AVI-USA CONNECT
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Why I Joined the AVI-USA Board
By Matthew Andrews

My relationship with Auroville began in 2000 when I lived in Verite for 3 months with the Living Routes program. But “began” is not quite right, because when I arrived and breathed the air and touched the earth and swam in the ocean, I felt more at home than I had ever felt in my life. Somehow Auroville was inside me, waiting to wake up and discover itself within my unique body and consciousness. I thought that surely I would live there, and it’s still somewhat surprising to me that I have developed roots here, in the USA, so distant in physical space.

But as I’ve become involved with AVI-USA, I have learned that Auroville is not only a place but a spirit. It is not confined to a district on the southeast coast of India but emanates from there as a result of an intensive concentration and collective effort to sustain and nurture this spirit. The city itself is like a great tree that throws off seeds continually, offering itself for replication as far and wide as the wind, the birds and we will carry it.

And America asks for these seeds. Disillusioned and jaded though we may find ourselves, our hearts are not nearly frozen or turned to stone. Beneath the façade of materialism and the turbid political froth that occupies our attention, we are longing for a Life Divine. And the social and spiritual architecture that Aurovilians have painstakingly built over nearly 50 years has immense value to our current collective milieu. Every effort to live the Mother’s vision for Auroville, every experiment, every project, even (and perhaps especially) the ones that seem to have “failed” to our eyes (which look habitually at the surface of thing), all of the collective work of building and nurturing and becoming Auroville is of immense value to the USA.

I joined the AVI-USA board to help increase access to this wealth. That means facilitating connections between individuals and groups in the USA and in Auroville, sharing stories about Auroville with US audiences, and raising funds to support projects on the ground in Auroville and here. I’ve spent the past 10 years working in nonprofit administration, recruiting, hiring, training, and coaching senior level fundraisers. I’ve worked with institutional and individual funders, encouraged and supported volunteer/staff collaborations, led retreats and strategic planning, and overseen small and large scale operational reorganization.

Recently my wife, Corinne, and I took over ownership of the Yoga Center Amherst (MA), which we hope to infuse with Auroville’s spirit, and especially Mother’s appeal to develop “inner means, inner knowledge and inner techniques” in order to help “change the world and master it without crushing it.”

The development of these “inner means” is, I think, the greatest challenge to a community such as ours. Can we discover and trust the inner Light, can we let it guide our steps that move in a world focused so intently on surfaces? Can we find the natural and inherent harmony that arises from a thousand hearts joined in a deep inner journey of self discovery? Can we overcome cynicism, and let our past missteps or confusions enlighten our future efforts, rather than weigh them down? I believe we can, and that, if our aim is to promote understanding and peace between nations and individuals, a living embodiment of an actual human unity, and an environment for unending education and constant progress for humankind, then we must. I look forward to adventuring with you.

Matthew Andrews is the Owner/Director of Yoga Center Amherst, 17 Kellogg Ave, 2nd Floor, Amherst, MA 01002, 413-256-0604, www.yogacenteramherst.com
What is Auroville? - Outreach to Chennai
By Julian Lines

March 1st of this year marked the start of a series of exhibitions, performances and workshops for the city closest to Auroville, Chennai (formerly Madras).

It began with an opening speech by the Governor of Tamil Nadu and former Chair- man, M.S. Swaminathan and closed weeks later with Governing Board Chairman, Dr. Karan Singh, made a presentation along with Sir Mark Tully and Dr. Vishakha Desai.

A series of articles in the main newspaper, The Hindu, raised awareness of the multifaceted contributions of Auroville. A seminar on sustainability was very well attended. Highlights are at: www.aurovilleradio.org/plenary-of-av-retreat/ and in articles for subscribers to Auroville Today.

The Festival coincided with a very dense community-wide gathering, the Auroville Retreat, facilitated by Aromar Revi along with a meeting of the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council.

The stage is being set for Auroville’s 50th in 2018!

Auroville International & All USA Meeting (AUM)

Menla Center, Phoenicia, NY Aug 20th - 23rd

We gather as a community every year to share our experience of Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s Integral Yoga and the international community of Auroville. This year we have the added delight of having Auroville International (AVI) members join us. Representing Auroville in Europe, Asia, and South America, many have a long and deep association with the community. Our theme is “Seeds of Light,” sharing our personal and institutional stories in manifesting the vision of human unity and spiritual evolution.

The long weekend will include updates on the work of the various Auroville International centers, a retrospective on the cultural shift brought about by the Woodstock Festival, a celebration of music and dance, and a series of experiential workshops and presentations.

Our keynote speaker on Friday will be Alan Sasha Lithman, a pioneer in Auroville known as Savitra. This acclaimed author will also give an “Evolutionary Intensive” workshop. On Saturday we’ll have a live Skype with Auroville, an update from Mandakini on Acres for Auroville and a biographical sketch of Dr. Judith Tyberg (Jyotipriya), founder of the East West Cultural Center in Los Angeles.

Workshops include:

- JV Avadhanulu: Pranayama and stress reduction
- Miriam Belov: Cellular consciousness, the chakras, and concentration
- Elliot Landy: Healing workshop
- Shelly McNeal: Integral education
- Martha Orton: An exploration of oneness
- Andrea van de Loo: 12 steps and Integral Yoga
- Fif and Hamish: Laughter is the Best… (Medical Clowning)
- Bill and Livia Vanaver will present a celebration of music and dance.

Details at www.matagiri.org/events
Scholarships available via info@aviusa.org or call 845-679-5358.
Please register now!
Graduation

Balu Kuppusamy, an Aurovilian from Edyananchavadi, received an M.A. in Sustainable International Development from Brandeis University’s Heller School of Social Policy and Management in May. His thesis project was “Using Pro-Poor Tourism to Develop the Village of Edyananchavadi in South India.”

AVI-USA Cultural Events in Auroville

Two concerts were sponsored this year, both at the Unity Pavilion. The first, at the end of January, was a “jugalbandi” (literally, “entwined twins”), a duet of two musicians usually on different instruments and often bring together south and north Indian musicians. It featured Gordon Korstange on south Indian flute and Joel Eisenkramer on the north Indian slide guitar. Both are from Vermont. They were accompanied by Rashmi Bhatt on tabla.

The second, in the beginning of March, was a masterful dhrupad concert on the cello with Nancy Lesh Kulkarni, an American from Wisconsin, who left one of the top orchestras in Italy to study in India where she has lived for the past 30 years. The deep notes of her cello as she moved slowly through the stages of dhrupad were trance inducing and produced a standing ovation at the end.

Walking the Labyrinth

On January 15, 2015 the new labyrinth, sponsored in part by AVI-USA, was dedicated at the Auroville Botanical Garden. A gathering of about 50 people attended the opening which included a short presentation by Noel Parent (see p.) who had dedicated himself to its design and completion.

The project was the inspiration of Bryan and Fanou Walton who, along with Paul Blanchefleur of the garden, combined on its design. They decide on a Cretan style labyrinth, simpler than others, the most ancient one historically, and not specifically Christian. Paul did the abstracted version on his computer and developed the size of paths and berms. The center sitting pit was Bryan’s idea while Paul added the four trees.

Looking at the labyrinth from the outside it seemed small: circular paths with new plants. As we entered however, it soon became apparent that it would take some time to come to the center and then retrace our steps. A labyrinth such as this is meant to be walked slowly, with gradually smaller spirals pulling one into the center. There is a single pathway into the center and the same path brings you back out. When you have reached the center you are halfway along the path. Take some time in the center. It is okay for several people to be seated in the center at one time. When you are ready, begin the walk back to the beginning. If a number of people are walking the labyrinth, then you will pass people on the way in and on the way out.

The group was in a festive mood to celebrate this new addition to the Botanical Garden. Afterwards, there was a lunch for all concerned. We will return each year to see how the plants have grown up alongside the spiral paths.

Memorial Grove Dedication

On February 28, 2015 a memorial garden, sponsored by AVI-USA and Sacred Groves housing project was inaugurated in an area next to the construction site. It is intended to be a place where trees can be planted in remembrance of someone who has been connected with Auroville and who would like their ashes included in the planting as well as a plaque with their names on it.

In the center of the garden is a large rock which marks the Vastu site (The Indian science of lines of force.) The Auroville Vastu group found energy lines at this site which run in geometrical directions carrying forces which were identified as an opening to the
ancestors. Thus it was felt by the Vastu group, AVI-USA members and the Sacred Groves team that here would be a place open to and welcoming in our ancestors. Thus a stone was set and lines delineated and an outline for where trees could be planted.

After a short silent meditation, the first tree dedicated to June Maher, AVI-USA’s founder, was planted along with some of her ashes. A gathering of about 40 people which included many volunteers the mason, Subramani and Manu the architect from the Sacred Groves housing project, as well as Aurovilians and other friends of June from AVI-USA and other AVIs. Participants encircled the center stone and reflected on their experiences of June’s love and dedication to Auroville which touched so many of us for so many years.

**Nakashima Complex Tour**

On August 17th a group of AVI members from Europe, Auroville and the USA will be touring the Nakashima complex in New Hope, Pa. Mira Nakashima and her family will show us around the property and buildings which George designed and built. One of his Sacred Peace Tables is in the Hall of Peace in the Unity Pavilion in Auroville.

George Nakashima is one of the first American disciples of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. He lived at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1936-39. He had gone there from Tokyo to design and help construct Golconda. This project was one of great importance to The Mother and so he worked closely with Her. Being deeply moved by the atmosphere, Nakashima joined the ashram. Sri Aurobindo gave him the name of Sundarananda, “One who delights in beauty,” and he considered himself a karma yogi devoted to creating works of beauty out of wood.

We will gather at 11am at the studio. There will be a boxed lunch which will cost $20. If you wish to join us, or if you want more details, email Miriam by August 10. miriam@wellnessagenda.com

**UPDATES**

**Sacred Groves**

**BY JEANNE KORSTANGE**

First of all you will be working in the dirt, dust and sun while sweat takes over your entire body as you use your feet to mix cob, your hands to pass blocks of adobe and a chisel to finish a wall’s surface. In addition you will live in a dorm which gives you a mattress and a box for your things. Each day you will take a hike to the compost toilet and the open shower—cold water only. Breakfast at 9 am from Visitor’s Center and lunch at 1 pm from Solar Kitchen are the 2 meals per day for your labor. And still you love to work as every minute of your toil is transforming red earth into cob, walls, floors, and one day a house.

Unlike building with steel and concrete this work is primarily human labor. You pick rocks from rubble, you pull strands of straw apart and strew in coconut fiber to the pile of cob under your feet as you dance on this earthen mixture till it stands the test and is ready for application to the wall.

While all this work seems like something from the ancient past in terms of house building technology, the people are all from today. Many Indian architecture students from all over the country are getting their first hands-on experience of actual building. They work side-by-side with people from Australia, Switzerland, Uzbekistan, England, the USA, France, Germany, Spain etc. They come looking for a hands-on communal experience where even if you never made cob before you can do it now and have found hard work with the community of workers fun. Daytime dancing on cob and then night time...
dancing Salsa or afternoon sessions of Hatha Yoga or just having enough energy left to find dinner somewhere.

The Sacred Groves experience is transformative. Yet the houses need to be completed and the pressure to achieve that is present. Timelessness and time, Auroville’s past and present, seem to have come into conflict. How do we work and live now to build the future?

I will always be grateful to all 18 of the Sacred Groves volunteer team that I worked with from December thru March for that timeless experience of the moment when body, earth, others and work created for me an unforgettable experience. Dance on dear friends. Your work and your lives will be changed by this experience forever.

Thank you: Sarin, Veeren, Ashika, Neeta, Ram, John, Amal, Mani, Himanshu, Minky, Silpi, Nitika, Sindya, Michelle, Matthew, Cameron, Veedushi and Rupert - The Citizen Green team

Sadhana Forest News

FROM AVIRAM

In March, the Sadhana Forest team embarked from Auroville on a one-week trip to three farms in the north of Tamil Nadu. The goal was to share knowledge and practical experience on how barren land could be reclaimed. All three farmers had severely degraded pieces of land that they were not utilizing. The farmers hosted the team very warmly and generously and we exchanged ideas on how they could make their land productive through water conservation and tree planting.

In each one of the farms, there was a map that serves as the blueprint for the development of the land. The team then got to work planting the first trees and implementing the first water conservation measures. At one of the locations we designed and implemented a water catchment pond with beautiful islands in the center with the help of a bulldozer. At another location, we planted a tree with school children, a very joyful morning for all of us. After seven days, the team came back to Sadhana Forest exhausted and happy.

Sadhana Forest Kenya will be offering its first Permaculture Design Certificate course in June and July, 2015. This will be a free two-month long hands-on course with participants from Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Congo, Egypt, Singapore, Brazil, Australia and other countries. All the course participants will be planting trees with the local community. The Samburu community around Sadhana Forest Kenya is very excited to work together with all the participants to create a greener and more sustainable landscape.

Help Chandra Go to Cambridge

Chandra De Dionigi, a 25-year-old Aurovilian, has an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Sri Aurobindo and attend King’s College, Cambridge University in England to study languages next fall.

After receiving high marks on the British A level exams, she applied, was interviewed and accepted last fall. Chandra writes that “I have a passion for languages (she is fluent in four) because I feel this world needs better communication. Mastery of languages would enable me to become a bridge between people, projects and nations.” She wants to use this opportunity to help connect Auroville to the great universities of the world.

Chandra is also an accomplished musician who has studied and performed with the great Indian flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia.

Although she has received a scholarship to attend Cambridge she is still in need of further funds. Donations to support Chandra realize her dream can be sent through AVI-USA.
A House in the International Zone

By Amy

I arrived in October 2004 as a casual tourist and never left. So here I am, 10 years later. Talk about an adventure. All the while I have lived in the Residential Zone. I believed I would always live there. Then when I rescued some abandoned puppies and two ended up staying with me, it just didn’t work out in the apartment building setting. So I started to look for another place to create a new home for me and my 2 little ones. I knew B (Sullivan) from, well, from how we know each other in Auroville, and asked him what were the possibilities in the International Zone. I had seen that Krupa put up a container to make into a residence just past the Tibetan Pavilion, and was hoping there were other such opportunities for housing.

At that time, October 2013, the International Zone Coordination Team (IZCT) was planning a new bore well specifically for the International Zone. Before I had even inquired it had been discussed that it would be nice for there to be a presence at the site of the well. This sounded good to me, and the IZCT was very welcoming. It was a happy coincidence, for me anyway, that the location for the new well ended up being directly adjacent to International House. The well was installed in February 2014. And once everyone agreed that the dismountable house construction was a temporary situation, the real fun for me began. That was in June 2014.

I didn’t know I had a house in me. Well, you know what I mean. I was inspired by a small space that was built by a fellow-Aurovilian, and he agreed to recreate the same model as a residence. I worked on the design in a spreadsheet with coloured cells. I’m no architect. It is a one-room, humble, but beautiful abode. I witnessed it rise up: first as a steel frame on concrete pillars. Then it became more grounded with kadapah stone flooring, and it took on its house-shape with an insulated aluminum roof. Then wood-framed walls fitted with bison board on the bottom, and glass screens and windows in the top, provided the final structure. It even has a composting toilet. I sweated, cried, earned more gray “wisdom” hairs, and at times laughed like a crazy person, but sure enough it was a slowly unfolding miracle that I was involved in creating. Amazing! I still can hardly believe it.

Now, sitting in this new house, I feel blessed and deeply grateful. The IZTC has been sweetly supportive. B and Nandini at International House, and caretakers, Manu and Garima, have been a steady source of encouragement. For me, being in the International Zone is like being in the “Wild Wild West”. Well, not exactly, but there’s a fresh sense of opportunity and hope and promise.

Recently I began to attend weekly IZCT meetings. There’s a lot of positive energy, goodwill, and hard work focused on manifesting temporary or permanent pavilions, inviting more activities, working more closely with the Bharat Nivas group, and everybody at the Unity Pavilion. The development plans are taking concrete shape. Meetings with L’avenir d’Auroville are on going with regular communication and tangible action steps being agreed upon. The participants are energized and really making things happen. There’s focus, clear intent, and laughter. This is my place. I wouldn’t have dreamed it but I’ve found my home in the International Zone.

Darkali

By Agnes

Very near the increasingly busy roads to Auroville’s town hall and Kottakarai, northwest of the Matrimandir, there is a small forest/park called Darkali, meaning “place of Kali.” The small Kali temple is very close by with a sacred grove where seeds for the first trees and plants were collected. It takes up about 50 acres, some of which are in the international zone and include the supposed site of the American pavilion. Three Aurovilians, Agnes, Gopal, and Auronevi are the dedicated stewards of this refuge. Here is their story.

Our adventure started in 1987 when the person whom Mother named Krishna took a crowbar in one hand and Gopal and Agnes in the other and began to dig and plant. It would seem at first that the objective was to transform the arid red earth into a forest, but the real work was what we would attempt to become while making this forest, because in Auroville the “how” is more important than the final result. We were looking for discoveries within while digging the Auroville earth.
And so in the evenings under the stars on our rope beds our first reading would be *On the Way to Supermanhood* by Satprem.

Many years later, the trees have grown, the miracle has flowered and a multitude of other indigenous flowering shrubs are thriving. The mongooses, foxes, jackals, porcupines, a multitude of peacocks with plenty of other birds and so much other wildlife have all happily taken up residence in Darkali.

Part of Darkali is a canyon in which we have built many dams and in other places we made water catchment ponds. Our first well was initiated with a hand pump; it was later followed by a windmill and finally it has a very efficient solar pump. We are also grateful to have a small tractor and digger to help us with the hard work.

The financial burden of this park is mostly carried by us, the stewards, who go out of Auroville to work for money. Some help also comes from the Darkali friends here and there in other parts of the world.

Darkali, this seed planted at the beginning of our adventure, still remains a work that is our prayer for Mother.

AVI-USA, as part of a commitment to the land of the international zone, is supporting Darkali park with a grant of $5000 to build another dam in the canyon that runs through it. As Agnes wrote to us, “The water level is dropping in many wells in Auroville and it is imperative to catch all the water we can.”

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**Honoring Ancestors at Aikiyam**

**By Kate Strassman**

I am a teacher in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Six years ago I lived in Pondicherry where I taught for one year at the Primrose School. I had visited Auroville and made friends there during that time, but felt it would be such a more meaningful experience to be there long term and work on a project. This summer my dream of returning to Auroville to teach was fulfilled. In July of 2014, I taught a creative writing project to students at Aikiyam school that employed the writing process and portraiture.

My passion as an educator is to bring the creative arts into the classroom. One project in particular evolved while teaching for several years at an inner city school in Milwaukee comprised of Mexican immigrants. To honor “Dia de Los Muertos”, every year I led the students in a creative writing assignment to “resurrect the dead” while learning about and honoring an ancestor from their family. For many Mexican families, remembering family and a land they left behind can be painful, like opening up an old wound. Many families had chosen to forget about their ancestors, and so the students ended up creating their stories from their imaginations. In many cases, resurrecting these spirits through art became a form of healing. Furthermore, when teaching this project to African American students whose ancestors were slaves, the project took on a new meaning. It gave the students a sense of purpose by understanding their roots, and this pride in turn strengthened their understanding of history. Every year the project got better and better, and its importance gained momentum. I thought, “How fascinating would it be to take this project to another country?” I renamed the project “Real and Imagined Ancestors,” applied for a grant from the FWE, and a few months later I was at Aikiyam school in Auroville ready to teach the project to three sections of middle schoolers.

This project is really about the creative process. I believe in giving ideas time to flower, so the first week was spent brainstorming and pre-writing. When class began at Aikiyam, I introduced the idea of what ancestors are to the students and I challenged them to learn something about their great grandparents. After drawing family trees, interviewing family members, and doing a guided visualization, the students produced a first draft. The students were so surprised that they didn’t actually “write” anything in this writing workshop until the fifth day! However, the quality of all their ideas were very strong and authentic; nothing was copied from a chalk board or a text book. The stories that came out were so beautiful and brilliant: I learned about a grandfather who died defending his family from a thief in the night, a grandmother who was weak her whole life from a snake bite, and how a young girl emotionally still talks to her deceased grandparents in her dreams. This glimpse into other worlds can only happen through the art of story telling. I’ll always marvel at

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Painting the Ancestors

Kate with students from Aikiyam
I could perhaps call myself an Aurovillian, yet even that does not express who I am. I have always identified with the statement by Sri Aurobindo, in responding to all the biographies written about Him, that the Truth of His Life was not on the surface for men to see....The Play and Action of His Life was truly much Deeper and Vaster. So the idea of sharing about myself while caging myself in short descriptions of the surface ‘activities’ of my life never feels very attractive.

My second reaction was that the idea of writing about myself always feels so very.....egotistical! I am most of the time the quiet type, and have never felt comfortable talking about ‘myself’. Who I have become now is so far off from who I have been in the past, and who I am now is still something unfinished, still Aspiring and Becoming, an unending process that seems to Quicken with each year....So who I am shall be surpassed, hopefully, and it is this identification with Something Else which is still Beyond (yet still Near) that I identify with more than anything else, like constantly reaching for the Stars.

I have been a Flame for a long time, wanting and seeking desperately the Truth....seeking intensely to be Transformed. It is this that I came to Auroville for, and nothing else....for the Transformation....for Mother....for Sri Aurobindo....to work for the Divine Life. I came to know of Auroville first through discovering Sri Aurobindo’s writings through a simple quote in a book while still living in the U.S. I immediately felt the Power and Force behind the writings and everything ‘clicked’ inwardly for me as I dove into their depths, and then, eventually, into the Power of Mother’s Agenda as well.

When I first visited Auroville and the Ashram in 2002, I felt the Mother calling me to Auroville. It took me until 2007 to finally return as a Newcomer, which was in itself a Leap into the Flame of the Divine. It was a smaller Flame leaping into a Greater Flame, seeking to help work out this Transformation which is at the Heart and Soul of Auroville’s existence.

There is a constant Grace in Auroville that is present for everyone, as much as each person is capable of opening to it, and it is there for the Collective as well, as much as we are all capable, together, of being open to it, receiving it, and manifesting it. It delivers Magic in unexpected ways - sometimes intensely, sometimes softly, sometimes without any effort at all, sometimes with more effort than one feels one has to give. It is challenging and yet also inspiring at the same time. Auroville is not simply a place on the Earth with lots of interesting ‘activities’ and ‘projects’, but is more a Spirit and Consciousness which flows and grows....Auroville is the Mother and Sri Aurobindo at Play with Their Self, with Their Children, with All, to Transform it and Awaken Something New into the World, which is already Here, waiting....

When I first came to Auroville I worked in the Matrimandir Gardens. I had felt called to work there when I first visited Auroville. Having lived in Atlanta, Georgia where I worked with trees (among other jobs helping with adult literacy and refugees),
I knew little about gardening, yet felt drawn to working with the physical Earth and to help manifest the Gardens. I can only say that the five years that I spent working there were a Grace and also a challenge, on many levels. I am one who believes in the power of working with the physical body, with the cells and the Consciousness of Matter, and I can only say that working in the climate of south India, and Auroville, forces one to dig deeper into oneself to find the physical capacity to overcome the weaknesses and fears of the body, the vital, and the mind. This is never really easy for most people, yet the Force being Ever-Present to support this work builds and supports the Faith that all is possible.

Last year when I returned from a visit to the U.S., I was looking for new work and found my place in the Botanical Gardens just as it was beginning the ground work for the Labyrinth (funded by AVI-USA yet another Synchronicity of Auroville!). I knew nothing about it, but found out soon that it was funded by Americans and by chance found myself, ‘the American’, taking up the role of coordinating and executing most of the work to materialize it. As someone who loves to work with stones and brick, I enjoyed being able to make the curving pathways as perfect as possible - though I do believe my quest for perfection might have annoyed a few! The Labyrinth has turned out to be beautiful and has changed the Energy of the whole area.

The future of my life here in Auroville holds many possibilities. We hope to begin a Japanese Garden in the Botanical Gardens, among other projects that will require fundraising. As a writer who has self-published a book of poetry entitled _Transcendent Sky_, I will also soon have my first children’s book published, _Yaroslava’s Flowers_, which is a story about the healing and transformational power of flowers, using the flower significances given by the Mother as inspiration for the story.

I have also recently been inspired to pursue a new building project for Auroville which intends to be a Center for research and education into the Consciousness of flowers and Nature in general, where all of Mother’s named flowers can be exhibited, where the truths that Mother and Sri Aurobindo have shared about flowers and Nature in general can be researched, explored, and shared, and where all types of meditations, workshops, films, courses, and other activities relating to Nature, gardening, landscaping, horticulture and more can be offered. It is a large project, hopefully with the idea to connect the Matrimandir Nursery, Matrimandir Gardens, and the four main Parks of Auroville into an interconnecting theme of Mother’s Flowers throughout the city.

So, my Brothers and Sisters in Soul and Spirit, thank you for all your support and work in helping to realize The Dream of Auroville and the Transformation of the Earth Consciousness. If you wish to contact me about the Flower Center project, or anything else, please feel free to email me at earthyogaunity@gmail.com. You can also visit my blog at www.truthyoga.wordpress.com, where you can read my articles and poetry. Love and Light to All.

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**The Flow of Technology in Auroville**

**By Sanjeev Ranganathan**

I received enormous freedom during my doctorate studies at Columbia University in NYC that helped me be open to opportunities of growth. During this time I volunteered for Asha for Education and visited many of its projects in India. One such trip brought me to Auroville in 2002. I came to study some of the child-centered teaching techniques used at the Isai Ambalam school and then worked on spreading this work to other schools in Tamil Nadu. Over 5-6 years, we reached out to over 300 schools in TN through teacher training of what is now the ABL (Activity Based Learning) system all over TN.

We (Anita and I) moved back to India in 2007. Even at this time we were very much looking at Auroville as a partner for social change but had not seriously considered living there. However, working on social change (fundraising, awareness and campaigns) tends to be exhausting. We volunteered in a tribal village and noticed how the children who had dropped out from school were excellent with their hands, but didn’t feel worthy because they had not done well in schools. I felt the need to work with middle schools where children are expected to think abstractly and feel helpless when they are unable to do so. Gradually a different experiential learning started to open up for us after we went through Vipassana meditation together. Though we only spent 9 months volunteering in the tribal village we were otherwise in Bangalore where I worked.

In May 2013 Anita, Arham (our small son), Shifu (our 4 yr old dog) and I moved to Auroville. I had the opportunity to work in two outreach schools, Udavi and Isai Ambalam, on making math and science fun and engaging. In the first year I worked
with puzzles, games, hands-on projects and some electronics. An under-utilized computer center in one school and an unexpected grant to create one in another school set me to explore what an effective and meaningful way to use computers in outreach schools would look like.

At a summer camp in Isai Ambalam I worked with children of different ages to learn programming with Scratch (a drag and stick computer program) and made some stories. I realized programming could be used as a form of learning and children could use it to demonstrate what they learnt.

The children used programming to visually represent abstract ideas like algebraic expressions, created animations to present a concept they had learnt e.g. fraction additions and they even created their own games for rigor. They gave life to the stories they had created in English by animating them in Scratch.

They took programming further into sensing the real world and controlling a robot. Children were able to make programs respond to touching a plant or water. They created a water tank overflow alarm and a plant based burglar alarm. They were able to create and overcome obstacle courses with their robot and also create simple games for other children.

My task as a teacher initially was to come up with an appropriate challenge for the children. However this seemed to come naturally and even subtle aspects of what was needed in the space happened at the right times, e.g. just as the projects got serious I was able to systematize how the children saved and retrieved data to build on their work and handle complexity.

I find abstraction was useful for me to be self-aware. In not trying to program for the children using computers but rather letting them express themselves as programmers, it supported their ability to abstract. It also helped them develop perseverance when they realized that failure is not final but necessary for learning and growth.

At this point another series of events led me to interact with a Auroville youth who had completed an undergraduate course in electrical engineering but had not found an appropriate place there. Even though I had chosen to be a teacher when I moved to AV, this young person’s needs pushed me to do more. I put together the idea of a company in which you learn, grow, work and teach. Aura Semiconductor, the company I worked with in Bangalore, decided to support the initiative. Within a couple of months from the initial thought, in January 2015, Aura Auro has started with two Auroville youths and one more from a nearby village. We volunteer together at the schools 3 hours a day taking forward the idea of incorporating technology in schools and work and learn electronics in the remaining 5 hrs.

There has been a flow in all that has happened to me in Auroville. Though a lot seems to have been accomplished in just a couple of years, it has not felt like an effort. Doing something creative and new has just happened; support and guidance needed has arrived when we were in the best position to utilize it (including electronic gadgets to sense and control the real world, Build-It-Yourself big shot cameras) and by and large without specifically asking for it. We are now in the process of creating a STEM lab and resource center for not only these schools, but for others to have access and engage with these activities in their own schools. There is a certain grace in Auroville that seems to not only guide, but also support the execution of what needs to happen through us. We flow with it.

I record some of the experiences in a blog at: smallisbeautiful.blogspot.com
The youth document their experiences at: www.aurauro.com
See a recent list of images taken by a teacher at Udavi at: tinyurl.com/udavi-pics-1415

Aikiyam Students working on a project

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Correction Issue 3: Diaries of a Caretaker is by Nikhil Chawla Bhowmick. To read the complete article go to our AVIUSA Facebook page.
The Garden of Remembrance

If you would like to remember a person who, in his/her lifetime, was a part of the Auroville dream, please use the form below to make a contribution to the Sacred Groves Garden of Remembrance.

In order to plant a tree, a minimum gift of $100 is necessary for its planting. Donations for long term care and protection of the garden are also appreciated.

You can also make a donation in the name of someone to an Auroville project through AVI-USA.

Make A Tribute Gift

AVI-USA accepts gifts in memory of someone who has died. Donors may also give a gift just to remember those who have made contributions to Auroville through their work/financial contribution/dedication to the Auroville community.

AVI-USA remembers with gratitude the following who have contributed to our community.

Ron Anastasia  
Ariel Browne  
Auroarindam (Russell Douglas)  
Cassia Berman  
Haridas Chaudhuri  
Bob Dane  
Bhavana (Dec Decew)  
Rosine Debode  
Lois Kellogg Duncan  
Mary Helen Eggenberger  
Lalit Fullman  
Kenneth Fator  
Myrtle Fator  
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