Celebrating Auroville's 50th Anniversary

***Srimoyi '78** tells us about some of the major events that were held to mark the occasion*

Auroville celebrated the 50th anniversary of its inauguration this year. On 28th February, the customary Bonfire and meditation was followed by the Water Ceremony which was reminiscent of the inaugural soil ceremony 50 years ago. Can you tell us something about it?

The idea to have a water ceremony came over a year and a half ago. Jyoti and I were brainstorming and we thought we could have something reminiscent of the Inauguration ceremony but with a different element – water. And slowly it dawned on us that in fact this is the element that is most relevant today, the element that is the topic of the moment all over the planet. It's beauty is that it transcends national boundaries thereby taking this ceremony one step farther from that of the original inauguration ceremony. An element which truly belongs to all and must be shared by all.



The Water Ceremony

Our Matrimandir Events Team took it up. We spread the word regarding our plan and people brought samples of water from all over the world. From Iceland to Antarctica, from Peru to Sudan, from Tibet to Hawaii, they came from all over – there were 321 samples in all *(see map here: https://www.auroville.org/contents/4257)*. There were so many sacred sources: there was water from Lourdes, from the Chalice Well at Glastonbury, from a sufi mazaar from Pakistan, from Gangotri and Mansarovar and from many many other sacred places, springs and rivers in India and abroad. People put in a lot of effort. For instance Vilas, who had represented Cuba in the original inauguration, went especially to Cuba and got water from four different sacred sources there and she brought them with so much care in bottles that had been used by the Mother. Many in India brought water from their tirthasthanam. I was really touched by the dedication and devotion with which so many brought the water.

As we got closer to Feb 28th there was like a deluge of water samples that started coming in. We had to receive each one of them from the collaborators who brought them, listen to their particular story, put them in order, label them, enter them into the chart and finally forward them to the calligraphers who would then copy them out onto the beautiful blue paper placards. The placards in the shape of drops were cut and spray painted by two Auroville units. An Auroville potter made the beautiful pots to carry the water. It was really a collaborative effort.

On 28th February, after the meditation, shortly before 6 am just as it started to get light, the Auroville children came down batch by batch into the Green Room of the Amphitheatre where a team of volunteers handed over to them one by one the water samples and the placards, with which they walked quietly out into the Amphitheatre, then up to the Urn and down on the other side, walked along the water symbol as given by the Mother and finally poured the water into the golden disk placed at the centre of the Auroville symbol made of flowers and candles. The disc already

had water from the Lotus Pond that is below the Matrimandir and water from the Samadhi that had been kept in Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's rooms. This water received all the other waters.

The whole ceremony was accompanied by live music from Auroville musicians and the Auroville Choir. The theme of the music was the "Earth's Aspiration Chant" as given by the Mother. It was a special moment in the history of Auroville. We, the organisers were very touched by how beautifully it all went. We really felt that the Mother presided over the whole event.

All the water that was part of the ceremony is now in these 3 large sealed containers. We hope that all this water will go into the future lake that will surround the Matrimandir. The waters of the world will flow in the Matrimandir lake and keep receiving the Mother's force. And we believe that when the water comes here and receives the Mother's force it has an effect on the source from where it comes.

Volunteers from the Ashram helped with the crowd management on 28th Feb. Also in an exceptional arrangement you helped arrange for the Ashram students to be present for the early morning meditation, Bonfire and Water Ceremony. Can you tell us something about this?

Usually, I along with some volunteers are left to take care of crowd management. This year I said "I can't do it. I have to concentrate on the water ceremony." Besides, we were expecting some 6000 or more people and it had to be organized in a different way with at least a hundred volunteers. It was wonderful that Ashram volunteers came forward to help us. A special bond has been forged between Auroville and Ashram through this endeavour. The Golden Chain started it some years ago by issuing passes for the Bonfires on our behalf and now your office has become an important link between Auroville and Ashram.

And yes, 160 odd students of the Ashram School with their teachers attended. I remember how I handed over the passes to Manoj-da who handed them over to Uttama. It was like a ceremony in itself. The students' coming was a very symbolic and a beautiful moment. It was really wonderful to collaborate with people from the Ashram to make this possible. Srijita of Auroville Security was also involved. She organized the routes the buses had to take etc. I think finally it all worked out really well. The children also must have made the effort to wake up really early to be able reach here on time. It is something they will always remember.

I am left with a very happy feeling when I remember the 28th Bonfire and Water Ceremony. Yes, we had our share of difficulties in Auroville with the limited passes etc., but I feel when you persevere and try to go beyond the difficulties asking for Her help the final outcome is powerful and beautiful.

In the buildup to the celebrations, Auroville hosted the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi. What were the highlights of his visit? How will it benefit Auroville?

I believe that nothing happens at the Matrimandir that is not the Mother's will. Prime Minister Modi's visit must have had Her sanction. I believe he spent around 15 minutes in the Matrimandir. What happened there is between him and the Mother. Then, we were asked if he could inaugurate the water ceremony and so we provided water samples of Ganga, Narmada and Kaveri to pour into the lotus pond below the Matrimandir. He did it very well, very ceremoniously, while five children from Auroville chanted Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri Mantra. His speech at Bharat Nivas was also very nice. I was particularly touched that he referred to the Mother as the Divine Mother and that he paid tribute to Kireet-bhai.

I am not in a position to say how we are benefitted by his visit. Yes, the Prime Minister of India visiting Auroville has a certain significance on deeper levels, but that is beyond us and I cannot comment on that.

The main cultural event of the celebrations that some of us attended was the programme Seas 'Soul Encounters for the Auroville Soul' which was staged in the amphitheatre on 17th Feb. Can you tell us something about the concept of the programme and what it was like to be a part of it?

SEAS narrated the Soul's evolutionary journey through passages taken from Sri Aurobindo's



Srimoyi during the programme *Seas*

Savitri. There were about a hundred participants in all. The performers from various disciplines of the body came together and created this unique event along with video projections as backdrop.

The vision and concept of this programme came from Grace, an Aurovilian and a dancer. Production, direction, choreography, choice of costume etc were also hers along with some professional collaborators. She was the driving force behind its creation. The music was by Patrick, who used to work with Sunil-da.

Grace must have begun working on it a year and a half ago. She had a very clear idea about what she wanted to do. Then of course it evolved from there. Grace, Patrick and Savitri (another Aurovilian) selected the lines from *Savitri* and from April or May we started going to Patrick (in Sunil-da's music room actually) and would listen to the music that he was composing and give our feedback. This went on for a few months. Then six of us were chosen to read the lines. We practised the reading and recorded the lines. Finally, I must say I loved the music.

A programme of this scale has not happened before in Auroville. As you saw there were performers of all kinds. These are all activities in Auroville: the fire dancers, the Odissi and Bharatnatyam dancers, children doing acrobatics and gymnastics. It brought together the community in a way. It was a very beautiful experience for all of us. To work with *Savitri* with such beautiful music in a space like the Amphitheatre in the vicinity of the Matrimandir is a tremendous privilege. You have to have the tremendous Grace of the Mother to experience this. Not that we didn't have difficulties between ourselves – you know the human factor always comes up – but if you sincerely ask to be able to go beyond these petty egoisms, the help is always there.

You have been in Auroville for a number of years. Have the celebrations, this working together created a greater bonding, a greater focus? Has it yielded something?

Yes, it surely has yielded something. I believe something has gone into the very fabric of the community. I cannot say it is "this"or "that". I don't have the vision or the insight to be able to say it, but something has definitely happened. The programme Seas and the Water Ceremony were both an offering to the Universal Mother. In return, I believe She gave us a gift by making it all so beautiful. Something was in the air, and who made it so? It cannot be us, it was Her, Her presence which made the difference.

And now it is like a lot of doors have been opened for us. We have to now go through these doors. I can only say that there are moments in Auroville, when you feel, that after being stuck for many years, things/projects start moving. It is a moment like that now. We have to use this moment that Mother is giving us.

New generations of SAICE alumni continue to join Auroville. Do you feel there is any special contribution they can make to the development of Auroville in the coming years?

Yes, definitely, SAICE alumni have a special role to play. They receive something in the Ashram which is essential for the growth of Auroville – this full commitment to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We need people here who say "this is what They have said; this is what They have seen; so, let's do it." I think this is easier for Ashram students. I am not saying it is true for all, but the Ashram education is really very special. The speciality lies in just the fact that the environment and the teachers who teach there have this inner connection to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo which they communicate to the students. We were bathed in that. It is in the very pores of our being. Nothing can change that. I hope that things are still like that today. Yes conditions may have changed. We have to do the best we can. And I believe the Divine is still in charge; She is still taking care. ⌘