

Cyclone Fengal hits Auroville



The ‘Lego block’ wall between sections 1 and 2 of the Matrimandir Lake broke in the middle and at the banks

On November 25, meteorologists of the India Meteorological Department observed a deep depression forming in the Bay of Bengal. Their initial forecast was that the depression would weaken and that a cyclone would not form, as the depression was moving at the unusually slow speed of 3 kmph, far below the typical cyclone speed of 10-12 kmph. But the initial assessment was wrong. On November 29, Cyclone Fengal developed and intensified into a cyclonic storm about 270 km east-southeast of Puducherry. It made landfall over Puducherry in the night of November 30, bringing torrential rains, strong winds, and gusts of 3-minute sustained winds of 85 km/h. Meteorologists observed that the storm was stationary for nine hours after landfall, retaining strength as its centre remained close to the sea, drawing moisture. This was the reason for the record downpour that happened in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

In Tamil Nadu, Cyclone Fengal wrought havoc in 14 districts, delivering the equivalent of a monsoon season’s rainfall in just 36 hours. Certain areas received around 56 cm of rain. Crops were flooded, lakes breached their banks, dams broke, trees were uprooted, livestock drowned, civic infrastructure was damaged, and thousands of people were displaced. The Villupuram and Thiruvannamalai districts received more than 51 cm of rain in a single day.

The cyclone also brought extremely heavy rainfall to Puducherry, with the Union Territory recording 48.4 cm of rain over 24 hours, as

of 8.30 am on December 1. This marked the highest 24-hour cumulative rainfall in the last 30 years, news agency ANI reported. On 2 December, Puducherry was hit with another disaster when water was discharged from the brimming dams of Tamil Nadu, particularly the Sathanur dam in Tiruvannamalai. Flood-like situations resulted: arterial roads were submerged, basements and ground floors were inundated, and four residential areas waterlogged for more than a week.

Auroville

The cyclone also wrought havoc in Auroville, where a weather logger reported that 54 cm of rain had fallen in 24 hours, an all-time record for the community. Hundreds of trees were uprooted, roads were blocked, and the ground floors of Bharat Nivas and of some apartments were flooded. There was a general power outage, which was gradually restored, but in some communities only after two weeks. Internet connections too were disrupted. A few Auroville communities suffered water shortage. The damage caused to houses and storerooms, however, was less than that sustained during Cyclone Thane.

But the situation at the Matrimandir Lake was different. In the Matrimandir Newsletter, published in the third week of November, executives had announced that the Matrimandir Lake section 1 (also known as the Test Lake) was ready for the monsoon as the concrete block walls (also known as Lego block walls) at each end of the 100 metre long Lake section 1 had been raised to their full height of 10.6 metre. “Once the expected good rains of the upcoming winter monsoon arrive, harvested rain water, flowing from the Gardens into the open water channel, will pour into the Lake, raising it up to its full level ... And then finally, after only three years of collecting the rain water, we will all get a first view of

the Lake as envisaged by the Mother,” they wrote. It was not to be. At some time during the night of the cyclone – a few minutes before midnight according to a surveillance camera – the Lego block wall that separates Lake section 1 from the as yet unfinished and unlined Lake section 2, slid from its foundation into Lake section 2. It broke in the middle and at both banks, and water stored in section 1 cascaded into the 10m deep excavation of Lake section 2.

The situation was exacerbated when the water in the open water channel around the Matrimandir area also drained into Lake section 2.

On December 4, concerned Aurovilians wrote to the Matrimandir Executives and the members of the Lake Team, raising questions about engineering accountability and the use of donor contributions. They also recalled that over the past few years, they had requested that the executives obtain proper building permission from the community, get environmental

impact assessments for the lake excavation and the mountain, pause tree-cutting and excavation, and consider integrating an alternate lake proposal that addresses ecological and aesthetic values [see *AVToday* November 2023, #412 and .and May 2024, #416], concerns that have been largely ignored or rejected. “The work continued in a hasty manner by setting an unrealistic time frame of completion [completing the Lake by The Mother’s 150th Birth Anniversary, February 21, 2028, see *AVToday* October 2023, # 411, page 5, eds]. This neglect highlights a significant failure: the disregard for participatory and collaborative processes, which are fundamental for the work on Auroville’s core values. We consider this to be the biggest failure in this project and yet to be acknowledged by the present Matrimandir executives and the Lake Team.” The concerned Aurovilians called for an entire reassessment of the project and for all involved to step back from the current course.

The Matrimandir executives and the Lake Team issued an extensive technical report on December 5, sharing the structural calculations for the Lego block wall, the details of its construction,

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Before the cyclone: The Matrimandir Lake section 1 is almost full, while section 2 (left) has been dug and awaits the lining. The Lego Block wall between them broke.

PHOTO: MATRIMANDIR NEWSLETTER



A big Kaya tree fell on the Vikas radial road

Photo: Rrivu Laha

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and showing that the wall had been built with an additional reserve of about 30% over and above the recommended strength. The report stated that the sliding and opening of the Lego block wall was the result of a combination of four unexpected events, each of which was analysed. “They happened all at the same time during the cyclone, which discharged 60 cm of rainfall in one day. None of the four events alone would have been able to cause any damage. Even if two of the events would have happened simultaneously, it would have still been all right. But all four together had an effect where each one enforced the impact of the other three, which finally led to the sliding of the wall,” they wrote in the report.

The breaking of the wall has not discouraged the Executives nor the Lake Team members, who circulated an encouragement of The Mother: “*Do not be sad – things happen because they have to happen and finally everything leads to the ultimate victory of the Supreme.*” They stated that a different type of foundation, which will prevent a shifting of the wall, will be designed and that, most likely, there won’t be any financial disadvantage. But the wall between section 1 and 2 will not be rebuilt. Once the rains have stopped, the Lego blocks from the broken wall will be removed. As only a few blocks got damaged, all the others will be used to build the next wall, 180 metres away, at the end of section 2, so that section 1 and section 2 of the Lake will be joined. “This means that it will not be necessary to manufacture new Lego blocks for the third wall, which was the plan till now. This is a big saving. So in total, the new concept is less expensive than the plan



The inundated exhibition room in Bharat Nivas

which we had so far,” wrote the Executives. They expressed the hope that the rupture will not affect the proposed time line, i.e. having the Matrimandir Lake completed by The Mother’s 150th Birth Anniversary on February 21, 2028.

The report has not satisfied the concerned Aurovilians. They wrote in another mass bulletin that the report highlights a significant lack of safety awareness in the planning and execution of the lake project and reflects a clear lack of accountability. They called for an independent third-party assessment to evaluate the failure of the wall design and engineering.

The report was also rejected by Aurovilian Jan Imhoff, who was the chief engineer of the project till the summer of 2023 when he resigned because of a difference of views with the Lake Team. At that time, the dams were 8 metres high and the water level in section 1 stood at 5 metres. In a detailed technical rebuttal he argues

that the claim of 30% safety margin was not valid as the supporting earth buttress on the back side of the dam had been prematurely removed against the instructions in the technical specifications; section 1 of the Lake had not been provided with an overflow to ensure that the water does not rise beyond 10 metres, and the Test Lake was allowed to overflow; and the overflow weir of the water channel around the Matrimandir had not been lowered during the heavy rains to allow excess water to flow out. Consequently, there was a sudden inflow of water in Lake section 2 and the dam was flooded from behind. “These all led to the point where all safety margins in the design of the dam were used up and the dam failed,” he wrote.

Jan also claims that there had been carelessness by not considering the impact of the heavy cyclonic rains. “It has already been raining heavily for hours and a large amount of water is collecting in the Test Lake and the next section of the lake [*Lake section 2, eds.*]. The Test Lake is full and the channel around Matrimandir is overflowing onto the oval road. All sump pumps from the Amphitheatre and under the Matrimandir are working overtime pumping even more water into the channel and that flows into the Test Lake. Nobody stops to think – what will happen now that the Test Lake is full, where will all the water go? Instead, everybody just went home.” He expressed the hope that the failure of the dam will be a chance to improve the lake design, and change the way it is executed and impacts the people of Auroville.

Carel

For more photos on the impact of Cyclone Fengal visit <https://photos.app.goo.gl/W6mTgvBKYVN9eoe9>

AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

Auroville Foundation issues residence criteria standing order

On 25 November 2024, the AVFO Officer on Special Duty, Dr G. Seetharaman, issued a new Standing Order detailing residence criteria and a code of conduct for all Residents, Newcomers, volunteers and permanent guests in Auroville, which came into effect immediately.

The Standing Order outlines "General principles of life in Auroville" and contains a detailed code of conduct, as mandatory requirements rather than guidelines, with the stated threat of “termination of status” if the ‘rules’ are breached.

Key aspects of the new code are that full-time residence in Auroville is mandatory; any trips must be reported to the Human Resources Service (HRS); absences exceeding two weeks require prior approval from the HRS; and unauthorised absences beyond two weeks may result in “status termination”. Guests may only stay in allocated residences for a maximum of seven days and thereafter have to go to a guesthouse. Aurovilians must acquire permission from the Human Resources Service to host family members beyond seven days; or host a spouse; or live with elderly parents and minor children as "Permanent Guests". Other strict rules are that only the AVFO media body can issue press releases about Auroville; all Aurovilians must work for 6 hours per day for 6 days per week, or 5 hours per day for 7 days per week and shall not be engaged in work or business outside of Auroville save for exceptional circumstances to be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Funds and Assets Management Committee constituted by the Governing Board (GB FAMC; pregnant women, nursing mothers, the elderly and the disabled will be offered work “suitable to their condition”; all those residing in Auroville must attend the Auroville Spiritual and Material Refresher programme, organised by the Human Resources Service; and social gatherings can only be organised in authorised locations that are published by the GB FAMC. Auroville residents are also expected “to participate in the building of the city” and to act “in strict compliance of the decisions of the statutory working groups, approved by the Governing Board”. Auroville residents shall also “submit an Annual Declaration as required by the Admission and Terminations Registry, in a template as prescribed by it with the due approval of the Governing Board, along with a yearly undertaking on compliance with Act, Rules, Regulations, other instructions of Competent Authority, and this Standing Order or its subsequent amendments if any.” Regarding household employees, the Order states, “In the spirit of a life dedicated to Auroville ideals, there shall be no servants” and “a Maintenance Service to manage and take care of all assets will be organised.”

Human Resources Team

On 16 December, the GB FAMC informed the community that it had established a sub-department of six Aurovilians, the “Human Resources Service” (HRS), to manage all matters related to the residents of Auroville. The GB FAMC specified that HRS will ensure that residents live full-time in Auroville; provide information on departures and arrivals for residents going out of Auroville for two weeks or less; receive applications for leaving Auroville and approve such applications for residents wishing to be away for more than two weeks; ensure that residents work full-time in Auroville; invite residents involved in business activities outside Auroville for interaction to ensure they are given the appropriate status options to relate to Auroville, should they wish to retain

their private activities; receive and process applications for Residents wishing to host a house guest in an Auroville asset for longer than seven days; receive and process applications for residents wishing to host a “permanent guest” in their allocated residence (e.g., a spouse, or aged/infirm parents/close family members); design and organise the Spiritual and Material Refresher program for all Residents, at a periodicity determined by the Governing Board. “For all the above, the HRS may invite you to an interactive meeting or visit your residence or workplace. Additionally, the Human Resources Service will compile a database of available work opportunities for residents. Once this database is ready, it will be uploaded to the Auroville website. All residents are requested to extend their full cooperation and approach this effort with transparency, as a joint initiative towards the betterment of Auroville,” wrote the GB FAMC.

Responses to the Standing Order and HRS constitution

On 28 November, the Working Committee constituted by the Residents' Assembly (RA WCom) released a mass bulletin stating that the Standing Order “aims to forcefully establish a regimented society and is blatantly in contradiction with the Charter, the Dream and the quoted works of Sri Aurobindo that aim at an inner discovery and growth of a group soul; does not respect the letter and the spirit of the Auroville Foundation Act as recognized by various orders of the Madras High Court; and does not respect proper procedure and the spirit of Auroville”.

On 18 December, the RA WCom offered further clarifications regarding the Standing Order and the constitution of the Human Resources Service (HRS) by the GB FAMC. It stated that neither the Standing Order nor the HRS have any legal basis. The Standing Order appears to have been issued disregarding the procedures established in the Auroville Foundation Standing Order Regulations published in the Gazette of India on 5.3.2011. Moreover, stated the RA WCom, the Auroville Foundation Act does not grant the Governing Board powers to establish residence criteria; the Order was issued without obtaining the required advice from the International Advisory Council and without the required consultation with the Residents’ Assembly; and the Order’s interpretation of Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s vision is severely flawed by selectively using quotes without context, and so presenting a distorted interpretation of their writings, particularly regarding the nature of Auroville as a spiritual experiment. “The Mother consistently emphasised the importance of flexibility, plasticity, and suppleness in the development and governance of the community. The rigid and dogmatic nature of these regulations contradicts this fundamental principle of freedom and self discovery,” wrote the RA WCom. It also faulted many practical aspects of the order and the HRS. “The requirement for residents to participate in mandatory Spiritual and Material Refresher programmes goes against the core principles of spiritual freedom that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother emphasised; the restrictions on guests, the requirement for permissions for absences over two weeks, and the limitations on external work are neither practical nor aligned with Auroville’s reality; the Order also contains provisions that infringe on basic human rights and constitutional freedoms such as the restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, movement, and association; the threat of expulsion for various infractions, without clear due process, is not in accordance with the legally established regulations of the Auroville Foundation and the orders of the Madras High Court.”

REFLECTION

Death of a dream

*But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.*

WB Yeats

Death has been haunting me of late. I have dreamt of local funerals where I awoke as I stepped forward to be a pall-bearer, and of ornate dark-wood juggernaut hearses. I volunteer at Farewell, so corpses and the reality of our final passing are oh so close. In my family, illnesses and ageing are around and I’ve had an outburst of skin cancer since I moved here. So, I’ve been trying to understand more of this archetypal and ultimate phase of life.

When I can step back enough, something deeply personal emerges – though I would guess it is shared with others – a grief at the loss of an ideal, namely the dream and aspirations of a utopian community.

When I finally was able to join Auroville in 2019, I felt a deep happiness and that I had caught some of the ‘adventure of consciousness’. I was alive in the purpose of Auroville and it elicited the best of me. I was particularly inspired by two aspects of the Auroville experiment: its pioneering environmental work and that it was a place where ‘money was not the sovereign Lord’. I’d tasted the opposite of both and knew the value of what Auroville offered.

However, it feels like both of these important aspects are in the process of being destroyed in recent years. Materialism seems far more sovereign now than it did a few years ago, corruption and greed, never far from humanity’s orbit, feel stronger.

I mourn the loss of the dream of living in harmony not just with each other as humans but also with nature herself. I found Auroville’s story of re-greening the eroded plateau so compelling. Now trees are slaughtered, often it seems for no purpose; goodness knows what is happening to our water table; beyond these distressing facts, it’s the loss of understanding the importance of how living in ecological balance is a part of our evolutionary life.

At the very moment the world appears to be comprehending this, it feels as if here in Auroville we are being strong armed back to the 1950s. Divine anarchy is being replaced by top-down power. There is no indication that diversity, both botanically and with people, is the source of wealth, that the projects which enriched Auroville came from the play and experiment of unplanned but organically growing life.

All of this has led to a kind of deadening of possibility, generosity and inspiration. There is no ‘treading softly’ (to revert to the Yeats quote at the top) and our dreams are consequently dying under the weight of the heavy JCB tread. It’s hard to stay emotionally stable with all the constant destruction.

Unexpectedly, what upsets me most is the tone of our new masters. Now we live in a world of diktats. Communiqués are issued from the Foundation Office or from the FO FAMC in a cold didactic tone. I can recall no inspiration, just a constant putting down of the residents and their voice, often in an aggressive and mean-spirited way. Remarkably and contrastingly, the Residents’ Assembly Working Committee correspondence with its inclusive tone does remind us of higher purposes for being here.

Something has died, at least for me. New life will come, or not. Auroville could end up being a soulless cipher built over what was once a vibrant, anarchistic, organic experiment where many jewels emerged. Or something unknown could emerge through this painful labour of a new birth. A new Auroville. Wiser, more discerning and communal, able to value the wordless spiritual path it always offered. Mother’s passing and the clash with the Ashram in the 1970s both challenged Auroville’s core, so it could be another new beginning. Death has a sister in life, and perhaps by acknowledging the death of dreams, some new form, maybe not even in Auroville, will emerge with its own vitality.

Whichever it is, I’ve found acknowledging the grief of an ending helps. It’s important to mark rites of passage – funerals are painful but also emotionally cathartic – as we come to terms with the present reality.

Peter L.

“I’m very concerned about Auroville’s planning future”

Prashant Hedao was the Regional Planning Coordinator of L’Avenir d’Auroville, Auroville’s Town Planning Department from 2007-2010. In those years he worked closely together with then Governing Board member Dr BV Doshi on the Auroville Master Plan. At present he is a member of the Working Committee constituted by the Residents’ Assembly.

Auroville Today: You are trained as a landscape architect. What exactly is landscape architecture and what is its relation to GIS (Geographic Information Systems)?

Prashant: Ideally, before the planning of any project takes off, landscape architects should be hired to do a site analysis, which includes site topography, hydrology, biodiversity, site ecology, human geography and so on. On the basis of the data provided, they make composite maps, also called ‘map overlays’ combining multiple layers that show the relationships between features in a geographic space. Such mapping exercises, also known as suitability analysis, are then used in the planning process, to see where roads and buildings can best be located, where industry could be located and where parks or forested areas should be. Such maps usually include a site inventory, basic land and site planning, water management proposals, location of waste water systems, storm water management and in some cases specifications on sustainable design and construction.

My wife Lata and I studied at the University of Pennsylvania under the late Ian L. McHarg, a Scottish landscape architect known as the father of ecological planning using map overlays. His work had a major impact on the development of GIS. Under McHarg’s guidance, Lata and I also became GIS specialists. We specialised in using GIS to create digital overlay maps and analysing spatial data, and so we can help local area and city planning authorities in developing suitable detailed development plans and maps.

McHarg also brought environmental concerns into the public awareness and designed ecological planning methods as a mainstream of landscape architecture, city planning and public policy. His 1969 book *Design with Nature* pioneered the concept of ecological planning. It is still one of the most celebrated books on landscape architecture and land-use planning. The book has step-by-step instructions on how to break down a region into its appropriate uses. It contributed to the development of the concepts of environmental impact assessment, new community development, coastal zone management, river corridor planning, and sustainability.

Has landscape architecture using GIS been embraced in India?

No, it hasn’t. Unlike the USA, where GIS analysis is now mandatory for any area development, the Indian government has yet to adopt GIS fully. There is a lack of geographic data and of proper GIS analysing tools. Post the 2004 tsunami, Lata and I worked closely with district and state officials to make them aware of GIS and the value of shared information systems. That was a big national disaster and so we did manage to include GIS in the long term rehabilitation process. But sharing of data is still a problem. The Railways, the Department of Water Resources, the Department of Health, the Department of Environment and Forests, to mention a few, each have their own data sets which they are not always inclined to share. Only a centralised authority could bring them together. Between 2009 and 2014 we tried to convince the Planning Commission of India, the government agency that previously oversaw India’s economic and social development, to become such an authority and so have all data available in one centralised place. We also worked on a draft National GIS bill, to be enacted by the Indian Parliament, which would oblige the different departments of the central and state governments to share their data. But this didn’t happen, and when, in 2014, the Planning Commission of India was dissolved it was abandoned. India still has a long road ahead in this area.

What about Auroville? Does ‘The City The Earth Needs’ set an example to India in this area?

During our time working for L’Avenir d’Auroville (during 2003-04 and again from 2007 to 2011), we put together composite maps of the Auroville area, for use in the planning of the city. The data sets were organised not just for the Master Plan area but also for the extended bioregion, but we never seriously used this data for planning in Auroville. At present, the whole GIS concept has gone out of the window with the planners appointed by the Governing Board only aiming at executing the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspective 2025) as it was conceived 23 years ago. But since its approval in 2001, neither Five-Year Development Plans nor Annual Plans as prescribed in this Master Plan have been made. Neither was the Master Plan ever adapted to the present and evolving ground realities and our work was ignored. I am very concerned about what this means for Auroville’s planning and how it interfaces with our neighbouring villages, existing road networks, water channels and ponds, human geography, etc.

Can you explain?

The Auroville Foundation Act was passed in 1988 by the Central Government. But India is a union of states, where land and planning are state subjects. Ideally, what should have happened is that after the Auroville Foundation Act was passed, a similar act should have been passed by the Government of Tamil Nadu. That did not happen. At present, Auroville’s Master Plan is not a Master Plan in Tamil Nadu’s planning system. It is a plan of the Auroville Foundation which is an independent juristic entity with large land holdings.

I am bemused that the Tamil Nadu government does not intervene. Any large scale development even on privately owned land should concern it because such development will have a large impact on the environment, economy, mobility, people’s lives and livelihoods in the surrounding area.

Auroville’s planners, it appears, are at present only concerned



Former Governing Board member Dr B.V. Doshi discusses the Auroville Master Plan with Prashant in 2010, while Tejaswini and Meera look on.

about manifesting Auroville’s internal road network consisting of the Crown Road, the Outer Ring Road and the connecting radials. You can now add to that the creation of a 30 metre high hill in the Greenbelt with the earth excavated from the Matrimandir Lake – a project which is not mentioned in the Master Plan – and the plans to build Lines of Force, for which some areas have already been deforested. But there appears to be no consideration about how all this will affect us and the surrounding villages.

For example, one of the largest Lines of Force – 1.2 kilometres long – is planned to be 18 storeys high near the village of Edayanchavadi and tapers down to 2 storeys near the Matrimandir Reception Pavilion on the west shore of the Matrimandir Lake. What impact would such an enormous building have on the village of Edayanchavadi? You will have serious real estate problems. The land prices in that area will steeply increase, and there is a risk of some big developer taking over privately owned land and building another apartment right next to our Line of Force.

The growth of cities and the effect on the surrounding villages that get incorporated in the city is a topic of many films in India. How do these expanding cities merge with the surrounding villages? There is a movie about what happened when the villages around Pune, a city in the state of Maharashtra, got absorbed. The 2018 Marathi film *Mulshi Pattern* and the 2021 Hindi film *Antim: The Final Truth* showed the influence of the land mafia, how local youngsters were pulled in and became goons working for them, and how many small land owners were killed because of this. You think I am exaggerating thinking that this might happen here? Look at the recent land controversy near Evergreen community; and remember the killings that happened in our surrounding villages but a few years ago. Land is being monetised, in the villages, and, alas, also in Auroville. The land exchanges are nothing but monetisation of the land.

You mentioned the focus on manifesting Auroville’s internal road network as conceived in 2001. How ‘internal’ will this be, taking account of the employees, the visitors and the tourists?

It won’t be internal at all. The Auroville population is only a 3,000 residents; but we are catering to at least 25,000 people who come into Auroville each day, counting the interns, volunteers, students, employees, the visitors and the tourists. Is the infrastructure designed for 3,000 or for 25,000 or for 50,000 people?

I’m afraid that the present infrastructure planning – or rather the lack of it – will be leading us into many difficulties. Auroville doesn’t own all the lands required to build the Crown Road or the Outer Ring Road. Currently we have bits and pieces of roads being built that go from nowhere to nowhere or end at a privately owned land. What’s stopping the private landowners from building a resort on their land, to which the Auroville planners have so nicely given access? Or, in case that landowner finally agrees to sell the land to Auroville, what lands has Auroville to offer in exchange for this land and at what rate of exchange? We all know of the controversies of recent land exchanges and we don’t need to add more.

In a recent email to the town planners and to the Auroville Foundation Office, you summarised your concerns about the general road and pedestrian infrastructure, as it is being developed today. What are your concerns?

This started when, one day without giving any notice to the people who are living in the nearby apartments, a JCB began removing the paver blocks from the Vikas radial. It was a perfectly fine road, wide enough for two JCBs to pass one another. Why did this happen? We don’t know. Then the work suddenly stopped. There was a meeting with the GB appointed TDC personnel and I learned that they wanted to increase the height of the road by 15 cm. Why this was necessary was not explained, nor why the road was being demolished in the middle of the monsoon season, making it treacherous for the traffic.

Also, the consequences of such an elevated road were not mentioned, such as that rainwater might flow from the elevated road into the neighbouring communities which are at a lower level. They promised to provide alternate access for those who reside near this road and that an information board would be erected which would also show the name of the project, start and end date, name of the contractor, total cost and funding sources. So far, these promises have not been kept.

Being a landscape planner I took the opportunity to ask a few more pertinent questions. One was why the Crown Road, which was intended for pedestrians and light traffic, has been built with heavy in-situ concrete, whereas the Outer Ring Road, which would carry heavy traffic, has been built using paver blocks. I did not receive a reply. Neither was there a response to my question about how they plan to make the city pedestrian friendly. In the Perspective Master Plan document, road section drawings show tree-lined sidewalks for pedestrians, but they are not being built. Today, pedestrians have no option but to use the concrete road without shade in the hot summer sun.

Earlier, before the Crown Road was so badly redone, there was shade. The road was flanked on both sides by Service Trees [*Peltophorum Pterocarpum*, eds], children of the Service Tree that shades the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. With a partial grant-in-aid from the European Commission, which supported the innovative way of planning, these trees had been planted by Aurofuture, Auroville’s then Town Planning Department headed by Chief Architect Roger Anger, with the intention to provide shade for the Crown Road. These trees were brutally cut down. I still question why this was done. But there has been no answer to my questions.

Do you see a way to rectify all this?

Honestly, the only way to bring Auroville’s planning back on track is by reinstating the Residents’ Assembly to manage its day-to-day matters and let it select its working groups, as laid down in the Foundation Act. Until that happens, we residents will be just bystanders to the senseless destruction and construction. The only thing that the Auroville planners could do right now is to use this period to independently work on the next version of our master plan and DDPs, or detail out sections for immediate development. There already exists a body of work and studies that have been done in the past years, bring them all together and integrate them into planning. One additional thing we will have to work on is what to do with the bits and pieces of road (that go from nowhere to nowhere) constructed in the past two to three years. These pieces are not connected with any mobility plan and are not pedestrian friendly, so maybe they can be converted into plazas or market places with dead ends. We will have to be innovative about it.

In conversation with Carel

Prashant Hedao is a landscape architect cum geographer and GIS specialist with over 35 years of experience in using GIS in various fields, such as ecological planning, biodiversity conservation, post-disaster rehabilitation planning, and health emergencies. Previously, he worked with ESRI, USA and the World Wildlife Fund-US on biodiversity conservation projects in Asia, South America, Africa and the US, and as a consultant to the Environment Agency (EAD) at Abu Dhabi, UAE. He returned to India in 2003. From 2005-2007, he worked on long-term Tsunami rehabilitation planning through the Auroville Coastal-area Development Centre. From 2007 till 2011, he was the Regional Planning Coordinator at L’Avenir d’Auroville, Auroville’s Town Development Council (TDC). Currently he is a GIS consultant at the World Health Organization (WHO HQ) working on global geographies and human health, and visiting faculty, Department of Human Ecology / Landscape Architecture, University of California, Davis.

Echoes from the Himalayas: a journey with the nuns of Karsha

Serena, an Aurovilian and filmmaker, recounts her journey with the nuns of the Buddhist Karsha Monastery in Ladakh, documenting their inspiring story and the powerful exchange that unfolded.

Two years ago, I had the incredible opportunity to live in Karsha Nunnery, also known as Chukshikjal, for a few weeks – a dream come true for me. Karsha Nunnery, founded in 1957, lies in the remote and harsh Zaskar Valley of the Himalayas, often referred to as ‘Little Tibet’ due to its untouched culture and deep-rooted practice of Tibetan Buddhism. The nuns there follow the Gelugpa, or Yellow Hat, sect, under the spiritual guidance of the Dalai Lama. Over the last 60 years, these remarkable women have built their nunnery stone by stone, carrying each one up the mountain by hand. In a part of the world where monks receive immense respect, women have had to fight for their spiritual freedom, and Karsha Nunnery stands as a testament to their resilience and determination.

The journey that led me to Karsha began more than two years ago when I participated in an Auroville exchange programme. This initiative, part of the Auroville Learning Exchange, involved a filmmaker from Zaskar coming to Auroville for three months, while I spent three months in Zaskar. During my time there, I met Norbu, a local resident, and shared with him my wish to experience life in a nunnery. Norbu’s aunt lived in Karsha, and through his help, I was able to stay there. For those few weeks, I contributed by teaching English and assisting in the kitchen, though the language barrier was significant – I did not speak Ladakhi, and the nuns spoke little English. Norbu became an essential part of this experience, translating and assisting with logistics.

When Norbu came to pick me up at the end of my stay, I asked him to explain Auroville to the nuns. They were deeply fascinated and expressed a strong desire to visit. They asked if I could try to make it possible for them to come to Auroville. It took two years of effort to organise this, but eventually, we made it happen. Bringing ten nuns from Karsha Nunnery to Auroville has been a dream realised not just for them, but for me as well.

The journey was not without its challenges. Initially, it felt daunting to secure the necessary funds, but Auroville’s travel unit Inside India provided immense support, booking tickets in advance even before we had the money. This reduced costs significantly, allowing us to avoid last-minute flight prices and secure train tickets at a lower rate. I also received invaluable support from Anne, who helped me navigate the overwhelming aspects of the project, particularly the difficulty of arranging accommodation for ten people. There were moments when I felt incredibly low, but her encouragement kept me going.

Kalsang from the Tibetan Pavilion played a crucial role as well. The Tibetan Pavilion, busy and often fully booked, was the only place that felt right for this project, and it took two years to secure a slot there.



Playful discoveries at the Svaram sound garden

Seeds of change

I am so happy it happened. We found that rare moment where everything aligned and synchronised perfectly, creating an experience none of us will forget. Venkatesh and I embarked on a remarkable journey to Karsha in Zaskar, Ladakh, where he played a crucial role in helping me document the entire process from start to finish. Transitioning from the balmy 30-degree weather in Auroville to the biting chill of minus 15 degrees in Zaskar was a shock to the system. The cold felt unrelenting, but after some time, we acclimatised. We spent days interviewing the nuns, immersing ourselves in their world, and eventually filmed their journey as they traveled to Auroville. The experience was not just beautiful – it was transformative for all of us involved.

The nuns found immense joy in the simple pleasures of Auroville. They had never seen the ocean. They delighted in exploring the botanical gardens, marveling at the diverse flora, and taking

Another memorable visit was to EcoService, which left a profound impression on the nuns. They were amazed by the dedication to recycling and upcycling, and it sparked a desire to incorporate similar practices in their own communities. Inspired by what they saw, the nuns expressed a deep commitment to promoting sustainability within their own circles, aiming to teach and share this new knowledge across their region.

The nuns found immense joy in the simple pleasures of Auroville. They had never seen the ocean. They delighted in exploring the botanical gardens, marveling at the diverse flora, and taking

moments to simply sit and reflect. Volunteering at the Solar Kitchen became another highlight for them. They wholeheartedly embraced the tasks of chopping, cooking, and serving. They brought a tangible sense of happiness to the Aurovilians. It was heartwarming to see how much their presence brightened the atmosphere – joy seemed to radiate from the nuns, touching everyone around them.

Each day began and ended with chanting. The nuns chanted once in the morning and once in the evening, drawing together the community. Initially, just a few curious individuals attended, but as word spread, the gatherings grew until the Tibetan Pavilion was brimming with people. After each chanting session, the space opened up for dialogue, where the nuns engaged in heartfelt conversations with Aurovilians and visitors. These exchanges cultivated an incredible bond between the nuns and the community, deepening the sense of unity and understanding.

We also held an event together with Svaram, at the Tibetan Pavilion, featuring a gong master. The nuns got to play the gongs, and that experience was incredible for them. They still talk about it. The gong conductor led them through soft and powerful moments, and the nuns were completely engaged. Afterwards, the nuns chanted. It became a beautiful exchange – nuns chanting and instruments echoing. The nuns rang their bells, which held deep significance, creating a call-and-response rhythm. At the end, the nuns chanted alongside the instruments, blending their voices and sound in a way that was new to them. The entire audience felt the magic of the moment, and the Tibetan Pavilion was packed.

Even in casual encounters, the warmth of the nuns shone through. On the streets, at events, or during quiet walks, they greeted everyone with genuine kindness. Their presence seemed to lift spirits effortlessly. I still hear stories circulating about their time here – proof of the lasting impact they left behind.

Among the many experiences, visiting the Matrimandir stood out as a profoundly spiritual moment for the nuns. They described their meditations as deeply powerful, and the energy of the space resonated strongly with them. Beyond the architecture and physical beauty, the spiritual essence of the Matrimandir left an indelible mark on their hearts.

Another significant moment of learning came through nutrition and women’s health education. Paula and Carla delivered an enlightening talk on health and nutrition, which was eye-opening for the nuns. Until then, many had little understanding of how their diet impacted their well-being. This newfound awareness sparked a shift in how they viewed food and self-care. It was as if a veil had lifted, empowering them to make healthier choices moving forward.

Additionally, Suriya the dentist visited to provide much-needed dental care education. Many of the nuns had neglected oral health due to a lack of knowledge and resources. This session was invaluable, equipping them with the understanding and tools to maintain better dental hygiene, which they were eager to share with others in their community.

Another joyful day was spent at Shradanjali, making paper with dried flowers, something that the older nuns recalled doing when young, highlighting for them the importance of bringing back old traditions.

Another part of their journey was the nuns’ culinary discoveries. They experienced a variety of new dishes here, since their access to fruit and vegetables in Zaskar is limited by the harsh climate. A funny moment happened at Surguru restaurant after visiting the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. We ordered ghee roast dosa, which arrives rolled up in a triangle to stay crispy. They called it the ‘Happy Birthday hat’ and wore it, making the whole restaurant laugh. The nuns still recall that with joy. Food became a beautiful part of their journey. Now they experiment more in their cooking, exploring nutrition, spices, and flavors beyond their usual meals.

One particularly joyful day was spent at Mandala Pottery. The nuns had a wonderful time learning, and Adil generously gifted each nun a beautifully handcrafted mug. This gift carried significant meaning, as nuns traditionally travel with a mug and a bowl, essential items in their daily lives. The gesture resonated deeply, symbolising hospitality and thoughtfulness.

Wherever they go, the nuns now carry this small but cherished reminder of their time in Auroville, ready to accept tea or food in the spirit of shared community.

Journeys of the heart

When we initially left Zaskar, we hadn’t raised enough money to fund the entire journey. We only had enough for the nuns to reach Auroville. But thanks to a matching campaign by AVI USA, and the generosity of so many during our time in Auroville, we managed to gather the rest. Through social media, chantings, and the kindness of people drawn to the nuns’ presence, we raised what we needed.

The Auroville stay feels like a distant echo now, but its warmth lingers. The nuns then asked me to continue with them on the next leg of their spiritual pilgrimage. Together, we visited two Tibetan



Happy smiles with Serena (yellow T-shirt) and Kalsang (bottom row left)

settlements in Karnataka –one near Mysore and another not far from Goa.

At the first settlement, Tashi Lhumpo, monks were our hosts. We met three rinpoches connected to the nunnery – monks deeply immersed in spiritual practice, guiding others on their paths. They were moved by the experiences the nuns had gathered along the way and encouraged me to continue supporting them however I could. Their warmth and belief in the exchange we were creating left a lasting impression.

Moving forward, I want to empower the nuns in tangible ways – collaborating with groups like Eco Femme and EcoService. Empowering them has the potential to ripple outward, as the nuns hold a revered place within their communities. Their influence can gently reshape the social landscape, simply by leading through example. This, to me, is the heart of the project – a quiet, lasting change that endures long after we leave.

Far too often, outside help arrives briefly, builds something like a toilet, and departs. Without the tools or knowledge to maintain it, the gift fades. But if we teach and involve the community, that impact roots itself deeply. This is the approach I’ve tried to follow with the nuns. It feels less like a project and more like family – a bond that is both enriching and bittersweet to part from.

Just days ago, our group split. Four nuns and Norbu, our translator, returned to Zaskar, bound by duties at the nunnery. Six nuns and I continued onward to Bodhgaya, the sacred ground where the Buddha attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree. We arrived only last night, and already the absence of the others is felt. There were tears, of course. We call each other every day, sharing small updates, and holding onto the thread that ties us together.

We recently talked about a potential new project with the young nuns – there are about ten, aged three to twelve, at the nunnery. Winters in Zaskar are so harsh that the younger nuns often leave for warmer places, like Bodhgaya, where we recently met them. We wondered if it might be possible for the young nuns to spend a winter in Auroville and attend school there. It’s just an early conversation, but we’re exploring the idea of an exchange – bringing the young nuns to Auroville and perhaps having Auroville children visit Ladakh in return.

I feel immense love and respect for these women. The thought of leaving them fills me with a quiet ache. But I’ll face that when the time comes. For now, I’ll simply cherish the days we have.

One presence on this journey has been especially remarkable. Lobsang Dolma, an 83-year-old nun, had not left the nunnery since she was a teenager. She expressed a heartfelt desire to join the trip – to see more of the world before her time passes. Her family, bluntly, told her not to go. ‘‘You might die on the trip,’’ they said.

But Norbu reassured her, promising to watch over her. That was all it took. With quiet resolve, Lobsang Dolma set her heart on the pilgrimage. She became the soul of our journey,

filling each place with joy. Her laughter, energy, and spirit carried us. Whether walking alongside us or dancing at gatherings, she never lagged behind. She made it home safely to Zaskar, and even now she calls me, overwhelmed with happiness. Her presence touched everyone, even the rinpoches, who marveled at her resilience.

In the end, this journey will live on in the form of a documentary. We filmed throughout, and the next chapter will focus on the lasting impact this pilgrimage has had. I hope to follow how the nuns continue to teach and share knowledge about waste, sustainability, and empowerment. It may take a year or more before the documentary is complete, but for now, glimpses of the journey live on through pictures and videos we share along the way (on our instagram page – @auroras_eye_films).

In conversation with Chandra

Sagarika's journey

Sagarika was born and raised in Auroville. In 2019 she went abroad to continue her education and broaden her experience. Recently she returned to Auroville. We asked her to introduce herself and share about her journey abroad as well as her plans for the future.

I was born and raised in Auroville, and studied in the alternative, free progress route Auroville nurtures. By the time I completed my high school education in Last School I had worked on a variety of art projects, and I applied to college in the United States with an art portfolio. Taking time away from school and building this portfolio felt like a rite of passage, and as a visual learner it was a powerful collection of decisions to reflect on. At Bennington College in Vermont I was able to continue designing my education, using a system called 'The Plan'. This process essentially allows and facilitates the student in mapping a field for study as well as practice that goes beyond the bounds of a traditional major. This means that at Bennington there are no majors or minors and the student's 'Plan' is what informs their coursework for the term, eventually aligning with their year, and finally their 'Senior Work'.

At the start of this journey I returned to Auroville during Covid in 2020-2021, and was one of the few students in my online classes able to continue working with clay, and out of a studio. Shoutout to Flame Pottery, Path Studio and Kailash, for sharing their space and resources. Lots of gratitude, too, for my community, especially during this year of uncertainty.

As an art student, I built and pursued my Plan of 'Transformative Visual Language' through a variety of classes. These included Qi Gong, Slow Studio, The Right to Opacity, Transformative Justice, as well as Nonsense, Surrealism and the Absurd. I also took advanced classes in Ceramics, Painting, and Drawing and developed a studio practice under the umbrella of Transformative Visual Language, using a ritual and process-based approach. This practice, starting from a need for authenticity in a new context, evolved to simply prioritise being rooted in holistic and integral ways of my being.

My senior work was a two-piece painting on canvas, a culmination of movement, mantras, codes, images and intentions that I had been researching and working with. The elements of this work were perpendicular to each other, one laying on the gallery floor, and the other on the wall. They were positioned to face each other, generating a third element in my eyes, the space in between.

Moving from the philosophical and spiritual lens of Last School, on through the academic space of Bennington, I looked for hands-on

and immersive jobs in order to be more in the physical. Landing briefly at Matagiri in Woodstock, New York, while waiting for my work permit, I heard about Arcosanti, an adventure that piqued my interest.

Arcosanti (see [Arcosanti.org](https://www.arcosanti.org)) is an Urban Laboratory, founded in 1970 by Visionary and Architect, Paolo Soleri. His vision follows a term he coined, 'Arcology', a blend between architecture and ecology. Some may have heard about it from the potters and architects who have visited, or from the early exchange programme, Hexiad, which linked Auroville, Arcosanti, and Findhorn.

Getting in touch with old friends David and Nadia Tollas, and after an interview with Jean Tuller, the COO of Arcosanti at the time, I was invited over for an adventure, with open hands and nothing promised.

Landing at the Tollas, and being introduced to Arcosanti by three people who had been to Auroville made the transition very grounding for me. The Tollas and Adam Taylor shared their home through the lens of values, ideas, purpose, and love, all aligning with how I'm used to navigating community and finding myself within it. 'Arco' became home quite quickly, and as the community had a good understanding of what Auroville is, they allowed me to follow my own interpretation of their workshop-style entry process.

This space felt intuitive, inspiring, filled with incredible people, and brimming with energy. At Arcosanti, everyone works eight hour days, forty hours a week, and to live there, you have to work there (aside from the spouse policy). This was a dive into karma yoga, and it turned into a strong bond of family! Here I was involved in various workspaces for the first couple of months, gathering an understanding of how the place runs. I continued streamlining into more art-related projects, and also worked in the Ceramic Apse. In the Apse I led a mug project along with Shanta Ambady and Angela Piro, using the famous bell moulds to produce mugs. The mugs survived the prototype and review stages, and are now selling well in the gallery at Arcosanti. Participating in the design review committee for the mugs also provided me with a lot of insight into community processes and the aspirations of Arcosanti.

Throughout my time there, there was space for me to sense what part of my upbringing in Auroville was alive in me through my work, outlook, sense of community, and self. The intense



The senior work



The artist at work

application of physical work was transformative, and allowed for parts of my learning to fuse and become integrated in myself and my practice. At Arcosanti I did very little of my own personal artwork: my energy was completely channeled to my body and I was held in this by the collective work of my community.

As my visa neared its end, I had the chance to take a step back and reflect on Auroville and Arcosanti. Here is where I read *Linking the Future* about the three communities in the Hexiad project, familiarised myself with Teilhard de Chardin, and read more of Soleri's work as well. Reflecting on the holistic and spiritual approach of Auroville, and the transformative power of Arcosanti, I began designing an exchange programme, which is still in the works. It was a blessing to end my journey by taking time to engage with the space in between the two communities, feeling completely supported by both spaces. And it didn't hurt to have a huge festival, with DJ Skrillex closing the weekend in my backyard!

Now it is always a special adventure to be back home in Auroville. Thank you for allowing me to share a reflection of my journey away, open to what is to come.

Sagarika

REFLECTION

Prefiguring the supramental

Some time ago, Suryamayi Clarence-Smith wrote a doctoral thesis entitled *Towards a Spiritualised Society: Auroville, An Experiment in Prefigurative Utopianism*. She explained that "prefiguration" means trying out various experiments on the basis of our present limited consciousness in an attempt to bring our ideals into practice. In other words, it's a way of pulling us towards a future ideal by putting in place today the kinds of organisation and encouraging the kinds of behaviour that the ideal appears to require.

Suryamayi pointed to ongoing experiments in governance, economics, education and the arts as examples of how we are attempting in Auroville to prefigure a more ideal society on the basis of guidance provided by The Mother.

I would like to go further. Why don't we try prefiguring the supermind?

Of course, on the face of it this is an extremely stupid proposal, not only because we are talking about a spiritual summit which most of us cannot even contemplate, but also because both Sri Aurobindo and The Mother warned that it is impossible to comprehend the supramental with our present limited minds and understanding. Moreover, in the past a few Aurovilians have mistakenly claimed to have become 'supramentalised', invariably with tragic results.

But I am not suggesting that we pretend that we are already supramentalised. Rather, that we attempt to 'prefigure' in our outlook and behaviour something of what, given our present

limitations, we understand the supramentalised experience to be.

So what did Sri Aurobindo and The Mother say concerning the qualities of the supramental?

Among other things, they described it as a *Truth Consciousness* which, because it sees all, possesses true Power and can dissolve all falsehood; as "*Light and bliss and beauty and a perfection of the spontaneous right action of all the being*"; as a divinised body; and as the final victory over the necessity of death.

All these seem far, far beyond, our present understanding and capacity. However, there is one aspect of the supermind which may be more amenable to prefiguration. Indeed, Mother herself stressed that it was something that needed to be worked upon today. This was that aspect in which there are no contraries, no contradictions, where everything is included and finds its true place.

This is why, at the end of 1969, in reference to Auroville and the need to unite the energies of Roger and Paolo in the construction of the Matrimandir, Mother said, *Now, for me, things are no longer exclusive, not at all. I very clearly see the possibility of using the most opposite tendencies AT THE SAME TIME...It's not exclusive, I don't say, 'Ah no, not this!' No, no, no, everything, all of it together. That's what I want, to succeed in creating a place where all contraries can be united.*

And in early 1970 she reiterated, *All human knowledge had gone bankrupt because it was exclusive. And man has gone bankrupt because he was exclusive. What the New Consciousness*

wants (it insists on this) is: no more divisions. ...The step forward humanity must take IMMEDIATELY is a definitive cure of exclusivism... They all say, 'This and not that' – no, this AND that, and this too and that too, and everything at the same time. To be supple enough and wide enough for everything to be together.

Auroville today is clearly not a place where we have conquered exclusivism. In fact, much of our present public discourse involves the pitting of one narrative against another. But the challenge Mother is placing before us today – and not in some distant future – is to view all our contradictions, differences, as part of a larger whole in which all find their true place.

Just think how this would transform our whole outlook as well as our relationships with each other. Instead of seeing things as always in opposition and therefore in conflict – leading each orientation to believe that they must triumph over the opposition and, in the process, dissipating our collective energy -- we would combine our efforts to seek the larger vision in which seemingly different perspectives complement each other.

However, we have to take care that we do not seek an easy compromise based on superficial points of agreement. For example, some people would say that the concept of Auroville as a 'green city' is an example of combining very different outlooks and energies. But 'green city' can mean many things. It can mean concrete high-rises with a smattering of parks or, conversely, an urbanised form of a green suburbia. Neither would necessarily

demonstrate that the planners had grasped the 'truth' of each perspective and discovered how they complement each other.

For that, they would have to dive much deeper. In this particular instance, they would need to understand and, ideally, experience the profound truth both of the 'wisdom of the earth' as well as the transcendent vision of higher planes. Only then could they begin to explore and understand how they complement and complete each.

In this sense, planning would become yoga.

If we Aurovilians embarked on a collective prefigurative exercise today, it could begin with us assuming that the major oppositions we have struggled with over the years – in town planning, governance, education etc. – are actually not oppositions but complementary truths. We would then come together to discover what those truths are and, on the basis of this, find practical ways of implementing them (here it's worth recalling what Sri Aurobindo observed: that even when there appears to be an *irreconcilable opposition...it drives towards a more subtle and puissant order than can normally be the result of a less difficult endeavour*).

If this sounds far beyond our present capacity, what is the alternative? Do we really wish to continue this zero sum game, battling each other over competing visions of the way we want to build the city and organise ourselves? Or are we ready to take the first steps towards becoming the place where "contraries are united"?

Alan

Auroville’s impact upon Kulapalayam village

In early December, six graduate students and their professor from the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Queen’s University, Canada, visited Auroville to explore the social impact of Auroville on the nearby village of Kulapalayam. This was the fourth such study on Auroville and its surroundings by students from this university. Beginning in 2012, previous studies had focussed upon Auroville road planning access in relationship to tourism-driven development; creating a tourism impact management framework for Auroville; and a growth management framework for settlements in the Auroville Green Belt.

The students were hosted by Lalit Bhati of the Auroville Integral Sustainability Institute. Lalit, who has a Master’s degree in Urban and Regional Planning, explained, “It is now a well established fact and phenomenon that Auroville’s surrounding areas, especially the neighbouring villages, have been experiencing rapid growth and are on the path of a major urbanisation drive.... Auroville needs to re-calibrate its approach and capacity to take care of these and related challenges before it is too late.” He believes that very few Aurovilians realise how the landscape is changing, how market forces are moving in and that people buying land close by may have no connection with Auroville’s values: “a totally new reality is already existing.” Therefore, there is an urgent need for these studies “so that we can prepare and implement our suitable responses/proposals/policies in a proactive manner”.

On 13 December the students made a public presentation of what they had learned. They had studied Auroville’s direct, indirect and induced impact on Kulapalayam village through four lenses: economic development, education, community services and women’s empowerment.

The impacts

Among the direct economic impacts they reported were increased employment rates, increased women’s participation in the workforce and greater financial literacy, as well as a shift from manual to skilled labour. They also noted that English education has increased economic opportunities. The indirect impacts included an increase in household incomes, rising education and literacy and a shift to tourist-oriented development, but the downside was an increase in housing prices and a diminishing of Kulapalayam’s sense of community. Many of the land sales are to outside investors, which means that residents are not benefitting from the market. Also, many of the enterprises opening up in the village are tourist-oriented and locals feel excluded.

The direct educational impact of Auroville on the village includes the fact that outreach schools offering low-cost education is leading to increasing enrollment and literacy rates, while adult education programmes are improving the literacy rate among women. The outreach schools also lead to greater community cohesion as they reduce caste-discrimination barriers. However, the rise of English has diminished the speaking of Tamil and valuing of Tamil culture.

Indirect impacts include the fact that Auroville’s educational approach has introduced progressive learning methods to local schools, benefitting critical thinking, while increased access to education has reshaped family dynamics and elevated social status and pride.



School of Regional Planning, Queen's University, Canada graduate students with their professor, Dr Ajay Agarwal (centre)

However, while better education possibilities provide pathways for local residents to pursue new career opportunities, the mismatch between educational achievement and local job availability is leading to educated villagers migrating for work elsewhere.

Concerning the impact of the social services which Auroville runs in the villages, the students noted that there are initiatives which address alcoholism and offer mental health support for men, helping address domestic violence and substance abuse, while outreach schools provide healthy food, promoting community health and education, and sports programmes encourage girls to participate, bridging gender gaps and fostering equality. Auroville-run health centres also offer accessible services for local residents.

Finally, regarding women’s empowerment, they noted that women are a large percentage of the Auroville workforce, and educational programmes have provided them with better employment opportunities enabling upward mobility, while Auroville’s policies challenge traditional gender roles. Also, mental health programmes have decreased suicide rates. Social programmes, like women’s groups, have strengthened connections between women, giving them an increased sense of solidarity and safety and, generally, lead to greater respect and support for women in village society.

One of the students noted, “There is a sense that women hold more power now in the village, but they also saw empowerment at times as a burden because sometimes they are expected to take up more responsibility for the family if a man can’t or doesn’t want to work.”

Recommendations

In the second part of their presentation, the students made a number of recommendations, along with suggestions about how they could be implemented. The recommendations included the need to promote the Tamil language and culture through Auroville creating an official bilingualism policy; more of a mixed student body and a mixture of free progress and the state system for each school; and using sports programmes to

further integrate communities and genders. They also recommend that there should be an Auroville-supported mentorship programme for young men and boys to sensitise them to the need to respect women and support their empowerment. Interestingly, they noted that many villagers still do not know much about Auroville or what it stands for, so they recommended creating more opportunities for villagers to engage with the Auroville community.

Possible next steps for Auroville include reviewing the recommendations from the previous three project reports for possible implementation and collaborating with the surrounding villages to create a regional plan for the bioregion.

Reflections

Given that the Canadian students had less than two weeks (further truncated by Cyclone Fengal) to survey the village, employing individual interviews and focus groups, what they came up with is impressive. Given more time, no doubt they would have investigated further

how, for example, increased employment and education opportunities for women has “reshaped family dynamics”. Inevitably, a short-term study like this lacks such granular detail. Moreover, the students admitted that a gap in their research was the fact that most of their interactions were with groups holding power or with project holders rather than with ordinary people on the ground.

Also, it is not clear why the study is titled ‘Pathways to Unity’ as the report does not mention to what extent the villagers feel closer to Auroville as a result of the reported initiatives and their impact. Nor was it mentioned if villagers still want to join Auroville, although one of the students noted that some interviewees said there should be an easier path for villagers to join if they wanted to, and suggested a fast track programme for those who have grown up in the area.

The big question, however, concerns whether Auroville will implement at least some of these recommendations. As one of the students put it, “Our role is only to set the stage,” and Lalit confirmed that “To build upon it is now our task.” However, the students noted that three previous Queen's student reports with recommendations [see below] still lacked any kind of implementation by Aurovilians. This points to an uncomfortable truth: that Auroville finds it extremely difficult to implement even those proposals which would benefit both the community and the bioregion as a whole. Why this should be requires further study. Some of the proposals may be unworkable for lack of financial and/or human resources, or because of Auroville’s limited ability to influence policy and development in the bioregion. And perhaps the attitude that ‘nobody from outside can understand Auroville or can tell us what to do’ remains prevalent in some quarters, leading planners and others to reject whatever does not immediately align with their current thinking.

Whatever the reason, it would be deeply disappointing if the efforts of students from Queen’s and elsewhere to improve the development capacities and preparedness for change both in Auroville and its bioregion go to waste for lack of effort to engage with the findings and to find ways of implementing the most important recommendations.

Alan

A selection of Queen's student recommendations from previous studies

2023: The Road to Auroville: planning for tourist driven development along the Auroville access road

1. Collaborate with the six neighbouring village panchayats within the Green Belt to develop a Visitor Management Action Plan.
2. Encourage specific land uses along the Auroville access road that align with its principles of sustainable development, cultural exchange, and eco-conscious practices.
3. Build strong social relationships between Auroville and village residents to foster a supportive and transparent planning process and development management strategy.
4. On the Auroville website, have a homepage targeting casual visitors that clearly states what they can do as day visitors; reduce the use of the Matrimandir in images and marketing to reduce the perception of it as a tourist attraction; create an easy online navigation system leading visitors through their entire visit to Auroville so that they understand completely what they can do before arriving.

2018: Tourism Impact Management Framework for Auroville

1. Create a certification programme for guest houses and tour guides.
2. Develop a certification programme for tour guides operating in Auroville.
3. Collaborate with Edayanchavadi on tourism-related development. Involve key stakeholders from Edayanchavadi in a tourism working group.
4. Educate villagers on sustainable development practices and environmental stewardship.
5. Bring the Auroville community together on the topic of tourism by running a community visioning workshop on tourism and forming a tourism working group.
6. Determine Auroville’s tourism carrying capacity.

2017: Growth Management Framework for Settlements in the Auroville Green Belt

1. Conduct a carrying capacity analysis to highlight what resources are available to Auroville and the surrounding villages to determine where resource prioritisation is needed.
2. Conduct tourism studies to understand tourist impacts on infrastructure sustainability.
3. Prepare a water carrying capacity analysis to interpret data on water recharge rate and regional water availability.
4. Develop planning and design guidelines in consultation with Green Belt villages to share with developers.
5. Continue to develop environmental education programming in collaboration with Green Belt villages.
6. Provide a forum for discussion between Auroville and the Green Belt villages through the establishment of a Collaboration Hub.
7. Create a document on lessons learned to identify how, and in what ways, Auroville is impacting the villages and if they are successful.
8. Work with village local leaders to format a community asset assessment to capture the unique skills and strengths each community has to offer.



Traffic jams at Kulapalayam caused by tourist traffic are now a daily occurrence

Dr Federico Mayor Zaragoza

Dr Federico Mayor Zaragoza, a former member of the Auroville International Advisory Council, passed away on 19 December.

A scientist and professor (biochemistry / pharmacy), Dr Mayor was Minister of Education during the first period of the current Spanish democracy and presided over UNESCO as Director-General for twelve years. A renowned writer and humanist, he was a fervent defender of gender equality. His deep commitment to human rights led him to be a critical voice against injustice, the power of money and war, defending the truth wherever he went. Till his passing, he presided over the Culture of Peace Foundation, which he founded in 2000.

Dr Mayor was a member of the Auroville International Advisory Council during his term in office at UNESCO, from where he wrote statements in favour of Auroville. He supported the work of Auroville and Auroville International Spain through several videos and with his presence at the General Assembly of Auroville International in Tortosa in 2013.

A short clip made of Dr Federico Mayor Zaragoza's talk on the occasion of Auroville's 50th anniversary in 2018 can be seen at <https://shorturl.at/Kcztz>.



Victor Plotnikov

Victor Plotnikov was born in 1954 and grew up in Moscow, Russia. Since 1993 he had been living in Certitude, with his wife Galina. His son Nikita was born in 1998 in Auroville and all three lived as a family till his last day. He passed away on 27 November, 2024 at the age of seventy.

As a child he was very smart and inquisitive with varied interests, and he loved hiking and rafting through rocky rivers in the Ural region.

In his youth, Victor began to show great interest in Eastern practices, took up yoga and karate, attended thematic lectures, and became a vegetarian.

In the early 90s, friends brought Victor a clipping from the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, which told about the city-commune of Auroville. Since his friends had dreamed of building a similar city in their youth, Victor decided to go to India and see this inspiring vision for himself. From then on, a new stage in his life began.

In his thirties he visited Auroville a few times until he finally moved and settled here. He joined in 1993 and dedicated his entire life to Auroville, especially Matrimandir, which was very dear to his soul. He worked there as an engineer, leading a team of workers to manifest the soul of Auroville. From 2019, he worked inside Matrimandir, providing peace and guidance for people to meditate.

Victor was an adventurous soul who kept a smile on his face through any circumstances. He was an extremely dedicated, sincere and honest person, full of passion and joy towards life. He was a good husband and a great father who supported his loved ones through thick and thin. He was always ready to help others and supported them with unconditional love. He will be remembered as a person with goodwill, good heart, and an eternal smile that radiated positivity and love.

Victor's remains were cremated on 3rd December 3rd at the Auroville Cremation Ground.

Remembering Karuna

Karuna Periyaswamy, who was born in Kulapalayam, was only 14 years old when he joined Auroville. As a child, he had once met The Mother at the Ashram, as part of a school visit, and offered flowers to her. His grandfather was one of the village chiefs of Kulapalayam. He initially stayed in Fraternity, then in Aspiration for a while, and finally settled back in Fraternity with his family.

He was partly educated in Auroville (After School), and he became a keen kabaddi, volleyball and basketball player. He worked at Aurelec for some time, and later was part of the Solar Service team for a while.

He married Uma in 1991 and had two children, Vidhya and



Kishore. He also had a four month old grandson, Vihaan, with whom he spent his last months.

At Fraternity, Karuna started a small workshop, producing handicrafts items and dolls. He started with one tailor and one lady assistant, and then, in 1993, this became Discovery,

This was a garments exporting unit with about sixty employees which offered a lot of job opportunities to the surrounding villages of Kulapalayam, Bommayapalayam, Edayanchavadi and Alankuppam. The unit specialised in silk hand painted garments and accessories.

Karuna was very actively involved in Auroville life. He was the first Tamil to start a successful export unit in Auroville. Later he expanded the business by taking over the Lotus unit (hammocks). In recent years he was managing the Discovery Guest House. He founded Discovery trust and was a trustee of Aurosarjan, and served on the Entry Group, the Working Committee and the ABC support group. He was also helping and supporting youngsters. He financially supported a lot of sports activities and he contributed to Auroville schools. For some time he was one of the executives of NESS school and of the water maintenance service.

He will be remembered as a very straightforward, skilful, organised, and hardworking person, with great willpower, and as a strong and bold person. He loved to travel the world and had travelled to the USA, England, Germany, France, and Switzerland.

For the past six years Karuna had been suffering from chronic kidney disease and was in dialysis. He passed away on the 5 December, aged sixty. His cremation took place the next day at the Adventure Burial Ground.

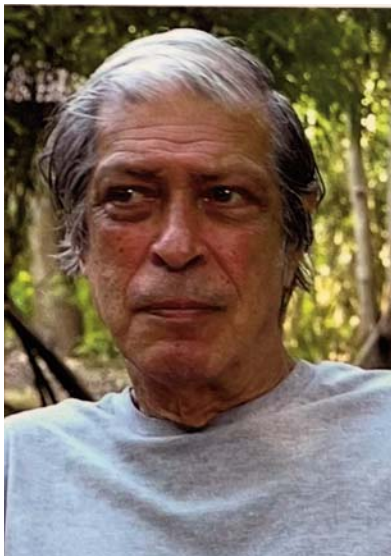
Richard Pierre Pérez

Richard Pierre Pérez, who passed away on 17 December, was born in southwestern France and spent much of his life in Paris with his partner Marie Christine. They visited Auroville for the first time in 2008 and then returned every year for a short period of one month until their permanent settlement here in 2017. Richard had been working at the Botanical Garden since then, where his manual skills, generosity, and availability were fully expressed. His smile, his radiance, his simplicity, and his sincerity will remain in the hearts of all those who met him. Richard's remains were cremated on 23 December at the Auroville Cremation Ground.



Navroz Kersasp Mody

Navroz Mody, environmental activist, died in Pondicherry on 20 December 2024. He was 79. Born and raised in Bombay, Navroz was the only son of Kersasp and Rati Mody. He attended the Cathedral School, where he was a great sportsman, Head Boy in 1964, and Palmer House Captain. He was awarded the Macdonald Medal for Leadership in 1963. From 1965 to 1969, Navroz studied at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, USA, under the mentorship of Hans Penner, noted scholar of comparative religion. Returning to India, he worked as Regional Editor for Oxford University Press from 1971-1980. Among his editorial projects were the late volumes of the *Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan* by Salim Ali, the renowned ornithologist and natural historian. Their friendship inspired Navroz's developing passion for environmental conservation. During the 1970s, with Shyam Chainani and others, Navroz became a founding member of the Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG). For decades, through speaking, writing, and legal advocacy, he worked with BEAG to impact policy and effect change. At his death, he remained Honorable Secretary. In 1980, Navroz moved to Pondicherry to start his own business, Southend Typographics, and in December 1983, he joined the Auroville community. He developed a grant-funded project to enhance water and crop management for small farmers in the Palani Hills watershed. He played an integral role in the Palani Hills Conservation Council and was instrumental in legal battles to protect the region, including the landmark victory over Pleasant Stay Hotel in 1995. During the 1990s, Navroz worked with the global organisation Greenpeace, helping to pursue legal action against the companies responsible for the gas leak disaster in Bhopal. In Kodaikanal, Navroz was instrumental in exposing mercury contamination and seeking justice for affected workers. In Auroville, he was known as a "fearless soldier" for environmental justice. Navroz was a member of the team that worked on the Auroville Master Plan. Based on his extensive experience in environmental issues, he focused on the co-development area (now called "outside the Master Plan") and the Auroville Greenbelt.



Navroz showed that planning and natural growth in designing a Master Plan are not contradictory but complementary approaches. In 1999, he became a member of the official representative team for the Master Plan. In 2022, after the destruction of the Youth Center and Bliss forest, he was one of two Aurovilians who petitioned the National Green Tribunal Southern Bench to preserve Auroville's forests and green spaces, uphold participatory planning and stress the need for obtaining environmental clearance for the Master Plan area.

Navroz was also an artist. And in recent times, he was instrumental in starting the Ecology Action Lab at Aurobrindavan to encourage citizen science in Auroville.

Navroz will be remembered for his fearlessness, kindness, passion, generosity, concern for others, and capacity to articulate issues. For his family and friends, his indelible spirit remains.

Navroz's remains were cremated on 26 December at the Auroville cremation grounds.

Marco Feira

Marco Feira passed away in his house in Sharmga community on 26 December at the age of 74. He had been suffering from cancer.

Marco joined Auroville almost 30 years ago. His was a full and varied life, initially shaped by his love for the arts, later by his love for the spiritual. While growing up in Turin, Italy, he started painting and joined the Arte Povera movement, using everyday materials to create a new pictorial language. In the late 1960s he travelled to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India where he fell in love with the arts and antiques. His focus expanded and he became one of the first Italian dealers in Asiatic art and antiquities, running, by the end of the 1970s, a business with more than 20 employees.

India touched him in other ways as well. He started studying Indian philosophy and the Vedas, with his first book being one by Sri Aurobindo which, he said later, he hadn't understood at all. Together with his wife Liliana, Marco discovered Auroville. After visiting Auroville for many years, in 1997 they joined and gave their antiquities business to the people who had been working with them. Marco and Liliana then started the fashion and jewellery unit Miniature – a name chosen as a living reminder to keep the business small.

Marco will be particularly remembered for his role in stimulating the arts in Auroville. Together with four other Aurovilians, he started the Auroville Art Service in 2010, aiming at supporting and developing the arts in Auroville. He was concerned that Auroville would be built by bureaucrats and politicians who didn't have any artistic ideas and didn't care about art, because art doesn't produce money. He stressed the importance of art for Auroville and followed what The Mother had said about art:

Art is nothing less in its fundamental truth than the aspect of beauty of the Divine manifestation. ... like a Yogi an artist goes into deep contemplation to await and receive his inspiration. To create something truly beautiful, he has first to see it within, to realise it as a whole in his inner consciousness; only when so found, seen, held within, can he execute it outwardly; he creates according to this greater inner vision. This too is a kind of yogic discipline, for by it he enters into intimate communion with the inner worlds.

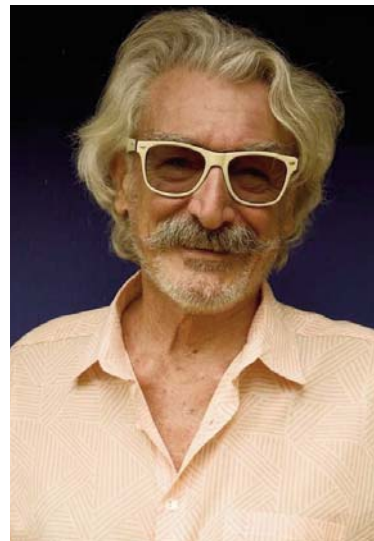
For a brief period of time, the Auroville Art Service published the magazine *MAGZAV*, which focused on questions around what the new culture of Auroville would be, how art could contribute to the building of the city and inspire spiritual search, and how Auroville artists could become revealers and teachers of the divine beauty in life.

Marco also curated many art shows, amongst which the exhibition *Transformation*, which was part of *The Auroville Festival – City for Transformation* at the India International Center, New Delhi, in September 2012. The exhibition, which showed works of Auroville artists, was a great success and led Marco to dream about an Auroville Museum of Modern Art, which would host art that spoke directly to the viewer, who should experience 'something' and ask questions so deep that answers would have to be found at the spiritual level.

Cinema was another art form Marco loved. He created the Cinema Paradiso in Auroville's Multi-Media Centre, showing films from different parts of the world, and started the bi-annual Auroville Film Festival, a platform for movies made by people from Auroville and elsewhere. The experience led to exchange programmes with film festivals in other parts of the world and to the decision to make film making part of the curriculum of Auroville's schools.

His focus on art was supported by his focus on Tai Chi. When he was young, Marco had stayed some time in a Zen monastery in Japan learning breathing techniques, concentration and meditation, which became part of his daily routine. In Auroville he learned a form of Tai Chi called *The Inner Way* from master Vlady Stevanovitch. He studied this form intensively and became a teacher himself, ultimately training between 200 and 400 people a year for more than 20 years.

Marco's remains were buried on 27 December at the Auroville Burial Grounds.



"HAPPY NEW YEAR" by Marco Saroldi at Centre d'Art

What do you get when you mix a seasoned photographer, theatrical flair, and nearly four decades of festive mischief? HAPPY NEW YEAR by Marco Saroldi – part photo exhibit, part autobiography, and entirely the cheekiest holiday tradition around.

Marco's exhibition is a time capsule stocked with wit, reflection, and just a sprinkle of glitter. For 38 years, he's sent out New Year's cards that go beyond clichéd fonts and champagne flutes. Each card is a self-portrait – not stiff smiles, but social commentary on politics, tech, and the absurdity of being human.

It all started in 1986 as a crafty way to dodge phone calls. Saroldi snapped a photo with his girlfriend, sent it off, and turned a holiday chore into nearly 40 years of visual storytelling – festive and brilliant.

Since then, his playful portraits have evolved into elaborate scenes



reflecting modern anxieties and joys. From clutching a cluster of smartphones with the multi-armed grace of a deity to poking fun at consumerism, Saroldi leaves no sacred cow un-photographed. Take *Venus in Oil* (2012), for example – a biting reimagining of Botticelli's *Birth of*

Venus. Here, Marco's Venus emerges from the sea not in soft pastels, but cloaked in crude oil. Accompanied by oil-slicked pelicans, it's an image that replaces beauty with environmental devastation, all the while playfully mimicking the language of luxury advertise-

ments. "Give your skin new smoothness," the piece teases – a revisited moisturizer campaign.

Smart, festive, and just irreverent enough to make you wonder why you haven't sent your own ironic holiday card yet, HAPPY NEW

YEAR stands out with its humour and surprising depth. Marco reminds us that ringing in the new year needs less pressure and more play – a camera, a little mischief, and plenty of laughter.

Chandra



NEWS IN BRIEF

New Governing Board member

The website of the Auroville Foundation mentions that retired Gujarat cadre IAS officer Shri Kuniyil Kailashnathan, the new Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry, has been inducted as a member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. Mr Kailashnathan has held key positions in Gujarat, including that of Additional Chief Secretary to the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi until 2013. He is considered to be one of the most trusted aides of Prime Minister Modi. His term of office will end on 5 October 2025.

Governing Board meets in Auroville

According to an article in The Hindu, the establishment of an IIT Madras Research Park and a Centrally supported Innovation Hub were discussed in the 68th meeting of the Governing Board held in Auroville on 5 December. GB Chairman Dr. Ravi noted that "the establishment of a new IIT campus on Auroville land will foster research, education and new entrepreneurial initiatives, driving economic growth and social developments in the region." The proposed Innovation Hub, supported by the Ministry of Science and Technology, would empower young innovators and entrepreneurs. In the Governing Board's assessment, the Innovation Hub, with an allocation of Rs 2.5 crore from the Auroville Foundation and a matching contribution from NITI Aayog, would nurture creativity, foster job creation and contribute to the regions' economic vitality. Other topics discussed were the formation of new committees, project approvals, land related matters approval and compliance issues in Auroville. The meeting was attended by Shri Kuniyil Kailashnathan, Shri Aravindan Neelakandan, Prof. Gautam Ghosal, Prof. R.S. Saraju, and Dr Nirima Oza, as well as by Dr Jayanthi Ravi, Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, stated the article.

Auroville Foundation Secretary position clarified

In response to three Right to Information (RTI) requests, the Ministry of Education, Auroville's

nodal ministry, replied on 25 November 2024, that Dr Jayanti Ravi IAS had been appointed as Secretary of the Auroville Foundation for another term of one year with effect from 5 July 2024. However, on 2 August 2024, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet had approved a premature repatriation of Dr Ravi from the post of Secretary, Auroville Foundation, to her parent cadre, the Government of Gujarat, with immediate effect. The Ministry further replied that the RTI question whether Dr Ravi been relieved from her duties as Secretary, Auroville Foundation or has been entrusted with any additional responsibilities regarding the Auroville Foundation "is under consideration". The Ministry informed that it had on 5 November forwarded to the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions the RTI question whether there exists any Office Memorandum of the Central Government which permits a State Government employee/All India Service to simultaneously hold a substantial post under the Central Government, with the request to provide the information directly to the RTI applicant. On 20 December 2024, the Secretariat of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet of the Department of Personnel & Training of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, wrote that the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the proposal of the Department of Higher Education for entrustment of additional charge of the post of Secretary, Auroville Foundation to Dr (Smt.) Jayanthi S. Ravi, IAS (GJ:1991), presently in the Cadre, with immediate effect, for a period of one year, or till appointment of a regular incumbent to the post, whichever is earlier.

Handing over of Red Assets

The Auroville Town Development Council constituted by the Governing Board (ATDC) informed the community through a mass bulletin on 25 December 2024 that Auroville is currently implementing its road network, which comprises the Crown, Radial Roads, and the Outer Ring Road, and that, consequently, all Red Assets connected to this project, i.e. structures located on the road or on the rights-of-

way, will need to be demolished. The bulletin stated, "Many of you have already been relocated, or have been invited to interactions on the same with the Officer on Special Duty of the Auroville Foundation. If the house or asset occupied by you falls within the right-of-way of these roads, and you have not been contacted already to facilitate your move, we urge you to please contact relocation_avf@auroville.org.in at the earliest to arrange for alternate housing for yourself."

Auroville without boundaries

In the same mass bulletin, the ATDC announced that all fences within and between neighbouring communities will be removed. "This initiative seeks to manifest an open and walkable city, without any boundary demarcations, encouraging a more open and connected environment." The removal will be carried out in a phased manner. The materials from the removed fences will be reused as necessary to reinforce or establish new fencing in areas requiring protection, such as green spaces or vulnerable boundaries. All fences are and will be treated as Auroville property and shall be reused/ removed/ recycled for public spaces. Cow protection will as much as possible be maintained at the peripheral entry points, however, preventing cows from entering extensive private gardens is not ATDC's top priority. "Once Auroville as a city is fenced and gated, cow intrusion into gardens will phase out on its own," wrote the ATDC.

Fair and Square

Youth Centre and YouthLink's annual end-of-year fair took place on 21 December, attracting a sizeable and enthusiastic crowd. The organisers of Fair and Square (as the event was called) focused their efforts on showcasing the Youth Centre space as a vibrant social centre - or town square - prominently located on the Crown road. Visitors were asked to reimagine the Youth Centre they would want to see five years from now. This was then harvested in the form of drawings, ideas, and suggestions for the Youth Centre and YouthLink teams to draw inspiration from in the coming years. Visitors



Collaborative artwork at the Youth Centre fair

were also treated to a 47 metre long zipline, a giant seesaw, a dunk tank and a crate stacking game. They could participate in a giant collective art project, screenprint a Free Store teeshirt with the commemorative Fair and Square design, or support the Youth Centre by buying teeshirts already printed with the unique artwork. At the Upcycling Studio stall, visitors made earrings or keychains from waste leather; at the Revelation Forest stall, visitors who matched plant leaves with the correct name won a free cup of juice; the Green Silk Road stall featured photos from the programme's overland travel across Eurasia connecting people and regenerative projects; the Rainbow Collective exhibited the work of various community artists; and, as always, Johnny's stall brewed free tea for one and all. Visitors commented on the strong show of Youth Centre vitality and Auroville community spirit, and many felt reinvigorated by the bustling event.

Uneven rains

This was a year of uneven rains. No less than 8 months were rain-deficient, but the year was bookended by exceptional rains in January and December including, of course, an all-time record rain of 54 cm over the 24 hours of 30 November/1 December, courtesy of Cyclone . The total rainfall for the year of almost 195 cm was more than 39% higher than the average annual rainfall of approximately 140 cm (see figures below, recorded by Charlie at Evergreen).

30 December 2024	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Year Till Date	
Rain Days	6	0	0	0	7	10	8	12	10	19	16	11	99	
Total mm	290.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	38.5	58.0	99.5	236.9	47.2	130.2	333.2	730.4	1964.80	
Trace Days	1	1	0	1	2	3	4	2	0	2	4	1	21	
Monthly Rainfall - Deviation from Average:	1350.3%	-100.0%	-100.0%	-100.0%	-27.8%	-9.1%	37.7%	87.1%	-63.9%	-47.1%	-19.9%	236.7%	+/- avg. until end Dec=	
Seasonal Rainfall 2024 and below,	Dry Period Five Month Rainfall:					329mm	S/W Monsoon Rainfall:			442mm	N/E Monsoon Rainfall:		1194mm	1406.64 mm
Annual Deviation from Average +/-	plus or minus Dry Period Average:					145.09%	plus or minus SW average:		12.22%	plus or minus NE average:		35.84%	39.68%	
Summary Previous: 35 Years Rainfall Records														
Averages all past years	Five Month Dry Period Average:					134.4 mm	S/W Monsoon Average:			393.5 mm	N/E Monsoon Average:		878.8 mm	Average
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	35 Years	
Average mm per Month	20.1	23.9	15.1	22.0	53.3	63.8	72.3	126.6	130.8	245.9	415.9	217.0	1400 mm	

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