It encouraged youth to go to bed at a reasonable time, get up in the morning, and feel accountable to something beyond themselves. They were given the gift of living in this space, and in return, they had to give their energy to the community by contributing through learning and working.

There was also a clear age range: initially 14 to 21, but we quickly adjusted it to 16 to 21. We realised that 14 and 15-year-olds often struggled with the level of freedom we offered. They needed more adult presence and often misunderstood freedom as the right to do whatever they wanted, without realising it came with duties. With slightly older youth, these conversations became easier and more fruitful.

Managing a household was central to life in Kailash. Everyone had personal and shared responsibilities. Residents cleaned their own rooms and bathrooms, but shared spaces like the kitchen and corridors were maintained by a cleaning lady. However, all the management tasks, scheduling, purchasing, upkeep, were in the hands of the youth themselves.

Each person had a duty. One resident would be in charge of changing gas bottles. Another would monitor the water tank, ensuring it stayed full. Someone else handled garbage coordination with EcoService. Someone would take care of cleaning supplies. Others would supervise the financial contributions and manage accounting.

All of it served a purpose: teaching them how to live life and run a home, not alone, but together. It wasn't a leap straight from a family home to total independence. Kailash provided a middle ground where youth could learn how to live responsibly, surrounded by their peers, while slowly taking on adult tasks. What was theirs to do, they had to do, but always within a shared, supportive structure.

Cooking and community

The kitchen was the beating heart of Kailash. With 14 residents at full capacity, cooking was organised in pairs. Each person cooked once a week, with six nights covered by others. This rhythm kept things light and practical. The cooking team shops and cleans up too.

It also offered opportunities for creativity and sharing. Residents tried new recipes, introduced each other to foods from different cultures, and



Collective cooking

often surprised themselves with what they could prepare. It wasn't just about feeding the group, it was about contributing to a common life.

When youth move in, they quickly discover that Kailash is not just a place to stay. It is a community. That understanding deepens over time, as they take up roles, responsibilities, and relationships.

Who is Kailash for?

Kailash welcomes anyone between 16 and 21 years old who is part of the Auroville system. Residents must either be Aurovilians, children of Aurovilians, children of Newcomers, or registered as students or volunteers. One cannot live at Kailash as a guest, as it is not a guest house. It is a committed, structured community, and that distinction matters deeply.

Some come because they want to live near friends who already stay in Kailash. Others are seeking a break from family life, perhaps needing



Caretakers and residents celebrating Kailash 15th anniversary in September 2016

space, distance, autonomy, or simply a bit of breathing room. Teenagers often go through phases where communication at home becomes difficult. Kailash offers an alternative, without breaking ties.

For those planning to leave Auroville in the future, for study, work, or exploration, Kailash acts as an intermediary step. It helps them prepare for independence while remaining rooted in their familiar environment. They learn the skills of living alone, but within a net of support.

And for youth arriving in Auroville on their own, without family, for school or volunteering, it provides a rare opportunity to integrate meaningfully. In earlier times in Auroville, such young people might have lived with families or in existing communities like Aspiration or Ami. Today, those options are more formalised, and Kailash fills that gap.

Joining the community

Usually, young people hear about Kailash through friends, school, or siblings who've lived there before. When someone expresses interest, we take note of their name and add them to a waiting list. Depending on the moment, that list may be short, or it may mean waiting a year or more for a spot to open.

When a place becomes available, we reconnect with the applicant, sit with them, and discuss where they're at in their life. Are they still interested? Do they understand what Kailash really is? Visiting friends at Kailash is very different from becoming a Kailashian. It's like the difference between visiting Auroville as a guest and becoming a Newcomer. The shift from visitor to resident brings new dynamics and responsibilities.

If the conversation goes well, the young person is invited to attend a Monday community meeting, a weekly tradition in Kailash. There, they introduce themselves to the whole group. The current residents then explain how Kailash functions: the rules, the structure, and the expectations.

After the meeting, the prospective resident

leaves, and the community holds a round of reflections. How does everyone feel about the idea of this person joining? If any concerns arise, we address them in follow-up conversations. If the group feels aligned, we move to the next step: a joint meeting with the applicant and their parents.

During that second meeting, we go through a written agreement, a contract that outlines all aspects of Kailash life, point by point. This is also a space for parents to raise questions, express concerns, or clarify anything unclear. The family then takes the contract home to review it. Once they agree, the parents alongside the new resident signs it and is officially welcomed. They are shown the available room, a move-in date is set, and they join the rhythms of life.

A temporary but formative home

Residents generally stay in Kailash for several months to several years. The maximum stay is around five to six years, from the age of 16 to 21. We don't accept people who only plan to be here a few weeks. It's not a short-term solution, it's a place to grow.

And so they grow. Together.

A place that grew with us

We have recently been working on a documentary for Kailash's 25th anniversary. This opened a door I hadn't fully walked through before. It started on 28 February, the same date the foundation ceremony had taken place back in 2000. I was going through some old papers. Kailash is such a daily part of my life that I'm often engaged with something or other related to it, and it suddenly hit me: it's been 25 years since we formally started the construction!

the French Lycée in Pondicherry, and later to France, where I trained to become a social worker. I came back to Auroville at 24. Like so many in my age group, I had to leave in order to continue growing.

When I returned in 1998, the landscape was starting to shift. Kireet Joshi had become Chairman of the Governing Board and of the IAC. He was putting immense energy into education, especially into revitalising Last School and the principles of Free Progress. He brought momentum, attention, and a sense of structure. At the same time, Gateway funding helped launch Future School, offering Auroville its first proper internationally recognised high school setup allowing students to pass exams.

These developments created a foundation that could finally allow teenagers to stay in Auroville, not just as children but as youth preparing for adulthood. And yet, even then, there was a missing piece: a place to live.

Around the same time, the Youth Centre was also established. But the youth themselves were clear, they didn't want just a place to hang out or do activities. They wanted a home. A space that was theirs. And so Kailash was born out of that space in Auroville's timeline, at the intersection of social growth, educational development, and the desire to retain youth within the community.

It was a time of alignment. The city was ready, and the teenagers were ready too. And for the first time, Auroville had enough structure to raise children from infancy all the way to the end of high school, right here, without sending them away.

Then and now

Looking back over those 25 years, a lot has changed. And yet, the core principles of Kailash have stayed the same. The rules we laid out in the beginning, the balance of freedom and responsibility, the structure of daily life, are still in place.

But the social atmosphere around those rules has evolved. When Kailash started, Auroville itself was freer, more open. The environment was different. We had fewer phones, fewer screens, and no constant access to the digital world. So community life was more tangible, more physical and shared.

Residents of Kailash would do sports together, eat together, hang out, dance, go on outings. They listened to music in the same room, not just through headphones. There was more face-to-face connection, more shared presence. But over the years, especially with the rise of personal devices, that changed.

Then came COVID

The impact of the pandemic on teenagers was enormous. During the lockdowns, with schools closed and movement restricted, young people in Kailash were stuck in the building. Fourteen teenagers in one space, day after day, unable to follow their usual rhythms, that had a huge psychological and social impact.

During that time, Jean-François and I were in France. The caretakers then, Inge and Fabien, were holding the space. They navigated that



The in-house gym

intense period with incredible presence. But it shifted something, not only in Kailash, but in the whole generation.

Many of their social interactions moved online. A lot of real-world social muscles stopped being used. We've had many conversations since about the lingering effect of that period. It made the contrast between earlier generations and current ones more visible.

Still, through all that, the spirit of Kailash held.

A living, adapting place

Over the years, Kailash evolved along with us, its caretakers. Jean-François and I had two children. There were periods when we travelled or stepped back for personal reasons, but we always remained connected. Each time we returned, we rejoined the rhythm of Kailash, not trying to pick up where we left off, but meeting the space where it had grown to.

Twice, we reached a point where it looked like Kailash might have outlived its purpose. The number of residents dropped dramatically, and we began to wonder if the building should be repur-

posed, maybe handed over to someone else, or used for a different kind of youth project.

But each time that idea was voiced, word spread like wildfire.

Suddenly, youth from across Auroville, those who were too young to move in yet, or just old enough, started showing up, calling, messaging. They made it clear: this place still mattered. They wanted to move in. They wanted us to keep it alive.

It was a powerful reminder that the need hadn't gone away. The younger generation still saw Kailash as theirs.

Life, love and loss

Living in community means embracing the full spectrum of life. Over the years, we've experienced so much within these walls.

One resident passed away. That was a devastating moment for all of us.

There was one instance of aggression, which was difficult to navigate but not defining of the community. It became part of the collective learning.

On the brighter side, we've also seen love blossom. Two residents who met in Kailash went on to build a life together and now have three children. Another couple who lived here later wrote to us from abroad, sharing that they had a baby too.

In that way, Kailash doesn't end at its walls. Its story carries on in new families, in people who've learned how to live together, how to care for each other, and how to take ownership of their lives.

We've also been challenged, not so much by external threats, but by assumptions. When the Crown Road was built, and people started speeding along it, any teenager seen riding fast was assumed to be from Kailash. It didn't matter whether they were or not. The label stuck easily. It became an easy place to project fear or blame.

But Kailash has never been a place of chaos. It's been a place of structure, responsibility, and community, one that always held strong.

The end of a chapter

After 25 years of growth, Kailash suddenly found itself in the middle of what we understand as a political storm and a plan for centralising and restructuring Auroville's assets and activities.

It began with a single ground-floor room. Funds had been tight during the original construction, and Arlet, who ran a reflexology school, needed space. In exchange for using the room to teach her final-year course, she financed its completion. This sparked an idea: the room could serve as an incubator for educational projects.

Over the years, it housed various initiatives, from a children's library to a clinic. While not all were strictly educational, they served community needs. After the Clinic, Koodam, the conflict-resolution group, used that space. As Auroville's internal tensions grew, one faction of the Working Committee, excluded from Town Hall, joined in using the space in 2022.

On the 5th of May 2025 the FAMC issued an ultimatum: vacate the office in days, the entire building by month's end. No conversation. No notice. Just a directive addressed to "the residents of Kailash" on the Kailash email ID.

A project without a voice

The email wasn't copied to SAIHER, under whose educational umbrella Kailash has always existed. SAIHER objected, citing its mandate and funding. As a response, the asset was transferred to Housing.

No one contacted us caretakers directly, as executives, or as people who've birthed, parented, held, breathed and lived this project for over 25 years.

The youth living here were told to vacate by 31 May. It was exam season, 15 April to 16 June, and they studied under the weight of uncertainty, with no transition plan, no support.

An extension was then granted till 16 June, not because of any real discussion, but simply because there was no prior thinking nor planning for the repurposing of the building.

Now, we're in direct contact with Housing about a handover. But it's not a dialogue. It's a conclusion. Kailash is no more and it will be repurposed.

What happens to the spirit?

We meet with the residents regularly. Recently, there was a beautiful meeting, honest, raw, and moving. They spoke about the spirit of Kailash, and how those who've lived here carry it forward with them.

But it's hard. It's painful. Because the way this is happening, without conversation, without care, it reflects something deeper. It says something about the Auroville of today.

Just as the founding of Kailash reflected a community that was open to need, the abrupt clo-

sure reflects a community where that space seems to have shrunk. It's not necessarily forever. But it is what is right now.

What hurts most is the lack of acknowledgement. The lack of understanding of what this space has been, for individuals, for families, for the collective, and how it covered a need.

Over the years, more than 170 youth have lived in Kailash. They've written to us since this news broke. Former residents, parents, people who still feel the imprint of this place. I asked people to write and share what Kailash meant to them, hoping that those letters might help the decision-makers understand.

Instead, the response was that this was "nostalgia". That people who had left Auroville were clinging to old memories. That those letters were backward-facing, and that Auroville needed to leap into the future.

They said if one day, in the future, we still feel the need for Kailash, we can fundraise, get permissions, and build it again.

As if Kailash didn't already exist. As if exactly all of that had not already been done because of a real need. As if it weren't full of life and thriving, today, now.

All the residents have been told to leave. Some have already gone. Others are packing, or waiting to see if anything changes. But the sense is clear, this is the end of this Kailash.

The Foundation wants to centralise everything under a pyramidal structure. Decisions now move through narrow channels. Housing says they can't decide anything unless the FAMC approves it. And the FAMC isn't speaking to us directly.

A celebration, and a farewell

With the 16 June extension in hand, we've begun to plan a final celebration of Kailash, something meaningful, inside the building itself, before it changes form.

It's hard to say what will happen next. But the feeling among the residents is clear. This is the end of something. The end of a time. The end of a space that was never just bricks and rooms, but a lived experience. A bridge between childhood and adulthood. A painting made by many hands.

Maybe, someday, it will return in another form. Maybe in this building. Maybe somewhere else.

But right now, we are witnessing the close of a chapter, not just for Kailash, but for a version of Auroville itself.

And that deserves to be honored.

Carrying the spirit forward

The discussions with the residents gave me a sliver of hope. Not in the structure, but in the spirit. They said something I will carry with me for a long time:

"The spirit of Kailash lives in us. Every resident of Kailash is its continuation."

That's true. Even if the building changes, even if the sign comes down, what they've lived will travel with them. It will shape how they relate to others, how they build community wherever they go. Maybe it will guide the spaces they create one day.

Still, it's painful. Painful to see a place that once represented Auroville's openness to youth now feels like an afterthought. A structure to be "reallocated" by those who don't even ask what it meant. Who haven't walked its corridors. Who haven't known the smell of the kitchen on cooking night or the sound of a Monday meeting slowly becoming something deeper than logistics.

But I also know this: Kailash didn't fail.

It didn't end because it broke. It ended because the space around it changed.

That change may one day shift again. Maybe Kailash, or something like it, will return. Maybe the children of today's residents will find a home under its name. Maybe the spirit will find new walls.

Letting go, with love

I've cried a lot these past weeks. Been angry. Had headaches. Felt crushed by the weight of it all. But I've also found a still place inside me. A place of trust. I know that when something real is built with sincerity and service, it leaves a trace that can't be erased, not entirely.

And maybe this is what life in Auroville has always been. A cycle of building and letting go. Of answering a call, holding it for as long as it's needed, and then stepping back when the time comes. Kailash was never mine. It was always ours. And its story now belongs to those who lived it, and to those who might dream of it again.

So as we prepare our farewell, we celebrate.

Not just the place, but the time it represents. The Auroville that said yes to something beautiful, bold, and quietly revolutionary.

And perhaps, in that celebration, we plant a seed for whatever comes next.

Kripa, in conversation with Chandra

Rosa's Awareness Through the Body journey in South America

For almost two decades, Rosa lived in Auroville, immersed in the transformative work of Awareness Through the Body (ATB). Now she is bringing ATB workshops and advanced training to South America and plans to work with educators and trauma therapists in underserved areas, providing training that facilitates trauma release and inner balance.

Before Rosa found the conscious movement practice, her spiritual journey began in the villages and jungles of Guatemala, searching for deeper meaning in a corner of the world marked by existential intensity. At 17, Rosa first traveled to Guatemala as a volunteer. By 20, she had become a teacher and moved permanently into the jungle, where she would live for another 11 years. It was a time of civil unrest and trauma. Her work extended beyond education: she accompanied exhumation teams and provided support to workers and surviving family members. In her final two years in Guatemala, she was asked by a bishop to take testimony from torture survivors, community leaders targeted to instill fear and dismantle resistance.

Many of those testimonies shared a haunting common thread: a detachment from fear, an inner clarity even in the face of death. Some victims, in their final moments, asked their torturers, "Brother, what are you doing?" Rosa realised that beneath these violent stories, there was a hidden force, an inner freedom and awareness that sparked her own transformation. After participating in the exhumation of 97 individuals, she felt hatred for the first time in her life. But instead of letting it consume her, she began to wonder: Is it possible to not hate? To see the soul of those who commit harm?

This question led her to India.

Discovering the inner landscape

Rosa immersed herself in India's spirituality, traveling to far away temples and Vipassana retreats to find stillness. In the deep stillness of Vipassana practice, she found a continuation of her previous experiences. "What are you doing?" her mind asked, "You're wasting your life." But in the silence and sweat of meditation halls near Pondicherry, something shifted. In the deep stillness, the presence of the inner witness became stronger. With this new sense of clarity, Rosa discovered ATB.

ATB was the missing piece. "This is it," she thought. "The path where you stop being a puppet." With ATB, Rosa found a way to channel that clarity and detachment she had once seen in survivors into embodied awareness. The work wasn't therapy, yet it was deeply healing. While practicing, she felt her body release tensions she didn't know she held. How powerful this could be for war survivors in Guatemala, she thought.

Her first ATB students were children. Then came teenagers. Then adults. After more than 15 years in Auroville, Rosa knew it was time to return and share the gift of ATB.

The call of South America

It began with a group of women from Patagonia who were visiting Auroville. Their leader asked for "just a few hours" of ATB. Rosa gave them two. Afterward, someone said: "What a pity this never reaches Patagonia." That simple comment seeded an idea.

She asked Aloka, one of the two creators of ATB together with Joan Sala, to mention this on their website, just in case anyone was interested. Within a week, she was receiving messages from across Argentina: Buenos Aires, Mar del Plata, Patagonia, Córdoba. "I am not a very organised person, but I do know how to follow signs. I trust. I know clearly it's all about surrender." – Rosa followed the signs. She invited Francesco, a fellow ATB facilitator, to join. He stayed for three months; Rosa stayed in South America for two years.

Together, they planted the seeds of ATB across the continent. Over the last eight years, Rosa has offered workshops in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic. Even during the COVID pandemic, trapped in a mountain ashram in Argentina, she continued the

work, recording and sharing daily practices on YouTube.

Mexico and the signs that guide us

Eight years ago, someone from Auroville told her she must go to Mexico. She didn't. When she finally arrived, it wasn't for a formal training, it was to visit a couple from the ATB Saturday group in Auroville. In Ciudad de Mexico, she found communities wrestling with youth suicides.

She offered a weekend intensive. Participants felt the need to expand on the weekend training: This needs to be a full training. Others echoed the need. Another woman from Mexico had already been attending the ATB trainings in Colombia. Rosa felt a calling.

Still, organising formal training in some places was not yet possible. In rural Guatemala, for instance, the women she worked with came with babies slung to their backs. During one paired exercise with blindfolds and sound, even the babies began to hum. The humming of the children was so powerful, it amplified the experience of the class. Her dream is to one day provide child care so these women can fully participate in trainings.



Rosa Aleman Lopez, third from left, with Francesco, second from right, and a group of South American students from their advanced workshop in Colombia

remarkable openness. Rosa described it as powerful and sincere: "You could feel the depth of their aspiration."

On the closing day, reflections revealed how transformative the experience had been – not just as training, but as a personal transformation. Participants from across South and Central America left not only with tools, but a sense of belonging to something greater. Now, many are becoming facilitators in training – each preparing to extend ATB in their regions.

For Rosa, the most moving part was the unity that emerged: "We're not just different nationalities. Ultimately, we're one."

Europe and the next chapter

After 18 months in South America, Rosa is returning to Europe. In August and September 2025, she will lead workshops in Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary. In Bulgaria, she will work with facilitators serving youth in areas affected by war and poverty. A Europe-wide ATB project has also been approved, gathering selected participants from across the continent. Back in South America, the work continues. In Rosa's words, it's not about organisation or control. "Maybe that's why this work was for me," she says, "Just to follow the heart's guidance."

And so she follows – each whisper, each invitation, each quiet call from the soul.

Ioana



Workshops and breakthroughs

In Colombia, a woman attending a basic training invited Rosa to deliver ATB 1 & 2 to 20 employees from her large company. Rosa was hesitant, these participants hadn't chosen the work. For the first two days, they struggled. Many had never meditated. But something shifted. By day five, people were in tears. "I never knew this space existed inside me." A true breakthrough had happened.

Rosa has learned to surrender. She doesn't make detailed plans. She follows signs. Sometimes, when she's unsure, a whisper comes at night. Or someone reaches out. The path unfolds.

Deepening the work

In 2025, after over a year of basic ATB workshops across Latin America, Rosa and Francesco reunited to offer their first Advanced ATB Training in Colombia. Held at an ashram nestled in nature, the nine-day retreat provided the ideal setting for deep inner work. Participants came from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico.

Rather than diving straight into advanced content, the training began by restoring participants' attention and presence – what Rosa called "sharpening the attention". Only then did they move into exploring the five elements – Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Ether – through embodied practices that linked outer nature with inner awareness.

The final days focussed on the evolution of consciousness, drawing from the vision of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Despite many being new to their teachings, participants engaged with



This article was originally published in AVI-USA's May 2025 eConnect Newsletter in connection with a fundraising appeal to support Rosa's work in South America (<https://aviusa.org/rosas-atb-journey/>).

Beauty: cultivating an attitude of humility

La Revue d'Auroville: Do you think it's possible to define a specific type of beauty in Auroville?

Jyoti: For me, the beauty specific to Auroville is the beauty of spontaneity, in any field. It's something profoundly meaningful. India already has this spontaneity, but in Auroville, because of our intention, we experiment with a structured and conscious approach in order to create a vessel to capture that spontaneity. Of course, we have beautiful natural surroundings and an international community, which makes Auroville something truly beautiful and unique. But this spontaneity is something that exists independently of us and which we cherish, even though what manifests is often not what we expected.

We create a social structure, rules and regulations, but this spontaneous beauty always goes beyond all that, and in the end, we change, we adjust, and we smile at each other – that is the beauty of Auroville. It's subtly playful and unexpected. What we plan doesn't manifest as we projected it, because we are meant to work together. Therefore, it transcends individualistic approaches. Something else emerges, and this "something else" can ultimately be appreciated as both process and result. That's the beauty of Auroville: it consists of an intangible aspect (which is the most important), which also leads to a tangible one.

There's a gradual disappearance of the beauty that once surrounded us. People involved in works (like the Crown Road or the developments around the Matrimandir) claim that for now they're building the road, the lake, and that beauty will be added "later." What do you think of this reasoning?

I have to speak from the Japanese context. We Japanese are influenced by animism, by Shinto – we live close to nature and collaborate with it. That's the essence of the Japanese psyche and culture. Harmony is essential. To live in harmony, we cannot begin by imposing our ideas. First, before doing anything, we must study nature, the environment, everything around us, the context of the project, the people, and the whole society. We cannot impose our ideas on nature and the environment. For that, we must cultivate an attitude of humility. Not to try to impose our ideas. That is essential.

Beauty is the result of our aspiration toward harmony. The more we aspire to harmony, the more we arrive at beauty. That is our challenge. Of course, our context is international, and Auroville is located in India, and there are the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We must of course consider all three. But no one should claim they understand the ideals of Auroville, of Sri Aurobindo, or of the Mother. We need space for constant progress, space for collaboration. We must not fill this space with ideology and ego. No one owns the greater truth.

So we must start with an aspiration to manifest the highest beauty – something no one has ever seen! Beauty is not something you find in the programs of a computer like copy and paste. In Auroville's context, we actually still don't know what kind of beauty we are trying to manifest.

Personally, given my origins and background, I can bring something of Japanese beauty, of Japanese aesthetics – but that's not the goal in Auroville. We must manifest beauty in an "Aurovilian" way. That's what I try to do. And for that, we need to aspire to integral beauty, just as we aspire to integral yoga: beauty in planning, beauty in communication, obviously beauty in the attitude toward the project, and of course, when we come to infrastructure, we must think about safety. Safety is also linked to beauty. All of this contributes to the integral beauty of the project – whether it's the Crown Road or the Matrimandir lake.

What I believe is that the Matrimandir was a great achievement. And we must aspire for all Auroville projects to come from an aspiration as high as the one that led to the Matrimandir. They must all be of that same quality or aspire even higher. Every project should be a child of the Matrimandir.

But, for example, the Crown Road is in total contradiction with the Matrimandir's realisation, with Auroville's aspiration. One cannot feel the Matrimandir's presence in the Crown Road. The Matrimandir is for now the highest material manifestation of Auroville, and after that, we must not aim lower.

I also have doubts about how the Matrimandir lake project is progressing. Some people in charge say: "Beauty will come later." For some people, unfortunately, beauty is just a superficial addition, or just on the surface. That's a problem. Whether for the Crown Road or the lake, these two projects are

being carried out hastily. Moreover, they're being carried out in a way I would call capitalistic – in the sense of: "We have this much of money, so we can do this." But that's not true. This precisely separates us from the deeper connection with the matter. Money is not the first element to consider, whatever the decision to take. In my opinion, that's a backward attitude.

You could say that money is just the fuel for the vehicle, not the reason for choosing a destination.

I worked on the Matrimandir and noticed this haste in many people. As long as they are in charge, they want to get as much done as possible, without deeply caring for quality or the future. They want to manifest quickly, with excitement. For me, that is contradictory – it's a false attitude. If we don't have the sufficient funds or the right plans or drawings, we should not start – otherwise, it will be a disaster.

When I worked there as part of the management team, I noticed significant issues at the Matrimandir. Besides the general rush, a major organisational problem concerns donations that are earmarked for development projects. Usually, the Matrimandir only receives enough monthly donations to maintain existing infrastructure, pay worker salaries, and partly compensate Aurovilian workers.

Developments like the lake and gardens largely depend on independent donors. But when non-Aurovilian donors lead projects with very specific ideas about how they should be done, they are no longer in the hands of Aurovilians. They may bring in designers, consultants, engineers, and material suppliers from abroad or other Indian states – but they don't necessarily understand the ideal of Auroville or the reality on the ground. They may not really have experience with Auroville's harsh climate conditions.

In my 20 years living in Auroville, spending most of the year here, I can confidently say it really takes time to understand Auroville and the living expression of this place. Above all, patience and humility are essential qualities for deeper understanding – and they don't necessarily go along with linear, result-oriented planning or a capitalist mindset.



PHOTO: MONNA ERI

Beauty and harmony must also be integrated into the field of organisation. Intellectual understanding of Auroville is not enough, or rather it is detrimental. I often see that personal convictions contradict the essence of collective growth. What seems most important to me is to truly integrate and live the knowledge, and to cultivate a deeper sense of being in this dynamic and diverse society. I humbly believe what The Mother said – "No words, acts!" – is anchored in this clarity; but some people vulgarly interpret it as "We must do this, we don't care what others say!"

The Matrimandir is truly an intense place for *sadhana* and transformation. We must be especially careful because of the powerful energy it generates. In my view, the Matrimandir constantly reveals both our light and our hidden shadows. It often inflates our ego. Everyone is exposed in the same way to its energy, and we must remain humble and deeply sincere in facing the experiences and challenges that the Matrimandir constantly brings.

Why this haste?

It seems that some people want to see tangible achievements and results in the very short term – that is, while they are still in charge, or still young, or still have money to spend. Unfortunately, I observe this impatience in many areas of Auroville, and the Matrimandir is no exception.

Our task is to manifest a beauty that humanity has not yet seen. Imposing old mindsets or applying rigid, outdated methods leaves no space to reach our goal. To create never-before-seen beauty, we need a new mindset, a new method, and above all, a new and open attitude. We must recognise that we still

Jyoti Naoki Eri was born in Kyoto, Japan, to accomplished artist parents. He trained as a sculptor in Japan through a traditional apprenticeship process. With his family, he participated in national and international projects for years, including temples, museums, and numerous private projects.

He discovered Auroville during a trip to India, without any prior knowledge. From the first day of his visit to the Matrimandir, it became his home, and has remained so for the past twenty years. Currently, he works in various fields of art and design such as painting, ceramics, graphic design, landscape and spatial design. Since the Covid lockdown, he has also been involved in sound art. At a time when we are lamenting the recent degradation and disfigurement of certain corners of Auroville, *La Revue d'Auroville* asked him about his approach to beauty.



PHOTO: MONNA ERI

do not know. That should be the first step in building a new society for the future.

Beauty must be present from the beginning. Beauty must be integral. And that includes the process! Because in the end, beauty will be a conscious manifestation of the process. It's the same as yoga: we can't skip the process. But that's what's happening now. We're even skipping the decision-making process! We're taking shortcuts in our collective yoga.

Do you believe this is "repairable," that the ugliness that has invaded Auroville can be eliminated? When we see what is planned for Darkali and these other areas, it's frightening.

What they're doing in Darkali is very dangerous – for workers, for animals, for nature. It's the result of a purely mental process. Maybe they are using certain criteria – but the path of the heart is absent.

Of course, we probably cannot completely eliminate concrete and other materials – but we can

nity, to restore smiles to the community, and to make sure people can greet each other again when they cross paths.

At the same time, if we learn from this situation, we can do better in the future. There's a certain naivety in our approach. We invoke the Mother, we wait for her intervention – and so we act less. Actually, we should act as if there were no Divine. We must do all we can, do our best – whether for society or for the progress of our yoga – and once that is done, we can wait for the Mother's intervention. That's how I see it.

"Help yourself, and Heaven will help you"?

Yes, something like that. Of course, I believe the Divine is always there. But we should not rely excessively on the hope of divine intervention, resting on it. It may seem contradictory, but if we are to go beyond the human, we must use all human potential. Otherwise, we cannot truly move forward.

We can't leave things as they are – not the infrastructure, not the roads, not the decision-making process, not the present state of Town Hall, etc. We'll need to rework each element. In the same way that we must use all our human potential to transcend humanity, we'll also need to strive to transcend current material achievements, allowing them to become a higher manifestation of themselves.

I've always dreamed that Auroville's roads would be built by Aurovilians. The symbol and the life must come together. Paving the roads by us Aurovilians means paving the roads for the future. It's not just for Auroville – it's also for human society. And it's okay if it takes time to finish these roads, even twenty years – but we must pave the roads with our own hands.

And we'll be proud of it collectively, and we'll be able to show them – and even after a few hundred years, they'll still be there. And later people will understand what we did, what we tried to achieve, and what we actually accomplished.

The Matrimandir could be manifested through great effort and constant challenges. Whatever challenges arose, Aurovilians and workers kept working on the site. It took 40 years to complete. Is it justified to question the time it took, whether it was too long or too short? It's the process that matters! The question must always be "how" we manifest something – not how long it took or how much it cost.

For me, it's also important to understand that work on the Matrimandir is never finished. Our ongoing task is to keep its presence alive and prevent the Matrimandir from becoming a conventional temple. We humans tend to find comfort in dogmas and rules. Even in Auroville, we tend to reproduce them – which goes against its very purpose. We must not underestimate this task.

If, in a few thousand years, Auroville no longer exists, perhaps people will excavate and find ruins of the Matrimandir, buildings, and roads. They will see the materialization of our aspiration as a message that we tried something. We tried to manifest and reach greater beauty by overcoming human limitations.

Our inspiration will inspire future people, just as ancient Egypt, Greece, Tibet, and many others inspire us. It's not that they didn't struggle to manifest their unique beauty. There must have been great struggle behind their achievements. In the end, they were probably grateful and saw all the challenges they had to overcome as necessary.

In conversation with Christine

The original version of this interview appeared in La Revue d'Auroville of October 2024.

Bits of Boris

Boris Verjoutski, who passed away in April of this year, regularly contributed his observations of the natural world and human behaviour to Auroville’s weekly “News & Notes” community newsletter. Here is a sampling of his thoughts and musings collected by Mauna from 2018 – 2024 (slightly condensed and edited for clarity). [See also “Passings” in AV Today # 430, May 2025].

On science and yoga

For more than twenty years I worked legally in the Soviet Science Academy, and I practiced illegally yoga for fifteen years. I started from Hatha Yoga, Pranayama and was (not officially) in the society of Agni Yoga – Yoga of Fire. Now Agni Yoga is very popular in Russia. I was a workaholic – I was happy to do something for science. When I started my life in yoga, I understood: science is nothing compared with yoga. Hiroshima and Nagasaki, chemical pesticides and artificial manure – that is all science, not yoga.

In the Russian language, there is a word *vedima* – witch. Nowadays this word has a negative significance, but a long time ago it had a good Sanskrit meaning: “mother who knows”. Yoga gives joy, health, wisdom for all the people of the world. It is from God. Science on the other hand can be, at times, from the *asuras*.

(Nov 2018)

On oceans and seas

If we can in any yellow submarine fall in the oceanic bottom, we can see that wonderful world. I understand well the English song lyric: “Mother Earth, carry me back to the sea”. Can I incarnate again as a dolphin and play joyfully with the waves?

(April 2019)

On beauty and ugliness

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever.” (John Keats, “Endymion”) Some people are very beautiful: Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, Leonardo da Vinci, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Leo Tolstoy, etc.

But many human beings hate one another. According to the Latin proverb, *homo homini lupus est* – “one man is a wolf for another man”. They started the wars, created nuclear bombs, chemical pesticides, deforestation of the planet...

Once I walked with my two long sticks between Center Guest House and Solar Kitchen. Opposite me about 100 children moved on bicycles, together with some adults. One of these adults (evidently a teacher) stopped near me and said: “Auroville is beautiful.” Of course, I agreed with him. Auroville is a fine example of collaboration of beautiful people with beautiful nature. But it was an ugly place before 1968 – semi-desert landscape, erosion. Sunny beams fell here and return to the cosmos. It’s called entropy.

But now we have the opposite process in our beautiful city: the numerous plants catch the sunny days and use them for photosynthesis, they create oxygen and biomass. The ecosystem of Auroville is almost perfect. It is an example for the hope of mankind; the future of *Homo sapiens* is not only dark in perspective.

(July 2020)

On nature

If the human population on Earth is growing in geometrical progression, Nature creates its own limit – the pandemy of virus. *Est modus in rebus* – “there is a measure in things”. This expression belongs to Horacius, Rome’s poet. It is true in any time. People became the slaves of industry, machines. But Nature repeats again and again: “I am living and not so weak.” It can give more lessons to mankind.

Auroville shows the positive way for humanity: it needs collaboration with nature, not confrontation. Nature awaits from us *amicus curiae*– friendly care.

(Dec 2020)

On the ‘Sunlit Path’

Sri Aurobindo received a classical Western-education in England, studying, for example, Latin and Greek language. In Latin there is an expression: *sol omnibus lucet* – “the sun shines for everybody”. But in India the sun is hotter than in England. Many Englishmen used the sun-helmet in India, but not in their homeland. His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, was born in cool Tibet. He visited Auroville in 1973 and 1993. He said in 1993: “Twenty years ago it was difficult to find the shadows in the city, but now this problem has disappeared.” The name of the sun in Greek is Helios. Biologists use the special term: heliotropism.

There is a famous Latin expression: *lux ex oriente* – “Light from the East”. Of course, we see sunrise not in the west, but in the east. The Mother arrived in India twice, the second time from Japan. She liked that country so much, especially Japanese children. They have nice names – *Shigeko* (luxuriant child), *Hanako* (flower child). I also like the Indian name *Surya* – sun.

(Dec 2020)

On Auroville and youth

Sometimes it seems that Auroville is a city of utopia, its dwellers are idealistic ones and they haven’t a practical future. I arrived in Auroville almost thirty years ago, in 1991. Then I saw a child in every Aurovilian. And now my vision isn’t changed. It is a city of very young people who created their own young world. This reality has a great perspective. The physical and spiritual atmosphere of the city creates the constant youth of Aurovilians. In both hemispheres of our planet the air is polluted.

(Jan 2021)

On living creatures

For Aurovilians, the respect of serpents is a part of the normal ecological consciousness. Let every God’s creature feel comfortable and safe in our city.

(July 2021)

On visas and magic

I arrived in India on 21 September 1991 [*when he was 54 years old, eds*]. It was for me a really new world, a magic world. I had only a tourist visa for three months and lived in Auroville with it for five years. Magic, fairytale! Everything is possible with Divine help.

(2021)

On speed

“Don’t hurry, be happy.” Of course, I felt more happy on the bicycle than any people on motorbikes. According to the Roman wisdom, “*festina lente*” – “be in hurry slowly”.

One Aurovilian used a motorbike and met a holy cow on the road. He was sure that it would be easy for him to pass the creature without problem. But man conjectures; God disposes. The cow suddenly changed direction – and this unhappy Aurovilian fell and lost his consciousness.

The animal moved with natural speed but man – with supernatural speed. Crime and punishment.

(Jan 2022)

On motorbikes

On 2 January, there were two meetings – one in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium and the second in the Bharat Nivas parking place. An ocean of motorbikes were before the Bharat Nivas gate. Of course, these motorbikes don’t need forests or wildlife. What they need are roads. Plants produce oxygen, motorbikes are exhausting gas.

(Jan 2022)



On the ‘road to hell’

Mankind is killing the biosphere of the planet. But there is a boomerang principle: evil returns to its source. The Mother wrote: “*Each one seeks his own balance in order to stabilise himself.*” Human beings named themselves *Homo sapiens*. In Latin, *sapiens* means “wise”. Maybe a better name is *Homo a-sapientissimus*.

Environment and people are one. Sri Aurobindo thought that yoga is in a state of *samata* – equality to all things. For thirty years I lived in Auroville and I was always sure that a spiritual Green City is the future of civilisation. Was it Maya, illusion? Would it transform in the hierarchy of roads like any common city with bad health and without a future? Will it be a system of black roads instead of green Divine anarchy? No, no, no! I want to breathe the living oxygen of plants and do not want to live in the atmosphere of exhaustion-gas.

We cannot betray the first Aurovilians’ dreams and use an involuntary path instead of evolution. They created a green world by their own hands, but now a herd of machines starts to destroy it. Human beings are diurnal creatures – normally active during the day. Asuric force is in attack day and night. Aurovilians created the forest slowly, according to the natural laws. But the power of darkness wants to destroy it very quickly, before a resistance will be strong enough.

The Mother wrote: “*Time presses: the divine powers must come, O Lord, to the help of the agonised earth... Hear us, for we must conquer at any price.*”

There is an ancient rule: *primum ne noceas* – “first, do no harm”. Let there be creativity, not destruction. The planet is in a dangerous sickness. Our Kurukshetra battlefield for its healing is here, in Auroville. We cannot retreat on this field. The real yogi can transform a poison into honey. Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and all Aurovilians who have passed on – their spirit is with us, we are invincible.

All the nature of the world helps us too. Our weapon is in the old Indian principle *ahimsa* – nonviolence, and compassion. Let go to hell violence with its bulldozers, police, bands from villages, night attacks, destroying greeneries and buildings. Nike, the goddess of victory, is with spiritual people against murderous technology.

(Feb 2022)

On a Green Tribunal in Auroville

We urgently need our own Tribunal in our city for the trial of the direct and indirect killers of the ecosystems, soil in Auroville 4th-10th December of the last year [See AV Today # 390, Jan 2021]. It needs to punish them for the tragedy, disaster, catastrophe of these

days, for unprecedented violence in the city. In the first years of Auroville the pioneers gave life to dead ground, but in December the eco-criminals killed this life.

The Mother wrote: “*Look at the flowers and trees. When the sun sets and all becomes silent, sit down for a moment and put yourself into communion with Nature. You will feel rising from the earth, from below the roots of the trees...*”

It will be right if the Tribunal will decide to keep the life’s killers sitting on the place of their crime before the new life again appears instead of lifeless “clearing”. Auroville will use the sunlit path, not a pogrom for life. Let the criminals pay for their crazy, lunatic actions. Why would some Aurovilians stop the merciless violence? The spirit of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother helped them. Let’s publish the lists of the names of both sides: the murders of ecosystems and the heroes which stopped the enemies of life.

Sri Aurobindo wrote: “*Brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul.*” Can the bulldozers, roads, motorbikes have souls? Never! All forms of life are the brothers and sisters for the human beings, but the Asuric force uses the soulless technique for its dark goals.

In December last year the poisonous snake crawled into the city and its venom killed the harmony in Auroville. On 20 December there was a meeting in the Unity Pavilion with a very bad atmosphere, great noise. Narad successfully used an antidote, magic sound “OM” against that disbalance.

The Mother once went to a lecture in Paris about travelling in India. The lecturer was not interesting, but once he pronounced the sacred sound “OM” and for the Mother this sound-mantra filled all the world for some time. Ancient achievement doesn’t lose its power in our days. The great wisdom was born in the forests, not in “cleared” places.

The initiators of 4 – 10 December events opened Pandora’s Box; they brought a Trojan horse into Auroville. Their actions must receive the suitable reaction. Let there be a Green Tribunal in Auroville.

(Mar 2022)

From sin to butterflies

If a Catholic asks God to forgive his sin, he is told: *mea culpa* (my sin). *Mea maxima culpa* (my biggest sin) is that I forgot the Japanese word for butterfly. Italian composer Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1929) created the opera Madama Butterfly (*chio chio san*).

(2022)

On animals

Auroville has some animal farms, they are not similar to George Orwell’s Animal Farm, where animals revolted against humans with the motto: “Four legs are good, two legs – bad.” I think ants and termites can say: “Six legs are best” and spiders: “Eight legs are better.”

Not long ago, Prof. N. Numen in Sri Lanka wrote the remarkable lines: “Do not insult animals, animals are friends of human beings. You and I cannot live in a world without animals, animals do not throw bombs and kill people.”

Animals cannot live without plants, but plants need animals too. Bees and butterflies pollinate flowers. The wildlife of Auroville is the biocenosis of plants and animals. The great trees banyan and peepal live in symbiosis with pollinators – the tiny wasps.

The biocenosis of Auroville is an ecosystem, a product of long evolution. New roads in the city are like knives which murder the natural body. These roads are a part of the global attacks of industry against nature. Asuric forces now are very strong but darkness will be defeated, light will win.

Industry was born in England. The colonial regime of India was born in this country. But *Lux ex Oriente* – “Light is from the East”. The evil of the west is too weak for light. Industrial and colonial power retreats.

A long time ago, in England, they killed off the last of the wolves. The country doesn’t have full biodiversity. In India the last cheetah was killed in 1947, but now some specimens of the species were brought from Africa.

(Jan 2024)

On Love in the Matrimandir gardens

The Matrimandir gardens are a very lovely place. Patricia and I visited it and she received from Kartik two nice plants. Now her balcony garden is exactly like the Matrimandir gardens.

I received from Kartik a beautiful flower *Hibiscus mutabilis*. According to the Mother, its spiritual name is “Divine Grace”. The Mother commented: “*Thy goodness is infinite. We bow before Thee in gratitude.*”

Many flowers and butterflies are in the Matrimandir gardens. There is symbiosis of plants and animals. Sometimes people call butterflies “flying flowers”. The scientific name of butterflies is *Lepidoptera* which means “scale wings”. Some years ago, in Auroville appeared one fellow from Odessa University (Ukraine). He was a lepidopterologist and could identify butterflies in flight. It is a pity that he isn’t in Auroville now.

In the Matrimandir gardens, I found a dead butterfly. My attempt to identify it was without success. I named it Mystery butterfly. Maybe it died from loving flowers and before its death it sang a love song, “*O sole mio*”.

(Oct 2024)

A soundtrack of growing up

Manya Sekar, who came to Auroville in her teens, will soon start pursuing her higher education at Oberlin College in the USA. Here she talks about her experience in Auroville.



I arrived in Auroville at age 12 knowing I wanted to keep singing. Having learnt Carnatic music since kindergarten, singing was one of the few things I wished to bring with me and carry forward. During my first months in Auroville, I found it very difficult to adjust to my new surroundings and new way of living. At the awkward-tween stage of life I was in, I wanted very much to blend in to the crowd, and was inclined to be resentful of everything I tried. But the Auroville Youth Choir managed to enliven me when nothing else did. Rehearsals and concerts soon became a fundamental part of my life here.

The choir concerts are always a mix of classical, folk, and contemporary music. My first year in choir, we focused on classical and Baroque compositions, which we only managed to perform the second year due to Covid. The colours of our outfits for each concert always, sometimes unintentionally, reflect and embody the general mood of the songs chosen that year, and always influence how I approach each concert. For my first concert we wore black, which brought out the elegance of the classical pieces. The next year we wore red for our program centered around bold, vibrant contemporary songs and the year after, green for that year's hopeful folk songs.

I've been in Auroville for six years now, during which I've changed schools and been part of so many other activities, but choir is the only thing I've done consistently for all six years. No matter what would happen in my life, through the ups and downs of my teenage years, I have always, at least, known what I would be doing every Saturday from 2 to 3:30pm. The sense of comfort and stability the choir has given me is irreplaceable.

All of us in choir are different ages and from different schools and in different friend groups, but somehow so much of that gets left outside the door when we step in. The faces around me every weekend have changed year to year, but this remains.

And though there are so many people in choir that I don't interact with during the rest of the week, and don't necessarily consider myself friends with, there is something about seeing people so regularly, every week for six years, that has made them strangely dear to me. It really has felt like a family, or at least a very large sports team – this group of fifty or so who share so many jokes and references and, of course, know so many of the same songs. It's an odd feeling to realise you're going to miss so many people even though you've barely said two sentences to some of them these past years.

When I joined the choir, I was terrified and in awe of the 'seniors' who led the group with such confidence. It was so surprising to look around at the beginning of the previous season and realise I was the oldest person in the room. It feels like the choir has watched me grow up.

Concerts are such a major highlight at the end of every school year. The audience watches an hour-long performance, but for us, it means so much more. Our extra rehearsals on Thursday night, arguing over which colour to wear, resting all day before the concert and then warming up and getting ready backstage while we listen to CRIPA fill up with the audience. And after, when your friends swarm you backstage with flowers, as you take in that the choir season has ended, and summer has begun.

I have never known an Auroville without choir as part of my life, and it has come to be so deeply intertwined with my experience here and the person I've grown into. Growing too old for the youth choir, in some senses, symbolises that I'm not going to be a teenager much longer, and brings it home to me that I've also grown too old for my established pattern of life here. I think I'm still trying to come to terms with that.

Manya

REFLECTION

Auroville & soft rebellion

Four years into this crisis, I find myself searching for clarity on how we move forward. Yesterday, I came across a series of writings by Shannon Willis on Soft Rebellion that articulated what many of us have been intuitively practicing all along.

Willis describes soft rebellion as “the mycelial strategy of weaving beneath the surface, unsettling rigid structures with slow, persistent entanglement”. Reading this, I immediately thought of our community's response these past years.

When the AVFO seized our communications platforms, we created alternative channels. When they bulldozed the Youth Centre, we didn't respond with equivalent force – we found new spaces to gather. When they dismantled our Working Committee, we continued recognising our duly selected representatives.

This is exactly what Willis means when she writes: “Soft rebellion does not meet violence with a mirrored fist but with the supple intelligence of the willow, bending just enough to redirect the force and send it spiraling elsewhere.”

The most powerful part of Willis's framework is what she calls “sanctuary networks”. She

explains that “authoritarianism thrives on isolation, on making people feel like they stand alone”. Our response has been precisely what she describes: “building underground networks of care – mutual aid, resource sharing, protection”.

We've created these networks – but let's be honest, they remain fragile and incomplete. Some of us still fall through the cracks. When about 200 Aurovilians suddenly lost their maintenances, our community support systems were stretched thin. When residents are being targeted with vindictive actions, many of us prefer to pretend all is fine, because fear is creeping in. Many are exhausted from what Willis calls “engagement fatigue” as the assault becomes constant.

I've seen this fatigue in myself and others. There are days when, after another announcement of land exchanges, budget cuts and other abuses of power, hope feels distant. Willis acknowledges this reality when she writes: “And so I am writing this for everyone who, like me, has tried to outrun the fire only to become the kindling. Who knows the high of going all in, only to crash, emptied out.” Yet she reminds us that “endurance is its own kind of rebellion”. This is what we need to cultivate now – not just

flashes of resistance but sustainable networks that can withstand prolonged pressure.

As Willis writes, “A revolution with no head cannot be beheaded.” Our strength isn't in hierarchical power but in our interconnectedness.

Willis also speaks about “slowing the machine” by choosing to “work just enough to survive, then redirecting energy into resistance, into community, into slowness”. We've seen this in how we've maintained our focus on what matters – our ecological work, our educational initiatives, our community bonds – rather than being consumed by reaction.

What practical guidance can we take from Willis's concept?

1. Strengthen and expand our mutual aid networks – identify who still needs support and how to support them.
2. Create more resilient communication channels as censorship increases.
3. Practice what she calls “disobedient joy” – gathering, singing, creating art that reminds us “another world is possible”.
4. Continue our “rituals of rewilding” by maintaining our environmental work despite obstacles.
5. Rest when needed – as Willis writes,

“The machine thrives on exhaustion... choose to rest when the system demands exhaustion”.

I find hope in Willis's observation that “beneath even the most rigid structure, roots are moving”. The 20,000 trees they've cut cannot erase the forest we've grown for 55 years, nor can administrative takeovers erase the spirit of what we've built together.

Even in moments when hope dims, remember that Willis wrote about soft rebellion specifically for times like these: “For everyone who has tried to outrun the fire only to become the kindling” we need a different strategy – “one that doesn't just burn, but smolders, spreads, takes root”.

The full collection of Willis's writings (at thehoneyedoracle.substack.com) offers more wisdom on navigating through these challenging times without becoming brittle ourselves. I encourage you to read it.

Through all of this, I remind myself: they may control the offices, but they cannot control the roots of Auroville that run deeper than any foundation.

In community and persistent hope.

An Aurovillian

NEW BOOKS

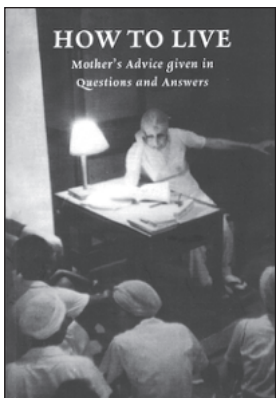
How to live

The seven volumes of The Mother's *Entretiens* (Questions and Answers) are a treasure trove. They cover a wide range of topics in considerable depth, giving us a glimpse not only of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's vision of life and the future of humanity, but also providing many answers to questions on how to live one's life and follow the spiritual path.

In early 2000, Georges van Vrekhem made a compilation of these *Entretiens*, which was published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram under the title *The Mother's Vision: Selections from Questions and Answers*. Georges ranged his selections topic wise, eg “The Divine and His Creation”, “The Gradations of Existence and Their Expression in the Human Being”, “Religion and Spirituality”, “The Supramental”, and so on.

Aurovilians Béatrice Baldacchino and Ginevra Viscardi chose to make a different selection, focusing on the need of the spiritual aspirant. In their compilation *How to Live: Mother's Advice given in Questions and Answers* they have extracted the practical advice given by The Mother on how to go through one's daily life in harmony with the Presence that inhabits us. Their “how-tos” have been grouped by theme, and arranged alphabetically, making it easy to find a quick response to one's question. As many of Mother's explanations were too long to quote, references to the relevant volumes of *Questions and Answers* have been included.

The 545-page book has been published by and can be ordered from Prisma <https://prisma.haus>. Price in India Rs 800.



Auroville Global Fellowship website and newsletter

An invitation to participate

Dear Auroville residents, friends and well-wishers of Auroville,

A website has been created for the Auroville Global Fellowship. Here is the link: <https://aurovilleglobalfellowship.org>. The website describes the history, purpose, and projects of the Fellowship. It also has a page dedicated to the January 2025 report “Auroville in Crisis & the Way Forward”. There is also a page for a new project of the Fellowship – a newsletter that is being launched in June.

The newsletter is titled ‘Auroville Witness’. Its goal is to publish first-person stories from those living in Auroville, past residents, or who have had a long-term relationship with Auroville. We are looking to present individual voices and experiences, the lived reality in Auroville at this moment. You can read more and subscribe on the website: <https://aurovilleglobalfellowship.org/witness/>

If you are interested in contributing, below is a brief introduction:

What does it feel like living with the changes of recent years? How has the atmosphere changed? What is it like living under the new administration? Talk to us about Auroville as you are experiencing it. Talk to us of your life in Auroville.

Personal, heartfelt reflections speak to people everywhere. They are especially important in conveying the real-life impact of the situation on life in Auroville and are powerful in a way that no other form of communication can match.

To submit a story, please send an email to AurovilleWitness@gmail.com with “Submission” in the subject line. Please explain whether you are a resident of Auroville, an ex-resident, or your relation to the community. Any other background information is also appreciated.

If you feel hesitant about sharing your experience, what can we do so that you are confident and motivated to share in Auroville Witness?

Please write in your primary language if you are not comfortable writing in English. You can also send an audio recording, or we can arrange an interview. We will do our best to ensure your privacy if you wish to be anonymous.

Many thanks. We look forward to reading and sharing your narratives. Each voice and lived experience matters.

Sincerely,

David Hutchinson, for the Auroville Global Fellowship and the Auroville Witness editorial team
Fellowship-Coordination@auroville.community

Legal updates

On 29 April four cases concerning Auroville were listed in the Madras High Court before its summer closure during the month of May.

1) The case filed by a concerned member of the Residents’ Assembly concerning the constitution of the Admission and Termination Scrutinising Committee (ATSC) was basically accepted for debate and the lawyers of the Foundation Office were directed to submit their arguments within six weeks.

2) The appeal to the Madras High Court ruling on the quo warranto case, filed by the Working Committee selected by the Residents’ Assembly (RA-WCom) was postponed by the appeal bench until after the summer break.

3) The appeal filed by the Auroville Foundation Office (AVFO) on the stay of the Regulations of the Governing Board regarding constitution of the Working Committee was also postponed by the appeal bench until after the summer break.

4) The appeal filed by the AVFO on the interim stay of the 2024 Admission and Termination Regulations of the Governing Board was admitted and the Madras High Court decided to vacate the interim stay that the Madras High Court gave in February 2024. This decision means that these Regulations on Entry and Exit are now applicable. The order does, however, recognise the prerogatives of the Residents’ Assembly as indicated in Section 19 of the Act and states that if any of the regulations contravene the function of the Residents’ Assembly under Section 19 of the Act, then the Act would prevail. The case itself is still awaiting judgement. The Court has posted the matter for final hearing in June.

Self-nominations solicited

“Wishing to move forward in collaboration towards the building of the city and the right administering of Auroville,” the AVFO on 9 May issued a call for self-nomination in key areas of the Auroville administration, eg a group, service, unit or trust. On 2 June, the Officer on Special Duty informed the community that the call had a response of almost 200 residents, newcomers, and volunteers, and that the deadline for submitting the Service Form was extended until 10 June.

Net neutrality

Concerned residents have called on the Governing Board, International Advisory Council and Secretary of the Auroville Foundation to instruct Aurinoco, the Auroville unit which created a fibre optic network in Auroville with GOI grants, to halt forcing a single connectivity upon all subscribers. The signatories request that Aurinoco restore net neutrality, process new BSNL applications, include resident representation in management decisions, and follow transparent tender processes. On 3 May Aurinoco had announced it would discontinue providing BSNL services over the Aurinoco fibre. This was followed by a drastic reduction of speeds from the expected 100-300MB/s to around 1-2MB/s for users on BSNL connections. A few days later, Aurinoco started disconnecting BSNL users. At the time, there were over 200 BSNL users on Aurinoco. The residents highlighted that large portions of the network were paid for by substantial individual funds throughout Auroville. These investments were made on the premise and promise of Net Neutrality and free choice of Internet Service Provider (ISP) by each individual resident. The residents also challenged Aurinoco’s claim that discontinuing BSNL was part of the Auroville Master Plan. When this issue went to press, the issue had not been resolved.

Auroville Tomorrow

Two editions of a new e-magazine named “Auroville Tomorrow” have been published by the Auroville Foundation Office. The first “revised edition No. 01”, [‘revised’ may refer to three earlier issues of Auroville Tomorrow published in 2022] dated 24 April 2025 introduces itself as “Auroville’s official future-

focused newsletter” of the Auroville Foundation, Ministry of Education. The second edition is dated 24 May 24. For more information contact avfoundation@auroville.org.in.

Auroville Connect

Auroville Connect, a WhatsApp platform “dedicated to connecting people in and around Auroville who care deeply about the Dream, the Charter, and the future of this unique city and its experiment in human unity,” has now published an e-newsletter. The editors explained that Auroville Connect “is not a forum for opinion or debate, but a field of shared intention. Whether one lives in Auroville or simply resonates with its ideal of a universal city, Auroville Connect invites you to stay attuned to the deeper pulse behind the visible events.” The newsletter will be shared via mass-bulletin to all Auroville residents. For subscriptions contact avconnect@auroville.org.in.

Auroville Urban Planning and Development Repository

A new website: Auroville Urban Planning and Development Repository <https://aupdr.auroville.community/> has been created. This initiative, led by a group of Auroville residents, brings together hundreds of documents related to the planning and development of Auroville. Spanning from 1965 to 2024, the open-access database includes a diverse range of materials – from visionary proposals to administrative records, participatory brainstorming to technical studies, and both official and unofficial documents. Together, they reflect the layered and evolving nature of Auroville’s planning and development journey. The website invites people to stay connected for upcoming updates and features and give feedback.

The Spirituality Industry

The News Minute, a digital subscription-based news platform which reports and writes on issues in India, with a specific focus on the five southern states, has published its third edition of a series on ‘The Spirituality Industry: A Deep Reporting Project’. This issue situates what’s currently happening in Auroville within the larger context of India’s politics and focuses on issues such as questionable land deals, large-scale felling of trees, and allegations that the township is being reshaped into a federal enclave – a foothold for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Tamil Nadu. The BJP has been the ruling political party in India since 2014. A video on its first edition on Auroville can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GCUUfB1hPo>, while the third edition can be seen at <https://www.thenewsminute.com/long-form/inside-auroville-power-profit-and-plans-for-a-federal-enclave>.

RA-WCom homeless

The Working Committee selected by the Residents’ Assembly (RA-WCom) has vacated its temporary office in Kailash, an educational youth residency under SAIIER, after the Funds and Assets Management Committee constituted by the Governing Board (GB-FAMC) instructed the Kailash caretakers and residents to hand over the building to the Housing Service by the end of May [see article on pages 7-8]. RA-WCom’s new accommodation at the Dustudio in Swayam community was however short-lived; after Dustudio received threatening letters from the GB-FAMC, the RA-WCom left the place. For the time being, the RA-WCom can only be reached by email.

Economic Development Strategy

The GB-FAMC informed the community that it has begun “a renewed effort to grow and strengthen Auroville’s economy, building on the groundwork laid in recent years around compliance, transparency and financial structure”. As part of this process, it has invited the Auroville unit AWARE to support the process of economic strategy and development. “AWARE’s role will be reviewing performance

data, identifying opportunities and challenges, facilitating consultative meetings with trust and units and helping to shape a roadmap for a more self-sustaining and conscious economy aligned with Auroville’s vision. This collaboration will also include working with willing unit executives, economists and community members to co-develop a five-year economic development programme, explore systematic improvements and create a culture of transparency, responsibility and collective action.” The GB-FAMC expressed the belief that such a collaborative and strategic approach will “help us to move beyond compliance toward true abundance – an economy that supports the realisation of Auroville’s ideals”.

Closure for small guest houses?

The GB-FAMC informed the managers of small guest houses that the Financial Services accounts of these guest houses would be closed by 15 June 2025 and requested the managers to cancel any future bookings. The FAMC wrote that it had decided to reserve these accommodations solely for volunteers. These guest houses have until now offered accommodation to a mix of extended-stay visitors, volunteers, newcomers and other Aurovilians when in need. The email did not contain any information on how the managers would be compensated for their personal investments and future loss of income.

AVFO signs more MoUs

The AVFO continues entering into Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and other “collaborations” with Indian institutes, which the residents learn about via newspapers. On 5 April 2025, an MoU with the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC) was announced in *The Hindu* newspaper. The MoU was apparently to “facilitate knowledge exchange in digital heritage preservation, language computing, AI-driven cultural initiatives, and sustainable technology development” and would be “executed in coordination with Auroville’s Electrical Service, Water Service and Aurinoco in the coming months”. Information about several other potential AVFO collaborations have also been shared in *The Hindu*. An article on 24 April envisaged the construction of a “Madhya Pradesh Bhavan” in Auroville and shared that “Auroville has offered to train 100 selected teachers from Madhya Pradesh in holistic pedagogy during summer vacation”. A further article from 20 May stated that the Ministry of Education was exploring “replicating Auroville’s unique socio-economic model”. The article claims that a ministry official met with “stakeholders”, and stated that she was “introduced to the diverse range of sustainable, artisanal, and socially responsible businesses that embody Auroville’s ethos of conscious living”.

Auroville accounting units dismantled

In May last year, the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation decided to appoint an outside company of Chartered Accountants “for accounting and allied services” with effect from the Financial Year 2025-2026. The minutes of its meeting state the reasons for this decision: not all of Auroville’s in-house

accounting units are professionally qualified; they are not competent to file all required statutory returns; and they have not submitted the accounts in time to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. The Auroville accountants have challenged the reasons as being incorrect. Nevertheless, with effect from 1 April 2025, the once bustling offices of the Auroville accounting units Mukti, Omega and Abacus came to a standstill. More than 40 people have been dismissed. The decision of the Board also affects the Chartered Accountants in Pondicherry who earlier audited the accounts of all Auroville units. All accounting work has now been centralised in the Archives building in the Administrative Zone, and is executed by many young people who are not residents of Auroville. Chartered Accountant companies from Chennai process the final auditing and consolidation of all accounts before submission to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India in accordance with the Auroville Foundation Act.

Auroville Animal Charter

Citing cases of animal neglect and abuse, the Auroville Dog Shelter team has invited Auroville residents and friends of Auroville to participate in the writing of an Auroville Animal Charter, which should become a framework for how to live in a harmonious co-existence with all sentient beings in Auroville.

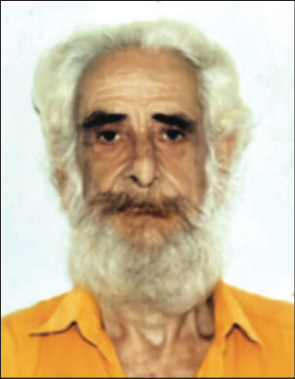
Morning Star




Morning Star, Auroville’s birth and wellness centre, has published its 2024-2025 Newsletter. Morning Star’s team offers professional birth and women’s wellness care in a serene, respectful environment. It raises awareness about birth, empowers women, includes fathers and families in birth and shares knowledge with hospitals in Pondicherry and India. Services include consultations, childbirth preparation and education classes. Morning Star also does pioneering research on fathers’ roles in childbirth, for which it was commended at the recent Better Birthing Experience Conference in Hyderabad. Morning Star has also started “Little Red Feet”, creating a supportive space for parents, babies and toddlers. This activity of Morning Star encourages socialisation, play, and child development, as well as support and fun for parents. The “Golden 1000 Days” championed by UNICEF and others around the world, recognises the first 1000 days of a child’s life, from conception to their second birthday, as the most critical period for growth and development and LRF offers space for that. Morning Star recently received all the approvals and NOC for its Morning Star Building which it hopes to start soon. For more information contact morningstar@auroville.org.in.

Passing

On 17 May Dominique Parizot, an Aurovillian of French nationality, passed away in a hospital in Villenave d’Ornon, France, where he had gone to undergo medical treatment. Dominique had been an Aurovillian for nearly 40 years, living in communities such as Simplicity, Revelation, and Horizon. He was actively involved in Development, AV Radio, and various Auroville groups. He was known for his generosity, having purchased land in Simplicity to provide support and space for Tamil families. He was a devoted follower of Sri Aurobindo, often reflecting on his “The Life Divine”, and a restless seeker, constantly searching for peace and understanding.



About Auroville Today <p>Auroville Today is an activity of the Kattidakalai Trust of the Auroville Foundation. The GST number is 33AAATA0037BXZV</p> <p>Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India, Phone: +91.413.2622572. Email: aurovilletodayweb@gmail.com and avtoday@auroville.org.in.</p>	Subscription information <p>Subscription rates for 12 issues:</p> <p>India print Rs. 850 India digital Rs. 1,000</p> <p>Other countries: Print Rs. 4,000 Digital Rs. 3,500</p> 	How to subscribe: <p>1. Through our website: Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through https://auroville.today</p> <p>2. By cheque: Cheques must be payable to <i>Auroville Maintenance</i>, reference <i>Contribution Auroville Today</i>, and need to be sent to</p> <p>Auroville Today, Surrender community, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.</p> <p>3. By bank transfer. Bank transfers are to be made to account # 163101000118 of Auroville Maintenance at ICICI Bank, Auroville Branch, IFSC Code ICIC0001631, Swift Code ICICINBBCTS, reference: Contribution Auroville Today.</p>	Editorial team: <p>Alan, Carel, Chandra, Gita. Proofreading: Alan, Gita, Kristen. DTP: Carel. Print editing: Jean-Denis. Digital editing: Krishna V.</p> <p>Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.</p>
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