A Dream

“There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have sincere aspirations could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony...”

~ The Mother
REFLECTIONS ON 2020

The year 2020 stands out as the year of the big shift which came with Covid 19. This big shift affected the whole earth, all countries, all levels of society. It makes us remember The Mother’s words in ‘A Dream’ where she writes “…where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities…” This vision of Mother touches on the need for a deep paradigm shift, a need brought into sharp focus through Covid 19: touching the whole earth, whether it was the helpless situation of the millions of migrating workers in India, the inequality of race and financial background bursting the barriers in the “Black Lives Matter” movement in USA or the vulnerability of the institutionalized elderly in countries like Sweden.

Every point has been touched. Now the challenge is to take a big leap forward, taking this moment of possibility that we are globally immersed in. We see the tremors in society, the threat of wars, protectionism; inequalities in opportunity, education, accessibility, economics - and through it all we saw again and again the stepping forward of individuals and groups standing firm in acts of Equality and Peace, Goodness and Generosity.
In this Newsletter we want to share with you not only our work and progress through this year, but also some of Auroville’s responses to these challenges. You will read about Uma from Upasana Design Studio, Auroville’s Village Action Group and the Thamarai Team and their commitment to act for change and equity. Through Dec 2019 until March 2020 we were fully busy with our yearly Art for Land activities. We widened our interactions, collaborated with Galleries in Auroville and Pondicherry: Citadine, Tibetan Pavilion, Aurodhan, Tasmai, The Promenade and The Governor’s Palace. Friends like Nadaka, Yogini and Chandra joined the Art for land collaboration, and together with our Auroville performers we had some of India’s top musicians and dancers performing at The Unity Pavilion.

With the full lock down the world went very quiet for many of us in Auroville, while others were carrying a big load of organization and management to ensure food supply, security, communication, compliance with the restrictions announced by the Government and interaction with the local authorities. Moments of difficulty and annoyance weighed lightly as compared to the gratitude towards those who carried on in these times of uncertainty, not knowing what the next day would bring. The lock down started to ease in May 2020. We still could not have any public events, but as our main Hall is large and can easily accommodate social distancing, we checked with the Auroville COVID Team if it could be offered for
Working Group meetings. With their agreement and following the regulations, we could facilitate an almost daily community use of the main building, not only by the working groups of the Auroville Administration, but also by Thamarai, The Prosperity Group on New Economy and others. A second strategy evolved which is now bringing us abundance at different levels. It was good to work outdoors – so the garden could finally get its due attention. A Pebble Garden in front of the new bathrooms came alive. When it came in place it connected the new building to the existing compound in an absolutely beautiful way creating pathways and integrating the whole space.

Financial difficulties were foreseen, so the next step was to complete the herbal garden and also include a vegetable patch for sharing. The work itself created the next moves and possibilities. The Orchid garden is completed, a small overgrown patch became a space for lilies and ferns were planted along the pathway to make use of the water drip from the Orchids. With earth from the large testing pond at the Matrimandir landscaping in the Peace garden moved forward. All this work has been done using recycled material, collecting plants from home or from friends as well as in exchange from other Auroville Units. The garden work seemed to have been a natural flow paralleled in the large Circle Garden movement [https://deep-adaptation.auroville.org/circle-garden/] which is presently blossoming and bearing fruit (and vegetables) all over Auroville.

About all this and more of what has been taking place during 2019-2020 you will read about in the coming pages, concluding with our invitation for you to join us and support the progress of The Unity Pavilion and the different activities which have grown from strength to strength each year and bring us new pathways of connection within the community and with the world at large.
The pebble garden in front of the Utility building with first floor upcoming construction

New orchid garden blooming in front of the office building
Art for Land 2020

The Art for Land exhibition at Unity Pavilion was opened by the Governor of Pondicherry, Dr Kiran Bedi and our last event for 2020 was the Art Exhibition at the Governor’s Palace which due to the Covid Lock down could not be taken down until May/June 2020. In close collaboration with Mandakini and A4A, there were altogether 8 Art Exhibitions, a row of concerts and performances as well as Loretta’s yearly February Talks and of course the fun stuff with the Grace Lottery, the Generosity Fair and the Afternoon Tea Party. More on Art For Land - Unity Pavilion 2020 - Video link for Inauguration ceremony

The Art for Land event has been growing from year to year since it’s initiation. In close partnership and collaboration with Mandakini of Acres for Auroville it has been a very inspiring journey of fundraising, inviting several ways of direct participation to collaborate, creating awareness, opening for creative initiatives and encouraging generosity in ways that enable everyone to contribute. This year we expanded the Exhibition. Together with the main exhibition where all the artists are represented which takes place in the Unity Pavilion, there were also individual and groups exhibiting at Citadine’s, Pavilion of Tibetan Culture and Savitri Bhan in Auroville and at Tasmai, Aurodhan and The Promenade Galleries in Pondicherry. All this brought so much attention that we received an invitation from Lt. Governor Dr. Kiran Bedi to bring the main exhibition to the Governor’s Palace, Raj Nivas in Pondicherry.
This event included a fantastic performance by Aurelio’s team from Swaram. Here is a [video link] from the interaction between Dr. Kiran Bedi, the Raj Nivas staff and the Swaram Team. It was an inspiring event and Dr Bedi expressed her support of Auroville and invited an active collaboration.

This collaboration between the Unity Pavilion and Acres for Auroville has brought in quite an unexpected aspect in our work. It started very small and grew into a large activity. The aim is to actively support the Acres for Auroville and the amazing work Mandakini, Aryadeep and others are doing to secure the Auroville Lands. All these activities are aligned with our purpose of Human Unity and it has not only helped us to contribute to the land purchase, it has also enriched our work and interactions, bringing people together in unexpected ways. During the Covid times, the Art for Land organization was also a work that needed attention and received it.

The Team has now grown stronger, with Gopika and her wide experience in this field leading it and with a committed team around her. Depending on the Covid situation we still are not sure how far we will have a physical exhibition this year, but there will definitely be an online Exhibition. The website is again being worked over to facilitate online sales in a user friendly way.

At Unity Pavilion itself a small upstairs room is being turned into a small Boutique with information about AFL and through the year sales of works donated by artists. miraculous grace. The work of collaborating with outside galleries that was initiated last year will continue. So, while Corona stopped us in the track and slowed us down, long term we met the difficulties and have turned them to our advantage. The development of the gardens and the attention they have been given, the big focus on organizational development, including team building has brought both fun and harmony with it.
Nadaka hosted many renowned musicians this year during the Art for Land Exhibition at the Unity Pavilion. It was a special treat indeed to see and hear so many accomplished artists from India and abroad performing in Auroville in a series of evening concerts or “Baithaks”- in Nadaka’s own words: “These are improvised sessions where the guest artists arrive on the day of the performance and we perform together the same evening. “Baithak” means, to lounge, sit and relax; in Indian music, it is a session or a comfortable informal hangout.”

These concerts were a delightful and engaging combination of musical styles: Hindustani & Carnatic (north & south Indian classical music) merging with ambient world music and Jazzy modes, with playful exchanges and stories Nadaka and his musician friends spontaneously shared on stage. Guest artists this year were: Jonathan Kay from Canada & Calcutta on Esraj & Saxophone. Sivaramakrishna on Sitar and his brother Ganesh Rao on the Tabla. Violinist Raghavendra Rao Basavaraj and Mridangam player N. Ramakrishnan. And Grammy Award-winning - Padmashri Vikku Vinayakram playing the Earthen Pot (Ghatam) along with his grandson Swaminathan on Kanjira along with Nadaka on his Indianised acoustic guitar. Mahesh Vinayakram and percussionist - Suresh Bascara We also enjoyed some evenings with our own Auroville ensemble - RagaMantra, (Nadaka, Gopika & Keshava). For those of you, not already familiar with this family trio; Nadaka plays his one of a kind, Indianised acoustic guitar that combines the sounds of multiple Indian string instruments, Gopika, sings soulful ragas and ancient Sanskrit chants. Keshava is a super talented Tabla player who has been performing since a very young age and gained recognition for his momentous participation, center stage, in the 2010 Common Wealth Games Opening Ceremony.
Our Unity Pavilion team feels proud and happy to host these special fund raising events, especially, seeing such enthusiasm coming from all who attend. All through this season; All of us involved, musicians and audience included felt deeply inspired by a central theme of “Art for Land” and the call for all of us to realize the Dream and the paramount importance of acquiring the missing lands of Auroville

More about the artists: [www.youtube.com/ragamantra](http://www.youtube.com/ragamantra)

*Keshava playing tabla, Jonathan Kay on saxophone, Gopika on vocals & Mahesh*
The Art for Land exhibition, raising funds for the lands of Auroville through a grand celebration of art and culture, held every year at Unity Pavilion since 2015, had this year, several outstanding performances, by renowned artists from India and abroad. They all came forward to contribute their broad spectrum of talents as a gesture of goodwill and generosity towards Auroville and the need of the day. Amongst the many beautiful offerings was ‘Vasundhara’ an outstanding kathak performance by the very gifted Yogini Gandhi.

A Danseuse par excellence, Yogini Gandhi, who has recently moved to Auroville from Pune, is amongst the very few dancers who performs two Indian classical dance styles - Kathak & Odissi with equal dexterity and virtuosity. Her training in Kathak commenced at Kalachhaya and Odissi under Shri Natbar Maharana. She further went on to receive guidance from India’s legendary dance maestros Pt. Birju Maharaj and Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra.

She has won several prestigious awards and accolades for her unique performances all over the world. Prior to the performance, with mindful planning to the tee, the hall was beautifully decorated with flowers and candles by several of Yogini’s friends and students who came forward to lovingly volunteer for the evening. Mona set up a lovely candle arrangement at the entrance while Yogini’s husband Chandra guided the tech team towards a smooth and flawless set-up. Manasa and Megha did flower decorations, while Sheetal opened the evening with a warm welcome to the audience and introduced Yogini.
Yogini’s mesmerizing performance at Unity Pavilion on 15th Feb, commenced with a Shiv Shakti Vandana as a glorious tribute to the primordial female and male energies symbolized by Shakti and Shiva followed by Ang Kavya - Poetry through the Body. She also performed the Bhairavi Taraana: A dance piece based on a lilting composition by the well-known vocalist Pt. Dinkar Kaikini. This choreography featured the unique Gat Nikas aspect of the Kathak repertoire and it concluded with a fast paced rhythmic footwork. The grand finale of the performance was with an abstract piece - Advait: based on the ancient Indian principle of non-duality.

The audience was absolutely struck by the reverence of this offering and also the opportunity to learn more about this sacred art form as Yogini blended her performance beautifully with very informative details guiding the audience towards a deeper understanding of the dance form as well. The performance ended with a thunderous applause and absolute delight was writ large on the face of every member in the hall!
The Four Aspects of Shakti
An Intermodal Expressive Arts Community Workshop at Unity Pavilion

Gopika has been conducting a variety of Expressive Arts workshops at Unity Pavilion since a year now and here she writes about her experience with one of the creative workshops she facilitated.

“Art, as part of Yoga, can be made a medium for expressing that which is noble and spiritual within us”. -Sri Aurobindo

Intermodal Expressive Arts is a field that invites an engagement with the different modalities of art like painting, poetry, music and performance to weave their way into offering us different viewpoints of perceiving the world within us and around us. Last year, I conducted an arts-immersive workshop at the Unity Pavilion called ‘The Four aspects of Shakti’. This arts-led experiment was about exploring and reflecting on the themes of courage, harmony, wisdom and beauty. We started with chanting together, going into movement in response to the chant, expanding that experience to a visual and thereafter moving into poetry and group performances. It was very interesting to note the natural engagement and our human creative capacities and sensibilities that presented themselves through the participants. The workshop was an inquiry into - How can the arts serve us? How can creative engagement or process propel change? How can we access positive resources within us through the power of the arts in our transformation as individuals and as a community?

These questions lead us into this very phenomenon of creative process as part of the yoga, as a transformative tool, essential to being human that can change how we perceive and act in the world and open a space for us in looking at what we are shaping into our future as a collective. The night before the workshop Khushmita and I had set up for 28 participants and exactly 28 people showed up!
A divine intervention and blessing that miraculously happens in the Mothers world.
I hope to initiate more such community arts gatherings this year at the Unity Pavilion along with Nadaka supporting us with his music.

We are walking away from who we are, while we are moving towards who we know we are

We are finding no space to breathe in the chaos,

while we are holding chaos lovingly with our breath

We are not knowing where we are going, while we are trusting a place known to us

We are lost in finding what art is, while we are found in ourselves being lost

- Gopika Dahanukar

Participants rejoicing after the Expressive Art Workshop at Unity Pavilion, Jan 2020
Auroville welcomed the year 2020 on a musical note with an Indian Classical Vocal Recital Aarohan, featuring one of India’s leading vocalists Smt. Manjiri Asnare – Kelkar.

Hosted by Arpanaa for the benefit of the Art4Land initiative, the concert was held on the evening of 1st January 2020. The program was very well received and the music connoisseurs also contributed generously for the cause of Auroville Land. Unity Pavilion was beautifully decorated with flowers, candles, lamps and incense to set the perfect ambience for a musical soiree. The guests were welcomed with herbal tea and cookies and there was a wonderful sense of festivity in the air.

The program commenced with the compere of the evening, Yogini welcoming the guests and inviting Sheetal to speak about the importance of the Art 4 Land project. This was followed by the introduction of the artists. A torchbearer of the Jaipur Atrauli gharana or school of music Manjiri is a leading artist of her generation and has received training from stalwarts like Pt. Madhusudan Kanetkar and the legendary doyenne, GaanSaraswati Smt. Kishori Amonkar. Manjiri’s music is a rare combination of erudition and lyricism. Her performances are an exemplar of the extempore tradition unique Indian Classical music. She sang a number of beautiful ragas like Tilak Kamod, Mali Gauda, Yaman Taraana and a Bhajan. Her renditions were soulful and the audience was mesmerized till the very end. Requesting an encore!. The Vocalist was ably supported on the tabla by Mandar Puranik and on the harmonium by Siddhesh Bicholkar. After a memorable evening of music, Yogini invited Mona and Geeta of Arpanaa to offer a token of our appreciation to all the three artists amidst thundering applause.
Arpanaa, funded by City Services of Auroville was formed 7 years ago to facilitate and invite artists outside of Auroville to enrich our community with their art. Arpanaa is led by Mona, Geeta and Yogini. Arpanaa has hosted varied events that include Hindustani and Carnatic music programs and diverse Indian dance forms.

After Arohan, We also witnessed another beautiful classical music performance by students from Sri Aurobindo Centre for Arts and Communication - Delhi (which is a unit of Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry) This performance was organised by Daljeet Wadhwa who is the Director SACAC, Delhi. Students Aditya Dutta on tabla, Sanchayan on Hindustani vocals and Vinayak Pant on Sitar.

Students from SACAC, Delhi performing a classical music concert
Various events of Art for Land 2019

Garba dance performed by Madhumita and her troupe from Pondicherry Ashram

The audience enjoying a beautiful music concert at Unity Pavilion
The Auroville string quartet concert with Holger, Matthew, Shanks, Benjamin and Gundolf delighted us with a wide repertoire from classical to modern compositions.

Aurelio and the Swaram team setting up their instruments for the inauguration of Body for the Soul exhibition
During the Art for Land Exhibition, we also arranged the **Generosity Fair** which is like a festive market with beautiful, nice, useful and fun things offered towards the land. Together with it we had the **Sunday Tea Party for the Land** where many of the Auroville bakers contributed their best cakes and savouries.

Throughout the Exhibition there was the **Grace Lottery** with each lot costing only Rs20/- each and everybody winning something. It is fun and everyone loves it, all ages!. The prizes consist of pottery items made by the children in the White Peacock Pottery class, of beautiful printed cards offered by artists and small crystals and polished stones offered for this purpose. People are not used to the fact that everybody can win and it often gets quite exciting and fun and in the end brings in its own way, a substantial sum towards the land - and all kinds of people had a lot of fun participating, each one bringing a small treasure home!

All the various items were gifted by individuals and Auroville units. From the Unity Pavilion side, during the Art for Land Exhibition we freely offer the place and our work to serve the Land Fundraising and all income from the programs go to the Land fund. We are glad that it has been a success and that it creates a lot of awareness of the Land situation.
A small experience was shared by one of our volunteers Rose during her time working with the Art for Land exhibition

“I started working at Unity Pavilion as a volunteer in January 2020. The Art for Land exhibition had started and the walls of the main hall were adorned with many beautiful artworks. I learnt that this initiative is in its 5th year and it normally runs for 4-6 weeks every year. It is about connecting with artists in the community and further afield. Collaboration is the key.

The artist’s donate artworks which are then procured and the funds raised go to consolidating the lands of Auroville. I was mainly involved with the framing of artworks, organising and registration, as well as in some events like the generosity fair and exhibitions in Pondicherry. I loved the many varieties of art and the different mediums used. Working with the art and artists has certainly been an interesting and rewarding experience for me at Unity Pavilion.

The Generosity fair/ Tea Party is one of the Art for Land fundraising initiatives. Started in 2018, it brings together the community in a space of Generosity. Every year for this fair; held during the Art for Land exhibition the community donates baked goods, jams, pickles as well as new and used household items such as books, artifacts, ornaments, clothing, jewellery, curios etc, things which are beautiful, useful and fun. The fair is a beautiful day of interactions, sharing and many activities which celebrates the spirit of Human Unity and generosity! This year we also had a beautiful session on T-shirt painting with Amando as well as a beautiful values based music concert with the very gifted Nimo Patel.”
The theme of the camp was Sri Aurobindo’s 5 dreams, as has been the case since the first Oneness camp that took place 5 years ago. This time, it was the aim of the organisers to give a good grounding in each of the five dreams. One day was devoted to each dream where participants unpacked the meaning of the dream and related them to their own being and life as well as to the collectivity, including their families, society, community, country, continent and the world at large. The dreams gave us a focus on India’s role in the world community and shed light on how we fitted in within the scheme of things.

**Collective artwork co-created by the team at Nainital with Auroville artist Helgard**

Here we share with you a small write-up from the Nainital camp that we held in Nov’2019. The Unity Pavilion initiated the Sourcing Our Oneness program in 2015 together with the Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Sri Aurobindo Ashram – Delhi Branch, Auroville International and the related centres in realizing Sri Aurobindo’s vision of Human Unity and Unity in Diversity.

**A short review of the Nainital Camp November 2019 by Jayanthy, Mirambika School, Delhi Ashram**

The camp for 2019 was held between 3rd to 14th November 2019 in Van Niwas for the first 10 days and then in Madhuban from the 12th to 14th of November 2019. There were a total of 60 participants, including Taradidi, the facilitators and the organizing teams. The participants came from various parts of the country including the Kumaoni mountains, from Gujarat, Pune, Bihar, Odisha, Bengal, Pondicherry, Auroville, Delhi and France.
The Asian Resurgence and World Unity raised significant upsurges within us as we went through the dreams in detail. It gave us a deeper grounding into the Sourcing Our Oneness programme itself and the reason for gathering thus not only in an annual event but also as a step in a continuity leading towards a deep Harmony and Unity within ourselves and amongst the brethren. Since The Oneness camp took place in November, when the Himalayas are quite (very) cold, we had this year a very large youth group, ready for adventure!

We adjusted our program accordingly, having treks every second day and a lot of space for Art, Music and Dance. The theme was Sri Aurobindo’s Five Dreams with an emphasis on his Dream of a united Asia and it was very interesting to see these young people explore a side to their life they had not thought about before. The possibility to work together, overcoming the issues of language, education and social and cultural backgrounds was an eye-opener for many, and a challenge which brought closeness, understanding and much laughter.

Himalayan range seen from the kumaon foothills on the drive from Nainital to Madhuban
A year ago, after the Unity Pavilion Art for Land exhibition, Jaya came to me with an idea. Why not create something comprehensive on the city, something like the presentations I had been doing? The city was definitely a missing element in our general awareness as a small exhibition of the Galaxy drawings, a few years ago, had shown. It had brought much curiosity and the need to know and understand more. Unity Pavilion was thinking in terms of a long-term exhibition that would last some years, where newcomers, volunteers, friends and Aurovilians could explore the city, offer platforms for further dialogue and be an evolving open source educational space.

The idea took off. A small, all ladies team with Anandi, Aryamani, Devasmita, Jacqueline and Uma formed, giving me the title of the exhibition, A Body for the Soul, plus support and feedback on the research, materials and design, and we mounted the exhibition all together. We were also lucky to find three ‘silent’ donors, just in time, to help us realize the exhibition according to deadline. And most of all, Ralf, who helped us solidly with the graphics and the Unity Pavilion team who helped with the set-up.
The exhibition has five broad sections:

1) The general human and urban context which prompted the Auroville as a city, setting new paradigms as the Mother and the architect worked together.

2) Evolution of the Galaxy Plan, the Matrimandir and Peace Area: the Soul & commencement of the city: the Body, with the International Zone.

3) Auroville's urban guidelines and parameters, the zones and greenbelt.

4) Introductory video plus a video corner with documentaries of urban and sustainable experiments around the world.

5) Feedback wall integrated with an art installation.

The exhibition had a beautiful opening on February 25th, 2020 and was well received. This was followed by the City Conversations on February 28th - a birthday dedication, also to a full house. We were fortunate to have video messages from Dr Karan Singh and Shri B.V. Doshi, as both could not make it to Auroville due to emerging circumstances. The Auroville Speakers on the City Conversations included architects and planners and those concerned by the land, by our ability to serve Auroville’s realization, by art and beauty as part of the city’s growth and education. The conversation extended to dialogues in sound, with the Sound Fields created by Aurelio and Svaram and the closing notes by Nadaka. Both days have been documented and are up on YouTube via five short videos. Auroville’s city plan, carried by a Dream, is unique.
In its totality it includes the greenbelt and its relationship with the bio-region. This totality needs research and conversations that go beyond the technical knowledge of architects and planners. The invention of a new life through a city plan meant to realize human unity, is an experiment like no other in the world. We hope the exhibition will serve to rekindle both the dream and its realization for humanity.

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Links to Auroville City Exhibition on YouTube:
Exhibition Opening 25 Feb 2020 - Click here

Introduction to the City - Click here

City Conversations 28 Feb / Auroville Speakers - Click here

City Conversations 28 Feb / B V Doshi - Click here

City Conversations 28 Feb / Dr Karan Singh - Click here

AUROVILLE CITY CONVERSATIONS #1 (2 Sept 2020) - Click here
The Galaxy Plan with B V Doshi, Toine and Sreevatsa

The Auroville City Conversation is the online forum of the Auroville City Exhibition at Unity Pavilion and it has received wonderful feedback from many people.

**EARTH NEEDS A PLACE**
where men can live away from all national rivalries, social conventions, self contradictory moralities and contending religions;
a place where human beings, freed from all slavery to the past can devote themselves wholly to the discovery and practice of the Divine Consciousness seeking to manifest.

**AUROVILLE WANTS TO BE THIS PLACE**
and offers itself to all who aspire to live the Truth of tomorrow

The Mother
Anupama Kundoo’s exhibition “Taking Time” opened at the prestigious Louisiana Museum of Modern Art at Humlebäck, Denmark, recently, as part of a special series on architecture.

Anupama explores Time as a significant resource and partner for seeking solutions, instead of hurrying towards development without considering the consequences. The exhibition reflects her work of the last thirty years, largely influenced by Auroville. It explores the origin of forms and of architecture’s role in creating possibilities for a new society.

Central to the exhibition is a model of the Line of Goodwill, the largest of the Lines of Force which define the Auroville city plan. Through this, Anupama explores the challenges of land, space and socio-economic realities, as well as energy, mobility, environment and bio regional factors, balanced with a beauty, diversity and inclusiveness to nurture Auroville’s ideals of Human Unity.

In conversation with Anupama are Toine van Megen, Jaya Jorel Bergreen-Clausen and Anu Majumdar. Click here to view.
**MOVING FROM CORONA TO KARUNA - UMA PRAJAPATI**

**Mask of Empowerment**
Amidst the lock down, when people were losing jobs, were in distress and thoroughly confused with what was taking place, Upasana decided to start making Reusable masks infused with herbs. They had more people joining to make these masks, and the staff was working from home making masks. As Uma said, “We are facing a global detox, challenged to calm our bodies, minds, spirits. Healing masks are there to support us in this process. I decided to introduce the Healing Textiles collection, in response to manufacturing practices that expose a lot of chemicals to consumers who buy low-cost fast fashion products. Now is the best time to choose self-care and care for the environment.” [https://www.healing-mask.org/](https://www.healing-mask.org/) Little did Uma know at that time how this small act would start a domino effect for Upasana as it got involved in much deeper projects from re-inventing the Tsunamika dolls into The Doll of Compassion - Karuna; or how a heartfelt expression of gratitude reached more than thousands of people in two whole cities; or how the felt desire of supporting the struggling artisans during the Covid times led to a whole citizen’s movement, giving rise to empathy and a respectful livelihood for hundreds of artisans in Pondicherry and Auroville.

![Uma with her team making the healing masks](image)

**The power of gratitude**
A chance encounter between Helena and Uma in Auroville during the lockdown, converted into a full blown gratitude marathon, touching the lives of more than 5000 people throughout Auroville and Pondicherry. Uma narrates the beautiful story as it unfolded, “We started baking cakes and making cards with many different volunteers participating from a small community kitchen in Auroville.
We started out with 100 cakes and soon reached 400 to thank all the frontline warriors serving the community. Many children and adults made beautiful cards to accompany these cakes and we started distributing them ensuring that we reach all the volunteers in the Covid Taskforce.” The Gratitude cake project began in Auroville with Uma, Helena, Jaya and many others who supported it. The cake project began in April 2020. Towards the end of May 2020, along with Anjali Kapoor, the gratitude cake project reached Pondicherry and joined hands with the’ Fairtrade community of Pondicherry and Auroville” to become a citizen’s movement.

Very soon housewives, children, and small businesses all got involved in baking gratitude cakes using Fairtrade cocoa and making beautiful cards to gift along with
every cake. They reached out to primary health care centers, hospitals, police stations, municipality workers, Swachh Bharat team, Collector, Tehsildar, Health Directorate, LT Governor of Puducherry - Kiran Bedi Ji, CM, DGP, IG AND SSP offices. They also had an opportunity to walk into the corridors of all these spaces including the local health centers with nurses and Doctors. It was a deeply humbling experience for them. Watch video on Gratitude cake! As Uma shares “5020 cakes and cards were distributed and gratitude was palpable everywhere. In the heart of each and every person who baked or received them. This has been our heart’s expression as we cannot say Thank you enough times and we pray that our genuine gratefulness reaches out to all those frontline warriors who have served the world during this crisis.” This beautiful gesture of gratitude was covered by The Hindu and The Times of India as news during Covid-19!

Karuna Doll: A Citizen’s Movement of Compassion

The beautiful Tsunamika dolls which were born during the aftermath of the devastating Tsunami in 2004, which was a ray of hope in the lives of hundreds of fisherwomen who re-built their lives and livelihoods, one step at a time thanks to Uma and her team underwent a beautiful transformation last year as the twelve qualities of The Mother were embedded into the Tsunamika dolls and each doll represented a wonderful quality. This year as Covid-19 brought the world to an unprecedented halt, The doll of compassion - Karuna was born through this disaster to support the livelihoods of hundreds of artisans struggling to make a living during these challenging times. Uma stepped forward and joined hands with The Creative Dignity
Movement to bring relief to the lives of Artisans in Pondicherry. Says Uma, “Today, in 2020, as the world struggles with a global pandemic, where millions of lives and livelihoods are at stake, Tsunamika once again resurrects herself as the doll of compassion - ‘Karuna’. A drop of compassion can make a difference to many lives, and your smallest contribution will go a long way in supporting our artisan friends. By supporting the handmade industry, you are sustaining and nourishing the craft industry of India at its very roots and providing creative dignity to over 200 million artisans striving endlessly to preserve these ancient arts passed on from generation to generation. Our artisans need our support and creative dignity has emerged as a citizen's movement in multiple states all over India. Creative Dignity is a movement that has brought together diverse creative producers, practitioners and professionals to energize the ecosystem that Indian artisans need in this time of COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 impact. Our focus is to provide relief, and rejuvenation of the artisans in a bid to ensure their sustained prosperity. Take home a Karuna doll - a living symbol of compassion and contribute towards an artisan's livelihood. So far hundreds of artisan lives have been changed due to this campaign - In Pondicherry alone more than 17 e-catalogues have been created and data has been collected for more than 178 artists under #creative dignity. Artisan Direct - National Edition, a campaign to enable artisans and artisan led organisations to reach customers digitally. To know more visit [http://creativedignity.org/campaign/](http://creativedignity.org/campaign/).
The response of Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) to the pandemic through effective and transformative actions in the villages surrounding Auroville

‘If you genuinely do something good to others, it will reflect back to yourself’ (Anbu, Director of AVAG)

In the midst of the pandemic with all the devastating news 24/7 around the world, the first few days of the national lockdown beginning 24th March were a silent period for us at AVAG. Then upon inquiry with the villagers around, we saw the urgent necessity to help the neediest like the migrants, the old people and many single women. We understood the acute problems of sudden loss of job, the fear and panic and wanted to help the people around Auroville as much as possible. But our problem was: where is the money to support these people, when the organization is itself in a financial crisis? When the entire world is facing a crisis, would it be possible raise funds to support the local people? Could/should we wait until we receive the grants to support? Nevertheless, AVAG decided to start supporting the neediest without waiting for grants. So we put in 300,000 INR from our own scarce funds and launched a campaign to raise funds. We were immensely touched by the generous donations that came in from individuals in Auroville, from the Auroville International organizations (AVIs) and from several Foundations from Holland and the USA.

We wanted to use the response to the pandemic as an opportunity for co-development and social harmony, which is always a major preoccupation of AVAG. We pulled in the leaders, women, youth, teachers, and government representatives as
well to collaborate with us towards this goal. While AVAG looked after the training of the volunteers, procured the food essentials and homeopathy immune booster and made the masks, village teams took the responsibility for selecting the people genuinely in need – one of the toughest tasks. They also participated in distribution, prevention measures, and education of fellow villagers on the safety protocols.

Our initiatives as a response to the pandemic started in April 2020. In each village different groups like the leaders, women Self Help Groups, youths, government and individuals like the teachers, health workers joined together, forgetting their frequent misunderstandings. Looking backward, we see a lot changes in the villages. There is a greater sense of acceptance and willingness to participate in positive actions. People have taken up more responsibility to care for each other. Almost all villages expressed their gratitude towards Auroville for its timely and multifaceted response.

So far, we have impacted around 9000 families with the distribution of food and sanitation materials and around 16000 families with our prevention and educational initiatives. AVAL, a social enterprise supported by AVAG not only was able to support the women associated with the unit, it also gave work to another 30 people, mostly women who lost their jobs partly or fully during the pandemic. Here in AVAG we are very grateful to all those who contributed in terms of donations, kind and time in these very special times.
ADAPTING, REDESIGNING AND GOING FORWARD - THAMARAI LEARNING CENTER SHARES THEIR APPROACH TO EDUCATION IN THE VILLAGES DURING THE PANDEMIC

The past few months have been an intense time needing adaptation, creativity and constant redesign. We have become very aware of the challenges that both the lockdown and the virus has thrown up and the profound questions arising about equity and well being. Many people in the villages surrounding Auroville are concerned about their families’ future, mothers in our women’s group meetings report increasing levels of tension and alcoholism affecting the whole family. A recent survey by the Tamil Nadu Women’s Collective in 62 villages in our state indicated that at least 81% of rural families reported some form of domestic violence.

*Children collecting worksheets, books and a little snack!*

*Children reading on the fence*
It’s a time for care and small acts of Human Unity. Since the beginning of lockdown many Auroville projects have been responding. At Thamarai Educational Projects, our youth facilitators have been reaching out to the children regularly distributing books/worksheets/snacks, exhibiting colourful children’s newspapers on the village fence, having small group project work and daily learning calls by phone each evening that are designed to connect children, check-in on how they are doing, and to have an interesting learning experience each day.

Youth facilitator Vignesh on his daily evening learning call with three children safely in their homes and Sowmya delivers immunity boosting spices, from an Auroville well wisher, to all of our children’s houses in Annai Nagar and Edayanchavadi.

Now as restrictions are slowly lifting, we are cleaning outdoor areas and covering spaces with shade netting to start small group classes for older children on open ground in Annai Nagar and Edayanchavadi villages. We have designed 1 hour socially distanced classes that rotate with different children throughout the day and they will also carry on their evening calls as usual. It’s been a time of stop/start/reflection/redesign constantly adapting to what is emerging and is possible. It has also been an exciting time for us all at Thamarai as we are building education facilities for/with local children and youth. A learning centre, sports ground and a small children’s play area on Auroville land that has been encroached for over 30 years on the north side of Auroville in Annai Nagar village, next to Ritam community. We have been steadily working with the community to build a shared vision for the future and are happy to report that encroachments are being clearly with the full cooperation of the people who have encroached. We have been told over and over again that this development is bringing hope in Annai Nagar village at this time of immense challenge.

www.thamarai.org
Auroville photo summer 2020 “The Bird of peace descending upon earth” photo by Sigrid

Bird flying above Matrimandir - Photo by Manohar
With the Covid partial lockdown extended since May, the Unity Pavilion and on some special occasions the Hall of Peace have been used for working group meetings, but not for events or other community gatherings. Nadaka has used the Hall for his practice and the music has permeated the building. Now that we again can open up for events and larger participation we see a focus around music, art, dance and movement, creating events of gratitude and oneness. The Covid lockdowns have slowed things down on one hand, giving a deepening of space, on the other hand it has brought to the surface strongly the need of change: of compassion, sharing, caring, equity and equality – and a deep gratitude towards the Life we are given. This is a space we want to continue to foster and hold and the Hall of Peace and the Peace table has a strong role in this work of simply being together in Oneness.

“The Bird of Peace Descending upon Earth” ~ The Mother
The beautiful banner installed inside the Peace Hall at Unity Pavilion
PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN THE UNITY PAVILION DEVELOPMENT

The Unity Pavilion has its base in the Auroville core values of Human Unity and Unity in Diversity. Over the years our facilities have grown and the Unity Pavilion complex is today able to serve the community in many diverse ways. Sometimes dreams take time and a long effort to manifest and sometimes they simply fall into your lap. In both cases, gratitude and the willingness to care and nurture are essential. Perseverance, openness, flexibility and trust are key qualities in this process. Throughout we have invited and supported activities, as well as created our own events. We work with Unity as our foundation, inviting creativity and celebration of our diversity.

With the Covid lock down, we were fully closed for a few months yet still taking care of our employees and paying full salaries. Since May we have been open and able to work, but due to the partial lock down our possibilities to raise funds from our own events and activities have been at a total stand still. Thanks to a long term friend of the Unity Pavilion in USA, we received through AVI USA a larger donation which has allowed us to keep the work up. This came as a true gift of grace when things were looking bleak. We want to thank our Friends in USA, Canada, Auroville and Puducherry together with the Matrimandir Executives and Team who all have helped the work to go on and even progress in several fields. We invite all of you to actively participate in the continued development of the Unity Pavilion.

Nadaka setting up the new sound system with Govind & technicians from Sound Wizard
NEW SOUND EQUIPMENT

As the Art for Land events have developed, they have brought with them a big increase in high class concerts and performances being offered at Unity Pavilion. While our sound system is great for verbal interaction and for playing recorded music, it does not work for concerts and live performances. For this purpose we have been borrowing and renting sound equipment with added work and costs. To have the good sound equipment was a wish for the future. Then, unexpected and in the middle of Covid lockdown, the offer came from Matrimandir to give the Unity Pavilion an in kind contribution consisting of high quality professional sound equipment which they were not using. Two Line Array Speakers for indoor use as well as eight garden speakers.

We would have to cover the cost of wiring and installation and find the funds for the two parts of equipment that would further be needed, an amplifier and a sub woofer. After testing the equipment in the Unity Hall all hesitations fell away. We looked at each other with shining eyes and smiling faces - The sound was truly amazing! As of now we have raised the funds to cover all the wiring work and to purchase the amplifier. Our aim is to inaugurate this new sound equipment at the AVI Fund raiser concert for Auroville’s Unity Fund on New Year Day, 1.1.2021. We invite all of you who love music, to be part of completing this effort.

With everything else in place we are now reaching out for collaboration to buy the sub-woofer at Rs 1,30,000 /1835US$/1505Euro.

Nadaka & Nidhish installing the outdoor speakers in the garden
COMPLETING THE CARETAKERS UNIT

Last year the new Utility building with bathrooms and store room was completed, sponsored by a GOI grant through SAIIER. Our plan included a proper caretakers unit on the first floor. This could not be included in the SAIIER grant. As our architect Piero Cicionesi had completed the drawings and we had two thirds of the funds needed specified for this purpose, we decided to go ahead. The construction is providing work and income during a time of hardship when much is at a standstill because of Covid 19. When completed, this unit will provide an Aurovilian couple or young family a proper place to stay and for the Unity Pavilion it will give an all round presence and security.

For the completion of the Caretakers Unit we need to raise Rs. 900,000/ 12227US$ / 10034 Euro and we invite you to participate so that this work can continue smoothly to completion during 2021.
THE UNITY PAVILION GARDENS

When the full lock down eased in May, we were allowed to work, but not to have any public events. In this situation the work on the gardens became a natural focus. Rajan, who created the pebble gardens in the U.P. Front courtyard, joined us and formed a garden team together with Kannan and Nidhish. Their first task was to build a pebble garden by the Utility building. The result was very inspiring and with it new ideas and possibilities emerged. With small means, goodwill and generosity a lot became possible. Jaya’s Orchid collection found a new home at the Unity Pavilion, it was beautifully arranged next to a small Lily garden created through gifts of bulbs and ferns from friends. To facilitate the wellbeing of these new ventures, a sprinkler system was installed which is beneficial for the plants, makes watering easier and timely and saves water.

From the Matrimandir came the possibility to receive earth for the landscaping of the Peace Garden, creating two small hills which create a movement in the garden. With the Covid-19 situation using the outdoors is a bonus, so places to sit quietly as well as seating arrangements for small groups are planned around the garden, a very welcome development for use during works shops etc. A timely donation from a Friend in Puducherry is enabling the work to go on presently.

The Peace Garden is emerging in beauty, with it’s mixture of cultivated and wild plants it is a haven for bees, butterflies, people and nature beings alike. The water lilies are blooming now and the pond looks very beautiful as it has small hills created in the background to accent its beauty.

We are reaching out to those of you who love plants and gardening, to collaborate and support Rajan and his team in their work to make the whole Unity Pavilion garden a most lovely and inviting space, with places to sit, sweet pathways, rocks and flowers, large trees and flowering bushes. Multiple spaces for interaction and simply ‘being’ are a possibility now with all these new developments.

For completing the present plans including: Proper pathways for full accessibility - Rs. 1,12,500; Purchase of stones and benches for seating arrangements Rs. 75,000; Completing the earth movements Rs. 15,000 ; and purchase of a lawnmower Rs. 15,000/-, a Total of Rs. 2,17,500/ US$ 2,962/ Euro 2,421 is needed.
Pebble garden by the Utility building, one of our lockdown garden work

The Orchid garden blooming in the rains
The small hill behind the water lily pond with larger hill coming up behind the trees

Rajan & Nidhish re-arranging the rocks around the lily pond
On 11th December 2020 we had a gathering celebrating gratitude for all the grace that we have received in our lives, symbolically planting the Supramental Action Tree.
SIGNIFICANT UPCOMING EVENTS

On 1st January 2021, New Years Day, the Unity Pavilion will host a Fund raising Concert held by AVI to raise funds for Auroville’s Unity Fund. Online link for this concert https://www.ragamantra.com/avisha

On 30th January 2021 The Unity Pavilion Art for Land Exhibition will open together with a well prepared on-line Exhibition. https://artforland.in/

On 27th February 2021 Phase 2 of the City Exhibition by Anu Majumdar and Team will open, it will include interactions with Anupama Kundoo around her exhibition at Louisiana Art Museum in Denmark. https://louisiana.dk/en/exhibition/anupama-kundoo/

WAYS TO DONATE TOWARDS THE UNITY PAVILION PROJECT

- https://auroville.org/contents/2835
- https://donations.auroville.com/

WAYS TO DONATE TOWARDS THE ART FOR LAND PROJECT

Payment via bank transfer to:
Account Name: AV Art Service
Account No. 37357794312
Bank Name: State Bank of India
Branch: Auroville International Township
Swift Code: SBININBB474
IFS code: SBIN0003160
MICR Code: 605002007
Description: Art for Land
(Please email the transaction ID to artforland@auroville.org.in ‘Attn: Claudine’)

This news letter has been joyfully compiled & edited by Khushmita & Jaya. The Layout and design has been worked on by Ashok & Bharathi. The various articles have been submitted by Nadaka, Gopika, Yogini, Uma, Bridget, Anbu, Anu, Jayanthy & Rose.
Orchid - Attachment to the Divine

*Wraps itself around the Divine and finds all its support in Him, so as to be sure of never leaving Him*