

# Auroville Today

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February is the time when we celebrate Mother's birthday and the birthday of Auroville, as well as, this year, the 'Golden Day', and we enjoy a plethora of events and inaugurations. This year there were celebrations organised by the office of the Auroville Foundation, as well as those organised by the residents themselves. But, alongside these, as if in a parallel world, many residents experienced huge disruption and uncertainty due to the continued clearing of forested areas for radial roads and the outer ring road, the cancellation of maintenances, and the fact that many foreign Aurovilians are still waiting for their visa recommendations to be processed.

In an open letter, the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly, while describing the times we are going through as "tough and distressing", appealed to residents not to give up hope, reminding them that Auroville, in Mother's words, will not fail.

On February 5th, the Office of the Auroville Foundation sent out an email invitation to the residents for a meeting at Bharat Nivas. Over three days, about 770 residents listened to presentations of the Governing Board approved and appointed working groups, which provided information about what they have been doing and their plans for the future.

In the past, February has also been the month when bodies like the Governing Board, the International Advisory Council (IAC) and Auroville International (AVI) held their meetings in Auroville. It appears that the IAC, the third Authority of the Foundation which is tasked with advising the Governing Board to ensure that "the ideals for which Auroville has been established are encouraged", did not have a formal meeting this year. However, two members felt so strongly about what is happening that they wrote a statement on Auroville's current situation, supported by eight international personalities. This has been widely circulated and we publish it with their permission.

We also publish an interview with the outgoing Chairman of the AVI Board, in which he reflects upon what it means to fulfill this function in such challenging times.

The Governing Board, in their 57th meeting, announced that they want Auroville to enhance food production to meet the needs of the community. We examine how realistic this is at present in a report on our farms, and hear from some of our concerned farmers. Our focus on landwork continues with the profile of a very special forest.

A different perspective on the present situation is provided by a long-term researcher in Spiral Dynamics, and we also publish reviews of two books: Luc Venet's new biography of Sri Aurobindo and "I am prayer only", a tribute to Kireet Joshi composed by two of his close Auroville friends.

Finally, a second-generation Aurovillian shares what it means to her to 'belong' to Auroville. She represents those who, in spite of all the difficulties, retain hope and love in their heart for this community. People like her give us hope that out of the relentless churning, a newer, truer Auroville will emerge in the coming year.



One of the cleared forested areas opposite Samasti community

## Statement on Auroville's current situation

issued by two members of the International Advisory Council  
and supported by eight international personalities

Almost sixty years ago, a handful of people from distant parts of the world and, later, India heard the Mother's silent call and started trickling into the area now known as Auroville, then a nearly bare expanse of red soil. Through the hard work and dedication of what grew to be hundreds, this place and community, with all its limitations and imperfections, became an inspiration to all those aspiring for alternatives to the world's current self-destructive direction. Apart from visible manifestations — a regenerated land and water table, productive farms, the Matrimandir, handicraft units, pioneering researches and techniques of all kinds — countless visitors to Auroville, trainees, volunteers, students, have testified to a life-changing experience. And Auroville's large pool of experts in every conceivable field has provided skills and knowhow not only to the bioregion, but also to governments and private institutions in India and abroad.

Following the takeover of Auroville's assets by the Government of India in 1980, successive administrations and (since 1988) Governing Boards of the Auroville Foundation, chaired by distinguished personalities — Dr Karan Singh, Shri Kireet Joshi, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan — worked in concert with the Residents' Assembly, advised also by the International Advisory Council. General and smaller meetings were regularly held. Despite many difficulties and challenges, a spirit of "mutuality" between these three bodies (to use Shri Kireet Joshi's favourite term) was palpable, and steady progress could be made. This progress was acknowledged the world over, also by the Central and Tamil Nadu Governments. It was restated by India's Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi when he visited Auroville on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. Arguably, progress could have been more substantial and

smoother in many areas, and opportunities were missed. Nevertheless, Auroville somehow kept working and growing.

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Since July 2021, the current administration of the Auroville Foundation has declared that all of the above amounts to very little, apparently taking the view that a "city" of concrete roads and buildings was the only way forward. Incomprehensibly, it has repeatedly shown deep contempt for Auroville's afforestation, water management and rural development programmes, among other sterling accomplishments. Falsely claiming to follow the Master Plan 2001 (which is only a broad framework), operating without a detailed plan or an environmental audit, it has irrationally insisted on perfect circles for Auroville's internal roads, and on 12 radial roads, all of which are now destroying thousands of precious trees and degrading the very environment that the Master Plan wisely put at the centre of Auroville's development:

*"There cannot be a complete freedom for individuals, groups of individuals or institutions to carry out developments without consideration for the surrounding environment. ... Development proposals will be considered only ... if effectively eco-friendly and environmentally appropriate ... Innovative models and techniques in the field of afforestation, land development, water conservation, rainwater harvesting, building technology, community participation, energy saving, etc. incorporated in the Master Plan would be integral to the township development and management."*

The world over, forward-looking urban planners currently strive to follow precisely such a vision. What we now witness in Auroville is, in sad contrast, a return to a failed past. Witness the needlessly broad roads (without a proper circulation

plan for the bioregion), the wasteful huge concrete slabs, the exclusion of well-designed, forward-looking urban plans by Auroville's own experts or by successful community processes such as the Dreamweaving. As Mother wrote in a 1971 message: "Auroville should not fall back into old errors which belong to a past that is trying to revive." Yet that is precisely what we are now witnessing.

This is even more visible in the strong-arm tactics the Community has endured for over two years now. We will not detail here the unjustifiable methods deployed to coerce Residents into obedience — including denial of visas or monthly maintenances, opaque and objectionable land exchanges, unilateral takeover of internal working groups, exclusion of Auroville's world-class experts in all fields, side-lining of the Residents' Assembly, and the shameful demonization of those who have questioned these methods. In several letters and statements addressed to the Governing Board's Chairperson, we have objected to all of the above, and offered constructive suggestions as well as our cooperation to work out collaborative solutions, without our advice being heard or our offer made use of.

We will also not discuss here the recent "notifications" through which the administration has arrogated to itself the power to decide of admissions and terminations in Auroville, and to appoint its own "working committee", except to state that they clearly seek to disempower the Residents' Assembly and its working groups, and are, in our opinion, illegitimate, unethical, and one more violation of the spirit of mutuality at the core of the Auroville Foundation Act.

Instead, we wish to highlight what, in our careful estimate, lies at the heart of the current phase of misgovernance:

1. **The complete breakdown of the spirit of mutuality**, with both Governing Board and the Auroville Foundation's Secretary rejecting due processes of consultation, which are the established norm in any democratic society, and should be much more so in an experiment for creating a new type of society.

2. **The Governing Board's failure to rein in the administration and its Secretary.** Unfortunately, none of the Governing Board members fulfils the conditions laid down in the Auroville Foundation Act, which states that they should have "rendered valuable service to Auroville ... [and] contributed significantly in activities that are being pursued or are envisaged to be promoted in Auroville, including activities relating to environment, afforestation, arts and crafts, industry, agriculture, humanities, sciences and integral yoga." This explains that the current Governing Board members readily accepted the narrative of Auroville Residents being "anti-India", "anti-city" and so on, not realizing how misleading and harmful it was. The Governing Board members could have remedied their shortcomings through multiple exchanges and consultations with Residents, experts, units, working groups, and by conducting open houses and other meetings, but chose instead to cut themselves off from the Community and ignore the existence of the Residents' Assembly, one of the Foundation's three bodies, which they are mandated to work in consultation with.

3. **A misreading of the Auroville Charter and the Auroville Foundation Act.** Since "Auroville belongs to nobody in particular", it cannot belong to the Auroville Foundation. In legal terms, the Foundation does own Auroville's lands and assets, but the Auroville Foundation Act

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1988 makes it clear that it was designed “for the better management and further development of Auroville in accordance with its original charter”. The Charter is thus supreme (indeed, what would Auroville’s purpose be without it?) and the Auroville Foundation is morally a custodian and trustee of Auroville’s assets, not an owner in the ordinary sense of the term.

It is also crucial to note that apart from a few buildings for educational and allied purposes, **the Foundation has not created these assets; all lands and most buildings of Auroville have been created out of private funds and donations**, from within Auroville’s own resources or from donors in India and abroad. And they have been developed through the hard labour of generations of Residents. To dispose of those assets without any consultation is unacceptable and disregards Auroville’s foundational principles.

On the specific issue of land exchanges for the desirable consolidation of lands in the City and Green Belt areas, the recent case of disposal of a large portion of AuroOrchard, one of Auroville’s oldest and most productive farms, is a case in point, with huge underestimation of the land and consequent huge financial loss to Auroville, when alternatives existed and were agreed upon by the Community a decade ago; several misleading statements were issued to the effect that the portion given away was not under agriculture and contained no house of Residents, when the reality was opposite.

The Governing Board should realize the profound immorality of unilaterally disposing of such lands when the Auroville Foundation did nothing to develop them and turn them into the invaluable farms, buffer zones, sources of groundwater, etc. that they now are.

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Abandoning the Charter, issuing unilateral and arbitrary diktats, brushing aside all advice received, indulging in opaque and unethical practices, will certainly not create the Auroville of Mother’s dreams. Auroville was not intended to become a real estate project with the appearance of a regimented “spiritual” community.

We once more call upon the Auroville Foundation’s Governing Board and Secretary to change course, reverse recent decisions, engage in genuine consultations with the Residents’ Assembly, and make a sincere attempt to understand Auroville — which implies understanding both its successes and its failures, and acting as a “helping hand” (as the Chairperson once said) to boost the successes further and work out solutions to resolve the failures or limitations in a collaborative atmosphere.

Let us recall the core of Auroville’s adventure: not for a set of roads and buildings, which could be done anywhere else in the world, but to create a new society of human beings endowed with a consciousness higher than the old mental ego now triumphing everywhere. As Mother said in 1972: “In Auroville I do not want many men. I want some people, but true people. If you want many people, I can give you a hundred thousand in a moment from South Africa.”

Let us also recall how the Auroville Foundation Act wisely asks the International Advisory Council,

in “tendering any advice to the Governing Board” to “endeavour to secure that (a) the ideals for which Auroville has been established are encouraged, and (b) the residents of Auroville 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.” This freedom is what has been denied in recent times, and what must be restored. It is central to Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and vision of a future humanity, as he said in 1926:

*“I have no faith in government controls because I believe in a certain amount of freedom — freedom to find out things for oneself in one’s own way, even freedom to commit blunders. Nature leads us through various errors and mistakes. When Nature created the human being with all his possibilities of errors and mistakes she knew very well what she was about. Freedom for experiment in human life is a great thing. Without the freedom to take risk and commit mistakes there can be no progress. ... Growth of consciousness cannot come without freedom.”*

This, too, is Auroville’s core and roadmap. With hope and prayers,

**Gabi Gillessen and Michel Danino,**  
members Auroville Foundation’s International  
Advisory Council  
Janiasry 30th, 2024

This statement has been endorsed by the following international personalities:

**1. Robert A.F. Thurman**

One of America’s leading voices for the teachings of Buddhism, in 1997 he was named by Time Magazine one of the 25 most influential Americans and called “a larger than life scholar-activist destined to convey the dharma, the precious teaching of Siddhartha, from Asia to America.” Prof Thurman studied in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in India and the United States. He was professor in the Religion Department of Columbia University where he holds the Jey Tsong Khapa chair in Indo-Tibetan Studies. He is also the co-founder of the Tibet House in New York. On 21 June 2023, Prof Thurman, a Padma Shri awardee, met India’s Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, who tweeted that they “exchanged perspectives on how Buddhist values can act as guiding light for finding solutions to global challenges.”

In December 2000, Prof Thurman visited Auroville with his wife and exchanged with a number of Aurovilians.

**2. Doudou Diène**

Doudou Diène is a Senegalese jurist. He was United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance from 2002–2008. He held several posts in UN bodies, and is former Director of the Division of Inter-cultural Projects at UNESCO. He served as a member of Auroville’s International Advisory Council in 2004-2013.

**3. Vishakha N. Desai**

A professor at Columbia University, she is former President emerita of the Asia Society in New York, member of the USA’s National Museum & Library Services Board, and Senior Adviser for Global Policy & Programs, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. Prof Vishakha Desai is currently a senior advisor to the President of

Columbia University; senior research scholar in global studies at the School of International and Public Affairs; trustee of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; and a member of the board of directors of Mahindra and Mahindra. Prof Vishakha Desai is a former member of Auroville’s International Advisory Council.

**4. Sir Mark Tully**

A British Indian-based journalist and commentator born in Calcutta, he worked with the BBC for some 30 years, covering major events of South Asia, and was Bureau Chief of the BBC in New Delhi. A prolific author of books on India, he was made Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1985 and was awarded Padma Shri in 1992 and Padma Bhushan in 2005. Mark Tully is a former member of Auroville’s International Advisory Council.

**5. Federico Mayor Zaragoza**

A scientist, scholar, politician, diplomat, and poet from Spain, he served as the Director-General of the UNESCO from 1987 to 1999 and is Chairman of the Foundation for a Culture of Peace. He served as a member of Auroville’s International Advisory Council and sent this statement on the occasion of Auroville’s 40th anniversary: “Auroville’s ability to survive and evolve over four decades bears witness to the strength of the founding principles and the resolve and perseverance of its citizens. In today’s globalized world fraught with regional conflicts and economic instability, it is especially reassuring to witness such enduring models of solidarity and humanism.”

**6. Julian Lines**

President of Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center, which was founded in 1968 in Woodstock, New York, he has served on the boards of the Foundation for World Education, as chairperson of Auroville International, and on Auroville’s International Advisory Council. He has visited Auroville many times.

**7. David Stein**

The son of Joseph Allen Stein, he grew up in India where his father worked and taught as a prominent architect. He has more than 30 years of professional involvement in urban and regional development, transportation planning and comprehensive planning. He has visited Auroville many times and advised Auroville planners on bioregional water planning. His additional separate statement is reproduced below.

**8. Mira Nakashima**

An architect and furniture designer in charge of George Nakashima Woodworker. She visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville numerous times and raised funds to create the Hall of Peace in Auroville’s Unity Pavilion, home of the Peace Table envisioned by her father. The other Peace Tables are in New York and Moscow. Her additional statement is reproduced below.

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**Statement by David Stein**

I would like to add my personal considerations to the Statement from the two members of the International Advisory Council for Auroville.

I am the author, along with my wife, Prof. Achva Benzinberg Stein of the City College of

New York, of the Green Belt Master Plan for Auroville which was completed in 2013 at the request of the Town Development Council (TDC).

In preparing the GB Master Plan, our chief considerations were the introduction of further environmental and ecological measures to protect the land within the boundaries of the approved planning area, including management of the water storage system for the benefit of both Auroville and the neighboring villages.

As is well known within the region of Auroville, water supply is a major issue for both agricultural and domestic needs, as the only source of potable water is groundwater, now being threatened by overuse and the resulting saline intrusion into the Kaluveli aquifer, the sole source supporting a population of over 10 lakhs.

Protecting the existing tree coverage created by the reforestation in Auroville is critical as is the protection of the water catchment systems, including both the natural and the man-made ponds that were created over the past centuries and in the past 70 years enhanced by the work of Auroville’s residents.

In our opinion, the rigid implementation of a theoretically conceived plan made without any regard to natural conditions would be a serious error and would damage not only all the areas within Auroville but also the entire Kaluveli basin, the home and source of income for more than a million persons.

We would urge the Board to reconsider its recent actions in rigidly imposing a road system that fails to protect the environment and threatens the livelihoods of the entire region.

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**Statement by Mira Nakashima**

I am shocked, no, horrified at what is now happening in Auroville, which I have always admired as an international community devoting their energies to building an idealistic new society, developing cutting-edge sustainable energy technology, preserving and developing natural resources, respecting the rights of all human beings, creating beautiful, sustainable architecture, new art forms and a new human consciousness.

The current administration seems to have disregarded all the hard physical as well as spiritual work which painstakingly transformed a barren desert into an oasis of verdant forests, gardens and organic farms, housing and education for people of all nations, carefully respecting the native communities so they would not disturb their culture and well-being.

To have decades of inspired planning and implementation of this New Society senselessly bulldozed to the ground in the name of “progress” seems at best a demonstration of the materialist megalomania which Aurovilians have gathered from all corners of the world to avoid.

Auroville was founded by Mirra Alfassa as a City of Peace; Mother and her architects envisioned and designed that City and that Peace which is now being wantonly destroyed, and I don’t know how to stop them, but they must be stopped!

My father, George Nakashima, became one of the first disciples of Sri Aurobindo in 1938, as he was building the first reinforced concrete building in India, and thought he would spend the rest of his life there because the way of life was so idyllically peaceful. I can only hope and pray that the spirits of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother may become manifest to those who are destroying Auroville so they stop the destruction of one of the most beautiful cities on the planet Earth.

*Mira Nakashima January 24, 2024*

IN MEMORIAM

**Fali Nariman**

The Residents of Auroville express their profound grief at the passing of eminent jurist Fali Nariman on ..... who, on more than one occasion, helped the development of Auroville by acting in court or by giving valuable legal opinions.

When, 1980, the very existence of Auroville and its residents was threatened by an attempt to claim private ownership and power over Auroville and its residents, eminent individuals such as Shri J.R.D Tata, Shri Govind Swaminathan and Shri Fali Nariman stepped forward to forcefully defend the spirit and reality of Auroville.

Fali Nariman had been requested by J.R.D. Tata to argue before the Supreme Court the case of the people of Auroville, who had followed The Mother’s invitation “to all men of goodwill to join the adventure of Auroville.”

The landmark judgment of the constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court of India settled for good that the teachings Sri Aurobindo and The Mother only represent their philosophy and do not constitute a religion, and that Auroville does not constitute a religious denomination.



Ever since, Aurovilians turned to him whenever they hit a roadblock on their journey and Fali, as we would refer to him, gave us a wake-up call by throwing heavy law books across the table:

“If you act like a Government Body, you are a Government-Body. Exercise the powers given to you under the Auroville Act”. And he explained that the Residents’ Assembly is one of the three authorities constituted by the Auroville Foundation Act, next to the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council.

My final meeting with him was in June 2023.

He had directed me to have Aurovilians write testimonies of their personal journey to India and their life and work for Auroville.

When I presented this document of over a hundred life-stories to Fali, he was happy and explained to me that the people of India listen to the heart.

Our hearts are filled with sorrow and gratitude remembering Fali Nariman.

Our condolences to his family, his colleagues and friends.

*Frederick for the Residents*

# The challenges of being Chairman of the AVI Board

**Christian Feuillette has been Chairman of the Board of Auroville International (AVI) for the past four years, some of which were possibly the most challenging in AVI's, as well as Auroville's, history. Now his tenure has come to an end. How did he respond to those challenges? And what are his suggestions for the way forward, both for Auroville and AVI?**

*Auroville Today: How did you come to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother?*

I was born in France, and lived near Paris for the first two decades of my life. I had a teacher who spoke to me about Ramakrishna. I was 15 at the time and it impressed me a lot and I visited the Ramakrishna Centre near Paris where they also had books of Sri Aurobindo. I purchased *The Life Divine* there, but unfortunately it was not the best translation.

In Paris, the atmosphere is very intellectual. When I mentioned my interest in spirituality and yoga to my friends, they didn't understand: they were completely closed. Later on, my philosophy teacher said that philosophy starts with the Greeks; there had been nothing before. But I had read about Indian philosophy, so I knew this was not true.

At 23 I was liable for military service but there was the possibility to do civil service instead, as a "military cooperant". As I had a Masters degree in French literature, I could choose to be a French teacher in several countries, including Canada. That's how I came to Montréal in 1969.

A short time after arriving there I discovered a small vegetarian restaurant, Optizoizo, established by Robert Lorrain, the sculptor of the statue behind the Media Centre at the Auroville Town Hall. In that restaurant I saw an announcement about meditation at the Sri Aurobindo Centre. I began to go there regularly, taking hatha yoga lessons. It was also where I started to read Sri Aurobindo in-depth. Every Saturday afternoon I would go to a small room in the Centre and read *The Synthesis of Yoga* in Mother's translation. During this time, I experienced a continuous flow of force.

One day after my reading I came across a picture of The Mother. She was wearing a blue sari and she had a beautiful smile. It was as if she was smiling at me. From that moment, I felt a deep connection with her.

At the end of the school year, a small group from the Centre decided to visit Pondicherry. I was asked if I would like to go, but I said I could not afford it. Then one of them said they would pay for my ticket.

So in July, 1970 I met The Mother in a very intense individual *darshan*. I had been told that I could write something which would be shown to her beforehand, so I wrote, "Mother, may you look at me and recognise in me one of your children". She looked me in the eyes and I felt her force coming down. It was like ecstasy, there was such a strong experience of identification and unity with her I was filled with extreme bliss. Then she looked again with a very intense gaze. I felt this was something I would have with me for the rest of my life.

When I returned to Montreal I quit teaching and for next 23 years I stayed and worked at the Sri Aurobindo Centre full-time, giving classes on yoga. During another stay in Pondicherry, I had the idea to get Sri Aurobindo's relics for the Centre. At first, I got nowhere. But then I spoke to Champaklal, who was in charge of the relics, and he informed me I could have relics on one condition: that I would go with him every morning for one month to Sri Aurobindo's room. What a privilege! That's how on the day of my departure, on March 29, 1987, I received the relics for the Sri Aurobindo Centre in Montreal.

As a number of the students attending the Centre wanted to live together, we started buying houses, and soon we had twelve houses in the same block. They were very cheap because they were in poor condition, but we made the repairs ourselves. We had a collective dining room and the main building had a bookshop and a yoga hall.

*Was that the beginning of Auroville International (AVI) Canada?*

We had a friend who was also a student of yoga who said he was willing to manage what was called in those days the 'Auroville Association'. Initially, the Association was in the same building as the Sri Aurobindo Centre, but when the problem with the Sri Aurobindo Society started in the mid 1970s, there was a split and the Association moved to another place. I had been more connected to the Ashram than Auroville, but when I got married I left the Centre to start a new home with Andrée, and we became more involved with the Auroville Association, which later became AVI Canada. (By the way, there is now a good relationship again between the Centre and AVI Canada. The AVI treasurer, Samuel, is also a member of the Centre.)

*You have been active in AVI Canada and, since 2005, quasi-continuously a member of the AVI Board, which coordinates all the AVI Centres and Liaisons. For the past four years you have been Chairman of that Board. How challenging was this experience?*

Very! Firstly, there was Covid, which was not at all easy for Auroville to deal with, so we made a fundraising campaign, with a degree of success. But after that, the new Secretary and the new Governing Board of the Foundation came and started their actions. I pointed out to the Board that while we can write letters to the authorities in power registering our concern, as indeed we did regarding visas, the suspension of maintenances, the cutting of trees etc., we could not keep doing this all the time because then their impact would be lessened. In fact, we never received any reply from our letters to the Secretary. I also said that, with all due respect for the Indian Government and its representatives in Auroville, we should not intervene in a harassing manner with the authorities and keep complaining in a harsh way about what was happening, because this might have unforeseen consequences.

*For whom?*

Primarily for the Aurovilians, because if the authorities feel that Western foreigners want to teach them something, I don't think it would have a good outcome. We had to be very careful as it is a very delicate situation. I was also aware that some people wanted to use us to get their message across, but we are the Board of AVI, and we are responsible to the members of the AVI Centres, not anybody else.

*We heard there were divisions in some of those Centres over what is happening at present.*

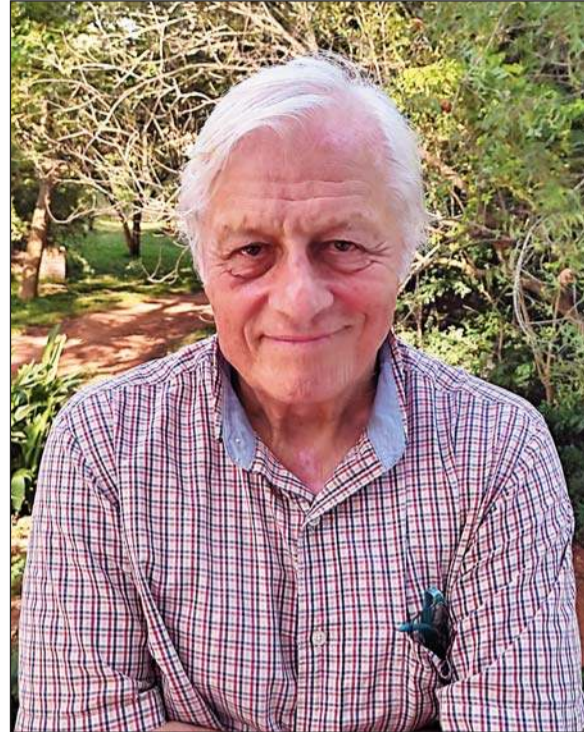
Yes. There were differences in many of the Centres. We also had some good donors who are happy with what the authorities are doing now, because they thought they were getting things to move forward, whereas before they felt everybody was sleeping.

*So how did you conceive of your role as Chairman of the Board? Were you called upon to arbitrate these disputes?*

No, I didn't feel it was our job to arbitrate or advise the Centres about how to respond. Even though each major Center has at least one delegate on the Board, the Board is a different entity from the various AVIs. And the various Centers are autonomous and free to make the decisions they want without interference from us, as long as they retain their primary purpose, which is to act as a link between Auroville and the countries of the outside world, and to help Auroville through its units and services. On the Board there are about fifteen of us, all sincere and good-willing people, but it's normal for opinions to differ. We always managed to create consensus, even though sometimes it took time.

As Chairman, I felt I had to resist those who allowed themselves to be dictated to by emotion, or who were not always aware of the consequences of what we may express, so I always tried to maintain a balanced point of view.

But recently this has become harder because the situation in Auroville is becoming more and more intense, so we feel more pressure from all sides and this is hard to manage. In fact, recently the AVI Board wrote a public statement of protest about tree-cutting on the Crown because we all felt this was a drop too much...



Christian Feuillette

*Your tenure as Chairman finishes in February. What advice would you give to the next Chairperson?*

All I would say to them is try to think of the consequences of your actions because sometimes if you react too quickly, you can do more harm than good. So you need to be patient and also to keep Auroville's long-term future in mind.

*One of the possible advantages of being connected with Auroville through AVI yet living outside is that you may see things that we can't: you may be able to grasp the larger picture.*

Yes, as an outside observer, I have more of a general view. I have friends in both 'camps' and I was getting interpretations of what is happening from all sides, so I thought I must try to grasp the larger picture, the possible scenarios, and communicate this because

everybody here seems to be thinking in silos. No one puts themselves in the place of the other; everyone is locked into their own mental system, so any effort at synthesis is impossible.

*The possible four scenarios you identified for Auroville [see below, eds.] are all pessimistic. Does this reflect a certain lack of hope in you regarding the immediate future of Auroville?*

First of all, these scenarios are realistic; I didn't invent them because I've heard them from all sides. For example, certain decisions taken by the current authorities confirm these hypotheses: the multiple mega-university projects, the fence around the city, the Galaxy's "magic yantra" which will act as a magnet for the supramental, all these have been pronounced and written down in black and white.

But, no, I am not pessimistic. Mother's presence is clearly perceptible, and I believe that, in a certain way, she is allowing what is happening to happen. But right now many Aurovilians are very depressed, many even want to leave, so we have to be aware that the present situation is perilous.

Mother no doubt authorises this stage of readjustment. For decades, Auroville has slumbered in a certain comfort. The new authorities want to recuperate lost time and double their efforts, but in their hurry they are making mistakes and blunders. Everything is being done in a precipitous way, too hastily, too hectically, without thought of the consequences. Even many of those identified with the actions of the Governing Board and Secretariat are exhausted because they are being driven so hard.

This is why I think a different way has to be found because many people are suffering. The authoritarian method may be tolerated in the short term, but ultimately it is incompatible with Auroville's *raison d'être*.

*So what do you feel needs to happen?*

From my point of view the only solution is, as Mother says, for the Aurovilians to come together and work together. I think there are many sincere people on both sides, but there are also extremists who want to continue the battle, who maintain the divisions because they don't want to consider any point of view but their own. So maybe the moderates, the most good-willing people, on both sides can come together.

But this cannot be done at the mental level. It has to come through people coming together, starting, for example, by a silent collective meditation in the heart. I think this can unite. The only way forward is to concentrate on Mother and the psychic centre.

Let's trust that Mother will protect Auroville and redirect it on its predestined path.

*From an interview by Alan*

## Futile rumours or plausible scenarios? Extracts from a personal reflection by Christian Feuillette.

Over the past three years, the government of India, Auroville's host country, which had been a rather discreet and benevolent partner in previous decades, has decided to precipitate the course of events and intervene vigorously in the Town's construction. We don't really know what motivates them, or what their pre-

cise aims are for The City of Dawn. Auroville is undoubtedly seen as a potential "window on modern India", justifying draconian authoritarianism and massive investment to complete it as soon as possible...

The rumour machine has always been very active in Auroville, but in the current climate

of fear and uncertainty, it's easy to see how it can literally run out of control. Most of the rumours we've been able to pick up may just be fantasies without any serious basis. But, as there's no smoke without fire, these rumours could just as well be theories conceived in certain brains, and therefore as likely hypotheses

to consider, as nebulous potential roadmaps. Let's take a look at a few of these scenarios, from a non-exhaustive list, in an attempt to analyse their validity and relevance to the Auroville vision as defined by Mother.

*continued on page 5*

# Spiral Dynamics and Auroville

**At present, many people are trying to make sense of what is happening in Auroville. The writings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother are an obvious aid to understanding, but Spiral Dynamics may also provide a useful lens through which to view the current situation and possible next steps.**

**S**piral Dynamics is a model of the evolutionary development of individuals, organizations, and societies based on the emergent cyclical theory of Clare Graves. Graves, a professor of psychology, was interested in knowing how a wide range of different people would choose to define the values that a mature human being would exhibit. After doing extensive surveys and a 'blind' analysis of the results, certain clear stages of development emerged. His model describes an evolving double spiral, similar to how we usually represent the DNA helix, with one of the spirals representing individual development and the other the collective development, where both spirals actively coexist and interact.

Graves died while writing a book about this but two of his students, Don Beck and Christopher Cowan, built on his work and gave it the name Spiral Dynamics, assigning to each stage of development, both of the individual and the society, a particular colour (see chart). Later, Ken Wilber collaborated with Beck to take it in a more spiritual direction, incorporating some of the insights of Sri Aurobindo.

Aurovilian David Nightingale has been studying Spiral Dynamics for many years.

**How do you see the usefulness of Spiral Dynamics for understanding our present situation, both in Auroville and the world?**

Over the course of the last twenty years I have been using it to help me gain a deeper understanding of the world around me, but I have also been moving beyond both Spiral Dynamics and Wilber's Integral Theory through my attempt to integrate these systems with the Integral Yoga. Spiral Dynamics is just a map, it's not the territory. We have to live it, and that is where it meets the Integral Yoga.

Spiral Dynamics is obviously not replacing the Integral Yoga but simply adding some nuances which, at least in my reading of it, weren't there before. I think it is important to take into account the evolutionary trajectory that has happened since *The Human Cycle* was written, especially taking into consideration the fact that evolution is also accelerating, and Spiral Dynamics helps to fill in some of those pieces.

For example, in *The Human Cycle* it is written that you have the symbolic age, followed by the typical, conventional, individualistic, subjective and spiritual ages (or infrarational, rational and suprarational ages). The definitions themselves are still perfectly valid one hundred years later, but since Sri Aurobindo gives us the impression that they appear to follow on directly one after the next, there's nothing really to help us understand the complexity of what we are living today, to the degree that the remnants of the last three of these previous stages are interacting with and fighting each other across all the cultures of the globe. In this way Spiral Dynamics helps provide another lens for understanding what is happening today, both in Auroville and in the world.

**How did you become interested in Spiral Dynamics?**

When I came across Wilber at the turn of the century it was an 'ah ha' moment. I had just run away screaming from Vérité because I had gone there wanting to experience intentional community but then I couldn't relate to the endless sharings. I wanted to understand why I was running away and Ken Wilber's version of Spiral Dynamics made perfect sense, for I saw that the Green value-meme (promoting egalitarianism and consensus) along with all its drawbacks, including endless discussions and difficulty in making decisions, was unfortunately encapsulated in my experience of Vérité.

In those early days, Spiral Dynamics also provided me with a much needed stepping-stone towards understanding Sri Aurobindo, whom initially I had difficulty reading before. For example, I found a wonderful overlap between the stages of the spiral and the stages described in Sri Aurobindo's *The Human Cycle*. How I interpret it, and this is a work in progress, is basically that what Sri Aurobindo terms the symbolic age would be the Purple value-meme in Spiral Dynamics (tribal, living in a sacred world), the typical age is Red (gratifying impulses, fighting to assert self), the conventional age or age of religions is Blue (imposing order through laws, religious conformism), the individualistic age is Orange (striving for autonomy, rational), the subjective age begins in Green (exploring the inner being, egalitarian), and the spiritual age would begin, after intermediate Yellow (integrative, open to diversity) which is the first stage of the Second Tier, in the second stage of the Second Tier with Turquoise (blending and harmonizing a strong collective of individuals), finally progressing, through four higher levels, to that of Supermind in the Third Tier.

In social terms, each one of the First Tier stages has had its moment of flourishing and then it has tended to tail off, although the remnants of most of those stages are still very much with us today. There is also a compression happening over time. The predominant Orange value-system that we are living

with in the world today only emerged after the Renaissance, while Green started to kick in around 1850 and peaked in 1968. Second Tier started appearing after the Second World War through the unfolding of Yellow, whilst the possibility of Turquoise was already coming online around the 1980s or 1990s. So it would appear that each of these jumps is happening in a shorter and shorter time-frame.

**This seems to imply there is continual progress. But can't there also be regression? Can't we slip back down the spiral?**

Absolutely. For example, each colour/stage has a tendency to lean back on the previous colour if things get difficult and can even drop down the spiral long-term if everything fails. So if things get difficult in Green it will lean back on Orange and look for some technological solution, and Orange will lean back on Blue and say we need more laws and a stronger adhesion to traditional values. Blue will lean back on Red and seek an authoritarian leader who will come to save them, which is why many Fundamentalist Christians in the United States ended up voting for Trump.

I think we are coming to a point globally where it is really make or break, and it could go either way. As a species either we will make it through or there will be a collapse, at which point I've no idea how far down the spiral we may slip. But if we make the jump collectively, because it has to be collective, then the jump will happen across the board and it could be a mass shift across all the stages.

**How do you view the present situation in Auroville?**

I think the communitarian values of the Green stage have basically been our collective 'centre of gravity' for the past 50 years, but many of the other levels are also actively present. In fact, if we include the local villages, I don't think there is anywhere on this planet that has so many levels of the spiral in operation at the same time. This gives us an incredible playing field to work with to create the true human unity that Mother envisioned.

**Yet it could be argued that we are reverting at the moment, that the feeling that some people have that we are stuck in Green and progress is arrested is creating a reaction which is strengthening Blue.**

Absolutely. The values of Green, which in many ways have



David Nightingale

entrenched themselves in unhealthy ways over the years, have created a lot of frustration in many Aurovilians centred at other levels of the spiral. They might well be welcoming the government intervention because the next stage has not emerged yet to help counter this frustration. However, there's a nice analogy which Beck uses, which is when you have to make a jump, you first have to drop down and flex your knees. So maybe that is what is happening now.

**Do you agree that we are stuck in Green? And that this is hindering our evolution?**

Yes. All of these stages can turn 'unhealthy' when they are no longer at their peak, and then we see their negative aspects. One of the challenges for Green is that it says we are all equal and everybody is the same, but then it tends to be dismissive of everybody who doesn't think like them. So Green, because it is generally anti-meritocratic and anti-authority, often tends to look down on Orange and Blue – and, unfortunately, often by default on Yellow, too!

In Auroville, Green as a collective energy has degenerated into being in a comfort zone. After 20 years of observing it, I am still shocked that we are collectively so addicted to this feeling of collective togetherness without craving something more. There are many positive things about it, but I'm very disappointed that we haven't made that leap to the Second Tier (Yellow and Turquoise) as a collective without needing to receive a kick up the butt, which unfortunately is what we are getting now.

Of course, that leap is not easy. For Graves, the leap into second-tier is bigger than all the other shifts put together because it involves a significant dropping of fear and of stepping back from the ego. In fact, he personally felt that the leap is so extreme that Yellow and Turquoise will only emerge in a life-and-death situation within a society.

For many years I was thinking that in Auroville the goal would be to just get to Yellow, because Yellow understands the qualities of every stage that has gone before, and sees the need to integrate them. But one of the patterns in the spiral as we move through the stages is this I-We-I-We oscillation between the individual and the collective. For example, the focus in Blue is collective, in Orange it is on the individual, while Green is the last collective stage of the first-tier. But Yellow, as the first stage of the Second Tier, is individual again. So if we are here for a collective evolution, we need to set our sights on the next stage, Turquoise, rather than Yellow, because Turquoise is profoundly intuitive and this would put us on the threshold of entering another stage of the collective yoga.

My latest intuition is that Auroville has in fact been a hotbed for developing Yellow – but more from an individual perspective. I think there are a significant number of Aurovilians at a Yellow centre-of-gravity, and these people have come together, at different moments and at different times, to try and test out new models like, in my own case, Dreamcatching, Dreamweaving, Citizens Assemblies etc. They are like Yellow flowers which have popped up in the Green field of Auroville, exploring new ways of working and decision-making.

But what comes next? I can feel the potential for these Yellow seeds to start to bring out Turquoise. This is why, when last July Omar, Mona and myself made a presentation about the next steps after the Dreamweaving experiment, we came up with a diagram in which we depicted an empty central circle surrounded by different initiatives that we believe embody the Yellow value-meme as it relates to planning. We wanted to leave the space in the middle free for some magic to occur, for Turquoise to emerge from these Yellow initiatives. This is what we are trying to encourage people to do now: to take the individual Yellow petals and translate these into a collective Turquoise with regard to how we relate to each other, formulate new ideas and make decisions.

As far as I am aware, nobody has been able to make this shift before, anywhere, but we have an incredible opportunity to do it in Auroville because we've got 50 years behind us of building the framework and the culture, which allows for the possible emergence of something new.

However, now the government has stepped in, and the danger is that if the Governing Board continues to be too heavy-handed, even though that elusive Second Tier emergence might be primed to happen, it won't be able to, and then Auroville may simply become a government-run project, albeit one with a spiritual focus, that is centred in the traditional, yet bureaucratic, Blue centre of gravity.

However, if there are enough Aurovilians who choose to leap into the unknown and embrace the possibility of a wider collective transformation, the lack of which having been the Governing Board's original claim for its intervention, then perhaps all is not lost? The next year or two will determine whether we finally progress as a collective or fall back.

*From an interview with Alan*

	LIFE CONDITIONS		BRAIN/MIND COPING CAPACITIES	
A	State of nature and biological urges and drives: physical senses dictate the state of being.	BEIGE	N	Instinctive: as natural instincts and reflexes direct; automatic existence.
B	Threatening and full of mysterious powers and spirit beings that must be placated and appeased.	PURPLE	O	Animistic: according to tradition and ritual ways of group: tribal; animistic.
C	Like a jungle where the tough and strong prevail, the weak serve; nature is an adversary to be conquered.	RED	P	Egocentric: asserting self for dominance, conquest and power. Exploitive; egocentric.
D	Controlled by a Higher Power that punishes evil and eventually rewards good works and righteous living.	BLUE	Q	Absolutistic: obediently as higher authority and rules direct; conforming; guilt.
E	Full of resources to develop and opportunities to make things better and bring prosperity.	ORANGE	R	Multiplistic: pragmatically to achieve results and get ahead; test options; maneuver
F	The habitat wherein humanity can find love and purposes through affiliation and sharing.	GREEN	S	Relativistic; respond to human needs; affiliative; situational; consensual; fluid.
G	A chaotic organism where change is the norm and uncertainty an acceptable state of being.	YELLOW	T	Systemic: functional; integrative; interdependent; existential; flexible; questioning; accepting.
H	A delicately balanced system of interlocking forces in jeopardy at humanity's hands; chaotic.	TURQUOISE	U	Holistic: experiential; transpersonal; collective consciousness; collaborative; interconnected.
I	Too soon to say, but should tend to be I-oriented; controlling, consolidating if the pattern holds.	CORAL	V	Next neurological capacities. The theory is open-ended up to the limits of Homo sapiens' brain.
<b>The theory is open-ended, with the possibility of more systems ahead...</b>				

## Futile rumours or plausible scenarios? Extracts from a personal reflection by Christian Feuillet.

*continued from page 1*

**1. Temporary trusteeship.** Some on the Foundation's side argue that the Governing Board would have been given a five-year mandate (more or less) to complete the road infrastructure, according to the Galaxy plan, as well as an unspecified number of buildings, and that at the end of this term the keys of power would be handed over to the residents. Balance would then be restored between Auroville's three governing bodies as defined in the 1988 Auroville Foundation Act: the Governing Board, the Residents' Assembly and the International Advisory Council... This temporary trusteeship would enable Auroville, sleepy and lost in its green shrine, to be put back on track for irreversible urban development. If this were really the case, we'd have to bear this self-proclaimed salutary and restorative intervention for a few more years. We should then hope that Aurovilians will re-appropriate a genuine spirit of fraternity, start working together for the development of the Town... Under this scenario, the damage could be circumscribed, and Auroville's derailment avoided.

**2. AuroUniversity, AuroSmartCity, AuroDisneyland?** The previous rumour, however, could be the result of a concerted plan to get the message across to any recalcitrant members of the community, and to put any resistance to sleep. And the governmental authority, through the members of the Secretariat and the Governing Board chosen by it, would remain in a position of absolute power indefinitely. The temporary would then become the permanent, and the government, eager to recover its stake, would become the administrator of either a

profitably managed mega-university campus, or another SmartCity ruled by artificial intelligence and algorithms, or - the worst solution - that of a lucrative tourist complex, a kind of spiritual mega-Disneyland, of which Aurovilians would perhaps become mere figurants. The gigantic fence surrounding the city, which has just been enigmatically decided by the Governing Board, would serve to protect and secure the area from any unwanted intrusion... These scenarios or hypotheses, which many fear and anticipate for Auroville, clearly do not correspond to the Dream of Her founder, and would mean a deviation, a misdirection from its vocation, which Mother so clearly defined in 1972: "a center of transformation, a small nucleus of men who transform themselves and set an example to the world."

**3. The Great Replacement.** According to this scenario, Auroville would be emptied of all its current residents, sooner rather than later, and replaced by younger, more plastic and less reluctant residents. The status of Aurovillian, as defined by Mother, would be effectively abolished. Residents would be made up mainly of volunteers for ephemeral, interchangeable use, deprived of any decision-making power, as well as visitors constituting a significant source of income. Construction would proceed unhindered, under government supervision. The international character of the project could be maintained, and the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother made compulsory for all. This could keep up appearances for distant or superficial observers, making them believe that Auroville still really exists. What this short-sighted vision fails to grasp is that Auroville would then be nothing more than an empty shell, devoid of any

interest, and deprived of the power of attraction that has made it so appealing up to now. Aurovilians are not ashram sadhaks, nor spiritual soldiers capable of reciting *Savitri* in one breath. They are representatives - specimens - of real humanity, with all its imperfections and shortcomings... Many Aurovilians arrived without ever having read a line on yoga, but willingly adhering to the statements of the Auroville Charter, and joyfully advancing along the path of the Great Adventure, invoked by Mother, they gradually imbibed the atmosphere of Auroville and Mother's consciousness, and became for many "Warriors of Light". Of course, the new residents could also eventually absorb and embody the spirit of Auroville, but in the best of cases, this roadmap of the Great Replacement would set us back several decades. Without necessarily implying total failure, this scenario would be harmful, both for Auroville and for the world.

**4. Tabula rasa:** "Clean slate" or "clean house", this is the most dizzying (or delirious) of perspectives, no longer the Dream, but pure nightmare. All residents are evicted, the forest is razed to the ground, and all buildings are demolished within the perimeter of the town, with the exception, presumably, of the Matrimandir. Sheltered by the famous and mysterious fence, all infrastructure and buildings could then be built, freely and without constraint, in an accelerated manner, according to the Master plan in hand. In many countries around the world, and even in India (Lavasa) and Malaysia (Forest City), there are brand-new cities, some of them sumptuous, but completely uninhabited, ghost towns, veritable urban deserts. And yet, according to some inspired thinkers, more or

less versed in occultism, all it would take is to build the city according to an immutable sacred geometry, a "magic yantra", for the supramental to naturally invest these brand-new, immaculate buildings. As human beings are not worthy of the Dream, the long and chaotic phase of transformation would be dispensed with. The very structure of the radiant galaxy, playing the role of a gigantic, well-protected heliport, would be destined to receive the descent of the new species of supermen from the subtle planes. This unlikely hypothesis is not quite what Mother had in mind when she created Auroville. Worse still, our sorcerers' apprentices may well be in for the surprise of their lives and end up with an unforeseen result... In any case, the scenario of an implementation built with brute force alone, even if spiritually tinged, devoid of the aspiration of the human heart and soul, could only result in a flagrant disaster for Auroville.

To avoid the foreseeable downfall of Auroville, to which all these more or less catastrophic roadmaps are leading us, there is only one solution - and one that more and more supporters of both sides of the debate are embracing, for there can be no winners in a fratricidal fight: at last, come together and work together, with faith and determination, avoiding as far as possible ill-considered, hasty and clumsy decisions. This is the only way to correct the potential deviations, or betrayals, indicated by the scenarios described above, and put Auroville back on the path to its destiny.

*(First published on Auronet and the ForAll forum)*

## FARMING

# The Auroville farms are stagnating

"Enhance Auroville food production to meet the needs of Auroville."

**Viewpoint of the Governing Board as recorded in the minutes of its 57th meeting.**

In late 2021, a four-member study group (Allan, Avinash, Fred and Nidhin) began analyzing Auroville's food sector. In the process they also looked into the efficiency of the three farm subgroups - the vegetable, dairy and grains subgroups - that had been setup by the farmers [see *AVToday* # 399 of October 2022, eds.] In April 2022 they presented their initial findings to the Funds and Assets Management Committee of the Residents' Assembly: the farm sector in Auroville was largely unplanned, seasonal and uncoordinated; apart from providing personal maintenances to the farmers, the community did not support the farms; no funds were made available for necessary infrastructure developments; and there were no formal commitments from the community distribution centres and eateries to utilise Auroville farm products. The team proposed doing a pilot project to demonstrate a planned production and consumption model for vegetables, so as to move away from non-planned and competitive production, starting with a few farm products and involving the Solar Kitchen, and to further survey the farms. The FAMC approved the proposal. The team became a sub-group of the FAMC and started work under the name of Aruvadai (meaning 'harvest' in Tamil). Auroville Today asked its three present members, Avinash, Nidhin and Madhuri, about their work and the state of Auroville farms today.

### The Solar Kitchen experiment

"Our Solar Kitchen pilot project aimed at harmonising the demand and the supply of vegetables," says Nidhin. "We invited the farmers to plan and supply the quantities required. We thought we could get the farmers to focus on the core needs of the community, and for the rest let them produce whatever they wanted. But this didn't work out as hoped. For some weeks the pilot was successful, but only because some farms over-produced, making up for those who under-produced. Quite a few farmers were not able to deliver, and many reasons were given: weather patterns, unavailability of seeds, or wildlife intrusion.

"We observed that most farmers do not collaborate with each other. Many farmers expressed a lot of goodwill and were willing to produce whatever was needed for Auroville, but there were no serious commitments due to the lack of accountability. There was no consideration about what would happen if their produce was insufficient. The farmers were not motivated to jointly plan for the needs of Auroville and to see jointly what can be done if a farm would be unable to meet the expectations. We tried to bring the



The Aruvadai team. From left: Avinash, Nidhin and Madhuri

farms together and do planning and review sessions, but there wasn't enough interest in working together. Due to the uncertainty caused by the administrative changes and the poor level of commitment from the participating farms, the pilot project was formally discontinued."

### The farm survey

"The survey work has been difficult," says Avinash. "When we started our farm survey we were met with distrust. We wanted to understand the situation of each farm, study each farmer's practices and listen to the challenges and the needs. But not all farmers co-operated. Some did willingly, some grudgingly, but some refused."

The survey intended to assess the farms in a holistic manner - how much land does the farm have and its usage, their vision and practices, number of workers and their working culture what are they producing in what quantities - e.g. grains, vegetables, fruits, eggs, milk and milk products such as cheese, and farm manufactured produce such as jams and butters. On the financial side, there were questions about income and expenditure, debt status, and the question if the farm was in positive, break-even, or in minus.

"We also tried to get information that indicates ecological sustainability under multiple variables such as soil fertility - organic and regenerative practices, water management, how dairy/poultry farmers manage their herds/flocks and integrate within the whole ecosystem, but we learnt that we cannot gauge a farm's sustainability with current levels of data," says Madhuri. "For example, most farms do not have water meters and have never conducted soil tests to understand how to improve or manage. Another observation made was that green manuring, building biomass for a regenerative system along with producing farmyard manure is relatively easy for large farms, such as Annapurna and AuroOrchard, which can dedicate some of their land for these needs. But if your farm is small, it is difficult to generate biomass as you have to grow a crop in that limited land area."

### Monitoring the farms

"We also monitored the vegetable production in farms," says Nidhin. "We tracked the farming process from planting to distribution. We then noticed that most farmers are not good at following through on the plan. If you commit to producing a certain quantity at a certain date, you need

to plan how many seeds you need to sow at what date to get the required quantity in time. But this did not happen. The vegetable farmers have been struggling with a high rate of crop failure. Most of them plough their land and resort to very basic natural fertilisation methods such as integrating cow manure into soil before planting. But that appears to be not enough. There is a lot of ecological pressure, such as pests and diseases, and if you don't have effective fertilisation and pest-repellent practices, your crops will have a poor yield. Also, wildlife invasion is on the increase, and crops can only be protected if there is proper fencing. Due to the absence of permanent fences, we observed that a few farms are using electric fences the maintenance of which adds to their farming expenses. Then there is the problem that some farms are located in low-lying areas that get periodically water-logged; here a landscape change will be required if they are expected to produce there."

### The subgroups

The team also looked into the functioning of the grains and dairy subgroups. They found that the grains group works well in terms of planning, crop loans, learning and maintaining grain-growing standards.

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The Auroville farms are stagnating

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The paddy granary is full, though it could increase and diversify with more storage and milling investments. But there is a substantial crop loss due to wild life invasion. The dairy subgroup also functioned well, even though one of the standards of the group, to provide milk figures for dairy production, was adhered to by only a few dairies.

Foodlink

The team observed that the vegetable and fruit farmers bring all their produce to FoodLink [the central distribution centre for farm products, eds.] in the expectation that FoodLink will deal with it, as they do not have a marketing capacity, unlike the larger farms Annapurna, AuroOrchard and Brihaspathi which maintain contacts not only with FoodLink but also with the community and its eateries.

“The classic problem with bringing all your produce to FoodLink is that FoodLink has a very limited and often clogged market for vegetables and fruits. Due to uncoordinated production, occasionally the same product is delivered by different farms on the same day, and distribution becomes quite challenging especially without reducing prices,” says Nidhin.

The dynamics are different for dairy and grain production. With dairy, the primary issue is the stark drop in demand during the summer months when the schools are closed and many Auroville residents are out of station. The former FoodLink team turned excess milk into paneer, cream and curd, but also would ask the dairy farmers to manage their milk on their own during the off-season and during school or public holidays.

The Auroville Foundation intervention

Soon after it took office, the current Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation constituted its own Funds and Assets Management Committee (GB-FAMC) and dismissed the previous one constituted by the Residents’ Assembly. The GB-FAMC in turn started a new Farm Service with four executives, Anshul, Anita, Gino and JyotiPrasad. This Farm Service then announced that, together with the GB-FAMC, it would restructure FoodLink; and that the Farm Group, a working group created by the farmers, stood dissolved. All farming matters

had now to be addressed to the new Farm Service, which also took over the finance and overall operations of the Farm Group, making the subgroups, such as the dairy subgroup, largely irrelevant. The GB-FAMC then fired two FoodLink executives and put in different people. A few months later, the GB-FAMC announced that all farms had to become self-supporting and that all farmers’ maintenances were now cut. Earlier, the Solar Kitchen was instructed to be frugal in its procurement from Auroville farms. And later, it became known that the Secretary had appointed an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to look into all farm matters.

“All these developments, coupled with the ongoing general polarization in Auroville, have added to the already existing mistrust and lack of cooperation,” says Avinash. “The farmers took the dissolution of the Farm Group and its replacement by the Farm Service rather badly. The cutting of the maintenances has increased their resentment and has led to fears and isolation. Every farm is now on its own and is expected to fully take care of itself. But this is unrealistic. The cutting of the maintenances created a pressure to become financially independent. It might work for large farms but it doesn’t work for small farms. They need support. Growing vegetables is not something you can survive on. Now there is a fear that the Auroville Foundation may decide to close down farms that are low producing or in the red figures, without consideration for the years of hard work of the farmers and the personal savings they’ve put into the farm.”

“Following these changes, a new kind of planning was undertaken by the vegetables subgroup but it didn’t translate into a meaningful increase in production,” says Nidhin. “The Farm Service wanted to improve the total production of each farm and find ways to deal with the excess produce. They had been looking at the prices in the Pondicherry market, but concluded that the Auroville prices were too high especially when it had to be distributed through intermediaries who add their own margins. It also proved to be impossible to market all Auroville produce as organic, as Auroville has only ten certified organic farms. Hence, Auroville vegetables are not competitive.

“Also the re-organisation of FoodLink has not been successful. Only the executives were changed; however no real support was given to them to handle supply surpluses and no coherent distribution policy was developed. The new

FoodLink team started with a policy of no-returns and wanted to create more distribution channels. During the first couple of months they took all the milk from the dairies regardless of low demand and looked into reaching out to cheese making units within Auroville. The new FoodLink team is making efforts to diversify its milk processing and cater to a wider customer base.”

Acreages of assessed farms	
Annapurna Farm	135.00
Aurogreen Farm	27.00
AuroOrchard	25.00
Ayarpadi Farm	17.00
Siddharta Farm	13.10
Kottakarai Farm	10.00
Boomadevi Farm	9.00
Brihaspathi Farm	7.50
Manvasam Farm	7.00
Alipsa Farm	6.50
Terrasoul Farm	5.50
Paszhamudir Chola Farm	5.00
Discipline Farm	4.25
Integral Harmony Farm	4.00
Demo Farm	2.50
Moonlight Farm	1.75

The resentment has increased the lack of cooperation. The Farm Service does the financial administration of all the farms but it appears that its current two executives do not interact with the farmers. The Farm Service also doesn’t publish the farms’ financial figures, and has not supplied them to Aruvadai for the survey. “As we did not get the details of this financial year, our data collection is very incomplete; we have no choice but to base ourselves on the financial figures of the last financial year,” says Nidhin.

Thinking of the future

Aruvadai is still discussing how best to publish the results of its work. “Given the complexity of the issue and the uniqueness of each farm, we are hesitant to enter into judgments or rate the farms,” says Avinash. “But we do have some strong observations which we will share.”

One of them is that Auroville needs to develop a wide-ranging and long-term work plan for farming and food security in Auroville. This can only be done in collaboration with all involved:

interested farmers, the Farm Service, the OSD, specific clients from the community, our team and perhaps some external experts. This plan should also address issues of farms’ sustainability and developing a good internal distribution system. The participation of farmers is essential, not only those who manage large farms, but also those who run small ones and now struggle to make ends meet.

Another consideration is that the Governing Board should approve a very large budget for long-term infrastructure development, not only for existing farms but also for the new ones, such as Kamadenu farm, a 15 acre farm located opposite the Irumbai temple, and a new 6 acre farm in Rayapudupakkam. This budget should include fencing of farms, landscaping of low-lying farm lands, building of storage facilities and farm produce processing equipment as well as allocating new maintenances for aspiring farmers in Auroville.

“This idea is not new,” says Avinash. “Many years ago, in 2011, a Five Year Sustainable Agriculture Plan was published which stated that sustainable organic agriculture could be massively increased in Auroville, but only if heavy investments in existing and new farms were made – the plan estimated Rs. 10 crores [in today’s values, 21 crore, eds.] over 5-years. [see AVToday September 2011, # 266]. But this was never done and to this day the demand for a large capital influx in farm infrastructure has remained unanswered. We recommend that the Foundation provides capital support based on specific needs and contingent on meeting criteria like participation in planning, transparency, accountability and periodic review of production targets by the farms concerned. This could be facilitated through training programmes for farms such as budget preparation, accounts management, best cultivation practices and ‘know hows’ of farming.

“Lastly, the Governing Board must realize that exchanging productive and established farmland for city lands, as was recently done by cutting off a large part of AuroOrchard and of Buddha Garden and Siddhartha farm for a VIP road bypassing Edaiyanhavadi, directly affects Auroville’s agricultural sustainability and is contrary to the Board’s views that Auroville needs to enhance its food production.”

Aruvadai’s report is expected by the end of March 2024.

In conversation with Carel

A new dreamweaving initiative

In August last year, Omar, Mona and David made a presentation to the community about the next steps they envisaged after the Dreamweaving on the Crown experiment (see AV Today no. 410, September 2023). Termed ‘A proposal for social transformation’, this included further dreamcatching and dreamweaving, self-education possibilities for individuals who want to learn more about planning, and the creation of a representative community feedback body on planning. They also announced that they were handing over the baton to a new core team who would be responsible for coordinating the next steps.

On 18th February, the new core team, all of whom are young architects who had participated in the previous dreamweaving experiment, introduced themselves to the community. They also invited those participating in the various initiatives which had come up since last August to provide updates.

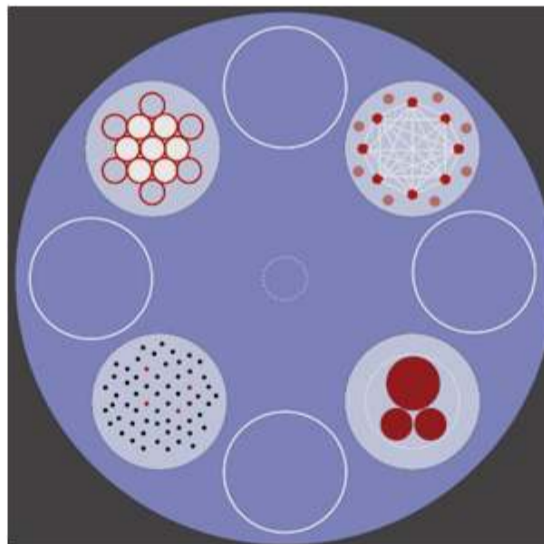
The Dreamcatchers, who meet weekly in a non-confrontational space to ‘catch’ new planning visions, shared two of their ‘pearls’. One was how to design a zero-waste city where noting could be considered as waste. The other was the perception that if the Aurovilians themselves are the ultimate product of Auroville, the built environment of Auroville is a byproduct of our collective processes. This means that the cohesiveness of our urban forms and spaces will naturally evolve as we do.

A number of people have been participating in the self-education pro-

gramme to learn more about planning issues, like values of urban form, density levels and connectivity. The approach is both individual and collective “where,” as one of them put it, “we share with each other what we have discovered: it’s a kind of Dreamweaving in learning about a topic”.

The third programme for a client body which could represent the community when it came to larger planning decisions has not evolved yet. The core group explained this will be an emerging aspect that would come as a result of the other programmes.

The main presentation of the evening concerned the launch of a new dreamweaving process. The goal is to create a temporary construction on a one-to-one scale in the area of the new Solar Kitchen parking. Here different activities could take place to help people envisage the urban fabric of the future. “Once we have a structure like this, there will be a ripple effect because it will create a space around it for envisioning and bringing more ideas to the Crown”, explained one of the core team. “We want to create a temporary form that will inform the permanent, as we think it’s important to bring into a physical space the different ideas we have regarding the city. The emphasis is on building because we feel that to create a collective energy of creation it’s very important to have a physical



In this diagram from last July’s Dreamweaving presentation Omar, Mona and David were proposing a range of processes that can lead to decision-making – including spaces for new proposals – but where the centre has been left open for a new ‘higher’ process to emerge that might unify them.

manifestation.” The project will involve three stages – designing, building and activating. The designing process will include presentations, and participation from randomly selected residents dreamcatchers and future activity holders, as well as designers. There will also be community pop-up boards on site where the larger community can give their inputs. After a few weeks, the architects/planners will come up with the first designs. These will be presented at co-creation café’s where all the participants will sit

together and exchange ideas about the design. The designers will take these back, integrate them, and after a few weeks bring back new designs. This will happen for up to three times. Then there will be a presentation to the larger community which will provide, it is hoped, support for the building phase to begin.

“We hope to initiate the process in the birthday week. The co-creating café’s will happen every three to four weeks, we hope to start building in June and be finishing around the end of August or in September,” explained one of the core team. She also explained that there are many possible ways in which people can participate in the project, including organising and facilitating discussions, accounting and fundraising, as well as assisting in the construction, “for we hope that the construction can be done mainly without paid labour, making it a community effort”.

The activation stage is when people will begin activities in the temporary constructions.

In the following open question and answer session, someone raised the concern which was on everybody’s minds. “How can you be sure that the Foundation office will allow this to happen? Will you work with the Foundation TDC?”

“We recognise the present situation,” replied one of the core team, “that’s why we have taken into account the radials and the Line of Force. We have been reaching out to their TDC because we don’t want to start something and then have it bulldozed over. Our intention is to maintain a central space, beyond polarities, so that together we can create something.”

“How will you avoid the roadblocks that the previous dreamweaving process encountered?” was another question.

A member of the core team clarified that this project is different from the previous one. Last time the brief was to develop a set of ideas which could be given to an external body to develop the Detailed Development Plan. This time the intention is to build community energy for the construction of the city, and this will require much wider participation. “Therefore, this time the roadblock we have to overcome,” she continued, “is to get enough support from the community to get this project off the ground.”

Given the enthusiastic support of those who attended this meeting, and the number of people who signed up to assist the project in some way, a promising beginning has been made.

In conclusion, one of the attendees recalled what it had been like to build the Matrimandir together. “There is a feeling that if we could start working on something together again, like this, it would create a beautiful energy that would unite us all. Thank you.”

# The Silence Forest assessment

**Silence Forest, an 11.2-acre green enclave neighbouring the Vérité community, is little known, even to many Aurovilians. In 2023, five research students from the University of Pondicherry, who were volunteering for the Auroville unit Yuvabe and were mentored by two professors, studied the flora and fauna of the forest and its ability to sequester carbon, conserve water, and increase resilience to adverse climate events.**

**S**ilence Forest is one of the forested areas of Auroville that houses many species of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF), the original flora of the coastal part of Tamil Nadu, of which now only a few patches remain. Like many of Auroville's forests, intermittent TDEF forestation started in the 1970s, along with indigenous tree planting and extraction of fallen trees for timber. But about a decade ago Silence was converted into an experiment in natural regenerative forestry.

## Stewarding Silence Forest

Dave, who holds a M.Sc. in ecological forestry from the University of Wageningen in The Netherlands, has been working in Silence since 2015 and became its steward in 2017. Together with Elumalai, who has been involved with forestry activities for over three decades, he ensures the forest's continued vitality. "Taking care of Silence Forest hasn't been a profit-making venture," he says. "I have invested lakhs to bring the forest to what it is today, a thriving and valuable ecosystem."

Dave also gives talks about his work, such as to students of Yuvabe, an Auroville unit that does impact assessments for various units and services of Auroville. Agreement was reached that Yuvabe would support volunteer students from Pondicherry University to do a research project in order to obtain an independent professional assessment of Silence Forest, and understand its environmental impact. The study took several months; when Dave was not there, he provided inputs remotely.

The assessment agrees with Dave's appraisal. The team focused on a 2.5-acre area of Silence Forest, where it recorded 62 tree species, 23 species of birds, 18 species of butterfly, 14 fungi species, 7 mammal species, and 5 different types of frogs. "They didn't count the number of mosquitoes," says Dave drily. "During the monsoon this forest is knee-deep in water; a few months later, the ground is still soggy in places. It's an ideal mosquito breeding ground." Visitors are warned. 'Beware of mosquitos,' reads the noticeboard at the entrance gate.

Dave takes me on a tour through the forest. It's beautiful, with many small shrubs interspersed with tall and very tall trees. "During 24 hours in spring, the forest floor is white," says Dave. "That's the time that the Mutti (*Coffea wightiana*) blossoms. This is a beautiful shrub with a jasmine-like fragrance. We showed a sample to a representative of Kew Gardens in England who verified it. It is a species of coffee which they had not seen in the wild. We harvested the seeds and Marc roasted them. They produce an excellent coffee, similar to so called "Arab coffee", with a distinctive taste of cardamom."

The tall trees are identified as African Mahogany (*Khaya senegalensis*) and Vengai (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) – both home to many mammal species – as well as the Kassod tree (*Senna siamea*). The abundant presence of the Kassod tree makes the soil nitrogen-rich, which improves overall soil health and increases the growth rate of the forest. The forest has also an abundance of Tamarind trees (*Tamarindus indica*), one of the homing trees of flying foxes, also known as fruit bats.

Dave points at a tree canopy where a large number of bats are roosting. "They are unique to this forest, you won't find them anywhere else within the Auroville city area," he says. "I estimate that there may have been up to 800 fruit Auroville bats roosting here.

Individuals travel upwards of 93 miles (150 km) in search of food. There is a large colony at Kaluperumbakkum, a village near Mattur. That village considers this animal as very auspicious and protects them; even the use of firecrackers during festivals is not allowed." Asked why they have chosen Silence Forest as their roosting colony, Dave says he doesn't know. "Elumalai tells me it's because the energy in Silence is very special. I can tell you that these bats may have planted more trees than all the foresters of Auroville together. The seeds from ingested fruits are dispersed through their waste." He mentions that in March this year a student from the Department of Ecology of the University of Pondicherry will come to Silence Forest to research the ecological and social significance of the Indian fruit bat for his M.Sc. thesis.

Like in many places in India, the bats in Silence Forest are threatened by habitat destruction caused by urbanisation or the building of roads. "Silence, unfortunately, is situated at the edge of the city area and the outer ring road is envisaged to cut straight through its middle," says Dave. "Bulldozers have already started clearing some undergrowth, and as a result, one part of the fruit bats' colony has disappeared."

## Carbon sequestration and groundwater recharge

Emphasizing that effective strategies for ensuring the long-term sustainability of a forest can only be developed by understanding and monitoring carbon storage, the researchers also studied the levels of carbon sequestration – the process of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it in carbon sinks such as forests, which store carbon in their biomass, and forest soils, which store carbon as organic matter.

Based on data collected from five plots of 20x20 meters each, the researchers found that six tree species in particular play a crucial role in the capturing and storage of carbon. They are the indigenous species *Tamarindus indica*, *Azadirachta indica* [Spiritual atmosphere], *Albizia lebbek* [Integral wisdom] and the exotic species *Senna siamea*, *Acacia auriculiformis* [Work tree] and *Khaya senegalensis*. [The names in square brackets are those given by The Mother, eds.] These trees not only play a vital role in storing carbon but also serve as pioneering species in the forest's growth, in whose shade many indigenous species can germinate.

Groundwater recharge is equally essential. The researchers found that the trees play a crucial role in slowing down the runoff, in boosting soil infiltration and expanding the water storage. Forests act like sponges, absorbing rain and letting it percolate underground, and so replenishing aquifers. The team observed negligible runoff, with water loss during rainfall primarily attributed to evapo-transpiration.



Flying Foxes roosting in Silence Forest

## Conclusions

In its final assessment, the team states that the existence of a Silence Forest positively influences groundwater retention and enhances water quality by serving as a natural filtration system, and that the forest plays a vital role in mitigating climate change by sequestering carbon dioxide. It recommends further study of the forest's biome by extending the survey to the entire 11.2 acres of the forest and including the study of additional species of insects and of herbaceous and woody plants.

The report mentions that the forest can serve as an example of integrating green and public spaces into urban planning. For this to happen, planners will have to cooperate with forest managers to minimise disturbances in the forest and help foster the occurrence of more flora and fauna. In particular, the effects of the Outer Ring Road crossing Silence Forest will need to be evaluated.

Carel

For more information on the assessment contact Yuvabe at [info@yuvabe.com](mailto:info@yuvabe.com)



The notice board at the Silence Forest entrance gate

demonstrates and compares this to Tai Chi, with an at first slow sweeping movement and then a sudden pounce, explaining that he "goes with the flow" and then there will be sudden "deadly movements".

His art emerges organically, "like a mystery", he says, "all my art is uncertain", the process is "always a struggle. It's never perfect and I need to fix it. It's a journey, I go on steps, discover what direction to go, I struggle, want to throw it away, keep going, and then suddenly I see the light and then it comes right away."

There are hints of the netherworlds in his illustrations and he agrees that it "comes from my unconscious", musing that "life is entangled, we find our way out of it, struggle, and adjust; if we don't adjust then we're dead."

Each piece takes him a week or 10 days. For Ongkie, "art is not about the subject, it's about the line, the movement. The line is an artist's signal. The line and the movement can't lie."

As to the frequent birds in his pictures, he says that "my spirit is a bird, wanting to go to the light, the bird is flying. Our spirit needs to keep flying."

Ongkie's personal life reflects this flying journey. He grew up in a family as one of nine siblings in Indonesian Borneo, before moving to Hollywood, and, for many years now Auroville. He signs his paintings in English letters and Chinese characters, reflecting his heritages. This exhibition captures parts of him in this moment, his dreaming made visible for us.

Peter



## Inky Onky

**Between 29th January and 10th February, in the Centre d'Art there was an exhibition of drawings by Ongkie Tan, titled 'Inky Onky'.**

**O**ngkie Tan's art is sharp, detailed, with a whirr of strokes, mostly in his trademark inky black and occasional subtle colours.

His background as a hair stylist comes through in his art, with a sense of layered proportion. I ask him if he is a tattoo artist and he replies, "No, but I could be because I have a steady hand". That steadiness is apparent in the precision with which he depicts his subject-matter, including cascades of unique feathers, and legs and toes splayed akimbo.

Beyond the details, this exhibition is an immersion into his subconscious, full of whirling flow, almost spectral and yet also with needles, beaks and talons. He physically

## EXHIBITION

From the assessment

## "I am prayer only"

This 280 page book is a tribute to Kireet Joshi composed by two of his close Auroville friends, Frederick Schulze Buxloh and Alain Bernard. Extensively quoting from Kireet's unpublished memoir "Notes of a Servant of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother," and interspersed with their own remembrances, the book deals with many topics from the life of Kireet. His early life, his meeting with The Mother, and his work as Registrar of the Sri Aurobindo Centre of Education take the first 50 pages. This is followed by his life in New Delhi, first as Educational Advisor to the Government of India, later as Special Secretary to the Government responsible for programmes relating to all aspects of education. It was in this period that Kireet battled for Auroville to get the Auroville Emergency Provisions Ordinance passed, which was later replaced by the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act 1980. The book describes the challenges he had to overcome to prove, through his lawyers, to the Supreme Court of India that Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's teachings do not constitute a religion and that Auroville is not a religious institution. In that same case, the Supreme Court acquitted Kireet from having any malafide intentions in helping formulate this Act.

The book then deals with the necessity of the creation of SAIER, the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, in Auroville; it is followed by an extensive section on the Auroville Foundation Act, its necessity, its concepts and its passing in the Indian Parliament. Kireet's work to get all this done, always attributed by him as a result of his prayers to The Mother, reads like a novel, with one amazing development following the other.

His extensive knowledge of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and his vision for Auroville's development led Kireet in later years to push for the building of the Centre for International Research in Human Unity (CIRHU), which was conceived by Roger Anger, the architect of Auroville. This project, however, is still to take off. The book also contains some of Kireet's views on Auroville's economic ideals and its internal organization.

In 1999 Kireet was appointed as Chairman of the Auroville International Advisory Council and, some time later, as Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. Alain and Frederick contribute with their personal reminiscences about this period. The two appendixes to this book contain Kireet's views on how education in Auroville should develop. But his chairmanship was not an easy time for Kireet, as he was drawn into a dispute regarding the Matrimandir management; it made him feel that he had been rejected by the Aurovilians, a feeling that only dispersed in later years.

The book, in a separate appendix, describes Kireet's other works before he joined the Auroville Foundation. His deep interest in the old spiritual knowledge of India led him, in 1987, to create and become Vice-Chairman of the Rasthriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan; this was followed by his Presidency of the Dharam Hinduja International Institute of Vedic Research, which he helped found. When his Chairmanship of the Auroville Foundation ended, he worked as Chairman of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research; and later as Educational Advisor to Shri Narendra Modi, then the Chief Minister of Gujarat. All these works were done in his same devoted dedication to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. In 2010, after a very intense crisis, Kireet returned to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where he passed away in 2014.

This book is called "I am prayer only," wrote Frederick in the epilogue, explaining that "each one of us is on earth for a particular reason and that it is our job to find that reason. While the call is upon the individual to find its own instrumentality, it is also the search for one's part in the collective body. We are born like a prayer. Kireet, as a true pioneer and forerunner, brought this light, this consciousness, this awareness to the body of Auroville ... We can join in the special prayer he represents."

Carel

Kireet Joshi: *I am prayer only*.

Available from the White Seagull bookshop at the Auroville Visitors' Centre.

Price in India Rs 490.

Kireet Joshi was many things to many people: administrator, guide, Ashramite, scholar, guru, professor, adviser, boss, speech writer, philosopher, sanskritist, and probably so many other things that we don't even know. People called him Kireet, Kireetbhai, or Professor Joshi, or Dr. Joshi, or Uncle, or Sir, or Joshiji, but to us Aurovilians, he was Kireet.

Kireet. He seemed to us a little of an extraterrestrial. First there was his imposing skull, smooth, elongated like in the pictures of some Mongol kings. Then there were his eyes, amazingly small, almost only a slit when they smiled behind the thick and round glasses. He would arrive fresh, impeccably dressed in white, holding under his arm a volume of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, a book that seemed to be a hundred years old itself so many times it had been handled. His face, round, full, open, glowed with happiness, or rather I would say, with delight – a delight that seemed to flow from some mysterious source that was his own but that he was ready to share with everyone. The impression accentuated when he took your hand into both of his. Nothing could be compared to the feeling of softness you got: you entered a protective space, padded with something incredibly warm and spacious and comfortable and reassuring.

In the little group of Aurovilians, questions were raised, stories were told, discussions started, disagreements were expressed.

Then he would speak. He would summarize the problem, analyzing its components, which usually were three in number. After a methodic exposition, he would then broaden the whole topic, enlarge it to new dimensions altogether. The problem on which we had been breaking our head, in front of us gradually turned into a learning material. With the right key, with the right references, the matter which seemed inextricable was transformed into a tool for progressing and for beginning to understand the depths of life, the different planes of our being and the different planes of the invisible world. At that point very often he would refer to some text of Sri Aurobindo; he would quote it. Someone would be asked to fetch the book. The book would be brought. He knew the chapter, the page, the line.

There would be a moment in his speech when progressively his sentences became shorter, less didactic, more insistent, more repetitive. It was like a plane finding its right speed and right height. And at a certain moment something was seen. That was it. His voice then took on a new enthusiasm and resonance. It was as if at last he could seize in its entirety what he had been looking for. Something that was hidden before was being revealed clearly in front of us all. So his words were rejoicing as it were, they kept bouncing, coming back to that same point again and again, re-formulating it in various manners, abundantly, effortlessly, in the simplest and most creative way. It was an exhilarating feeling.

We were elated. Things seemed to have become miraculously easy.

They were not of course. Nevertheless the words uttered on that day, many of us would carry them in themselves for years and years. They would not be erased by time. If at all they have become more relevant, more urgent than before.

He could be stern and severe. At times, I experienced this mood of his twice. Once I was in his house in Talkatora, New Delhi. He came to me, asking me why on earth children of Auroville were coming for some camp organized by the Delhi Ashram. What were we thinking of? I did not know anything about it, I was dumbfounded but I remember his displeasure and it made me tremble.

Another time was when I showed him our slide-show on Sri Aurobindo's Independence Day message. He was displeased because we had included the passage on Sanatana Dharma of the Uttarpara speech. This was not to be used, he said, as this text dated from before 1910, and according to the Mother this was not yet the real Sri Aurobindo. Yes, he conceded, some political parties might like this very much, but those are people who reduce his message and interpret it in a narrow way for making it serve their own purposes. We were not to do the same.

He could be sad. I remember a dinner in Delhi; I think I was on my way to France. He seemed bitter, disillusioned with the Aurovilians. It was as if they had betrayed him somehow; one could feel a very deep pain. I felt ashamed...

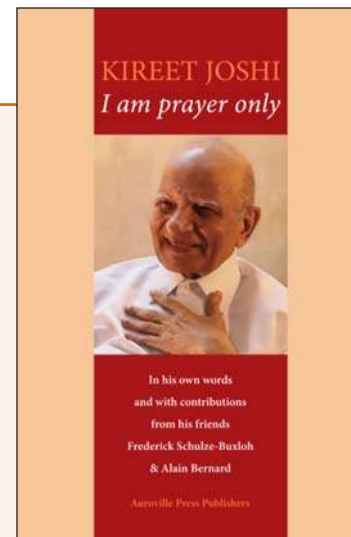
Most of the time though, he exuded love, and love, and love. I will always remember the last time we interviewed him on film. We were three in his little room in the Ashram nursing home. Olivier, Alain and me. We felt a bit embarrassed because we had been made to understand that bringing lots of equipment into his room was not really welcome. Olivier wanted to shoot with a good light, so we had to move objects around and arrange lamps the way he wanted. But once the interview started, it was only love. Love and gratitude. Love for Auroville, love for the Mother. His recalling of the Mother was so vivid, so strong – he remembered how she used to caress his arm – one felt that she was there in the room with us.

This book is meant to express a little of our gratitude and our love. He gave to Auroville without counting, without limits. We were grateful, of course. Of course. That went without saying – and without saying anything most of the time. Let us acknowledge that collectively we were quite stingy in our appreciation, too much embroiled in our own complications for realizing the miracle of that constant devotion. Now is the time for giving back to him.

Now is the time. Now that we know about nastiness, now that we know about arrogance, now that Auroville has learnt what it is to be trampled upon, – now at last we should honor the one whose constant concern was the protection of Auroville; we should remember the one who gave a legal status to the Mother's project with the only aim to create "a cushion" between this fragile endeavor and the harsh political realities.

That benevolent protector, that king-teacher whose name means "the crown", to him let Auroville give respect and love."

From the forward of "I am prayer only", by Christine



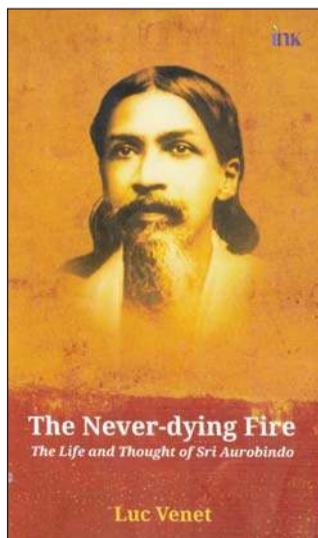
## The Never-Dying Fire: The Life and Thought of Sri Aurobindo

It takes a brave individual to write a biography of Sri Aurobindo. This is because Sri Aurobindo himself doubted the value of such an attempt – "Why write my biography at all? Is it really necessary? In my view, a man's value does not depend on what he learns, or his position or fame, or what he does, but on what he is and inwardly becomes" – and, besides, as he pointed out, only he could write such a book for "It would be only myself who could speak of things in my past giving them their true form and significance". "The attempt is bound to be a failure," he warned another aspiring biographer, "because neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see".

In fact, he never wrote a comprehensive account of his life, and what we know of his later years can only be gleaned from a few references in his correspondence with his disciples and others where he sometimes explained points by referring to some event in his own life, or some experience in his own yogic development. All these obstacles, however, did not deter some of his disciples from making the attempt, and Sri Aurobindo did give some assistance to three of his early biographers who submitted their manuscripts to him for verification. On several occasions, he also corrected misleading statements about himself published in journals and books.

The first biographies were hagiographic. And if they did not exactly portray him as emerging from the womb as a fully realised being, they tended to present his life as an almost effortless unfolding of avatarhood. More recent biographers have tended to emphasise not only his achievements but also his struggles, reflecting Sri Aurobindo's statement that "My whole life has been a struggle with hard realities, from hardships, starvation in England and constant and fierce difficulties to the far greater difficulties continually cropping up here in Pondicherry, external and internal".

The most recent biography in this line is Luc Venet's *The Never Dying Fire: The Life and Thought of Sri Aurobindo*. This is a continuation of his previous work *Sri Aurobindo and The Revolution of India*, which covered Sri Aurobindo's early years, his political activism and his early spiritual realisations and explorations. The earlier book ended with the *adesh* which commands him to go to Pondicherry.



The first part of *The Never Dying Fire* covers the same period in an almost identical way, but the second part deals with the Pondicherry years. Luc first confronts the stereotype, shared by Nehru among others, that Sri Aurobindo's decision to remain in Pondicherry after 1910 represented some kind of 'betrayal' of the revolutionary movement for independence that he had initiated, quoting Sri Aurobindo to the effect that he abandoned conventional politics only when he was sure that "the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence".

Luc then provides us with a picture of those first years in Pondicherry when Sri Aurobindo was accessible, describing his frugal lifestyle and easy interactions with the young men who followed him into 'exile', as well, of course, as the meeting with Mother and his subsequent identification of her as his "Shakti" who had "taken charge of the new creation". He also gives brief synopses of the major works which

appeared in the 'Arya', as well as lucidly presenting Sri Aurobindo's new programme for consciousness research – which included experiments in predicting and influencing the movements of birds and squirrels – as documented in *The Record of Yoga*.

For most of the last 23 years, however, Sri Aurobindo was in seclusion, making only occasional public utterances, like his support for the Cripps Proposal, and Luc, like other biographers, must resort to documenting the few snippets of information which Sri Aurobindo provided about his arduous work of anchoring the supramental consciousness in the physical.

It is instructive to compare Luc's biography with Peter Heehs' *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, both of which are modern treatments of Sri Aurobindo's life and work. Peter's intended readership is academic and consequently his approach is primarily objective, laying out the facts of Sri Aurobindo's life as far as they can be established. He reports, without comment, Sri Aurobindo's statements regarding his spiritual researches, while addressing the skepticism that some in the academic community may have regarding his subject's *siddhis* and state of mind. On rare occasions, he is also willing to raise questions about the efficacy of certain of Sri Aurobindo's political decisions.

continued on page 11.



## The Never-Dying Fire: The Life and Thought of Sri Aurobindo

continued from page 10

Luc's biography, while evading hagiography, is clearly the work of a devotee and consequently, because he does not have to anticipate the skepticism of academics, it is more immediately engaging, carrying the reader along in its flow. The writing of this biography was also a very personal process for Luc for, as he revealed in a recent online interaction, "I wanted to resolve things I had not previously understood in his writings. I was trying to get closer to Them".

In some respects Luc's biography is less detailed than Peter's – for example, unlike

Peter's, it includes almost no discussion of Sri Aurobindo's poetry or of a key text like *The Human Cycle* – and this makes it less comprehensive (although I am not convinced that either biographer pays sufficient attention to Sri Aurobindo's poetic and yogic magnum opus, *Savitri*, or, come to think of it, his humour). But, contrary to Peter, Luc compares the work of Sri Aurobindo with that of Gandhi, pointing out that Sri Aurobindo had no sympathy for Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence. Luc succeeds admirably in conveying the cut and thrust of Sri Aurobindo's early political life as well as the extraordinary dimension and nature of the spiritual challenge which Sri Aurobindo

confronts on behalf of all humanity. Interestingly, both biographers come to almost identical conclusions in the Epilogues of their biographies. Both agree that Sri Aurobindo's role in changing the course of India's freedom struggle is now widely acknowledged, and that his place as a leading thinker and politician is assured. However, they also point out that he never considered these achievements to be of first importance. Rather, his most important work, as he saw it, was to bring a new principle, that of the Supramental, into the 'earth consciousness'. While occasionally revealing that he had made significant strides towards achieving this, both biographers believe that at his

passing the final descent of the supramental power still eluded him, but that his work endures and continues to inspire individuals and centres around the world. "It is the silent practitioners of his yoga around the world," concludes Luc, "who bring a concrete meaning – a body – to (his) vision: the appearance of a new human (sic) species on earth."

Alan

*The Never-Dying Fire: The Life and Thought of Sri Aurobindo* by Luc Venet. Published by BluOne Ink LLP, 2023. Available on Amazon.in and Amazon.com.

## PROFILE

## It's about 'Belonging'

**Auma is a second-generation Aurovilian, born to Indian and French pioneers, Marie Babu and André Tardeil. While she raises her third generation child, she shares insights with us about what makes Auroville unique to her.**

*Auroville Today: What was it like for you growing up here in Auroville in the 80s and 90s?*

Growing up in Auroville was truly unique. One remarkable aspect that has stuck with me was the opportunity to interact with children from various countries, each with their own languages and backgrounds. It was something that felt so natural from a young age; it was almost like being automatically immersed in this diverse cultural tapestry. Hearing different languages and experiencing various cultures wasn't strange; it was just a part of daily life. After that, going abroad never felt alienating, almost as if one had already been exposed to the whole world here already.

*You must have a good idea of what it's like growing up here today, because of raising your own child. How is it different from when you grew up?*

I believe there's been a shift, and not all of it is for the better. When I reflect on my own childhood, there was a remarkable sense of freedom, a deep connection with nature, and a vivid sense of imagination. However, today, there's a lot more interference from technology, and everything seems to happen at a faster pace. The freedom to explore, especially in nature, and the richness of imagination seem to have taken a backseat.

Back then, learning involved a more in-depth research process. You had to delve into books, conduct thorough research, and the whole experience felt like a journey of exploration. Now, with the internet, information is readily available, and the approach is more about more superficial instant gratification. While it's convenient, I find the process of genuine research, which was so much more rewarding, has somewhat diminished.

*Trying new things is not just encouraged, but is a fundamental part of life here. Can you talk a bit more about how this freedom to choose and explore different opportunities has impacted you personally?*

The freedom here allows me to explore a variety of activities that I genuinely enjoy. Unlike a traditional job where you might feel confined to a specific role, Auroville provides an environment where you can choose to engage in things that align with your passions, or even just things that you would never have been exposed to and had the opportunity to try out in other settings.

The culture is such that it nurtures exploration and experimentation. For instance, I never anticipated being part of a children's choir, but the opportunity arose, and I took it. This experience wasn't just about playing the piano for the choir; it was about exploring a new facet of myself, understanding the commitment involved, and deciding whether it was something I wanted to pursue further. It's about having the choice and the freedom to try, to experiment, without the pressure of it having to define you.

In many traditional settings, there's a linear path set out from an early age. You get an education in a particular field, and that defines your career and, in many ways, your identity. In Auroville, the approach is much more fluid. You're not boxed into a single identity or profession. I could be involved in music one day and then explore farming the next. There's no strict definition of who you should be or what you should do based on your education or initial career choice. You're free to explore and redefine yourself.

*You lived abroad for some time, and then you came back. What were some of the reasons for choosing to come back?*

Living abroad gave me a different perspective on life, education, and work. However, what I realised was that the freedom and the learning environment in Auroville is unique. Here, learning is not just about acquiring knowledge; it's a continuous, dynamic process that involves exploring, creating, and growing alongside others. In my role as a teacher – though I often hesitate to use that term in the conventional sense – I find myself constantly learning. Whether it's art techniques, music, or any other creative field, the learning process is mutual. I learn as much from the process and the students as they learn from me.

Here the term 'teacher' becomes more fluid and expansive. It's less about being an expert and more about being a facilitator of shared learning experiences. For instance, while teaching art, I find myself learning new techniques right along with my students or colleagues. For example, my colleague, who is more experienced in certain art forms like watercolour painting, becomes a teacher to me in those moments. It's a reciprocal learning environment where everyone is both a teacher and a student at different times. Students are more engaged because they see their teachers also engaging with the material in a genuine way. It's not just about filling gaps in their knowledge; it's about embarking on a learning journey together.

*Auroville, as a concept, seems to encompass both detachment from ownership and a deep sense of belonging and care. How do you reconcile these seemingly contrasting ideas in your daily life?*

Indeed, it's a delicate balance. Auroville, to me, symbolises a journey towards a higher collective purpose, transcending individual ownership. However, this doesn't negate the importance of personal attachment and responsibility. In fact, it's this very sense of personal care and investment that brings vitality and beauty to the community.

While Auroville belongs to 'nobody in particular' it thrives because each one of us feels a profound connection to it. We take care of our homes, our spaces, and our community, not because we own them in the traditional sense, but because we are deeply invested in their well-being. This investment is not materialistic; it's about nurturing and contributing to a shared vision.

We are here to contribute, to grow, and to help nurture a collective dream. My home, or any space I inhabit in Auroville, is a reflection of this philosophy. I care for it, not because it's mine in a conventional sense, but because my contribution and care are part of a larger tapestry of community and shared values.

It's about understanding that while physically, my home or my workspace might not belong to me in the conventional sense, emotionally and spiritually, they do. I care for them, I invest in them, and I make them beautiful because that's part of making Auroville what it is. It's this personal investment and care that collectively creates the Auroville we love.

It may sound paradoxical: it doesn't belong to you and yet it has to belong? You can't feel like it belongs to you if you might have to suddenly leave. You have to feel like it belongs, otherwise you're not invested in it. And if you are not invested, it is people's nature to tend to neglect, and then things fall apart.

I've been asking myself recently, what would I be giving up? When you have been in one place for a long time and you have put all your energy into it, even if it's just for hundreds of tiny things, or a big thing, even if it's just placing a stone exactly where you want it to be, it is then very challenging when you are confronted with the idea that you might be asked to suddenly leave it all. Because it doesn't belong to us. Then it becomes about acceptance and surrender, and you have to start working on yourself again all over again, trying to be okay with whatever may come. That's what's happening right now.

*I think that's really beautiful. It makes a lot of sense. And we're talking about the home which is mostly the physical home. And on a more inner level, do you feel like you belong to Auroville and you feel like Auroville belongs to you?*

When I talk about my 'little bubble,' I mean the space I've created around myself – my home, my workspace, the way I interact with nature and people around me. It's a reflection of my values and my connection to Auroville. By nurturing beauty and peace in my immediate surroundings, I feel I'm contributing to the larger picture of Auroville. This, in turn, inspires others. When they see a well-cared-for home or garden, it encourages them to do the same, creating a chain reaction of positivity and beauty.

It's about showing through action how Auroville's principles can be manifested in daily life. The beauty of the Matrimandir gardens, for example, isn't just aesthetic. It's a symbol of what we can achieve when we work in harmony with nature and with each other. And that beauty can be brought into your own room, garden and space. I try to instil this understanding in the children I teach – that creating beauty around them is part of creating a better community.

And it can sometimes lean towards an organic and nature-inspired aesthetic. It's about being able to connect with oneself and simply appreciate nature. There was a time when we had the luxury of spending moments in solitude, gazing at the beauty of the natural world, simply being and doing some inner work. As an adult, I find myself having less of those moments.

*Because adult life gets too busy?*

In youth, such moments of reflection were more accessible. As time goes by, there's a tendency to overlook them. It's as if with age, the urgency to engage in those moments diminishes, as we get caught by many tasks. However, being in Auroville provides the chance to consciously remind oneself of that, of taking time. It's an environment that encourages self-reflection and prompts you to return to your work, your inner work, your outer work, whatever it may be.

*Returning to the topic of teaching, it's a shared experience among those who grew up here that different teachers have diverse approaches. In the present day, this diversity in teaching styles remains a characteristic feature of the educational landscape. What do you make of that?*

Our teachers in Auroville definitely had diverse teaching styles. This variety, I believe, stems from the cultural diversity we're immersed in here. You grow accustomed to interacting with a wide array of cultures and behaviours, and that extends to education. So, when you encounter a teacher with a unique approach, it becomes a



Auma Tardeil

norm rather than an exception. You learn to accept that one teacher might have a certain method, while another differs significantly.

However, this acceptance doesn't come without its challenges. With such varied teaching styles, there can be gaps in the learning process for the students. It raises the question: is there a more effective way to integrate these different approaches? While diversity in teaching enriches the learning experience, it also highlights the need for a cohesive structure that can bridge the gaps and ensure a more comprehensive educational experience.

*Is the way you teach shaped by all these alternative ways of teaching?*

Definitely. The alternative teaching methods I've been exposed to have significantly influenced the way I approach teaching. The passion and genuine interest that our teachers here displayed in their subjects left a lasting impact on me. I observed that when a teacher is truly passionate about a topic, it resonates with students, creating a desire to learn and explore that subject further.

However, despite the passionate and engaging teaching styles, as I mentioned before, I've noticed a potential area for improvement – a need for more collective interaction. As a musician, for instance, I've come to realise the importance of accepting one's own limitations, acknowledging gaps in knowledge, and having the courage to seek help from fellow musicians. This openness not only enhances personal growth but also opens doors to unexpected opportunities, whether it's musical collaborations or shared experiences in the process of learning and performing.

It's about the importance of collective interaction and learning from one another. It's not just about individual excellence but also about creating a collaborative and supportive learning environment among us adults as well as for the children.

In conversation with Chandra

### Madras High Court temporarily stays Governing Board regulations

On 23rd February the Hon'ble Madras High Court considered the petitions filed by the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly and a resident regarding the two new regulations approved by the Governing Board and published by the Secretary, Auroville Foundation, in the Gazette of India, e.g. the 'Admission and Termination of Persons in the Register of Residents Regulations, 2023' and the 'Auroville Foundation (Framework for Selection of Working Committee) Regulations, 2024.

In the new Admission and Termination Regulations, an "Admissions and Terminations Scrutinising Committee" (ATSC) would be constituted with all members nominated by the Governing Board. Its task would be to scrutinise all applications for admission as volunteers, newcomers or residents; decide each case on merit; and, after completing the process of consultation with the Residents' Assembly, convey its decision to the Secretary. The ATSC would also scrutinise all complaints for violation of the Auroville Admission or Auroville Residence Criteria, and decide each case on merit. The Secretary has been given the final power to either accept or reject the decision of the ATDC.

The first bench of Chief Justice S.V. Gangapurwala and Justice D. Bharatha Chakravarthy considered that the subordinate legislation (the regulations, eds.) may supplement the statute [the Auroville Foundation Act, eds.], but cannot supplant it and found that, prima facie, the impugned regulations erode the powers of the Residents' Assembly to allow admission or cause termination of the persons in the Register of Residents.

The bench passed interim orders. "Until further orders, the admission or termination of the persons in the register of residents of the Auroville Foundation shall not be finalised nor a person shall be admitted or terminated from the register resorting to the impugned regulations," the bench said.

The Auroville Foundation (Framework for Selection of Working Committee) Regulations, 2024 specify that the Governing Board shall constitute a Selection Process Committee (SPC) which will to review the existing selection process and conduct the selection of the Working Committee members. Following the publication of these regulations, the Auroville Foundation Office called for self-nominations for SPC membership. As these regulations also seem to be in contravention of the Auroville Foundation Act, which states in section 19.2 that "The manner of choosing the members of the Working Committee and their term of office shall be such as may be decided by the Residents Assembly", the bench passed interim orders that "The function of the Working Committee shall not be interfered with by the committee constituted under the impugned regulations."

### Students' exposure tours

Nearly a hundred students from across India participated in week long exposure tours to Auroville in early February organised by the Ministry of Education under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB) programme. The emphasis of the tours was on providing exposure of the youth to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of integral education and its implementation in Auroville.

### MOU with IGNOU

On 27th February, in a ceremony in Delhi, The Auroville Foundation and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to foster cross-cultural understanding and promote artistic exchanges and to advance the teachings and vision of Sri Aurobindo. The ceremony was attended by Jayanti S. Ravi, secretary of Auroville Foundation, Sachchidanand Joshi, Member Secretary of IGNCIA and David Frawley, writer, astrologer, and member of the Auroville International Advisory Council.

### Auroville hospital

On 30th January, the AVFO published on its website (and then in The Hindu) a notice inviting private hospitals to share their "expression of interest" in operating and managing "the hospital in Auroville". The notice stated that a pre-selection would be made, after which the short-listed hospitals would be required "to submit their technical and financial bid" to the AVFO. The proposal is "to set up a fully functional allopathic clinic inside Auroville". Concerns have been expressed that this move is the first of its kind in privatising the health sector in Auroville and outsourcing activities related to the health of Aurovilians to a private clinic.

### New Town Hall planned

Tree clearing around the Town Hall parking lot took place on 26th January, in order to make way for a new and larger Town Hall. This new building is estimated to be more than triple the size of the existing Town Hall building. The RA was not informed or consulted prior to planning this new construction, and there is no clarity as to where its funding is coming from.

### Emergency RAD on WCom selection

An Emergency Residents' Assembly Decision in early February was initiated through a petition signed by more than 300 members of the Residents' Assembly (RA) to approve or disapprove the following resolution: The Residents' Assembly resolves that the Working Committee shall be selected by the Residents' Assembly in the manner it chooses, as stated in the Foundation Act, 1988. Further, we state that the Notification published in the Gazette of India on the 12th of January, 2024, by the Secretary of the Governing Board concerning the selection of the Working Committee members, does not follow the letter of the Foundation Act nor its spirit. In addition, this Notification violates the whole spirit of Auroville's Charter which the Auroville Foundation Act set

out to protect and promote.

A total of 647 valid votes were submitted online and in person. 99.2% (642) participants voted in favour of the above resolution, 0.3% (2) participants rejected it, 0.5% (3) participants didn't know. Therefore, the Residents' Assembly approved the above resolution.

### Call for another Emergency RAD

Concerned residents have initiated a call for an Emergency Residents' Assembly decision on (1) extending the emergency functions of the Working Committee (RA-WCom) and (2) authorising the RA-WCom to do the work of the Funds and Assets Management Committee (RA-FAMC) of the Residents' Assembly. The residents stated that in August 2023 the Residents' Assembly had approved the giving of emergency functions to the RA-WCom for a six months' period, which has now expired; the reasons for extending this period are the same as then, e.g. because the Residents' Assembly finds itself in an emergency situation in which it needs the ability to counter the threats to its role as an authority of the Auroville Foundation.

The reason for the RA-WCom to take over the work of the RA-FAMC is that since July 2022, the RA-FAMC selected by the community has been unable to carry out its functions, when the Governing Board seized control of Auroville's funds and assets by appointing a parallel GB-FAMC.

This solution is a temporary measure and will be used only until the RA-FAMC can again take up its rightful and statutory role according to the Auroville Foundation Rules, 1997. The petition was signed by 357 people, which exceeds the 300 signatures that are required, and was sent to the Residents' Assembly Service, which will verify the signatures before launching the Emergency RAD on behalf of the Residents' Assembly.

### Safety and Security Team stopped

On 19th January, 5 out of 6 Aurovilians members of the Auroville Safety & Security Team (AVSST) received an email from the BCC informing them that the Foundation appointed BCC & FAMC "are unable to support maintenance on your current positions". No grounds on which this decision was made were provided. Due to this decision, AVSST has to unfortunately announce that it will no longer be able to serve the community on an emergency basis from 1st February 2024 onward and its 24/7 emergency number (9443090107) will not be available until further notice.

### auroville.org.in unsafe

A group of concerned residents have warned all Aurovilians that the old Auroville email addresses ending with the suffix "@auroville.org.in" are not secure and can be read, and that certain email addresses are blocked since the email administration has been taken over under the office of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and is managed by unknown persons. They also point out that most mails under @auroville.org.in cannot receive communications from the Residents' Assembly (RA) working groups that have been

selected through due process by the RA as mentioned in the Auroville Foundation Act, nor can the Resident Assembly Service (RAS) reach them for online voting.

### Request to inform of visa issues

The RA-Wcom has requested all those who have had or are having issues getting a letter of recommendation for new visas or for extensions of existing visas to contact them. The issue mentioned were (1) requested a letter but have not received it and one's visa has expired; (2) received a letter with a negative remark; (3) received a letter for less duration than what one is eligible for (e.g. one year instead of 5 years); and (4) any other issues one has faced in the application process for a visa recommendation letter or for the visa application process itself.

### Auroville's birthday and the Golden Day

Auroville's birthday was celebrated, as usual, with a dawn fire Dawnfire at the Amphitheatre. On 29th February, the Golden Day, there was a morning meditation at the Amphitheatre, and an evening programme of a musical offering from Kim Cunio and Heather Lee, accompanied by musician friends from Svaram and beyond.

### The Auroville Marathon

Sports and fitness enthusiasts from far and near participated in the 14th edition of the Auroville Marathon that was held in various distance categories on Sunday 18th February. This year, over 3,000 runners, including over 650 women, registered for the "Run for the Joy of Running" marathon, a non-commercial event in which no prize money is involved and the runs are not timed.

### A month crammed full of events

As usual, February has experienced a plethora of cultural and other events. These included performances by the Auroville Choir, an international conference on the revival and promotion of Sanskrit, a four day gathering in Unity pavilion entitled Toward a Collective Awakening: Experiments in Evolution conceived as a follow-up to the Summit held in Auroville in February 2023 to facilitate consciousness change at a collective, The Auroville Festival – a weeklong festival including discussions on diverse topics and daily cultural performances – the Shakti Kumbh event in Unity Pavilion entitled Regenerative Renaissance of Mother India: Revitalising Bharata Shakti, three conferences on the relationship between spiritual and social life organised by the Pavillon de France, yoga activities, chanting and sound meditation in the Matrimandir Amphitheatre, a chanting and bhajan performance at SAWCHU, and a week of events in Mother's Flower Garden. There was also a festival in the European Pavilion, as well as the Endangered Crafts Mela, shadow puppet theatre at the Youth Centre, and a poetry evening in CRIPA on the theme of 'The Sunlit Path'. The AVI centres also held their annual meeting in the Tibetan Pavilion.

PASSINGS

## Sylvia Zimmerman

Sylvia Zimmerman, who lived in Surrender, passed away in the evening of February 4th.

Sylvia had come to join Auroville in 1999, after a long worldwide search and experiences in different spiritual places and communities. In Auroville, she said, she had finally found her home, a community with a sensible lifestyle and which cared for nature as well as for their residents. She also mentioned that she experienced that Aurovilians had never stopped trying to find improved ways of living together.

Sylvia had been teaching English and Meditation in the Life Education Center and Transition School, providing individual tuition as well. In the last two years she was also involved in caring for and entertaining Auroville's elderly residents. Her smiling presence, her ability to talk in five different languages and her lively interest in innumerable things made her a wonderful companion for many. She was known to reveal a sense of gratitude, often for nothing in particular, but for Life as a whole.

Sylvia's remains were buried at the Auroville Burial and Cremation grounds on February 5th.



## Shakuntala Patel


On February 20th, Shakuntala Patel passed away at her residence in Swayam. She was 78 years old.

Shakuntala came to Pondicherry and Auroville in the early 1970s and spent many years here. After ups and downs in life, she rejoined Auroville in the early 1990s and settled in Djaima and later Swayam.

She was a free spirited soul, living life on her own terms. Only those close to her became aware of her in-depth studies of the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother as she preferred an inward, secluded life, but she kept herself updated of world events and the happenings in Auroville. She and her family have contributed and supported Auroville and individuals within the community over the years though she preferred never to talk about it.

Shakuntala's remains were cremated on February 23rd at the Auroville cremation grounds.



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