

# AVI-USA CONNECT

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Mothers Signature in flowers - February 21st, 2018

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## Jothi's Dream: The Auroville Sports Resource Center

By Savitri

*Jothi Govindaraj has been involved in sports education in Auroville for many years. In recent years his mission has been to include the local village people as part of the Auroville Sports Resource Center. Here is his story:*

Sunday morning in Auroville. Most residents of the community are enjoying their one day a week off, but if you go to the New Creation sports ground you will see a tall, thin man with a Seattle Seahawks cap surrounded by young Aurovilians waiting for their coach to start practice. This is how Jothi spends most Sunday mornings and Tuesday and Thursday evenings coaching a group of perhaps 20 children through drills and scrimmages before they finish with a snack. He has been doing this for years.

Jothi was born in Kulilapaliam, the village on the eastern rim of Auroville. He ran away from the physical punishment of the village school to join Auroville in 1972 as an 8-year-old boy. Varadarajan, who was entrusted with the task of integrating local people into Auroville, took him along with other kids to meet The Mother.

He soon came to live in Udayam, a dormitory for Aspiration School Tamil students begun by Gordon and Jeanne, two former Peace Corps volunteers who had worked in Tamil Nadu. Jothi stayed at Udayam with about 15 other children both girls and boys.

In those early years of Auroville, the Aspiration school sports ground was the only sports facility in Auroville. After the day's work Aurovilians would come to this sports ground, and it was here that Jothi first saw basketball being played. He was fascinated.

This halcyon time of Auroville was soon to end. As a result of the conflict between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society in the mid 1970s, Auroville was left without funding. Schools stopped functioning, land was not purchased, and development work stalled. Many families left Auroville in those difficult years. Those who stayed behind had to make do with very little in

a harsh climate. For the children of Auroville it was a time of adventure, exploration, but also frustration that their education had been cut off at a crucial time.

Most afternoons around 3.30 pm, the few children in Aspiration community and from Udayam would gather in the Aspiration sports ground and play basketball. Initially they were on their own without supervision, playing barefoot on a dirt court. Soon some older members of the community took interest in coaching them. Jothi fondly remembers Joel Goodman, Ray Meeker and Tall Bob from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, as well as Roger Toll, David Wickenden, David Nagle, Mali, Krishna, and many others playing basketball that inspired him.

Since the closing of the Aspiration school Jothi, along with other young Tamil Aurovilians, was working in Aurelec in the PCB, Monitor and cable assembly section. In 1984 Jothi along with other kids working there, left to restart the high school in Aspiration. In 1985, Gordon and Jean

returned to Auroville with a project to take Tamil students for a year of study at high schools in New England. Jothi, an excellent student, was chosen to attend Northfield Mt. Hermon, an elite prep school in Massachusetts with an interest in diversifying their student body. With the support from the school and the Foundation for World Education, he spent two years completing high school and graduated from Northfield. His main regret was that he was deemed too old to play on the school basketball team, though he played volleyball.



Jothi with subjunior players

Soon after returning to Auroville (where he was immediately dubbed "American Jothi") in 1988, Jothi was asked to manage the AuroPress. He had never managed a business before but it prepared him for being in charge of a unit.

After a year and half, he handed over the press to Claude Arpi and joined AuroFuture, the Auroville Town Planning service, while also helping to teach Tamil students, first in Last School then at After School and much later at New Era Secondary School. He continued to play basketball with his old friends from the early days, forming a solid Auroville team which played matches in Pondicherry and eventually sent him and others to play in tournaments around India.

During this time Jothi was increasingly frustrated that there were no competent basketball coaches in Auroville to train the increasing numbers of youngsters who were playing basketball. So in 1991 Jothi went to Aurangabad in Maharashtra state to receive training as a sports coach. After obtaining his National Institute of Sports certificate in basketball, he came back to Auroville and started teaching, first at Certitude for a year, then at the New Creation sports ground which Andre Tardeil had set up some years back.

Initially, there were only two basketball clubs in Auroville. Quickly the number of students increased and as a result, four more clubs from Auroville were affiliated to the Pondicherry Basketball Association that also included players from the bioregion. They



Court roof under construction



Jothi coaching the girls' team

regularly won tournaments and many young players were selected to join the official team of Pondicherry for national tournaments. Through basketball, many of them were able to travel to different states in India and have experiences which they couldn't have otherwise.

The turn of the century was a difficult period for Jothi. He had to undergo a kidney transplant in 1999 and had to cut back on his regular activities. However, he got re-integrated into sports when the Auroville Sports Coordination Team was set up with Frederick, Santo, Mark, Jothi and a few others to coordinate sports and cultural programs for Auroville and the bioregion. A proposal for creating an Auroville Sports Resource Center (AVSRC) at the New Creation sports ground was submitted to SAIER for funding and accepted.

The construction of AVSRC began in 2006 and was completed in 2007 and in the same year it was registered as a sub-unit of SAIER with Jothi as the executive. In addition to managing the day-to-day activities, he also carried out fundraising and the coordination of sports and cultural events for both Auroville and its bioregion, bringing in young people, both male and female, from villages to play volleyball, basketball, kabadi and other games. This was one of the first instances of local villagers using Auroville facilities. In 2015, Satyakam helped to improve the basketball court at New Creation by transforming it into an open-air stadium with lights.

In 2017, as Auroville began to prepare for the 50th anniversary celebrations, Jothi presented a proposal under AVSRC that was his long-standing dream of creating an indoor stadium in Auroville. Having an indoor stadium will make the court usable through the day during the harsh summer and strong monsoon of south India, while the special surface will help reduce injuries. AVSRC received a substantial grant through the special Government of India grants for Auroville's 50th anniversary, but this turned out to be enough just for the roof and few other improvements. Now the roof is nearing completion, but without a proper playing surface the potential of the stadium will not be realised.

Jothi has done research into various synthetic products, and an 11-mm Pulastic



Jothi coaching a practice.

turf was the best match for his requirements. Now Jothi has to obtain the full 25 lakhs (around \$34,000) as a top-up to his original 50th anniversary grant.

The indoor stadium and the special turf will make the experience of playing basketball all the more exciting and safer. The multipurpose indoor stadium will also be used as a large gathering space for the community to attend cultural activities, meetings, watch live telecasts of special events like the Olympic Games etc, and for other indoor sports like: Badminton, Table Tennis, Gymnastics and Kabaddi.

For more than 30 years, Jothi's dedication and perseverance have inspired others to help create human unity through sports. You can still find him every Sunday morning with his young players. Now his dream of a professional level facility is nearing completion. New Creation sports ground has been focal point for young people from in and outside Auroville to come together and a place of joy and growth through sports, games and meets. It is now at the cusp of a big change.

*Savitri lives in New Creation and teaches sports and dance. Tax deductible donations to the Auroville Sports Resource Center can be made through AVI-USA.*



## Art, Artists, and Mirra Alfassa in Context:

### Paris 1850-1900

by Kay Lisseck

It was a beautiful New England summer's day as we set out to the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, MA. The exhibit, "Women Artists in Paris, 1850-1900," interested me for two reasons. First, I had heard that the Mother's time in Paris overlapped with the time frame of the exhibit. I was curious to learn more about this part of her life. In addition, I was keen to see some original paintings by Mary Cassatt, having been a long-time admirer of her paintings and subject matter, women and children in relationship.

I decided to use my time as the passen-

ger during the two hour drive to the museum to find any clues about Mirra's life that might connect her to the artists who we were about to see. By searching the exhibition information as well as Mirra Alfassa's biography, and that of her husband at the time Henri Morisset, and son Andre Morisset, I learned about her time in Paris. By the time we reached the Clark Museum, I felt ready to search for possible connections between Mirra and the artists showcased at the exhibit.

- ◆ Mirra joined the Academie Julian (the subject of the exhibition) to study art in 1893.
- ◆ She was married to Henri Morisset, an ex-student of the Academie, on 13 October 1897. She was 19.
- ◆ Both were well off and worked as artists for the next ten years.
- ◆ Some of Mirra's paintings were accepted by the jury of Salon d'Automne and were exhibited in 1903, 1904 and 1905.

We arrived just after noon and met our friends (Jeanne, Gordon, Tom and Rudy) for an informal picnic beside the reflection pool on the beautiful museum campus.

Once inside, we approached the exhibit and were immediately met by a larger-than-life sized photograph of women art students at the Academie Julian in Paris. We scanned the photo to look for any sign that Mirra might be among them, and I read the credits carefully for any dates or other details that might help us place her there. I learned that women were not accepted at the preeminent art school, Ecole des Beaux-Arts. But the Academie Julian, which was founded in 1867, began accepting women in 1880.

A museum summary of the exhibit describes the situation in

Paris this way: *"Paris was the epicenter of art during the latter half of the nineteenth century, luring artists from around the world with its academies, museums, salons, and galleries. Despite the city's cosmopolitanism and its cultural stature, Parisian society remained strikingly conservative, particularly with respect to gender. Nonetheless, many women painters chose to work and study in Paris at this time, overcoming immense obstacles to access the city's resources."*



Kay Lisseck

At that time women could not easily move about in public without a chaperone, and they were not able to paint with a live model in the studios along with men artists. But they could paint one another in their homes and private studios. The show opens with many self-portraits and portraits of fellow women artists indoors engaging in their work as artists or in the company of other artists. The paintings capture a glimpse of everyday moments among strong and rebellious, but thoughtful and perceptive artists who participate in a "robust community of women."

The exhibit notes explain that a woman artist must get special permission from the police to move about in public wearing trousers in order to paint outdoors, or must get permission from the military to stage small groups of soldiers and recruits who pose as models for her large outdoor paintings.

Finally, there are Mary Cassatt's beautiful images that glimpse the world of women and children picking apples in the orchard or playing at the beach. Another is a portrait of her sister, "Autumn Portrait of Lydia Cassatt" which depicts a woman sitting on an outdoor bench lost in thought. The brushstrokes conjuring the autumn colors of the trees and the patterned fabric of her coat seem to blend together in a somber swirl of energy.

Many of the paintings make statements about the life of women artists at this time. One by Berthe Morisot shows her with her sister, both accomplished painters, sitting side by side on a sofa. Berthe is to continue working as an artist while her sister, recently married, will put down her brushes and give up her art career after marrying. Another striking self-portrait shows Berthe at her easel, looking directly at the viewer with a proud and almost defiant glare.



Berthe Morisot - "The Sisters"

What stands out for me is the real sense of a community of women artists who created social change, and a movement that demonstrated clearly their talent and determination to follow their artistic and creative dreams, not only in the act of painting, but also on the canvases themselves which portray women as thinkers and strong-minded artists.

In her review of the show published in the Boston Globe (September 14, 2018), Cate McQuaid notes that "Class and marriage inevitably played roles in a woman's success. Berthe Morisot married a sympathetic man, Eugene Manet (Edouard's brother), and kept painting. Her sister Edma gave up her art career after marrying. Mary Cassatt never married. All were well off."

Like these other artists, Mirra Alfassa came from a well-to-do family and married a man we might think of as "sympathetic" in Henri Morisset (since he was also a painter studying in Paris). Mirra was able to marry and have a child but continue to paint, submitting paintings and exhibiting in the newly established Salon d'Automne in 1903, 1904 and 1905. Getting a sense of her life at this period of time, I see that she was able to make her own independent choices in life.

I conclude, not surprisingly, that there is every indication in the biographical details of her life, that Mirra was participating in this artistic movement and, perhaps more importantly, in the social change of the time. She was as innovative, creative, strong, and perceptive as many of the women artists we see in the exhibit, if not more so.

Once home from the exhibit, I continued to follow the thread, looking for more information about the students at Academie Julian and about



Mirra (far right, row two) at Academie Julian

Mirra's paintings. In addition to my online research, the book, *The Mother: Paintings and Drawings* provided me with a rich picture of Mirra's life at this time and give me a sense of the context in which she lived and painted.

I had not realized what an accomplished artist she had been!

And to my delight, we located a photo of Academie Julian students, just like the one displayed at the Clark Art Exhibit, but this time with Mirra included!

The more I learn about the Academie, the more I can see how it would appeal to and influence Mirra as an artist and an innovator. It offered "lessons in life" as well as art, and "operated as a free

city of the spirit." In a 1989 NYTimes review of an art exhibit devoted to the Academie Julian in Paris as it existed between 1868 and 1939 John Russell wrote:

"...The school was by definition unofficial and unbureaucratic. Almost without exception, its teachers were admired and liked.

It was customary for new ideas to be looked over without prejudice..... Human exchange went forward in an atmosphere that was collegial, easygoing and mutually supportive. Women students, to whom the official Ecole des Beaux-Arts was off limits, were welcome at the Academie Julian.

Carried on after Julian's death by his widow, the school functioned more as an extended family than as a way station on the road to official success. It nurtured some of the best artists of the day, but those who went there for lessons in life, as much as for lessons in art, did not come away disappointed.

I love knowing that Mirra continued to paint and sketch into the 1960's, even though



Berthe Morisot



"Villa Zarif" by Mother Mirra Alfassa

she gave less importance to her accomplishments as an artist. As I look at the collection of her paintings and drawings I find that my favorite image is one of her paintings of Max Theon's house with its brilliant colors and sunlit walls, perhaps a signal of her move beyond the art world of Paris and into continued explorations of her inner life, occultism and, ultimately, her life-changing spiritual leadership.

See the video of "The Mother, an artist": [tinyurl.com/paintermira](http://tinyurl.com/paintermira)

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## Back in Auroville After 35 Years:

### An Early Aurovilian Reflects on Then and Now

by Margaret Greer

I first went to Auroville in the late fall of 1972. My then husband and I had heard and read about Auroville through his sister and her husband. Remember, these are the hippie days and we were young, far less fearful of dropping everything, selling everything, and moving halfway around the world from St. Charles, Missouri to Auroville, India. We planned to go for at least seven years because we read somewhere that humans get all new cells every seven years. We were pretty "out there"!

When the wheels of the plane touched down in New Delhi, completely shocking to me, the tears just started streaming from my eyes and a sense of peace settled over me: I felt I'd arrived at my forever home! After some

language barrier problems (English was not universal back then) we made plans to travel by train, I remember cinders flying in the windows, at will. No food was available on the train. Vendors came on board or passed item or through the windows from the platform. I'd never tasted Indian food before, though it has since become my favorite.

The train took two or three days to Madras, now called Chennai, and then we had a long bus ride down the coast road to Pondicherry. I'm fairly sure I had to sit in the back of the bus as a female, as was the custom back then. I remember bouncing up and down as the bus hit ruts in the road. I remember we stayed in Pondicherry at the Park Guest House for about a month.

Park Guest House was one of the better guesthouses at that time but I was in for a shock. We had no hot water, thus my first of many cold showers. Then there were the beds: they were pretty narrow singles, hard stuffed cotton mattresses, and mosquito nets. For the first night I didn't know about mosquito nets and was therefore bitten A LOT! Then I learned how to put up the net and to make sure my skin did not touch the netting during the night. Easier said than done.

I remember my surprise that first night that there were lizards on the walls in my room! Geckoes! Love them and their sounds now but I was not too happy at that time. The grounds were quite lovely, right on the ocean. In fact, I remember being concerned during a storm that the water would come into the room – it sprayed through the windows when the waves hit the rocks just beyond our wall. We ate at the Ashram Dining Room, the place where I learned to love wholesome vegetarian Indian food. We rode bicycles everywhere, even out to Auroville. All those years ago there were far fewer people in Pondicherry and getting around was easy.

When living quarters were finally available, we moved to Auroville, settling in a house in Sincerity. I worked in the Center kitchen, a site that is no longer there, but at the time the kitchen used by Aurovillians who worked at the Matrimandir. My husband

worked at the Matrimandir. We applied to Mother to become Aurovillians and she accepted us. I was in heaven! Sunshine, fresh air, large spiders, a pet mongoose, fresh juicy mangoes, a garden to care for, wonderful seeking people all around and Darshan with Mother several times. What could be better?

While living in Sincerity and working in the Center kitchen, I heard about a school in Pondicherry called Equals One, founded by Yvonne Artaud, and managed day to day by Fausto Fernandez. After visiting for the day in mid-1974 I decided to stay and work there.

Although I already had a teaching degree and two years experience, teaching at Equals One was nothing like the USA. There were children from both the Ashram and Auroville, ranging in age from 5 through 13. Which of them showed up daily varied. Some children from Auroville spent several nights a week at the school, making me a "mom" who arranged food and sleeping in addition to working with the children on reading, writing,

and math. No books, little writing paper, lots of large sheets of art paper, chalk and paint, and lots of inspiration. And fun! The school was more about who the inner child was and how to help develop that child than traditional academics, though that was included. It was here I really learned to teach the whole child. We had a room with lots of toys (vehicles, people, flowers, animals, etc.) and a set of three or four sandboxes. These sandboxes were maybe 18" x 24" x 4" with about two inches of sand spread out in the bottom. Children would choose whatever toys

they wanted to create a diorama, to tell a story. Fausto would draw what was present in the box and would ask the child to tell about the box, both the picture and the story documented on the same sheet of paper. These sandboxes provided a window into the inner being of the child and were saved in a file for each child.

In one game we would gather in a circle, and place three to five objects in the center of the circle, usually little plastic toys like a lion, a tree, or a car, and maybe a real flower or piece of fruit. Then one person, adults played



Maggie at guest house 2017

too, would leave the room and not be able to see the circle center. The remaining players would choose one in the center of the circle and concentrate on sending that image to the person outside the room. The goal was to have that person guess which item had been chosen. Some children were better than others, nearly always guessing well over chance others not quite so much. It was amazing to see how much these children were in contact with each other and their surroundings, not just a physical plane but on a subtle plane not visible to our eyes.

During this time I was also extremely fortunate to find typing and editing work with a man who became my mentor, K. D. Sethna, also known as Amal Kiran. The name, Amal Kiran, was given to him by Sri Aurobindo and means "The Clear Ray". And he was! He was a published poet and the originator and editor of the monthly cultural review magazine, *Mother India*, begun in 1948, and still published today. We worked together several days a week, reading, talking, revising, proofing, and sharing incredible energy. He and his wife, Sarah, had been at the Ashram for decades and were steeped in its atmosphere. I was fortunate enough to be able to sit in his house with him for many hours a week for a year or more, absorbing that energy.

These wonderful experiences came to an end for me in late 1975 when I contracted a nasty case of hepatitis. My skin was very yellow, with absolutely no energy, and had an extremely sore liver, along with all the other symptoms associated with this disease. I spent two to three weeks in the Ashram nursing home, receiving Vitamin B shots and getting a bland but healthy diet.

Once released, still slightly yellow, I traveled back to the USA for a visit, the first in three years, and to rest up and recuperate. It was good to see my family and yet I missed being in India. I made my plans to return and was ready to book my flight when my return ticket turned up missing. In those days, it was a little slip of paper that was on the original ticket, the ticket having had three portions: one to the states, one returning, and one as a receipt. My returning ticket was miss-

ing although I still had the receipt. No one in my family admitted taking it, and they were not inclined to give me more money to return. No, definitely not—they wanted me on American soil.

I was very unhappy, questioning why this was happening to me. And then it came. I can still remember where I was standing and looking out over the river when I accepted that Mother wanted me in the USA for some reason and I should figure out what I was meant to do here. And it had to do with schools and children.

For the next 35 years, I taught nearly one thousand children in grades K-8, thirteen of those years working with gifted children. I worked in a district office dealing with school reform, received a PhD and taught a few college classes on the side. And always I kept in mind Mother and what I needed to share, though I must admit, it required doing so very, very subtly as to not seem to proselytize or promote a religion. But I loved what I was doing and I was doing it well, with Mother and Auroville always in the back of my mind, and in my heart, guiding me through choices.

In 2010, as I began to plan for retirement, I returned to Auroville over the 10 day Christmas break with two purposes in mind: One, I wanted to see if I could retire in Auroville. The answer was no, not really. I had built a life in the USA, had a family and other responsibilities, and wasn't quite ready to give up some of the comforts we find here.

The second reason was to visit Amal, who was getting very old at this point. In fact, he was already 106 years old, and I felt it was now or never. I'm so glad I did. I had told him I would be back and had always felt I had broken my promise to him. Now we were able to spend several hours together over the course of two days. It took a while for him to remember me but the smile when he did was life changing! We sat holding hands, sharing energy, as I told him about my life in those 35 years, my son, my teaching. At this point he was mostly non-verbal but, when he

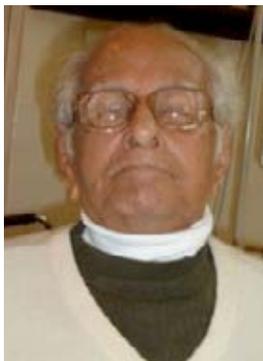


Mothers signature in flowers - February 21st, 2018

did speak, it was in rhyme. Always the poet! His eyes were crystal clear, cogent, and totally aware of me. I was able to return to the USA reenergized, reconnected to Auroville, the Ashram, and to Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In June of 2011, I received a call that Amal had left his body and was buried in the Ashram cemetery. This is where I visit him now.

Since that first visit, I have been to Auroville twice: seven weeks in 2014 and three months in 2018. In both 2014 and 2018, I wandered around and talked to all kinds of people, trying to understand the development of the community over the years, how the newer people, both residents and tourists, fit in and see the community; how newcomers feel about the process. I met people who were using Auroville for retirement, not sure they were really practicing the yoga but loving the environment. I met others who were anti-Auroville when they arrived while traveling somewhere else (yes, it still happens A LOT!) who later became enthralled with the yoga and how it fits in their lives. Those who have been there since the very early days lament the lack of innocence that was so evident then, the simplicity. However, overall they are going with the flow of a community inventing itself.

I'm looking forward to going back in 2019 for a few months to continue my explorations, to continue looking into the politics, the infrastructure, the industry, the services provided, and the ecological impact and how it is being addressed, to name just a few of the topics. But most of all, I'm eager to sit in the Matrimandir or on my veranda at the guest house where I will stay and feel the calm energy all around me allowing my own spirit to expand and grow, unimpeded by the energies so prevalent where I live the rest of the year. While I try to internalize and integrate the yoga in my daily moments throughout the year, kind of like, as someone recently said, "Doing the yoga while still balancing the checkbook", when I'm in Auroville, it just happens.



Amal Kiran at 106

## The Mother Told Me to Stay: An Interview with Amrit

From 1975 to 1983 a conflict over control of Auroville impacted every one of the few hundred residents of the fledgling community. Many Americans left. One who stayed was Amrit, born Howard Iriyama, in a Japanese-American internment camp of the USA during World War II. In his recent book, **Children of Change**, he narrates his life and his refusal to support either side in the Auroville conflict, along with how he understands its deeper, spiritual meaning. Amrit continues to live in Auroville. For further information: See the recent interview with him in the July-August 2018 *Auroville Today*, available online: [auroville.org/avtoday-free](http://auroville.org/avtoday-free).

Generally the whole narrative about what happened is from a particular point of view because of the struggle between the Auroville community (people, mainly westerners, who lived and worked on the land), and the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS), organization which Mother had put in charge of Auroville. Actually it was a complex situation that goes back way before the actual physical beginning of the conflict. It had a lot to do with The Mother and the people around her. The Mother was surrounded by different types of people who generally represented certain difficulties in human nature. Her work was to try to get these personalities, who had strong egos, to transform themselves. Someone asked her once, "What would happen if you leave?" She shuddered and said, "Chaos."

She understood that she was the cohesive force keeping the project together. That is why, when a major cyclone hit Auroville on 5<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1972, she gave a message to Aurovilians that they needed to change or they would have to go. That cyclone was only a physical symbolic representation of what actually happened a few years later beginning in 1975. Very soon after the cyclone The Mother left her body. Her passing in 1973 was a kind of cyclone which hit both Auroville and the Ashram. And it devastated Auroville.

Now when someone hears about the struggle which started in November of 1975 about 2 years after The Mother left, most of the descriptions and narrative of what happened are from one perspective: the Auroville community. Like any historical event naturally it's portrayed and controlled from the victorious side.

In the beginning of the conflict I supported this struggle against the SAS, but what I didn't agree with was how it devolved into something that very often happens in all revolutions, namely the turn toward authoritarianism and the attacking of innocent people. A number of people left Auroville because of the intensity of this situation; I happen to be among those who stayed.

The Mother had actually told me, in 1968, to go to Auroville, and when I told her that I didn't want to stay there she essentially told me that I had to stay. I took that almost like a command. I agreed with the objections against the SAS over development and management of the community, but the problem was that the disagreement started to degenerate on both sides into anger, hatred and violence. Auroville is not an ordinary place, and there were certain spiritual ideals important to uphold. Mother would certainly not have approved of what began to happen.

There developed in Auroville three basic factions: one was the SAS, composed of north Indians from the Ashram; the other was the Auroville community, primarily westerners, which in later years described itself as the collective. Then you had the neutrals a group of people who did not agree with either side. In the narratives that have been put forth about this period of turmoil in Auroville there has been a tendency to ignore the perspective of the SAS, one which I very much disagreed with, but still they had their own perspective. In addition, there has been almost absolute silence about the perspective represented by the neutrals. I felt it necessary to balance the picture.

But as I say this is more from an external view of the struggle and the conflict and the different sides involved in this conflict. I think beyond that there is something else much deeper, and the most neglected, and that is what I would call the more occult and spiritual aspect of the forces behind what happened.

There are reasons why I reacted the way I did and took the stance that was contrary to the Auroville collective, reasons that had to do with past experiences in the USA.

During World War II the Japanese Americans, including my family, on the West Coast were interned in what were called "relocation camps," and their land, houses and livelihoods taken from them. I was born in one of those camps. This had a very deep impact on my own emotional sensibility and in terms of certain ideals I felt were very important. Then later came the work I did in the Civil Rights Movement in 1964, the summer voting rights project in Mississippi in which I participated. Because of these experiences I started to realize that there had to be another solution to these problems other than a political or social resolution and that's when I became very interested in the spiritual approach.

The book is about my journey that took me to San Francisco and Zen Buddhism, Japan, then to Asia, to India and finally to The Mother and Auroville. From an ideal point of view, you can say Auroville represented what seemed to be a solution to all of these problems that I had observed in human society. But when the conflict started I began to see that the same problems that I saw in the USA were present in Auroville. Problems of ego, problems of ambition, power, money, the way people treat each other.

One thing is very clear: human beings are the same everywhere; the only difference is that I think most people in Auroville have been touched by something deeper in their consciousness. But to maintain that touch and deepen it is one of the very great problems of spiritual life. I think that was what was demonstrated in these conflicts in Auroville.

Why these things happen is the root of the problem, each person has a kind of *dharma* thread (*dharma* means in India a kind of inner truth of your being to follow in this life). I guess I wanted to articulate what my *dharma* has been. I'm getting quite old, and I wanted to clarify it for myself, but also in a sense for the history of Auroville where there is confusion and lack of knowledge.

It has to do with a very powerful inner experience that I had at the age of 12 in 1956 of a "force that would descend from above



Amrit



Amrit (standing rt) and family

the head filling me with a sensibly material, milky white light, so dense and powerful that the body would freeze into an unaccustomed immobility" (from *Children of Change*, p. 32). After coming to India I understood that this experience was actually the force of The Mother of The Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It's something I have experienced off and on over many years. When that happens I just have to follow it. I call it the *Shakti*, the Force. In that Force is the presence of The Mother. I can say that whenever I am quiet I have felt this force, this *Shakti*, my central *dharmic* thread. Different people may experience this in different ways but each person has to find this *dharmic* thread or theme of their life and follow it.

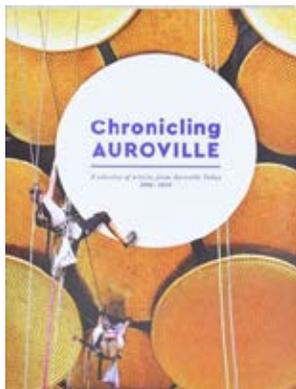
Once I began the book I felt that I was not even writing—it just kind of came out, but it helped me personally to have a certain clarity about certain things. When it came to Auroville and the conflict with the SAS, there is a deeper aspect to what happened, very much connected with The Mother but also with a teacher who I felt The Mother had brought me to. He was called Panditji, a teacher of the *Sri Vidyā Tantra* which is a certain path concentrating on the divine supreme Mother. I felt I had to clarify certain things about Panditji's role in the whole conflict because he is the one who had helped me to understand its more hidden aspects in Auroville, so what I have written in the book had a lot to do with the subtle forces that are involved behind events on earth.

For example in the USA now we have a political situation centered around a certain individual who happens to be the leader of our country, but I think it's very important to

understand what is behind it in a subtle occult spiritual way. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have spoken of these subtle forces behind world events. This understanding is very important. But it is not mental understanding; it's an understanding that you can only achieve when you try to go inside of yourself and you come in contact with this more subtle reality of things. And that is where the presence and the *Shakti* of The Mother is very central in the yoga of Sri Aurobindo. When you come into contact with the *Shakti* it not only helps you to understand, but it gives you guidance: what you should do, where you should go, how you should deal with all of these things. It's a question of inner development and inner concentration.

When I wrote this book it became an autobiography, but I feel it has a lot more to do with understanding not just the external situation of my life and of the Auroville struggle, but that which was motivating it, that which impelled it. That's what the book is about.

*Chronicling Auroville* is the newest anthology, a compilation of articles published between 2006 and 2018 to honor Auroville's 50th. Not only do the articles and illustrations represent a rich history of developments in the economy, arts, planning, education, outreach activities, etc. of Auroville over this period, but some articles written a decade ago remain as relevant today as they were then. *Chronicling Auroville* gives a taste of the challenges, frustrations and joys of trying to live the future in a community that, in its longevity and diversity, is unique in the world. Color photos. 290 pp. \$24 postpaid



Send a check payable to: Pondicherry, 12 Tinker St, Woodstock NY 12498 or phone in your credit card number toll free and securely to 800-815-1969.

## Aurovilians Attend 50th Anniversary of CIIS



Suryamayi and Sauro speaking at CIIS 50th anniversary

2018 is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of both Auroville and the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), an accredited university in San Francisco, founded by a follower of Sri Aurobindo, Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri. In late September, CIIS celebrated its golden jubilee with a 3-day conference, "1968 Revisited: (Whatever Happened to) Revolution, Counterculture, Revolution, Utopia?" in which participants explored the founding legacy of 1968, and the 50 years of practice, experimentation, and development that emerged from it, focussing on Auroville, CIIS and the broader San Francisco counterculture movement.

Three Aurovilians contributed to this gathering, funded by AVI-USA. Suryamayi Clarence-Smith, a core organizer of "The Bridge," Auroville's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference earlier this year, and a doctoral researcher in Development Studies at the University of Sussex who focuses her research on Auroville, gave the opening night's keynote presentation "Auroville, an Experiment in (R) evolutionary Utopianism," following a day dedicated to exploring the global imagination and significance of 1968, global utopian social movements, and Asia's contribution to transnational evolution. Moderating this Asia panel was Dr. Bindu Mohanty, an Aurovillian writer, educator and sustainability consultant, and current member of Auroville's Funds and Assets Management Committee. Bindu attended CIIS from 2005 – 2008, graduating with a PhD in East-West Psychology with a dissertation on Auroville entitled "Spiritual Ideals and Social Psychology of Auroville: A

Transdisciplinary Interpretive Inquiry.”

In another session dedicated to Auroville, “Auroville – Spiritual Anarchy: Philosophy, History and Social Conditions,” both Bindu and Dr Sauro Mezzetti – the former head of town planning in Auroville, and current member of Auroville’s Working Committee, the body responsible for Auroville’s interactions and relationships with external entities – presented on the community. Bindu focussed her talk on the socio-economic and environmental development of the Auroville project over the past 50 years, while Sauro focussed his on the township’s urban development, and involvement within the bioregion, primarily through environmental and educational outreach projects. The panel discussion was moderated by Kathia Laszlo, daughter-in-law of Ervin Laszlo a member of the Club of Rome who served on Auroville’s International Advisory Council.

Integral education was a central topic in the conference, given that Auroville and

CIIS are key sites for the practical application of the educational philosophy and pedagogy based on Integral Yoga. Raised and educated in Auroville, Suryamayi participated in the panel discussion dedicated to Integral Education moderated by Prof. Jean Eisele,

who has been a consulting volunteer educator and trainer in Auroville since 2000. They were joined by Dr. Liz Beaven, Provost of CIIS, and Dr Heidi Fraser, a lecturer and graduate of CIIS, who focused her doctoral research on integral education at CIIS. Following the panel, Suryamayi offered a 2 hour embodied integral education session in the flagship Auroville

practice “Awareness Through the Body”.

The intervention of Aurovilians, shedding light on Auroville, was very well received, fostering inspired, inquisitive and reflective discussion. The interest between members of CIIS and of Auroville was reciprocal, igniting and fortifying relationship-building between the two experimental Integral Yoga projects. As Bindu mentioned, they are at diametrically opposed poles of the globe, their bridging together embracing it. An auspicious addition was that of the Esalen Institute, a third powerful center for transformational consciousness inspired by Sri Aurobindo. Michael Murphy, a co-founder of the institute, was inspired by his stay at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. A former member

of Auroville’s International Advisory Council, he closed the conference with an entertaining and thought-provoking discussion of the past, present, and future of these three sites of integral education and integral yoga.

In addition to CIIS, Bindu, Sauro and Suryamayi presented at other US centers and institutions during their visit. Bindu and Sauro, along with Julian Lines of AVI USA, facilitated an “Auroville Immersion” at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi. In addition to a panel discussion on Auroville, Bindu offered a

workshop to engage with the four powers of the Mother in one’s daily life and work, with John Robert Cornell. Bindu also presented on Auroville at the Institute of Noetic Sciences in California, and Sauro at the Matagiri Sri

Aurobindo Center in New York. Suryamayi was received as a visiting scholar at Boston’s Northeastern University, to build on its budding relationship with Auroville following The Bridge, which Northeastern’s

School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs, Jennie Stephens, attended. During her visit, Suryamayi guest-lectured for Northeastern’s College of Professional Studies Psychology course “Stress and Its Management,” an experiential lecture-session integrating Awareness Through the Body as a form of embodied integral yoga psychology.

The 50th anniversary of Auroville has been framed by many within and without Auroville as a turning point in the community’s life, a moment in which, following an intensive period of incubation, the time is ripe for this experiment in the spiritualization of society to share its practices and process, its challenges and successes, and contribute to a globalized progressive movement. This Auroville-USA visit was certainly that.

*Suryamayi was born and raised in Auroville. She was an undergraduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude. She is currently a Doctoral Researcher in Development Studies (School of Global Studies), Sussex, UK.*

[tinyurl.com/1968RevCIIS](http://tinyurl.com/1968RevCIIS)



Wendy, Sauro, Suryamayi, Bindu, Mike Murphy  
co-founder of Esalen Institute



AVIUSA Board and friends gather at Anie’s Memorial at International House



AVIUSA Board and North and South American friends gather at Darkali

## AVI-USA Board Members in Auroville

Auroville's 50th anniversary drew all of the AVI-USA board members who visited several sites and projects that have been supported by the board in recent times: Rishi Walker's Kamataru in the far north part of the Green Belt, Darkali Forest project of Nevi, Agnes and Gopal in the International Zone site for the Americas, and Poppo's site for his proposed Auroville Museum of Archeology. Here is a report.

### Kamaratu

Rishi, who grew up in Auroville, volunteered to develop many acres of Auroville land in the far north part of the Green Belt, and he named it Kamataru Forest. As he has stated, it represents the



Binah, Jack and Rishi at Kamataru

second phase of reforestation in Auroville on land north of the old forest front; it is an effort to create a healthy life-support system, a microclimate, an environment resilient to climatic extremes, a healthy source of germ plasm and biodiversity, and an environment conducive to the change of consciousness.

### Darkali Forest

Darkali's long time stewards are Auronevi, Agnes and Gopal. Part of AVI-USA's interest in this project is that Darkali abuts the land set aside for the pavilion of the Americas in the international zone, which the Darkali team is also taking care of, including a fitness trail much used by Aurovilians.

Recent work there, according to the stewards, has involved a team of Nepali workers who cut and dug out all the "wait-a-minute" thorn bushes that had invaded the place and then made great big bundles placed here and there. At the same time a leucaena patch which is not local and not good as a forest tree was also removed. Now one can actually walk around the place quite freely. Clearing

the bundles from the forest would have been a very time-consuming job, and the priority was to stop the continued growth.

They are seeking funds to hire a half day worker who could work on removing all the bundles, tidying up the place and also keeping the weeds and regrowth in check as there is plenty of space and sunlight now. In no time it can grow back to how it was if not a little maintenance is provided.

Visiting wildlife biologist, Don Norman, a friend of Bill Leon, is developing connections to support AV projects like Darkali through his native plant business near Seattle.

### Auroville Museum of Archeology

Directed by long-time Aurovilian Poppo, it's to be located at the junction of the road to the Visitor's Center, and is planned to be an information kiosk that explains in a non-scientific way the history of the 2500-year-old burial ground on Auroville land to the common man in three languages under a sun & rain shaded roof. The impetus is to honor ancient Tamil culture and heritage.

It will have benches made of granite for rest, reflection and picnic and there will be information in Tamil, English and Hindi with a small built-in showcase for original artifacts. It's meant to be unique in Auroville and India because the usual handling of artifacts: cairn circles, urn burials etc. is being destroyed by development, agriculture, roads, mining and others.

The landscaping, re-lifting of stones and slabs, contour building, tree planting, fencing, etc. was completed in March of 2018

## Greenwork and the Galaxy:

### A Visit to Auroville

by Peter Callaway

My November-December 2017 visit was my first since 2004, and the 40th anniversary of my very first visit.



Peter Callaway

Forty years ago I arrived with a vision of Auroville as the point at the end of a line of light. I also had in my mind an image of the "galaxy" model I had seen on a poster at an Auroville center in Montreal.

What I found when I arrived with my traveling companion Toni Sutherland, on old bikes rented in Pondy, up a long sandy rutted road, was a group of rural settlements, a large construction project, and several fancy concrete suburban houses.

We had come after visiting Arcosanti, whose goal was to put a lot of people on a small "footprint" of land, and Findhorn, which was endeavoring to become a city, harmonious on all levels. I saw the "galaxy" model as an outline for how Auroville thought about becoming a city on a fairly small piece of land. I wondered if the experience of Findhorn and Arcosanti could be helpful to Auroville, and vice versa.

I visited again several times over the next 15 years during which the environmental idea was pervasive among progressive people and groups everywhere, and also in Auroville, which more than many places, exemplified the environmental ideal and ideas. Aurovilians were doing exemplary work, along with the many workers from neighboring villages. The city-building idea was still present, but the "galaxy" model was not so fashionable. Findhorn had adopted the idea of being a "planetary village," not the city of 100,000 that Peter Caddy had once dreamed of. I thought maybe that that was what Auroville would become, a network of green-oriented settlements.

During my recent visit I could see, feel and hear the spreading of Puducherry, including new resorts enjoying the park-like green work of Aurovilians. With pervasive



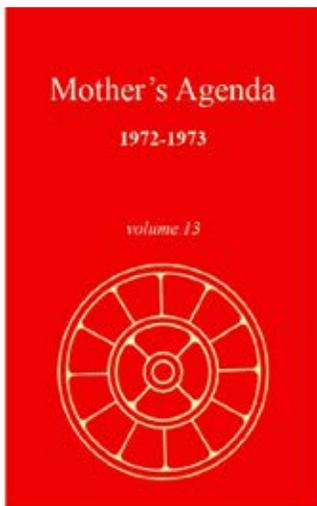
Auroville Museum of Archeology plan

motorized transport, what had once been felt as “vast” expanses of forest and forests-to-be, felt urban to me. (I’m used to America’s sprawling citiscapes.)

It turned out that my visit was really more of a retreat. I allowed myself, given the rainy weather, jet-lag and fatigue to read. I began reading the Mothers Agenda. A novel or two, and also *Auroville, a City for the Future* by Anu Majumdar. She recounts in her history tensions between the prioritization of green work and that of city building as exemplified by the galaxy model.

I came to realize how much my thinking had, during the 90’s and 2000’s, been influenced toward green work, rather than the idea that Auroville could become the coherent city form the “galaxy” implied. The construction of the Matrimandir had inspired me, the workers’ camp, the concreting, the primary focus it provided, the concretization of the “soul of Auroville.” It might not be a bad thing, I think now, for the construction of the body of Auroville to have what to me is an inspiring and attractive form, the “galaxy” to anchor a community vision for its process.

Two things I took away from my trip last fall. One was to read from the Mother’s Agenda every morning first thing. The other is weekly to read Auroville Notes. The Notes inspire me that the process of Auroville continues, steadfastly, holding to the quality of its Soul that somehow I feel when I read the Mother’s Agenda.



Mother’s Agenda (13 Volumes) available from Pondicherry in Woodstock NY. Order information on page 8.

## My Activism for Auroville’s Land

by Mandakini (M Lucien-Brun)

“The most important thing is to get the land now – you do not know the power of greed.” —The Mother

“The city envisaged by The Mother is under serious threat by speculative developers ... Land prices have risen exponentially. Every month that is lost means that the price of land is rising and the dangers of commercial interest intruding into Auroville steadily growing.... In the final analysis, if we do not get the land, we will not be able to build the city.”

—Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013

August 15<sup>th</sup> is a significant date for all of us, and very much so in my personal history. My first conscious August 15<sup>th</sup> was in 1969 at the Woodstock Festival when half a million people survived in harmony on food and water planned for 20,000, showing that impossible things are possible. Then on August 15<sup>th</sup> in 1977, I found myself at the East



Mandakini

West Cultural Center of Los Angeles, at a Sri Aurobindo birthday celebration by Dr. Judith Tyberg (named Jyotipriya, “*The Lover of Light*”, by Sri Aurobindo). I had been searching for a durable path to the “new world” I had glimpsed, and when Dr. Tyberg, lifted her arms skyward and declaimed with incredible force, “Friends, we are the dawn of a new age for humanity!” I knew I had found the way. Jyotipriya was Sri Aurobindo & The Mother’s premier pioneer in America – their “Golden Bridge” - and one of Auroville’s first promoters.

On another August 15<sup>th</sup> — this time in 2014 — Aryadeep, Sigrid, Jothi Raj and I launched Acres for Auroville, a fundraising campaign for Auroville’s designated but still-missing land based on an inner inspiration I’d received over a period of months. A4A is a collaboration between Auroville International (which I represent) with Auroville’s Lands for Auroville Unified (led by Aryadeep) and this past August 15<sup>th</sup> we kicked off our fifth year!

Flashback: Something in me can’t accept impossibilities it seems. My activist roots first bloomed when I organized an action for disadvantaged children in New York City on behalf of Mayor John Lindsay. And my “encourager” tendencies date back further to when I was cheerleader captain at my Brooklyn high school (please don’t laugh)!

After my years with Jyotipriya, I had the privilege of spending 3 years at the Ashram where I was a teacher and worked at the Sri Aurobindo Archives. I met my French husband there, leading to my 34 years in France. Each year I went to the Ashram and Auroville, but it hurt me to not be doing more for The Mother’s Dream apart from sending donations. So when I retired in 2011, I started a new life phase of activism for Auroville. I became AVI-France’s fundraising person, and

I started by militating for a much-needed ambulance for Auroville. Then I launched the first fundraising calls for the Farewell Facilities and for Santé, the new integrative health center whose building-in-progress was then a sad stalled skeleton for lack of funds. “Intolerable!” my insides screamed, and so I initiated

“BUILD IT NOW!” as a joint AVI-France and AVI-USA action with Julian, Chetana and Auroville’s Linda Grace and Carel. The funds we raised played a crucial role in finishing the beautiful facilities now serving Aurovilians and guests.

Unbelievably, the land need was less visible! Like so many of us who see with joy the buildings, forests, and farms that Auroville has created, I didn’t see the danger lying in the undeveloped fields in between. But speculators and outside real estate developers did. Aware of the goldmine that Auroville’s missing acres represent, an increasing wave of plot-buying and building “for-profit” private developments on Auroville-designated land started to grow. In late 2013, *Auroville Today* published an alarming article on the subject, and Dr. Karan Singh issued his warning to the community. The simple fact is that Auroville is in a competitive race for getting its missing land before others buy it first!



Outside developer opposite Visitor Center

Five years ago, that impossible-to-accept word "impossible" is what land fundraising for Auroville was deemed to be. So I contacted Aryadeep in Auroville and the AVI-France Board to propose a fundraiser for the land. After all, the last 3 times I had felt that same inner urge to militate, it worked, so why not this time?! I also felt the campaign could serve as a rallying point for greater unity within the Auroville-Integral Yoga "Family". The AVI International Board agreed, and together with my buddies on the AVI-France Board, we came up with specific ideas for creating motivation and trust which became an inherent part of A4A:

\*all donations go only for land purchase and for no other use

\*donations are immediately acknowledged with a motivating system of appreciative donor thank-you's

\*Jothi Raj creates our accounts with the Auroville Unity Fund which I then check and send to the AVI Board, the Land Board,

and AV's Working Committee on a monthly basis

\*A4A's fundraising success is shown on the donor pages of our dedicated land website where the petals of our "Mother's Symbol Success Barometer" grow more golden with each donation. When we reach our year's target, the symbol is totally gold. We have achieved this happy result for each of the campaign's 4 years!

The 50th Birthday gift that A4A has so far given to Auroville includes over 45 acres — 29 critical plots for consolidation, protection, and manifesting the City of Dawn next to the Matrimandir, near the Solar Kitchen, in the International Zone, in other parts of the City & throughout the Greenbelt. The most recent A4A-funded plot was just purchased in September near Fertile Windmill.

For awareness-building, we have our very rich land.auroville.org site with its information, news section, and library of original films, including our now iconic "Landing

Auroville" film and our just finished "The Mother — an Artist and Artistic Influence" (created in association with Rakhal and AuroImage). For motivation, we have held the Landing Auroville celebration and an A4A-AVI tea. And with AVI's Aravinda and Jasmin, we have created the "Art for Land" action. It has also been most gratifying to have the warm support of Dr. Singh, and the presence of Secretary Chunkath at several of our events. Our annual New Year's card created with Aravinda sits on every AV office desk. Happily, I now see that all the years when I thought I wasn't working for The Mother were in fact a preparation for my work for Auroville: my experience as an educational film producer & writer, and my English-teaching years with French finance professionals have served me in good stead for many of the above campaign creations!

Auroville International's role has been the key to our success, with US donors as the most dynamic. It is a wonderful feeling to receive thank you's from donors – AVIers, Aurovilians, Ashramites and AV supporters - who are so happy to have a vector for building and protecting Auroville and its land. About 10% of the City and 50% of the Greenbelt are still-missing and at imminent risk. We can support the A4A action by spreading the message, organizing a support action, and by donating! The time for securing The City of Dawn's remaining land and protecting it for the future is NOW.

Donations can be made through AVI-USA's website specifying "Acres for Auroville." More campaign information, news, and our film library: [tinyurl.com/acres4av](http://tinyurl.com/acres4av)

### Keep informed:

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