

## The International Advisory Council meets the community

On 16<sup>th</sup> February, the Unity Pavilion was full. There was huge interest because it was the first time in the last seven years that residents had met in an open meeting with an International Advisory Council (IAC). This was also the first collective interaction with the current IAC since its appointment in October 2021, and little was known about their stance regarding the present crisis enfolding Auroville.

Four members of the present IAC attended: Dena Merriam, H.P.Rama, Gabi Gellissen and Michel Danino. After they had briefly introduced themselves and spoken of their connection with the Ashram and/or Auroville, the floor was thrown open for residents to express themselves and to ask questions.

Many residents spoke of their deep distress regarding the situation which has unfolded over the past 18 months. They spoke movingly of their attachment to Auroville and to India – “this is where our soul is, this is our home” – but non-nationals felt that the present practice of the Foundation Office withholding visa recommendations, or only making them for a limited period, for certain individuals, was creating a pervasive sense of fear and insecurity. (This was dramatically underlined by the news that a young resident had just been issued with a Leave India notice). This uncertainty was further intensified, it was said, by residents’ employment in important community jobs being terminated without due process, by the takeover of Outreach Media and the internal communication platform, and residents being threatened with eviction from homes deemed to be on the alignment of roads or parks in the Master Plan.

Residents asked the IAC members how they perceived their role, and how they had responded so far to these events. For it was pointed out that, according to the Auroville Foundation Act, the IAC had the responsibility to advise the Governing Board, and in giving advice they should endeavour to ensure that the ideals for which Auroville has been established are encouraged, and that the residents “are allowed freedom to grow and develop activities and institutions for the fulfilment of the aspirations and programmes envisaged in the said Charter of Auroville”.

Michel from the IAC responded that “freedom is the key word today”, and “my feeling is that this freedom is being infringed upon”. Gabi agreed. “Change needs to come from within and my experience so far is that change is being thrust on the community, which is contradictory to any spiritual aspiration.”

Noting that we are all one family, H.P. Rama also agreed that change has to come from within

as “you are the best judge of what needs to happen”. He warned that “outside advisors will not help you, but may put fuel on the fire.”

Michel reported that the Chairman of the Governing Board had said that freedom is not ‘license’ and that there had to be a ‘code of conduct’ to regulate this freedom. When Michel had asked if the community could participate in drawing up such a code, and who would decide if somebody was living up to Mother’s ideals, he had received no reply.

In fact, it transpired that Michel and Gabi had written a number of times to the Chairman expressing their concerns about what was happening in Auroville without receiving a response.

But why was the Governing Board not responding to these concerns?

Gabi said that there “seems to be a negativity which exists which can’t be seen beyond”, and that there is a “spiritual superiority that is judging people”. In this context, Michel noted that the Chairman had asked two questions. Is Auroville meant to take *sanatana dharma* (see note below) to a higher level and create gnostic beings? And is Sri Aurobindo part of *sanatana dharma* or not? “But we never hear of Mother,” said Michel, “and it concerns me that the founder of Auroville is kept out of all discussions.”

He also said that the Secretary had told them that, according to the Foundation Act, the Governing Board is the sole authority. When he reminded her that it is necessary that the Governing Board takes decisions in consultation with the Residents Assembly, “This is usually where the dialogue aborts. The methods employed in Darkali and the Youth Centre were not in consonance with the spirit of Auroville. There were solutions suggested, but (the authorities) continued with their predetermined idea. So how to engage with this Governing Board? There is no proper consultation process happening between the Governing Board, the Residents Assembly and the IAC.”

But a community member pointed out that the failure of the IAC to speak with a united voice may also have been a factor in limiting their influence. The only common communication from the IAC had come on 11<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021. “You may not agree with all our requests, but at least some basics of not harassing people or threatening their lives is something the five of you could have agreed on”. Another resident agreed. “I’m very surprised that human rights violations are there all the time and there has



A community member addresses the members of the International Advisory Council

not been one collective statement from you to denounce that”.

Dena explained they were five different people in the IAC with different styles. She had expressed herself on many issues to the Secretary and the Chairman “but I know what can be done and what can’t be done. There are things that won’t change. Accept the reality on the ground. Move on beyond the Crown Road. There are bigger issues like how this place is going to be governed.” She also pointed out that in this situation she is not a decision-maker. “Nothing says that the Governing Board has to listen to us. I can only advise.”

Gabi, however, thought the IAC could do more. “I think there is always a job description and our responsibility as IAC members is to keep that in the forefront. I do think it’s possible for four people with very different views to come together and to agree some basic principles from which we respond as a collective. Unfortunately, this has never happened.”

At this point, a resident suggested that as the residents – and the IAC – seem to be facing an impasse with the Governing Board, the IAC could come together to make an appeal to the Prime Minister’s Office, pointing out that something is “amiss with the City of Dawn. They are taking the experiment away and we are becoming an institutionalized event.” Michel agreed to draft a simple note expressing the anxieties and strong feelings of the residents, which he would submit to all IAC members and see if they would agree to issue this as a common statement.

Dena confirmed that she was “not giving up on your situation” and had spoken a number of times to the Chairman and Secretary regarding issues like the visa situation. But she agreed that the need to improve communication was paramount. “One of the main services we (in the IAC) can provide is to be a communication bridge because there is no communication at present...I don’t think the Governing Board realize the goodwill that is here, and you don’t realise their aspiration.”

A long-term Aurovilian welcomed this offer, inviting them to become “midwives, to build the bridge, to crack open the wall we are facing

and take these words from the community (to the Governing Board)... Take the words of the community to their closed ears and eyes...Please try to influence, to stop this wanton destruction”.

Another Aurovilian asked the IAC members to communicate two points in particular to the Governing Board. One is that while some Aurovilians are suggesting different ways to do things from the authorities, these Aurovilians are not anti-government. Secondly, to respectfully ask the authorities to withdraw the police case against six residents, as they are based on false information.

Dena urged residents not to give up on the process, and that a small group of residents should meet with the Secretary and Chairman to voice their concerns because “I think we are in a different stage now than six months ago”. “If you believe in dialogue, you have to dialogue...I can’t judge which side is right. I say, guys, talk to each other.”

A resident responded that we know that when there is a problem, our role is to find a more inclusive solution which will satisfy everyone. “But what has happened is a takeover. People are threatened regularly. How can we find solutions together when the takeover continues because we are feeling the pressure?”

In fact, as another Aurovilian pointed out, there have been numerous attempts at dialogue, “But either it has been denied or it has fallen on deaf ears...If we want dialogue to happen the goodwill should be from all sides. And everybody should listen to each other, and the three bodies of the Foundation work together in a spirit of mutual respect and mutuality. I hope that today will be a turning point for people to start listening to each other and collaborating.”

H.P. Rama concluded the meeting by saying, “We have listened to you and will do what is best to influence the decisions. Let ten to fifteen people log all your concerns and present them to us and we will have an audience with the Foundation. I appreciate your patience and goodwill because Auroville is based upon goodwill, and it also stands for unity and harmony. I think we in the IAC also have to follow that.”

Alan

### Sri Aurobindo on the Sanatana Dharma

What is this religion which we call Sanatana, eternal? It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it, because in this peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas, because in this sacred and ancient land it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages. But it is not circumscribed by the confines of a single country, it does not belong peculiarly and for ever to a bounded part of the world. That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others.

This Sanatana Dharma has many scriptures, Veda, Vedanta, Gita, Upanishad, Darshana, Purana, Tantra, nor could it reject the Bible or the Koran; but its real, most authoritative scripture is in the heart in which the Eternal has His dwelling. It is in our inner spiritual experiences that we shall find the proof and source of the world’s Scriptures, the law of knowledge, love and conduct, the basis and inspiration of Karmayoga....

(from Sri Aurobindo’s Uttarpara speech. 30th May 1909)

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# “I strive to pursue what is true, right and just”

**G**abi Gillessen qualified as a yoga teacher in 1997, and is Chairperson and Senior Tutor of the Irish Yoga Association, running teacher training programmes. From 2014 – 20 she was President of the European Union of Yoga. For many years she has brought groups to Auroville for yoga intensives. Currently she is a member of the International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation.

**AV Today:** What was your reaction to being appointed to the IAC?  
I was really shocked and surprised, although I had been asked if I would be interested in 2019. I said that I was most honoured to be considered suitable for this position but felt that I would be completely underqualified for this role, even though I had been bringing yoga groups to Auroville for many years. Then it went completely out of my head until I heard I’d been nominated. But I have always lived my life in a way that I don’t chase things to happen. Instead, things seem to evolve and unfold and so I trusted this had happened for a reason, and I opened myself up to the challenges.

*The members of the IAC only met through Zoom until a few days ago. Was it challenging to create a group in this way?*

It was. I’m used to working in organizations and groups as I’ve been involved with the European Union of Yoga since 2004 and been part of the Irish yoga Association since 1995. I’m also used to working in groups where people have different perspectives, but there was always a kind of structure to them. There would be regular meetings and internal regulations to follow. I presumed that in joining the IAC there would be a similar format to guide us. But it became apparent from the first three or four meetings that we were grappling with understanding our role. Michel and I would say it is spelt out in the Foundation Act that we could advise the Governing Board on any matter relating to the development and management of Auroville. However, it seemed the other members were saying they didn’t want to get involved in the day-to-day running of Auroville; that we had a different role.

Then, in our first Zoom meeting with the Governing Board, the Secretary told us what her perspective on our role was. This was to spread the word of Sri Aurobindo internationally, to heighten the awareness of Auroville, and to raise funds. But I had understood this to be the role of Auroville International (AVI). Afterwards, I initiated meetings between the AVI and IAC to hear from the AVI people what their role is, so that they and we could see that we have a different role to play.

*Is there now agreement in the IAC regarding your role?*

No, we are not there yet. I’m really hoping that after Thursday evening’s meeting with the community [see page one, eds.] that the other IAC members heard that we have a certain responsibility, and I will try my very best to jell us to a point where we can actually make some joint statements. When you meet face-to-face, which is happening for the IAC the first time for now, you get a feel for somebody that you don’t get on Zoom. So I hope that this has made a difference in our relationship to each other.

*One way the difference in perspectives seems to be reflected is in Dena’s and H. P. Rama’s statements that they don’t want to pour oil on the fire in regard to the present situation, for this seems like an implicit criticism of the fact that you and Michel have been quite forthright in expressing your concerns to the Governing Board.*

If I’m given a role to play, either as a teacher on a yoga course or as a delegate to the European Union of Yoga, I leave my personal stuff out of it. I take on the professionalism which the role requires. So I feel that as a member of the IAC I need to be as honest and open as possible, and if I see something that is not sitting right, I have to say it. I can’t say that’s not my job, that’s not my role.

*But in the meeting with the community you said that when people are not free to express themselves, it particularly touches you – which sounds as if a personal element is involved.*

Yes. My partner and I were born in South Africa, we grew up during apartheid and were politically active against it, albeit within the law. So we always try to stand against injustice, and stand for freedom of speech, because these kinds of things we can’t let go of. Then we lived in Ireland where the whole North-South conflict was going on, so it seems that part of my journey is to find myself in these conflict situations.

*Can you carry any learnings from those experiences into the present situation in Auroville?*

I hope so. I do try to step back and see things in perspective, but in my opinion there are basic human rights that need to be respected. Freedom of speech is definitely one of them and I don’t feel this is being respected in Auroville at present.

*You and Michel have written some quite strong letters to the Governing Board along these lines. Did the other members of the IAC support you in doing this and in what you expressed?*

At our very first meeting, which I think was after the Youth Centre demolition episode, we did agree upon certain things. I can’t remember the exact points but it was about certain things not being acceptable and the need for respect, and we put this in a collective letter and sent it in the name of the IAC. But within

24 hours three members withdrew their names, saying it was too confrontational. One member also made it very clear he wanted nothing to do with the day-to-day matters of Auroville.

We have not managed to issue any joint statement since then. But we decided as a group that since we can’t stay silent, and can’t wait for all of us to always agree on something before we express ourselves, then we could speak as individual members of the IAC rather than in the name of the whole group.

*Does this mean that you are not aware of how some other members have been communicating with the Secretary and the Governing Board?*

No, I’m not aware, and it’s incredibly frustrating. For example, it was only during the AVI/IAC meeting a few months ago that I first heard that Dena was working on the visa issue with the Secretary.

*Did you ever get a response to your letters to the Governing Board?*

Michel and I have written four letters in the last year or so and we never received a response, except to the last letter. And this was on the lines of if you can’t furnish proof of this, then you will have to withdraw that statement. This despite us asking the Governing Board on numerous occasions to furnish proof on certain matters, to which we have never received any response.

In one meeting with the Governing Board, all members of the IAC were asked to write individual emails giving our opinion of what the Board can do to address the current situation. We all did this. But these were never responded to.

*Have you had any direct communication with the Chairman or the Secretary since you’ve been here this time, either as a group or individually?*

H.P. Rama, Dena and myself had breakfast with the Chairman and the Secretary. I used it as an opportunity to say to the Chairman that I had spoken to many people and, on the whole, nobody is objecting to the city being built. However, the way they are doing it is not considered appropriate. I could only emphasise that we need to look at how this is being done, because in my opinion it is not being done fairly, with respect.

*What was the response?*

The Secretary said that they did an audit and all the audited units were found to be fraudulent, and the Chairman spoke of drugs use and fraud. He also said he had heard people say they had been here for 40 or 50 years, which he did not consider as an argument for their right to stay. But I think this is just these Aurovilians’ way of expressing their level of experience and commitment to the project.

Basically, I didn’t feel they took in what I was saying. I felt they had a preset idea of what the situation is and what had to be done.

In this connection, after our first meeting with the Governing Board, we got a letter from the Secretary asking for our support. She listed some achievements of Auroville but spent far more time listing what was wrong. However, when we ask for proof of financial mismanagement or drug-taking, we are never given any. And if these allegations are made, people have a basic human right to defend themselves, but that opportunity doesn’t seem to be given at present.

*A phrase you used in the meeting the other day was ‘spiritual superiority’. What were you referring to?*

It’s my opinion, and it comes from meetings that I’ve attended, that some people feel they can judge the spiritual status of others. For example, in one meeting of the Governing Board it was said that Auroville is a place for gnostic beings, with the implication that many of those here now do not qualify. But who can judge somebody else’s spiritual endeavor and progress? When we are called we are not expected to be perfect immediately, but a small step for someone could be a giant leap in their personal evolution.

*What do you feel is the way forward?*

I don’t know. I’m still processing all the information and experiences. But, personally, my first priority is to push the IAC to do its job, because that is what the community asked for.

Dena keeps saying ‘dialogue’ is the answer. I’ve participated in some recent meetings, including Governing Board meetings, and I don’t see any dialogue. But now I do see a few very clear points which can be debated and rationalised, and I’d like to see if there could be dialogue on them.

For example, during the recent Governing Board meeting, the question was put to us: do we accept that Auroville is an institution for *sanatana dharma*? I have my own opinion, but this at least gives us something concrete to debate.

Then there are the inconsistencies. We are told that the reason for not recognizing the Residents Assembly Working Committee is that the Register of Residents needs to be updated. But if this is so, both Working Committees should be null and void. So in my opinion what should happen, once the Secretary finishes updating the Register, is that there should be a new selection process, and the result should be respected.

Another inconsistency is that you want more people to come here, to commit their energies as well as donate substantial amounts of money to this project, but you don’t give them any guarantee that at any moment their visa or membership won’t be terminated and they will be asked to leave: in which case their donations will not be returned. Who would come here on such a basis? These kinds of inconsistencies are really creeping up on me

on this trip, and I think they are topics that can be rationally debated.

*You assume that in spite of the fact that one side is not listening to the other at the moment, they could be brought together to discuss specific issues rationally. Do you think the present conditions are conducive for this to happen?*

My first answer is ‘no’, but these kinds of issue gives us something to debate concretely. And it’s worth trying because I don’t know what else to try.



Gabi Gillessen

*With what kind of feeling do you go back home with after this visit?*

With a little bit more determination, and a little bit more hope. I like to feel that I have a better feel for the situation now, that I can ask more pertinent questions and ask for an answer.

I also feel there’s more constructive stuff that I can work on now, like challenging the inconsistencies and laying them out more clearly, which I will do my best to do. Whether this works or not is up to The Mother, Divine intervention and Grace. And I feel that this is an opportunity for all to recommit to the Mother’s aspirations of Human Unity and to building not only a City of bricks and mortar but a City built on innovative and just self-governance, based on Human Unity and Spiritual growth, with no specific religious context, no violence or coercion, and respect for all.

*Do you fear that your outspokenness may endanger your continued membership of the IAC?*

It’s possible (it has even been hinted at recently). But I feel I’ve been very open. I’ve tried to be neutral, I’ve met with both working committees, and I’ve listened to as many sides and to as many people as possible. I certainly haven’t said I will only listen to this group rather than that group.

Having listened to everyone, I feel I’ve identified aspects and processes that I feel are not right or just, while maintaining respect for everybody.

*From an interview by Alan and Carel*

## The spirit of Auroville

*Auroville International, the umbrella organisation of the Auroville International centres in Europe and the USA, had its General Assembly meeting on February 21st, 2023, at the Unity Pavilion in Auroville. Here is the opening speech of the Chairman of the Board, Christian Feuillette.*

I would like to start by thanking you for attending this meeting. Let me thank the members of AVI who have travelled often from great distances for this occasion, and especially my colleagues on the Board, who make their unique and fruitful contributions throughout the year. But I would like to talk to you about a subject that is very much on the agenda: "the spirit of Auroville". It is even on the front page of the February issue of *Auroville Today*. I will borrow from this article this quote from Mother:

In 1967 the Mother defined the spirit of Auroville: “And the concrete materialization of the spirit of Auroville hasn’t taken place yet, it doesn’t exist, there isn’t in the earth atmosphere a formation of the “spirit of Auroville,” which is a spirit... At bottom it is “The art of building unity out of complexity.” Without uniformity, you understand: unity through harmony in complexity, with each thing in its place... It’s very difficult.”

Does the spirit of Auroville exist 56 years later? Yes and no. Yes, because Auroville radiates with all its achievements, with its unique atmosphere, with its courageous residents who were once called "Warriors of Light". It is a jewel, which must be preserved and protected.

No, because the spirit of Auroville is still in the making, it is still to be built, it is not a goal to be reached, it is obviously a "work in progress".

Let’s hear what Aurovilians have to say about this spirit of Auroville. Here are, among others, some extracts from letters addressed by Aurovilians to the Governing Board’s Chairman, and published in this same article of *Auroville Today*:

- “The whole magic of AV is what the physical eyes cannot see.”
- “The two only explicit conditions mentioned by the Mother for becoming an Aurovilian were goodwill and to offer one’s work in all sincerity.”
- “Auroville being a representative microcosm of the entire world, the living laboratory of human evolution as Mother



# “Change has to come from within”

**H**.P. Rama is a successful hotelier based in the U.S. He is also a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and has founded a university – AURO University – in Surat based upon the former’s educational principles. Currently he is a member of the International Advisory Council (IAC) of the Auroville Foundation.

**AVToday:** How did you come to Sri Aurobindo?

I was introduced to Sri Aurobindo by my class teacher when I was 14. This teacher was a role model for me, and I wondered who his role model was. It was Sri Aurobindo. And since then Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s philosophy have guided me throughout my life.

In 1969, after completing an undergraduate degree in India in commerce, I came to Pondicherry for the first time. I had balcony darshan on 24th April and then met Mother personally. I had written to her that I was going to the U.S. because I wanted to be part of her vision that America and India would work together. So I asked for her blessings for that. Champaklal explained to her that I wanted her blessings, and she asked, “How much?” I still resonate with that.

I also visited Auroville. The Amphitheatre and the urn were there, and I met Narad who was just starting the Nursery. I had a very good feeling about Auroville: there was something in the air here that deeply attracted me, even without knowing what Auroville stood for. It was like an inner calling.

In fact, when I returned in 1974 after opening my first motel in America, I wanted to stay, to become part of Auroville, but my grandfather said it was not the time. However, whenever I come to Pondicherry – which has been every year for many years – I visit Auroville because it has captivated my mind and heart.

Now I understand it better. But what still amazes me is that so many of you have left the comforts of the West to dedicate your lives to this experiment. It’s because of the power and force that Mother has put in this place, which is something which cannot be explained, only experienced. There’s something here to which people get connected, and she is acting through everybody here in their own way.

This place has inspired me in many ways. When I established a university in Surat I used many learnings that are here.

The biggest thing I notice here is that people have the freedom to experiment in whatever their creativity calls for. And therefore they are able to express things more perfectly and more beautifully. In fact, Sri Aurobindo has said that freedom is fundamental for spiritual evolution.

*But in the recent meeting with the IAC which you attended, many residents said they felt that freedom was in danger now.*

I could feel that people felt very insecure and that they are living in the midst of unpredictable change. They love Auroville very deeply and, irrespective of everything they face, they have committed their whole lives here, but they felt that their commitment to living is being threatened today. To me, the threats that people are identifying are external things. If I am truly a divine servitor, I need to develop in me that which will help me overcome hurt, mental anguish. Has this happened? Have the residents grown inwardly to meet these challenges? I admire so much what all of you have achieved outside but I’m wondering how much you have grown within. And if so, why should these irritations overwhelm you? Freedom also demands discipline for harmonious collective life in a community.

*Yesterday a resident who was born here was served with a Leave India notice. Surely this is more serious than just an ‘irritation’?*

Is anybody enquiring why that person received this notice? The people in charge of making these decisions, which should not be taken lightly, are not irrational. They may have information; they have checked the facts carefully because such a decision will have a ripple effect on the whole community. They also owe an explanation to the person in question. I don’t know the background to the events which have happened over the last year, except that everyone has their own side, their own explanation. However, the worst thing that is happening here at present is that people don’t want to talk with each other. Each group says they will not recognize the other, but meanwhile decisions are made which affect everyone. To preserve the larger good of Auroville, everybody has to compromise and learn to understand each other better. What is preventing this? I see ego, narrowness and selfishness.

There is also something called basic respect. I’ve seen the video where the Secretary was in front of the community and they treated her disrespectfully. And the same people are asking for respect now. She came to listen to you, to share with you, but you didn’t allow her to speak properly. This is an IAS officer who wants to help Auroville progress, and yet this is how you treated her. I was appalled.

If you insult me, what would be my impression of you and how do you think I will react? None of us is perfect, she’s a human being just like you, so why are you surprised by her displeasure?

At the community meeting with the IAC, everybody was saying what was wrong. Not a single person mentioned anything that the administration has done that they approve of. What do

you think the person sitting in power will think about such a community? By behaving like this, Auroville has failed to leverage her position, to secure the resources that she could bring here to help it grow and take it to the next level.

*At the meeting, you said that change has to happen from within; it cannot be imposed from without.*



H.P.Rama

Absolutely, because people from outside don’t have the same full-time commitment to Auroville as the Aurovilians have. Change has to come from within, but that change needs to be in line with the larger good of Auroville. But remember it was the Aurovilians themselves who brought the government here, even though Mother said no government should be involved. And now that the government is here, you need to abide by their regulations, even if you don’t agree 100% with all of them. The fact that they are here means they have some commitment to what this place stands for, and this should be respected.

However, the solution to your difficulties has to come from the community itself; the responsibility lies with the community. If somebody of authority comes from outside, it is your duty to convert them, to makes them understand how things are here, because as you live here you know better than them. But this requires a lot of patience and effort on your part.

Mother says that anything happening here is a reflection of what is happening outside, so the solution has to come from here. Auroville to me is a university of humanity and everybody here should be a role model for the rest of humanity.

*How can the IAC help?*

It’s difficult at present. There are two camps in Auroville and each camp is telling us something different. If you guys are not together, how do you expect somebody coming from outside to help you?

*But the IAC itself is not together.*

Absolutely, because we are also human. Each member has their opinion because of what they are fed by Aurovilians. Each member is being influenced by different camps and it creates a difficult situation for all of us.

*The fact that change has to happen is generally accepted. It’s the way that it is happening that is causing disagreement.*

I don’t know what is fact and what is fiction, but Aurovilians are telling me there is some resistance to change. Twenty years ago, the city plan was decided but we are told that some residents, knowing the plan, developed areas which were not meant to be developed and now they are resisting change. Many people also tell me that for many years they have only talked and not taken decisions. Well, now you have a Secretary who wants to take decisions and to act. Maybe wrongly, maybe rightly, who can judge?

As an IAC member, we will be gone after a few years, but you will be the ones who will have to live with and deal with the problem. This is why as an IAC member I should not add fuel to the fire. I have to find out how I can help the authorities understand the reality here and take the right actions, for they also have opinions, just like the Aurovilians.

We are all in the game of transformation. I want both Aurovilians and Governing Board members to find common ground for better understanding and better alignment with Auroville mission. But for this you need to dialogue with each other, you need to figure out each other’s position and find a way to move forward together.

My main focus is on how to bring the north and south poles of this community together. This will require actions that will not be hundred percent palatable to either party. In my university there is a place I have called the Moot Court, the Hall of Nobility. Normally, when you go to court, one side will win and the other will lose. But when there is a dispute in the Hall of Nobility, both sides should feel they have won.

This is what I want for Auroville. Can you work with nobility to solve the problem? Even though each of you have your own priorities, can you do what is the larger good for community, something which will inevitably require compromise and sacrifice?

*Are you hopeful that the present difficulties can be solved amicably and integrally?*

I hope that from the present churning Divine Grace will bring out everybody as stronger and better human beings, and strengthen the community. Anything that is new is threatening, it’s very human. But as Aurovilians have some commitment to being ‘divine servitors’ – that’s why they are here – this will help them rise above the present chaos. Everybody should work with goodwill, because without goodwill you cannot solve anything.

This has to happen, and it will happen. I am very optimistic.

*From an interview by Alan*

## AUROVILLE INTERNATIONAL

would say, we seem to have to deal with every possible obstacle before real change can take root.”

This last comment explains well why the elaboration of the Auroville spirit is so arduous, and why Aurovilians have to go through crises like the one they are going through at the moment. This is not the first crisis, nor the last one, that Aurovilians experiment, but we have to keep faith in the wisdom of this emerging Auroville spirit so that harmony may return. Despite the apparent lack of progress in the reconciliation processes among Aurovilians, the Auroville Dream is more alive and relevant than ever, the strength of this Dream will transcend all obstacles, and we are confident that the goodwill of all will succeed to find the way to a fruitful collective development. The Mother precisely provides us with the key to recover the lost harmony:

"Come to an agreement, all of you. That's the only way to do a good work. In order to agree, each one must climb to the top of his consciousness; it is on the heights that harmony is created." (April 2nd, 1970)

It is a delicate matter for Auroville International to intervene in the debates taking place in Auroville. It is understood that only the Aurovilians can decide on the road to follow concerning the development of the Town, and consequently, on what constitutes the spirit of Auroville. However, the involvement of several AVI members goes back to the sixties and seventies. Some were captivated by the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother in the Sri Aurobindo Centers or Auroville associations around the world and, like your humble servant, had a personal encounter with Mother, which transformed their lives. Several of our members have even lived part of their lives as Aurovilians, the Auroville experience. Others have also lived the life of Ashramites at the Ashram in Pondicherry. We all consider ourselves, so to speak, "Aurovilians at heart", and there are therefore certain observations - or evidences, if you prefer - that we, as members of Auroville International, feel entitled to make:

- First of all, the spirit of Auroville is not found in the verticality of a power coming from above, but in the horizontality of a collective spirit. Aurovilians are servants of the divine consciousness that resides in us, not servants of any guru, leader, group or interest of any kind. Vertical power belongs to the old world, and it seems that in its most extreme form it is living at this moment its last harmful shakes in the world.
- Secondly, freedom for the residents to grow and develop activities and institutions should be respected – naturally inside the frame of the laws and rights of India. If the freedom to think, express oneself and create is not assured, fear will creep in, joy will disappear, and creative power will fade

away. As Sri Aurobindo puts it: “Without the freedom to take risks and commit mistakes, there can be no progress.... Growth of Consciousness cannot come without freedom” (Conversations, 25th November, 1938))

- Thirdly, in addition to the necessary framework of freedom, Aurovilians must be granted a framework of security, both legal and economic. That is why the intimidation of residents, the censorship of the various medias of Auroville, the arbitrary restriction of maintenances, the establishment of narrow rules of conducts, the pressure on visas and other repressive regulations, mainly for opinion differences, all these liberticidal and insecure patterns are manifestly contrary to the spirit of Auroville.

And I would also add that the spirit of Auroville is not also a spirit of blocking, of a systematic blockade to all good ideas and projects. Some suggest that the current crisis would be the consequence of a certain negativity on the part of a few residents, fostered by deficient decision-making processes. All must agree that collective work processes need to be dusted off and rejuvenated. There must also be an acceptance that infrastructure, construction and beautification work in a city will inevitably be accompanied by inconvenience and disruption. It is the same in every city of the world.

All must work together with the greatest possible goodwill to build and develop the city. Consultations and debates must take place, but once a broad consensus is reached, the work should proceed without hindrance or delay. All residents must obviously be included in this process. If someone feels rejected or excluded from the process, it is a signal of failure.

Auroville International will in any case continue to support the Aurovilians in every way, to support the harmonious development of Auroville and to give concrete help to concrete projects.

Did you happen to know the allegory – which can be an illustration of another chapter of the Auroville spirit – that a speaker had used to illustrate the actual situation in Auroville. We remember that Mother loved Japanese art. This researcher reminded us of the story of the Japanese emperor's broken bowl. To remake this bowl, the emperor found a way to re-weld the pieces with gold threads. The result reached such a level of beauty that a new art was born, "kintsugi" or "gold joining". This researcher used this story to evoke the situation in Auroville. There has been a break. Rather than lamenting the situation, can we find that golden thread that will glue the pieces back together? To glue back together to go further, in a more beautiful way...

# What have we learned?

For over a year now, Auroville has been experiencing turmoil on a scale which it has never experienced before. How have people responded to this? What have they learned about Auroville? What have they learned about themselves? We asked these questions to Aurovilians of different ages, backgrounds, cultures and time spent in Auroville. Here are the responses that we received.

About Auroville

I have learned, again, that Auroville is a Dream, and as such it can vanish and disappear unless I learn how to nourish and nurture that Dream. What is left to us to do is to keep dreaming and be that dream. Every detail is important, and I see that my daily struggles are not because of others, but because of my own difficulty to manifest that dream that brought me here. I have learned that the present situation can also give Aurovilians lots of alibis to drop the guard and give up.

About myself

Why I entered into difficulty is because I took that dream for granted. When I chose to be one of Mother’s Warriors, when She called me, I knew that it was a 24/7 job. This is the lesson, not to be eaten up by the unhealthy atmosphere that pervaded the belly of Auroville!

When I feel troubled and angry at the situation, I have learned to do small things. Like if my fists become clenched, I can gently reopen my hands. If I have tears in my eyes, I can smile, until my heart joins in. This helps me rest for a while, preparing for what the future has in stock for me... and for us....

(74 years old, 41 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

That Auroville’s mental being is underdeveloped. There are beautiful and healthy patterns of life taking place here which are already normalised, but often not much awareness about how these patterns came into being and why they are better than alternatives. Auroville is being called upon to justify and defend itself and there is a need to become more collectively conscious about what is actually happening here and why it is important. Strength in this knowledge can work on a different level than egoistic reactions.

About myself

After identifying myself and my life’s purpose completely with Auroville for years, I had to break this pattern and seriously consider the possibility that I might have to leave. I’ve become more conscious that behind the form of Auroville is what is creating Auroville, and this is indestructible. I’ve developed a stronger love for my home country and see differently many things that used to trouble me.

(36 years old, 10 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

Given I was 16 when everything started, Dec. 2021 was also a general sort of introduction to Auroville politics. The place that had always been just home was starting to reveal previously unnoticed nuances. I began observing how many different interpretations exist about what Auroville is and how it should proceed, and how people approached these things. Aurovilians can be very passionate, but that passion can get directed towards very different things, some I agree with and some I don’t. In a paradoxical way, this produced both a greater love for Auroville and may be also some disappointment.

About myself

This was my first time in the middle of a conflict. I found that my first instinct was to jump all in, and I initially stayed at the Youth Centre all day, every day. I needed to be completely immersed, know all the details and always be doing something. While I didn’t really get too emotional throughout all the numerous tense moments, I found it did affect me in other ways, and I was very on edge in a way.

(17 years old, 17 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

Auroville is both much more fragile and much more resilient than I ever believed. The infrastructure and systems we have built can easily be dismantled. On the other hand I have seen the power of community. I have seen that the true value of what has been built in Auroville is a community of people who care about each other.

About myself

I have learned that I really care about Auroville. Growing up here, I loved Auroville, but I took it for granted. Living through the last year in Auroville, I feel - perhaps incorrectly - that I understand much better the pioneering spirit of the first generation that moved to Auroville. There can be no true sacrifice to the divine with a guarantee of security. Therefore I feel like the last year has helped me to understand the spirit in which Auroville was founded. I have also learned how angry and sad small things can make me. For example, when decorations were being put up before an official festival to celebrate some anniversary this past year, I was so upset to see small children being made to do the electrical wiring work in the trees. I have learned how attached I am to things in Auroville being done in a somewhat proper manner.

(23 years old, 22 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

I have learned that people in Auroville are called to work on Unity at all levels and all the time, very concretely. I have learned that some persons or groups would like to use Auroville for their own wishes and interests.

I have learned that Auroville was stagnating for too long, and the horrible events that happened, as horrible as they were, have been a wake up for Aurovilians, to take charge and gather in Unity.

About myself

I have learned that I am powerful because I can pray. I have to let things go, both at a personal and Auroville community level. I cannot stop what is happening, but I can pray for Auroville to realise itself to its best potential. I pray that beyond my knowledge, from my heart, Auroville is realising itself.

(29 years old, 4 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

There are two kinds of people in the world -- those who live in Auroville and those who want to live in Auroville (some people who live in Auroville don’t want to live here, but that’s another story). Which means we have to do something for all of humanity. Therefore, instead of building the city the earth needs, we need to build the earth the city needs.

About myself

I need to take myself less seriously. I have a few years left on a speck of dust on the outer reaches of a galaxy, which is one among billions of such galaxies in the observable universe, which in turn might be an infinitesimally small part of the whole Universe.

(56 years old, 7 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

The past year has been intense for a lot of us, the confusion, the unsettled thoughts, and with many feeling they were or might become refugees. It is very difficult to live in that situation. It brings you nowhere and you are constantly stuck in a loop. Many a time, this past year, the thought would just come into my mind, why am I entertaining these negative thoughts and entities that are constantly attacking? Auroville is not about assets, roads, buildings, fascist ideas, or any authorities trying to claim it as its own. Auroville is much bigger. It has existed beyond all these difficulties and situations that have tried to break the collective consciousness. What I have realised is that if Auroville has to exist, it will exist with both the sides. There is nothing good and nothing bad, it’s the constant experiment which helps Auroville survive.

About myself

I learned to be more mindful of my purpose here and to ground myself in that purpose. It was very important for me to dissociate myself from the drama and negative energy that was thriving, to not give importance to any of the beings that want to break your trust, your journey, and impose their ideas and ideologies. And the minute one can stop reacting and the minute one cannot take these ideas and drama personally, it helps you to focus on your purpose and your spiritual path in Auroville and to remain centered on that. Having this tension and going through this phase where you reach an edge, where you ask if this is the end of your idea or perception of what Auroville was, you find a balance. The games are constant, but I have learned not to take that energy of sadness and crisis as the center of life, not to protest constantly, but to continue my own journey.

(29 years old, 6 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

It has become clear and unmistakable to me that spiritual ego and ambition are at the same level as license and free indulgence of the lower nature. In fact I see that it is worse.

It has become so clear to me that in the measure that Aurovilians open themselves more and deeper to the Spirit of Auroville, to the New Consciousness, to The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, move closer to the Truth, in that measure Auroville will grow and develop accordingly. All outside measures, circles or tricks are a vain chimera, and will lead nowhere.

It dawned on me that these events reveal the birth of the Auroville religion. If this succeeds, if the Auroville community cannot stop this, it will be as oppressive as other religions. The first signs of this are clearly visible, for example, in visa issues.

I have not been able to understand why there is such reluctance to admit that the age of ties to the 1960s is over. There is a reluctance to look to the Future, to what the Mother wants today, to how the Mother, The New Consciousness, the Auroville Spirit see the development of Auroville today, now.

About myself

These events were a big blow to me and to many others, I was (am?) too open to the effect of the negative destructive forces that were set in motion after Dec 5th 2021. Looking in ‘Some Answers from the Mother,’ I was as it were put back on my legs again, and stronger than before. I received clear indications and answers to personal issues.

I learned that there is a lot to learn about oneself!

(65+ years old, 40+ years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

Auroville is undoubtedly worth fighting for, worth living for. What an experiment though! The one place on earth where people have a real opportunity to take a long hard look at themselves in the mirror and “(hu)man up”, over and again. Warning: Side effects may include (non-exhaustive list) choosing to not fall in tamas; learning to temper one’s temper; staying strong in one’s stand but also ready to compromise; trying to find the middle-forward path; celebrating one’s flexibility, plasticity and adaptability (mental, physical, emotional, psychological, integral)...

Note: quite a few mirrors seem to be missing these days, time to look for one and see what stares back...

About myself

I have deeper reservoirs of compassion, communication, and compromise than I imagined.

I had to fine-tune my skillset in patience, perseverance, and purpose to meet the moment.

For myself, I have learnt the importance of silence, self-preservation, and surrender.

(36 years old, first 19 years + last 8 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

Until the incidents at the Youth Centre at the end of 2021, I thought things in Auroville were working just fine, and I didn’t feel any specific need to know what was going on. I didn’t know anything about all the infrastructure or the way that things were organised. Since that time, I’ve learned a lot about how Auroville functions, about Auroville as a whole. I realised I needed to know these things in order to play my part here.

About myself

This then led to some self-realisations both about what I believe and what I want for Auroville and for myself:

I believe in participatory discussions and decision making. We’re here for human unity. I think discussion and being able to speak with each other is a very basic level of human unity, to be able to at least listen to each other. And I feel that’s not exactly what’s happening at the moment from all sides.

I would like to settle in Auroville. In order for that to happen, I decided to focus on things that I can be passionate about and that can lead towards the Auroville that I would like to see. So, for example, I’m heavily involved in trying to create community events that bring people together in joy and harmony, or that promote discussion and education in areas that aren’t talked about enough.

I believe that transparency, honesty, and compassion need to be built into the way units and Auroville as a whole are organised. In the unit where I work, we are really trying to do this first hand, to lead by something of an example.

(25 years old, 12 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

What I’ve learnt about Auroville in the last year is that Auroville is not a place but a people. In December 2021, the week before everything was torn down at the Youth Centre, I experienced what community means. People dropped whatever they were doing to support each other. People whom I had never met came up to me to see if I was okay. Not for a second did I feel alone. To me, this is a prime example of what Auroville is. You can take down the buildings and tear down the trees, but it’s the people who hold it together. I have seen people give so much and expect nothing in return. People who believe Auroville is worth fighting for. To me they are Auroville.

About myself

As to what I’ve learnt about myself, I’ve grown to understand that I cannot exist on my own. I can never be fully independent because we as people need each other. I will always rely on others for support and others will rely on me and that is a beautiful thing. I know that if I decide to live here, there will always be people who will support me if I need it. As long as the people are here, Auroville will always be home to me.

(17 years old, 14 years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

I’ve learned once again that I can neither rely on Auroville nor on the Aurovilians living here - but as ever, the lesson is simply to surrender to a higher power.

About myself

I’ve learned that I’m even more naive than I thought, and that despite all my efforts to the contrary it would appear that I still haven’t managed to purge the last vestiges of idealism out of my system.

(50+ years old, 25+ years in Auroville)

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About Auroville

To my dismay, contrary to its boastings, I find Auroville today extraordinarily ordinary.

‘If one has not gone beyond that’. We’ve not gone beyond that ordinariness.

I expected ‘Auroville should be at the service of Truth, beyond all social, political and religious convictions.’ However, I find the



present Auroville conveniently reeling under lies, gossips, and reneging.

*‘To be a true Aurovilian one must never lie.’*  
*‘Auroville is an attempt towards world peace, friendship, fraternity, unity.’*

I think Auroville’s purpose and use are also at the global, macro, and universal levels. Whereas, we’re merely, ignorantly embroiled in the nitty gritty, micro, and the local issues.

*‘At last a place where one will be able to think only of progressing and transcending oneself.’*

*At last a place where one will be able to live in peace, without conflicts and without rivalries of nations, religions and ambitions.*

*At last a place where nothing will have the right to impose itself as the exclusive truth.’*

We’re yet to become worthy of the place we all claim to be ours.

About myself

I’m learning about myself, that I’m no more a people pleaser. For good. I’m also discovering that I’m increasingly far less worried about making a fool out of myself. Unlike before, when I would put a lot of effort into crafting and handling my personal image. This is a telltale for me that I’m departing from my ego self. I am also learning about myself, that I’m far less emotional and sentimental than I thought I am.

*(40 years old, 7 years in Auroville)*

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About Auroville

My learning of Auroville in the last year has had two aspects.

One is the learning about the Auroville community and the other is the learning about Auroville, the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the dream of the Mother.

While I find my understanding of the former becoming more and more complex, I am beginning to find the simplicity of the latter.

During November- December 2021, I was part of a group that was deliberating a new process for decision making in Auroville. We were meeting every week to ‘catch’ the insights emerging from all of us and from the group as a whole. At some point, we were discussing how cumbersome the current governing system of Auroville is and we could empathise with the people who were part of it. When we explored the question of how this can be simplified, we reached a rather simple conclusion. If all Aurovilians become ‘True Aurovilians’, we wouldn’t need such a tedious system of organisation. While this may seem obvious, it was a realisation for me, both funny and profound at the same time. And it is something that I think underlines our current predicament.

About myself

My reaction to the events of December 2021 was a deep sense of confusion. Confusion about not why what happened happened. But confusion about my response to the situation.

I was trying to understand how I felt with what was going on, what it meant for my love for the dream and my service to the community.

After many months of trying to find answers with people and in discussions, I realised that the best I can do is to be truthful and sincere in my work. I realised also that I am not attached to Auroville, the community, but more to Auroville, the dream and that the Dream is immortal and lives eternally in our hearts. This gave me the assurance that if I continued to do the work that life brings to me, I will be serving the purpose of Auroville. Through my work, I am learning to see true equality of all, freedom for all and a spiritual brotherhood that we came here for.

I found a brilliant quote in a conversation shared by a friend that summarises how I feel at the moment:

“Good democratic citizenship requires that we sometimes do non-political things with others, but it also requires that we sometimes do political things all by ourselves.”

*(33 years old, 3 years in Auroville)*

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About Auroville

We are not together. Not divided - but separated in our identities. When we focus on the inner work to get beyond personal identity and get together within, inevitably we will get together as a community.

About myself

I am not together within because the flame that has to occupy my every living second is absent. Our collective work has manifested a beautiful life, in which I have comfortably settled. I have settled for less and I am not moving toward why I have come here because I face no consequence for not pushing myself.

It is very easy to excite me, manipulate me. I learnt this through the current events. I want to cultivate *samata*. Accidentally I learnt that by distancing myself from any event I have a better chance of understanding it and contributing constructively. I learnt the importance of *samata*.

*(46 years old, 23 years in Auroville)*

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About Auroville

I learned that Auroville is more resilient than I can ever fathom it to be. The intangibles that are shared through Love and solidarity, that Spirit of Auroville reassures me that it is not up for grabs. I have learned that whatever happens only brings us together in a more genuine way, and that we are here to grow into better versions of ourselves. I have learned about Auroville that it is in a transitional period, and some old structures are getting shaken up... only to make way for a more integrative and flexible interpretation of what is to manifest.

About myself

I have learned that I have the ability to choose love over fear, to chose personal growth

over the expectation that others change. I have the ability to hold in me the Spirit of Auroville and keep out any vibration that would shake my faith in it. I have learned that I have a very large family, and am more than ever connected to my fellow Aurovillians, even when I don’t see them - like in that circle we made in Certitude where you absolutely could not see the person on the other side, but know for sure that we are all holding hands, and thereby connected. I am connected to everyone who finds a moment of love and gratitude for the Auroville around us!

*(60 years old, 30 years in Auroville)*

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About Auroville

What happened? A dominant obsession that outward implemented measures can dictate the journey of the inner soul. A lining-up of events and persons, discovering a fertile ground for the outburst of deeply hidden frustrations and unfulfilled desires about the functioning and the future of the Auroville experiment, amplified with appropriating the exclusive right to decide about the future development of the City the Earth Needs. A tectonic shift of unfolding events where truthfulness was replaced by untruth, aspiration for harmonious development by divisions, kindness and largeness flipped to unbridled ambition, deep-seated selfishness, incurable smallness. What has been omitted is the fundamental aim of human unity contained in the Charter.

About myself

Given that we traverse the most uncompromising opposite of what we want to realize, there is an ultimate certitude that the avalanche of untruth will dissolve. The earlier lukewarm interest about Resident Assembly affairs changed into an awareness that the principle of being granted equal status for this constituent is crucial for experimenting with an efficient governance model. The continuing inner self-exploration enlarged to strengthen, to demand the emergence of an enduring harmonious fraternity, a group soul, able to counteract the ongoing deviations of Auroville’s Charter. Intruding external factors will only be overcome by safeguarding, nurturing, the commitment to the deeper given aims of this unique earth journey.

‘Nobody can comprehend to what extent the Lord is intermingled and present and active in all things.’

*(65+ years old, 50 years in Auroville)*

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About Auroville

That we cannot leave our skeletons in the closet too long. We have some big elephants in the room that have been swept under the carpet - like the planning issue - but at a certain point these things have to be addressed.

This is a very fertile moment to define what is important in Auroville, and it reminds me of

the importance of focusing more on what is here today and where to go from here, rather than on how things ‘should’ be. It’s an invitation to build from our ground realities, from our ‘here and now’, moving forward.

It is also a good reminder that in the end nothing is really under our control and that it all belongs to something higher, and whatever circumstances are chosen by That for us to evolve.

About myself

It taught me that I have a spine, that I have courage. I remember that in my history classes 10 years ago, when I was studying Nazism, I wondered if I would have had the courage to stand against that. Now I understand that I would have definitely stood for what my truth is, and acted from that. That’s a very important learning for me.

I also find the ideal of Auroville and teachings of the Mother much more embodied in the day-to-day work of certain people working on the land than in the big discourses and words of those who wear white clothes and say that they act on Their behalf. I’m more of an ‘intellectual’ who never really had the occasion to work on the land, so that’s a real personal learning.

*(28 years old, born here and spent 14 years in Auroville)*

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About Auroville

That this place keeps surprising us and making us learn always.

That Auroville does not belong to the Aurovilians, but has a much greater and higher destiny than anyone who lives in it may even think.

That Auroville constantly tests us with permanent and endless challenges, and we cannot remain accommodated in an apparent tranquility, when we have come to expose ourselves to an adventure in the unknown.

That Auroville is always a miracle and a great privilege to participate in it.

About myself

That I have the strength to face people who insult me and accuse me and yell at me, without it affecting me and making me angry.

Also that popularity or sociability does not interest me in the least.

That my faith does not depend on circumstances and that it is always present and alive despite everything that may happen outside.

I have learned to continue to love people for their sincere aspiration and dedication, not for their opinions.

But I can’t stand betrayal or hypocrisy. That I am not capable of changing things, not even of having an impact in my surroundings.

And in the end, I have learned that the only thing and above all that keeps me in Auroville is The Mother and being able to collaborate in doing her work.

*(60 years old, 28 years in Auroville)*

# The wages of fear

Should one read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*?

Carlo Rovelli, the physicist/philosopher thinks one should if one wants to understand the roots of fascism. And what he learned from reading it was that the real root was ‘fear’.

“This fear,” writes Rovelli, “is explicit in *Mein Kampf*; this feeling of inferiority, this sense of being surrounded by imminent danger. The reason behind the need to dominate others derives from a terror of being dominated by them....The reason why we close ourselves into an identity, a group, a Volk, is to create a gang stronger than the other gangs in a relentlessly dog-eat-dog world. Hitler depicts a savage world in which the enemy is everywhere, danger is everywhere and the only desperate hope of avoiding succumbing to it is to band together into a group and prevail.”

Rovelli believes that fear, the feeling of not being strong, is the main source of

emotions which drive not only fascism but all beliefs of the political right. I think this is an oversimplification. Moreover, I can conceive of ‘leftist’ beliefs which could also, in certain circumstances, be driven by fear.

But I think Rovelli makes an important point. Above all, it made me wonder about why we hold certain beliefs, and how the way we hold them may influence our behaviour.

We don’t normally focus on this. Instead, we tend to look at people’s beliefs, and judge them on the basis of these, while assuming that people who share a particular belief are all similarly aligned. But it’s possible that we can hold the same belief in very different ways, for different reasons and with different ideas about how it should be materialised, which is why people seeming to hold the same overall belief system can differ so much in their behaviour (something very pertinent to Auroville at the moment).

At the huge risk of oversimplification, I would say one motivation for holding a belief is, indeed, fear – for example, fear of the ‘chaos’ of existence which makes one embrace a belief as a bulwark of certainty – but another is the positive feeling that a certain belief makes absolute sense, that it resonates with one’s deepest feelings and understanding. I think it is the latter which has brought many people to Auroville, and to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

But I think even positive beliefs can become infected by fear.

There’s a lot of fear in Auroville at the moment. Some people fear that the city won’t be built, others that it will be built in the wrong way. People fear that they will be told to leave their job or their house, or to leave Auroville and even India. Some fear that the very existence of Auroville is at stake. All this is very understandable – I feel a lot of fear myself

– but this pervasive sense of fear is corrosive. It is corroding fellow feeling and making people reactive; it is destroying friendships and dividing people into opposing camps. It can also cause people to act unethically, even violently and with hatred, against those who they think is threatening their belief in ‘how things should be’.

There is a world of difference between positively embodying a belief, having faith that it will triumph, whatever the present adverse circumstances, and feeling so fearful that one’s belief will be destroyed that one is willing to resort to any means to protect it. The positive holding of a belief does not prevent one from standing firm against everything that seems to threaten it – in fact it makes that stance even stronger – but it allows one to do this without demeaning others, and oneself. And without opposing thoughtlessly anything that doesn’t seem immediately consonant with it.

Alan

# The Science and Spirituality summit

In honour of the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, the Science and Spirituality conference took place in the Unity Pavilion between 13-15<sup>th</sup> February. Sri Aurobindo spoke extensively about the need for humanity to evolve to a higher level, and the stated intention of the conference was to explore the transitions already taking place in the world, especially through the growing reconciliation between spiritual knowledge and the physical sciences.

The first day of the conference saw interesting presentations on the ‘new’ science which, according to Dean Rabin of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, unlike traditional science acknowledges that consciousness rather than matter is primary. This means, he continued, that consciousness can influence matter.

Sraddhalu Ranade expanded upon this, pointing out that Sri Aurobindo had said there are no fixed laws, only ‘habits of nature’. “Consciousness can rewrite those habits. Once this is recognized, there will be a new civilization”. He referred to the Global Consciousness Project (which tracks unified consciousness events happening worldwide) seeing a peak in intensity nine hours before 9/11. This, he pointed out, shows that our subtle bodies can sense such things. “If we can sense the future, we can act consciously upon it”.

However, the neuroscientist Dr. Arnaud Delorme pointed out that “We are in the prehistoric stage of our extended mind capacities”. This led Sraddhalu to suggest that Auroville could become a centre for consciousness research which could lead the world.

Referring to more traditional forms of consciousness raising, Dr. Mishra pointed out that “It is man’s ignorance that he thinks he can protect nature. We cannot save it unless we transform ourselves”. Here mantras have transformative possibilities, he said, for every word has an impact on the environment. And when, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, there is the higher intensity of rhythm and the soul’s force in the words, they become transformative. For “through mantra one can touch the core vibration of everything.”

For Manoj, however, the keys to spiritual evolution are surrender and silence. He noted that somebody had once said that “It takes tremendous courage to become a stupid Aurovilian”, meaning to give up one’s sole reliance upon the mind. Manoj suggested that the way to do this is to “Relax and open, and then you realize there is one Being acting through everyone”. One also discovers there is an evolutionary compulsion of universal force with which we can collaborate. He asked, “Can we listen to that?”

But what prevents us doing so? Laila Atshan, a Palestinian therapist and counsellor, pointed out that as individuals we are conditioned by the messages our parents and others have instilled in us. Moreover, whatever we experience gets remembered in the body mind as a *samskara*, “and all *samskaras* bind us into a fixity of experience”. For her, the only way to get to a higher spiritual level is to deal with these feelings which are locking us into the past. And to do this, “We need to become fearless, to step out of our comfort zone.”

For Krishna Das, the only thing that keeps us locked out of our own hearts is our programmes, the stuff we believe about ourselves. Speaking of Babaji, his guru, he said, “He let us into a room where love lives, and we dragged ourselves out with our own minds and stuff. And then he would let us in again. This is how he taught. All we can do is try to remember because we have forgotten. The love lives inside of us, that’s who we are. It’s our true being.”

Jeff Genung of Prosocial World (US) pointed to indicators that transformative change is already happening in the world. He noted the speeding up of synchronicities, which, for him, were signs that we are ‘stepping on an escalator of grace’. He also felt that the pandemic had impacted a shift in consciousness. “I notice that humanity now has an increased sense of the whole, of how fragile we and the whole system is. And how interconnected we are... Perhaps the most important thing that emerged from this was an increased sense of the need for cooperation.”

Dena Merriam, in concluding the conference, agreed that “the need for collaboration, and the need to draw upon our spiritual

resources for humanity to take the next step in our awakening evolution” seemed to be the most important message that was emerging.

The summit brought together presenters from many different traditions and backgrounds to provide interesting insights and much food for thought. One problem, however, was that the term ‘spirituality’ was never defined. Instead, it seemed to function as a vague umbrella term to encompass paranormal powers, traditional religious practices and healing therapies. But both Sri Aurobindo and The Mother emphasized that spiritual life was something very different from any of these.

Dena Merriam, who organised the conference, asserted that “the intention of this summit is to share Sri Aurobindo with the world”, so one would have expected a clearer focus upon his yoga and his teachings. As one Aurovilian put it, “Would such a seminar not be the ideal occasion for studying His message for our world in the throes of transition to the New Creation, the manifestation of which He came to announce and hasten? Remembering what the Mother said about Their Yoga, that ‘we are not here to repeat what others have done before us....’, I am curious to know what prompted the choice of inviting a variety of contemporary spiritual approaches which do not appear to be in obvious relation with that of our masters?”

In fact, the real question is how far the presenters and organisers of this conference understood the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s yoga which, while drawing upon the spiritual achievements of the past, charts a different path, one which Mother described as an ‘adventure’ which had never been embarked upon before.

The Secretary expressed the hope that these summits would become an annual event in Auroville. However, perhaps it would be worthwhile to achieve greater clarity on this basic question first. Otherwise, there is a real risk that such conferences, while undoubtedly mounted with the best of intentions, will serve to obscure rather than enlighten.

Alan

## SACRED MUSIC

# Krishna Das in Auroville

Krishna Das is a rock star of the sacred music world, singing the chants that he first heard in Himalayan temples over fifty years ago. On 12 February, his performance at the Matrimandir Amphitheatre opened the Science and Spirituality conference. Yet before a note was sounded, there was already discord. Two weeks earlier, the Resident’s Assembly Working Committee had written to the Matrimandir Executives on behalf of the many community members who had expressed concerns about the choice of venue. Given Krishna Das’s popularity, it was felt the event would attract “large numbers of people from outside who may not understand the space in which he would be singing”.

What had been intended as a sacred music offering to help bring the community together as one, singing interactively in the *kirtan*, was caught up in the churning of Auroville, with many questioning the more frequent hosting of large-scale events and VIP visitors at the Matrimandir. This concert followed close on

the heels of the 24-hour closure of Auroville to tighten security for the G20/S20 delegates’ brief visit on 31 January.

On the day, there were long queues to enter the complex and a line of portable toilets by the bridge over the water, adding to a general ‘music festival’ vibe. There was excitement in the air as the audience talked and socialised prior to the concert.

The numbers involved are not fully clear. It seemed the attendees were primarily part of the international Krishna Das fan base. According to Mathew of AVI-USA, who helped organise the event, over 3000 people attended, and of those who registered online, 1400 identified themselves as either member of Auroville International or Aurovilian. Several Aurovilians who were present estimated that at most 10% appeared to be Auroville residents.

To start the evening, Dena Merriam spoke first, inaugurating the ‘Spiritual Summit’, followed by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Dr Jayanti Ravi, who welcomed the attendees, and Srimoyi, who read quotes by



Piotr Redinski

Sri Aurobindo. When Krishna Das and his two accompanists entered, there were loud shouts, whistles and cheers. Once he began the *kirtan*, the atmosphere became calmer, but it seemed at times an unusual juxtaposition to combine large crowds and concert flood lights with the intention of inner concentration. There were silken silhouettes dancing in the light of the Matrimandir’s golden discs, and at times the curious feeling of being transported to the beaches of Goa or Bali.

Whether Krishna Das was aware of the background rumblings was unclear, but his music was a sincere *bhakti* offering. He dedicated chants to the divine mother, nodding towards the Matrimandir as he did so. His chants and our refrains were uplifting, although perhaps slightly flatter in the open air than within the reverberating walls of a temple.

This was a taste of the mantras he learnt all those years ago when he came to India as a young seeker. Both the Mother and his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, passed away in 1973. As part of the 1960s generation who came to India, along with his late spiritual brother, Ram Das, Krishna Das brought some of India’s spiritual light

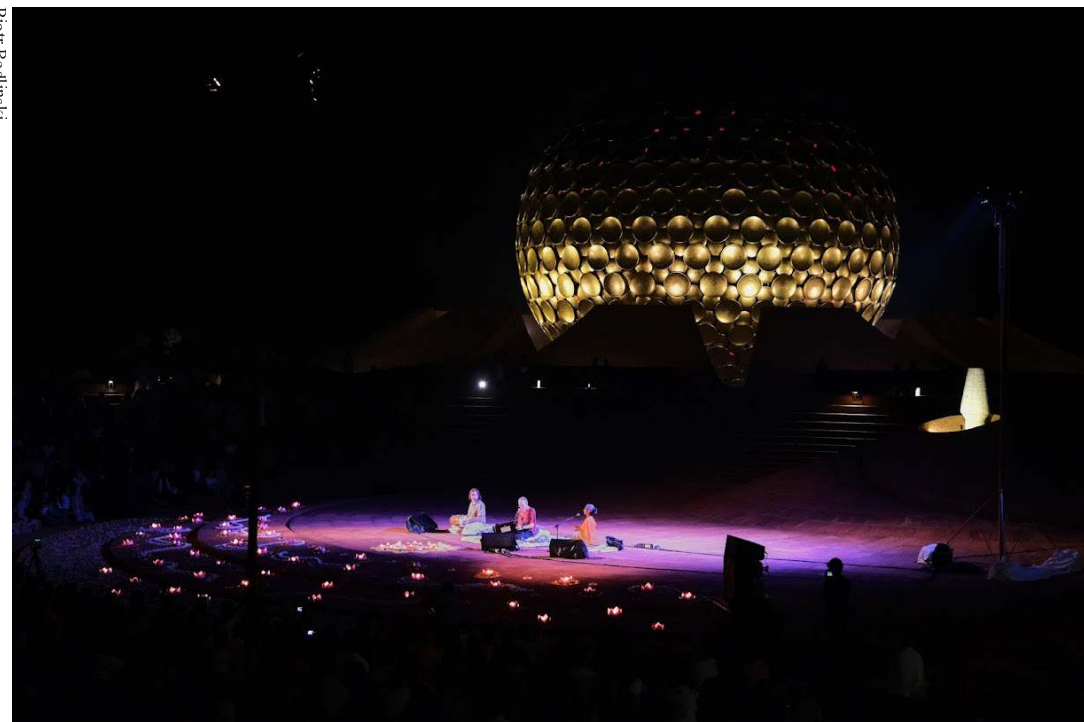
out to the West. Now he was offering it back to India herself.

Krishna Das let his music speak for itself, with no song introductions. His humility combined with his trademark New York humour (ending the concert with “As we say in India, see you later.”) was refreshing.

After the concert, it emerged that five members of the Foundation Office Working Committee (Anu, Srimoyi, Partha, Arun, and Selvaraj) sent a letter to Dena Merriam and Jayanti Ravi. They wrote “in support of the letter sent to you by the Matrimandir executives, we agree that the performance of Krishna Das at the Matrimandir Amphitheatre was not a suitable choice.” They further pointed out that “it was a very large crowd who apparently had no knowledge or regard for the place.” The Foundation Office Working Committee letter concludes: “The event has been felt as a violation of Matrimandir, a disrespect towards the Mother and a misuse of the Soul of Auroville, the Park of Unity in the Peace area. Videos of wild dancing with Matrimandir in the backdrop are unfortunately already being exploited on social media.”

The art of listening and being inspired is part of the *kirtan* tradition that Krishna Das exemplifies. It is to be hoped that in future a greater and deeper listening can take place in Auroville.

Peter



Piotr Redinski



# Within Without - A Pottery Exhibition

‘**S**haring this series is my way of taking a pause and evaluating my own journey, allowing myself to touch upon the core of my experience. In this collection of my latest work, several forms have emerged that reflect the serene atmosphere that surrounds my studio. I draw from nature; its simplicity, its spontaneity, as well as all its complexities. By utilising a variety of techniques, adapting them, and engaging with constant experimentation when creating clay compositions, kilns, and firing methods, I strive to remain on a constant path of new discoveries and experiences. Seed pods hold an entire universe within - the entire process of life, diverse yet contained. The imprints of these pods play a large role in my work. The intricate struggles of every life form illustrated by nature in these simple pods inspire me ceaselessly. This collection also delves into the idea of nihilism - containers that hold nothingness, the space within.

My travel adventures over the past decade are chronicled through these large jars and platters. The painter in me, who has been hidden for a while, emerges having traversed the hinterlands of rural Indian life and adorns many of the forms in this series. In these lands, women create mesmerising paintings, sizeable hand-beaten vessels and platters with wonderful spontaneous flourishes. Repetition and pattern, explored via texture and



technique, pay tribute to the way in which the work of these women transforms the Mundane into the Sacred, defiant against the perfect, disciplined forms moulded by their male potter counterparts.’

**Rakhee on her inspiration and process, exhibition brochure**

Rakhee’s recent pottery exhibition at the Centre d’Art in Citadines showcased a collection of many pieces, all created at her studio in Auroville during the last year. Given the size and number of the pieces and how much labour goes into the many steps of creating pottery, this is a prolific feat.

The potter quotes Lao Tzu as saying: ‘We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel, but it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the wheel depends. We turn clay to make a vessel, but it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the vessel depends. We pierce doors and windows to make a house, and it is on these spaces where there is nothing that the usefulness of the house depends. Therefore, just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognise the usefulness of what is not.’

Some of the big pots were used as vessels for Ikebana flower arrangements made by Valeria and Monica. Perhaps, as Lao Tzu would say, to take advantage of ‘the space where there is nothing’, inhabiting it with the life of flowers and leaves. This meticulously executed Japanese art perfectly complemented the pottery pieces and the spirit of the collection.

I walked through the exhibition with a friend who is a master potter herself, and she became my spontaneous guide. She wove each piece together with a story of appreciation, bringing to life in front of us one piece at the time, recognising the technique, skill and patience that was put into the art.

I learnt about the challenges of making such big pieces, that firing them in kilns is a laborious task, requiring great patience, endurance and physical effort.

Rakhee works with multiple firing methods, including the Japanese Anagama kiln. This kiln uses firewood and requires constant stoking and wood supply for several days at a time.

This method is unique because the flames are in direct contact with the clay, so the placement of the clay within the kiln is key, because the direction of the flames and how the pieces are set up against each other is what creates the patterns, ‘painting the pieces with fire’.

A series of plates hanging on the walls may all look very similar from afar, but as one approaches them, each one slowly reveals its unique character, imbued by the glazing. There are great variations in colour, texture, and thickness, ranging from



smooth and glossy to rough and sharp.

My guide helped me appreciate the timelessness of the art: because the inspiration comes from nature and seeds in their raw form, the pieces will always remain relevant. Pottery being an art form that survives for thousands of years, some say that potters have the responsibility of creating meaningful art. These pieces, she says, are such an intricate weave of nature and indigenous art that they become timeless because they speak the language of seeds, of how one grain encapsulates the potential of the tree, of blossoming into something it was meant to be and yet never imagined it could become.

Chandra

## PASSINGS

### Mahalingam Sangukrishna

On February 3rd, former Indian Independence fighter and Auroville’s oldest resident Mahalingam Sangukrishna left his body, at the age of 103.

In the 1940s, Mahalingam had joined the Quit India Movement, staying at Nehru’s home in Allahabad for some weeks and also meeting Gandhiji. In 1945 he visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry for the darshan of Sri Aurobindo. Standing in the long queue and trying to catch a glimpse of Him, he suddenly felt His grace: Sri Aurobindo was looking at him and smiling.

From then onwards, until Sri Aurobindo’s passing in December 1950, Mahalingam regularly visited the Ashram for the darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In 1950 he permanently joined the Ashram. But Auroville attracted him. After The Mother’s passing in 1973, and for a period of almost 20 years, he visited Auroville regularly, teaching part-time Tamil in Udavi and Arulvazhi schools. In 1994 he joined Auroville, settling in Pitchandikulam Forest. He continued his Tamil teaching, now also at Transition school. Six years later he started translating into Tamil the *Collected Works of the Mother*, Sri Aurobindo’s *Letters on Yoga* and other works. The material was published in *Vaigarai* (Dawn), a well-read Tamil magazine published by the Ashram.

In his later years, Mahalingam lived in Fraternity community from where he often walked over to the nearby New Creation’s Sports Resource Centre to see the trainings and matches. It was in that location that Aurovilians came to honour and congratulate him on his 100th anniversary. A video of the occasion can be seen at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APcxqOK\\_4XA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APcxqOK_4XA). An interview by Lourdes Epinal can be seen at <https://vaasalmagazine.wordpress.com/2017/12/23/mahalingam/>

Mahalingam’s uniquely humble presence and old-school devotion added a delicate, special quality to Auroville’s communal life. His remains were buried at the Auroville burial grounds on February 4th.



### Eva Mikulski



On February 11th, Eva passed away in her apartment in Citadines after a brain haemorrhage. She had just celebrated her 77th birthday on February 8th with her fraternal family in Citadines community, full of joy and deeply happy.

Eva came to Auroville in 1987. When she arrived she said she had come home. She first lived in Aspiration, then moved to Revelation, later to Djaima and finally to Citadines.

Eva served in the Auroville Council and in the Entry Group, worked as a teacher in the pre-crèche and helped in the creation of Deepanam school. She will primarily be remembered for her artistic work: her paintings, sculpture and collages. She had several exhibitions in Pitanga and in Centre d’Art. She considered that each painting was the result of an inner experience that she was happy to share with anyone interested in her art. She never sold any of her paintings, but offered them to those who were touched by her work.

The *Mother’s Agenda* was her bedside table book, she read and re-read the 13 volumes over and over, rediscovering them each time; it was a deepening process. She would surrender everything to the Divine and to The Mother.

Eva’s remains were cremated at the Auroville cremation grounds on February 18th.

### Ellen Tessloff



On February 19th Ellen left her body in her Arati apartment. She would have been 95 in April this year.

After a career as a hatha yoga teacher in Germany, Ellen arrived in Auroville in 1996 and was accepted as an Aurovilian the year later. Starting out as a welcome presence in Ilaigarkal school, she subsequently joined the Auroville Library, where she worked for years. On the side, she would translate works of Sri Aurobindo into German for a publishing house connected to her husband.

During the last ten years Ellen was confined to a wheelchair as she suffered from spondylolisthesis, a degenerative spinal disease leading to gradual paralysis of both legs. Helped by her no-nonsense and strong-willed character, she took it in her stride and managed to keep taking care of herself until the most recent years.

Ellen’s remains were cremated at Auroville’s mandappam on the afternoon of February 22nd.

### Cristof Alward-Pitoëff



Cristof Alward-Pitoëff, who met Mother in 1969, passed away in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on 28 February. In the early years, Cristof stayed in Auroville for a short while after which he went to live in the Ashram for good and functioned as head of the French section of the Ashram Press, SAICE professor, translator and theatre director. Quite a few members of the elder Auroville generation remember him as their friend and teacher in the Ashram school.

Cristof has been translating into French a good number of books by Mother and Sri Aurobindo, especially *The Life Divine*. In 2020 he published *L’aurore d’une vie nouvelle*, available from SABDA, in which he describes the adventure of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as seen through his eyes.

In a 3.5-minute clip on Facebook, Cristof movingly speaks about his experience in Auroville in 1969. (<https://fb.watch/i-4CBffjkD/?mibextid=2Rb1fB>)

His remains were cremated at the Ashram’s crematorium near Muthialpet on Thursday March 2nd.

A tree planting ceremony for Cristof took place on Sunday March 12th in Forecomers community.



Leave India Notice

The community was deeply shocked to learn that a young Aurovillian and member of the Residents Assembly Working Committee, had been served with a Leave India Notice on 15<sup>th</sup> February. No official explanation has been given. However, The Auroville International (AVI) Board sent a letter to the Governing Board, noting that the Notice raises “suspicion... that this serious measure is a retaliation for [Mael’s] commitment to the governance of the Auroville community.” The RA Working Committee reports that they are actively looking into the situation and are hopeful that compassion and reason will prevail, for “We have faith in the goodwill of Mother India”.

In light of the ‘Leave India’ notice, Aurovilians organised a choir event for 5.30pm on Tuesday 28th February at Solar Kitchen parking, where they invited everyone to get together and sing a song of hope for the future. Solar Kitchen provided dinner afterwards.

Appeals to the Prime Minister

Two long-time Aurovilians have written letters to the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, in response to the Leave India Notice, appealing to the P.M. to intervene in the ever-escalating situation, for “Auroville is in great danger” as the “core values” of the experiment are being threatened. Residents are invited to add their signatures in support. The organisers say that, while the letters are addressed to the Honourable Prime Minister, they are also intended to be read by government authorities and the wider public to inform them of our situation and our appeal for help.

Organisation research

Responding to a call from the Auroville Council, a group gathered every week from mid November onwards to try to answer a “call for organisation”.

They ended their exploration of the fundamentals by forming a first image of what could be the goal of our collective organisation. As the goal of Auroville is “Human Unity, Peace upon Earth”/ Divine Anarchy, the goal of Auroville’s collective organisation could be “to foster the growth of our individual and collective consciousness so as to make it the aim of life”.

The next steps will be exploring how to implement this goal in our collective organisation.

News and Notes letter

For some weeks, the News and Notes editors have not been publishing reports from the main Residents Assembly working groups. A group of concerned Aurovilians drafted a letter to the editors saying, “We request you to publish announcements and reports from the working groups selected and endorsed by the Residents’ Assembly. If either or both of you are unable to fulfil your function on behalf of the community, and to uphold the spirit and values of the News and Notes, we request you to resign so that other residents may fulfil this role.” The letter received 497 signatures in support. So far, there has been no response from the editors.

YouthLink work survey

YouthLink has initiated a survey to understand Auroville youths’ relationship to work. They write, “Throughout the years we have heard many allegations, statements, and comments, ranging from ‘Auroville youth are lazy’ to ‘youth want to work but there is nothing to do in Auroville’. This survey will serve to give clear and accurate information on the current realities.”

Tree marking

As part of a survey of the Galaxy Master Plan, the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), Government of India, has been marking and numbering trees. The standard procedure is to remove some bark and paint the number on the cleared skin of the tree. However, an Aurovillian arborist has pointed out that this is “a practice generally avoided unless you want to damage or kill a tree”. He advises that this work should be done, as had already been done in Auroville, using GIS which can very accurately geo-locate the position of each tree. It is reported that the CPWD is now adopting this approach.

Tree puja

The Secretary, together with Dena Merriam and some participants in the Science and Spirit conference, held a tree puja in Darkali to pray for the spirits of the many trees which may be cut to make the Crown Road.

New road study

Work is now going on apace to finish the Crown road, using RCC slabs rather than the paver blocks which were first experimented with. However, a study by the Auroville Earth Institute concludes that “The new road surfacing design approved by the Auroville Town Development Council appointed by the

secretary for the surfacing of this road does not follow any Indian standard. Consequently, none of the technical specifications given by the CPWD has any precedence to ensure safety or durability.” Moreover, the production and transport of RCC slabs results in 610% more CO2 emissions per square metre than the original paver blocks made by the Road Service which have now been discarded.

Home care expenses

The FO BCC reports that the overall costs for home care, including the care of Aurovilians (above the age of 60 years) at care homes and their residences, as well as the transport costs for hospital treatments, have increased by 44% at the end of the year.

Integrated Information System

The FO FAMC is setting up an Integrated Information System as a digital memory for the collective. The AIIS office will be responsible for securing a fully integrated, updated data system with all the core data of the Auroville administration, and making it available to working groups as well as Foundation office.

Gaia work

The FO ATDC points out that most of the residences in the Gaia community are in the designated Mahalakshmi Park, even though one of these residences received building permission in the recent past. “Residences, houses and or motorised traffic are not appropriate in city parks, and the modalities to make this shift this will be looked into in the coming months; the residents of these city parks will be asked to make some changes in their lifestyle and their function within these areas, including but not limited to the use of vehicles within these parks”.

As a first step, walking/cycle paths through the parks are being identified and their surface compacted with brick kerbs on either side. In future, says the FO FAMC, fences between houses in the park area will be removed entirely or else reduced to the bare minimum.

Closing small-scale activities

At the beginning of November 2022, the AVFO’s ‘FAMC’ sent an email to several Activity managers whose annual turnover does not exceed 2 lakhs. The email stated “If you do not intend to develop your activity to the next level we suggest you close down your activity and work with any other unit with a similar scope of work to your activity”. A little over 3 months after this information was shared, several people received emails informing them their Activities would be closed on 31st March.

Considering multiple perspectives

The RA TDC is moving forward with setting up a participatory planning process which is open for all to contribute to; the only rule of the game is for each to bring their goodwill, expertise and diversity into a shared approach and be ready to meet respectfully on middle ground. This process will pave the path to how our community will address many issues, with meaningful participation and carrying forward the work of the 2022 Dreamweaving and other previous planning works.

The team clarified that when they talk about “proper planning” they mean plans that are co-created with participative processes, agreed upon and endorsed by the RA; planning that takes the ground realities, the environment and the socio-economics into account; plans that enable the development of a city that is climatically appropriate and adaptive to climate change; and plans that respect the key features of the Galaxy vision model whilst ensuring enough flexibility for future generations to further develop the city, taking advantage of all discoveries from within and from the world. This, they say, would allow Auroville to become and remain the City the Earth needs.

White paper on the future

The Wednesdays for Auroville meeting is planning to issue a ‘White Paper’ on Auroville’s way forward. A couple of papers have already been prepared outlining what has been realised in Auroville since its inception, and what is being planned on the foundation of these achievements. The meeting decided that rather than a single rigid plan, what is important is the vision and, emerging organically out of it, a ‘basket of projects’, based on the ground reality and keeping in mind that exploration is at the very core of Auroville.

Legal update

The Ami/Evergreen land dispute case was heard in Tindivanam on 15<sup>th</sup> February, but the lawyers for the Land Board and the Auroville Foundation did not appear. The final hearing will be on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

No dates have been set in the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court of India for the other legal cases with which Auroville is involved.

WaterFest ‘23

Between 2nd February – 22nd March a festival focussed on stewardship for water and biodiversity is taking place as a call to action in the bioregion. February events were organized in various localities in the region to raise water awareness, concluding with events at the Auroville Visitors Centre. While water conservation and management is a top priority for Auroville’s development planning, Auroville’s water future is inextricably linked with the health of the larger bioregion.

Endangered Craft Mela

This is a yearly event organised by the Fertile community that aims to bring together local crafts people with the children of the Auroville bioregion and Tamil Nadu. The weeklong mela started on Sunday 19th February and ended with a fair. The featured crafts this year included macramé, basket-weaving, pottery, silambam stick fighting, upcycling, metal casting, rope making, leatherwork, stone carving, and wood carving. Every evening there was a programme with music and dance open to all.

Overcoming Apartheid

On 26<sup>th</sup> February, there was an informal community gathering with the South African activist and former minister, Jay Naidoo, in the Unity Pavilion. Jay Naidoo was a leader in the South African struggle against Apartheid, and Minister responsible for Reconstruction and Development in the country’s first democratic government, where he worked closely with Nelson Mandela. Aurovilians were interested in the insights he shared concerning how the divisive Apartheid system was overcome, as well as about the path-breaking Truth and Reconciliation process, with its rich learnings and challenges. Many felt the latter could offer valuable hints concerning how to resolve the present difficulties in Auroville.

Auroville’s birthday

As usual, there was a collective meditation with dawn fire in the Amphitheatre on Auroville’s birthday. Later, people enjoyed listening to *Savitri* music as the sun set on the same afternoon.

A cultural bonanza

Late February is the busiest time of the year in Auroville’s cultural calendar. This year there was an ‘Auroville Festival’ which took as its theme the first quality of the Mother’s symbol – Sincerity. Through various activities, the first four days focused on the four powers of the Universal Mother – Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, and Perfection – and the remaining four days on four attributes we need to develop in ourselves – Knowledge, Power, Abundance, and Self-giving. In addition, two days were dedicated each to Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, and Mahasaraswati. The festival is planned to be an annual event.

There were many other music concerts and recitals. They included a concert of sacred songs by visiting Australian soprano, Heather Lee, in the Amphitheatre, sacred music by the Auroville Renaissance Cappella choir under the direction of Eugene Liven d’Abelardo, a performance of Tamiz music in Unity Pavilion, a Rudra Veena concert, and a Western classical piano recital by Harmut.

There was a talk on Sri Aurobindo and Bharathiar’s poetry and a performance of Shakespeare’s ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ by the students of Deepanam School.

Flower enthusiasts welcomed the inauguration of Mother’s Flowers Garden in Mahalakshmi Park on 21<sup>st</sup> February, and some participated in the Hibiscus Art Festival and a flower mandala workshop at Savitri Bhavan.

Exhibitions during this period included *Within/ Without*, a pottery exhibition by Rakhee Kane, and an experimental photography exhibition by the late Giorgio Molinari at Ciudadines; *The Willow Tree* at Pitanga; and *Towards the Sun*, a photo exhibition at Aurelec Cafeteria on the Pharaoh Akhenaten. Akhenaten, who attempted to make ancient Egypt worship only one god, the sun god, was strongly influenced by his mother, Queen Tiye, who, according to The Mother, was one of her previous incarnations.

Passing: Ulf Mueller.

On March 1st, 2023, Ulf Mueller, passed away in Auroville. Ulf was a well wisher of Auroville ever since he first came in 2001 together with his wife Birgitta. During that first visit they organised a programme of organizational training for Auroville’s working groups, mainly the Working Committee and the Auroville Council, which was repeated and intensified in the next three years. During that time Ulf also arranged for the Chief Architect of his hometown, Halmstad, in Sweden to participate in the EU Conference held in Auroville.

Many Aurovilians will remember him for his warm personality. Ulf had a positive outlook on life, always seeing possibility, love, and that The Mother and Sri Aurobindo are at the centre of what Auroville is.

It was during this trip to India that Ulf has left his body. His body was cremated at the Auroville cremation grounds on March 3rd.

About Auroville Today

Auroville Today is an activity of the Kattidakalai Trust of the Auroville Foundation. The GST number is 33AAATA0037BXZV

Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India. Phone: +91.413.2622572. Email: avtoday@auroville.org.in.

Subscription information

Subscription rates for 12 issues : India: Print + digital edition: Rs 710 Other countries: Print + digital edition: Rs 3,540 equivalent. Other countries: digital only edition: Rs 2,480 equivalent.



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- 3. By bank transfer. Bank transfer are to be made to account # 163101000118 of Auroville Maintenance at ICICI Bank, Auroville Branch, IFSC Code ICIC0001631, Swift Code ICICINBBCTS, reference Contribution Auroville Today.

Editorial team:

Alan, Carel, Chandra, Gita, Peter. Proofreading: Alan, DTP: PRISMA. Photo Editing: Jean-Denis. Digital Editing: Krishna V Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.