Tency - 'a seeker of the unseen' - has been living and working in Auroville for more than 45 years. He started working at the Matrimandir from his arrival, is a land steward at the Center Field community, and was part of the early Auroville greening activities. He was a founding member of the CSR and is still actively involved in managing Auroville’s research organisation. His article «Glimpses from the Wonder-worker’s Hidden Hand » shares parts of his Auroville adventure.

Glimpses from the Wonder-worker’s hidden hand

Near my 18th birthday, while travelling in the British Isles and passing through London, I came across an Auroville brochure at the home of friends. Viewing for the first-time pictures of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, I was attracted by the invitation for participating in the building of a new city, located somewhere in South-India. A few years later, having travelled overland to India, I received a darshan from Mother. That short encounter anchored me, avoiding the need for me to look and search among a huge available list of fashionable gurus, New Age events, alternative communities, and escape products. That morning, 5th March 1972, She offered me an invitation to join Her adventure. I accepted. I signed the invisible contract with Mother.

Upon my return to Belgium from India, I met Hilde, we finished our studies and worked to earn savings. Five years later, we decided to attempt the Auroville adventure. Arriving by boat at Rameswaram, taking an enjoyable train ride and a less pleasant bus drive, we finally managed to settle in at Park Guest house. It was a place that acted as an entry port for so many of us, hoping to find more permanent living quarters in the City of Dawn. While cycling on those impossible sand roads to the center area, Hilde angrily voiced only one question 'Where is this city you spoke so movingly about, where are its buildings, where are the roads?'
During Auroville’s early days, landholdings were scattered and communities started to occupy land that required to be taken care of. There was no infrastructure for power, water supply, water disposal, telecommunications. Often this absence of basic and essential facilities stimulated experimentation with new ideas, methods and technologies.

We moved from the Matrimandir Workers Camp to Center Field, during a period when it was still possible to choose a nice corner next to what would later become the Center Guest House.
Hilde worked in the Center Kitchen preparing meals and she teamed up with Dadu, an elderly Orissa grandfather, an expert sought-after sweets maker. I teamed up with Ruud who invited me to join the Matrimandir steel team. Working on the chamber walls, the roof and much later on the modules of the outer skin, was a memorable period. The work duties we took up allowed us to grow and integrate at our own pace in the small community of less than 400 persons.

The need to create indispensable shade around the house led to the first attempts to grow greenery in tropical settings. The empty land around was an open invitation to care for a long-neglected environment and an opportunity to try something new - a new approach not yet tried out in the surroundings. The monsoon slowed down Matrimandir steel work, creating an opening for other activities. Bunding, fencing work, a tree nursery, planting – what an immense joy of putting saplings in the soil during an overcast rainy day. We quickly found out that planting activities were rather pleasant and easy to accomplish compared to providing protection against hungry four-footed animals and the absolute need for watering during summer time.

We moved from a tiny to a sizable land operation with a bullock pair and milking cows. By necessity, Hilde became a vet using homeopathic medicines to help the animals stay healthy. During that period, I developed a close relationship with the Kangyam bulls, an indigenous South Indian cattle breed. As a bonus, the presence of cows allowed us to assist with the countless births of calves. When the farm was still in operation, I valued tremendously the morning milking routine, which provided a quiet and tranquil period, an extra battery charge for encountering the other important activity in my life.

The research organisation called CSR (Auroville Center for Scientific Research) started in ‘84, offering an umbrella for ongoing small renewable energy projects, and creating possibilities to provide energy for community members. The first devices that were developed helped to make life more comfortable. A black pot, which was fitted in a glass enclosure during day time, gave hot water for an evening shower. Over the years, more projects were added, researched and tested. The most promising developed devices were wind pumps, biogas plants, solar warm water heaters, solar panels, solar street lights, the solar bowl, alternative vehicles. Most were spin-offs from earlier-started research efforts.
The activities broadened out, exploring design and building materials, energy and water resource management, mobility, solid waste management. CSR became a hub, an incubator for integrating and working out ideas, methods, technologies to help Auroville reach self-sufficient living patterns.
How to provide comfortable housing with integrated and efficient energy and water usage? How to wean ourselves from petrol addiction, how to move closer to a circular economy?

It became abundantly clear, at least for a small research-oriented team, that the countless submitted theoretical studies and reports didn't provide any meaningful practical help for an actual application and acceptance of sustainable practices. A unique feature of developing a product within the community is the possibility to test and fine-tune those ideas and products within the receptive environment of Auroville.
A few years ago, we took care of an extra piece of land bordering the western side of Center Field. Prior to its fencing, visits provided a feeling of the sad symptoms of abuse, neglect, inattention. Now, after barely 5 years of protection and care, the land is revitalizing itself once again. For one of those inexplicable reasons, our family became involved with the protection, the safeguarding, the management of land in and around the centre area. This is an effort shared and supported by CSR members, who contribute in their fields of action and initiatives to reach that impossibly high benchmark, the City the Earth needs.

The dull ordinary life patterns become suddenly interesting when accepting the opportunity to take up one’s given life task. A journey providing an abundance of travel experiences, joyful events, but also painful and even devastating moments, helping the traveller to explore the unseen paths.

No past or present civilization ever managed to sustain an actual manifestation of a living embodiment of human unity. The task of evolving and creating such an event has been meticulously elaborated by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. They ensured that their findings and deeds were cast in bronze to front the difficult travel years ahead for those who received the invitation.

During our ongoing Auroville journey, several themes kept re-appearing on a regular basis. A willingness to start an inner journey, the continued ‘return deposits’ from a ‘mantra subscription’, the messengers of light and the agents of darkness operating in the same room, the challenges to accept and integrate diversity, the imposition of narrow structures, an outstretched Hand helping and supporting in difficult moments, the healing and saving touch of laughter, the lasting gift of a sustained and loving relationship, the challenging ongoing expedition with an extended family tribe, the ardent search for the Unknown guest within.
Being part of the global fraternity, Auroville is not exempted from the fast-unfolding global changing events and its often-unexpected consequences. There are incoming mud waves of *incurable littleness*, added with festering frustrations, bitterness, words and deeds that hurt and slay, having the effect to reject the light and thereby deny access to the truth that saves.

By the Grace, there are forerunners who accept the offered help and support from the Wonder-worker’s hidden hand. They are the tribe of enablers, guardians and carriers of the inner mystic flame – the dreamers of the sunlit ways for the dawning of a new age, surely to come.

*While the unseen is found, the impossible done.*

Tency
Auroville, 16/07/2021

*Photo by Piero Cefaloni*