

## Darshan Messages The Words of Love and Inspiration

From July 24th till August 18th, Savitri Bhavan hosted the exhibition 'Darshan Messages'. It not only showcased the original cards from 1953 onwards, but also the evolution of the tradition of Darshan card gifting which has been stopped since January 2023. The exhibition was curated by Willemine Pernette and inaugurated by Dr. Alok Pandey.

*"To bring the Divine Love and Beauty and Ananda into the world is, indeed, the whole crown and essence of our Yoga. But it has always seemed to me impossible unless there comes as its support and foundation and guard the Divine Truth—what I call the Supramental—and its Divine Power."*

These two sentences are the opening of a letter written by Sri Aurobindo on August 13, 1931. Typed copies, individually signed by Sri Aurobindo, were distributed as 'Darshan messages' a few days later, on His birthday, August 15, 1931. This was the beginning of the beautiful and deeply meaningful tradition of gifting Darshan cards in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

During Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, printed Darshan day messages were given out once in a while. Afterwards, they were issued with consistent regularity. Some of them were composed expressly by The Mother for the occasion; others were passages from the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

How did the Darshan days come into existence? Darshan means 'seeing'. In the context of Integral Yoga, it refers to seeing Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and receiving their blessings. Shortly after the Siddhi Day in November 1926, Sri Aurobindo retired from daily contact with his disciples and saw them only a few times a year on what came to be known as Darshan days. At first there were three such days: The Mother's birthday, Sri Aurobindo's birthday and Siddhi Day. In 1939, a fourth Darshan day was added: The Mother's final arrival day at Pondicherry. The fifth and last Darshan day was added on February 29th, 1960. The Mother declared this day to be "The Day of the Lord", referring to the celebration of the Supramental Descent which happened on February 29th, 1956. It is also named "The Golden Day".

After Sri Aurobindo left his body in 1950, The Mother continued giving Darshan, each Darshan day containing a message of Sri Aurobindo or The Mother. Sometimes She would even sign the cards to highlight and confirm the force behind their messages. It is known that The Mother took Her time to rewrite the Darshan messages over and over again until She felt the highest consciousness was being expressed in words for the purpose it served.

### The Creative Force

What was the purpose of the Darshan message? Darshan cards not only conveyed a spiritual message but also contained the force to help in its understanding and realisation. The Mother explained:

*"One must not confuse a religious teaching and a spiritual teaching. Religious teaching belongs to the past and stops all progress, spiritual teaching is the teaching of the future. It enlightens the consciousness and prepares it for the future realisation."* She further explained that *"...a spiritual teaching is above religions and strives towards a total truth. It teaches us to come into direct contact with the Divine."*

A sadhak once asked The Mother: "But Mother, what is the significance of the message you give every Darshan? For example, today you gave the picture of the flower that symbolises the supramental manifestation." To this, She responded:

*"Yes, as I have just told, this is spread in thousands of copies all over the world. It is an externalisation of the thing, it is a way of spreading the influence, spreading the message, reaching farther. Everything that is said in a Darshan message has been studied, proved, tested, beforehand. And on Darshan day it is given. First the experiment is made, then it is declared publicly. The first*

*movement is the individual development; at the Darshan time it is spread abroad."*

Darshan cards therefore served a double purpose: addressing the individual who receives it, and addressing the collective. For the focus of the Integral Yoga is not only the formation of the individual in order to be able to reach the goal individually, but also the preparation of the world. Sri Aurobindo had explained;

*"The individual movement is always much more rapid and more penetrating; it goes farther, more deeply, and more quickly. The collective movement forms a sort of basis that both restrains and supports at the same time. And it is the balance between these two movements which is necessary."*

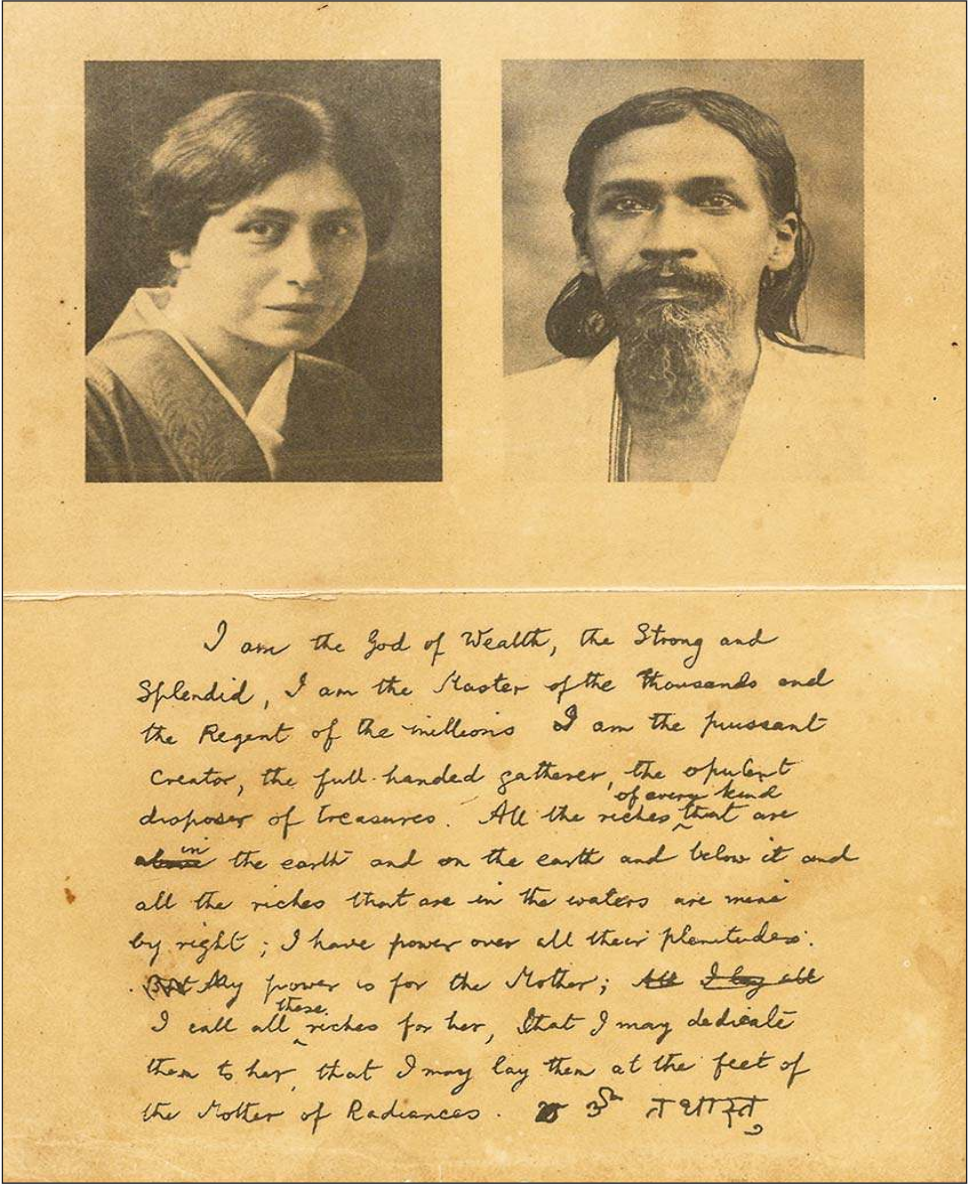
The Mother explained that the time factor was crucial for the spiritual messages to be landed effectively into a fertile consciousness. She had distributed on November 24th 1965 a Darshan card with a message from Sri Aurobindo: *"It is certainly a mistake to bring down the light by force – to pull it down. The Supramental cannot be taken by storm. When the time is ready it will open of itself – but first there is a great deal to be done and that must be done patiently and without haste."* She explained to Satprem a few days later: *"The message we distributed on November 24, 1965, it was Sri Aurobindo who had told me to keep it for the 24th, that was very clear and very categorical, but I didn't know why. But now he has clearly shown me why and I've well understood."* She clarified that the Truth-Power was becoming more and more obvious, but people want to see results right away. As this can create unbalance She had to be careful not to give the messages prematurely to those who were not ready to receive them.

On April 11, 1973, The Mother wrote her last Darshan message, which was issued on April 24th, 1973. She elaborated on it in a discussion with Satprem, recorded in Mother's Agenda. She said: *"This is what comes to me:*

*Beyond man's consciousness  
Beyond speech  
O Thee, Supreme Consciousness  
Unique Reality  
Immutable Truth  
(Mother hesitates and corrects herself)  
Divine Truth."*

After The Mother left her body in 1973, the tradition of Darshan card gifting continued. A special card was issued on November 29, 1973, twelve days after The Mother's Mahasamadhi on November 17th. Over the years, Darshan cards evolved from short and singular spiritual documents into profound inspirational sources for sadhana. Looking back on the history of the Darshan cards, one could say that they are external signs of the aspiration for the Infinite and expressions of Their spiritual legacy. Initiated by Sri Aurobindo and developed by The Mother, this tradition has definitely been one of the divine treasures given by Them to humanity with so much love and compassion.

The tradition of Darshan cards was discontinued in January 2023. The Ashram trustees explained the reason: "The Mother was very particular about the Messages that She gave. The Message distributed by Her always had a deeper meaning and reason. Notwithstanding the fact that we have continued, for many years, the tradition of distribution of Messages on certain dates, it was felt



Darshan card of February 21, 1983. Sri Aurobindo's handwritten message reads: **I am the God of Wealth, the Strong and Splendid, I am the Master of the thousands and the Regent of the millions. I am the puissant creator, the full-handed gatherer, the opulent disposer of treasures. All the riches of every kind that are in the earth and on the earth and below it and all the riches that are in the waters are mine by right; I have power of all their plenitudes. My power is for the Mother: I call those riches for her, that I may dedicate them to her, that I may lay them at the feet of the Mother of Radiances.**  
OM, TADHASTU

that our selections were no longer the result of direct experiences. Recognizing this limitation, it has been decided to discontinue the practice of distributing printed messages on Darshan and other days."

However, an exception was made on the February 29, 2024, the Golden Day. On that occasion, everyone was presented with a card along with a golden-colour cloth with the Mother's symbol sewed on it. Finished with rays around Her symbol, it referred to the Golden Sun.

### Spirit in Matter

Even today Darshan cards remain a powerful force that inspires, reaches out to, instructs, and bonds the devotees. Receiving a Darshan card still allows one to feel closer to The Mother and Sri Aurobindo even though They have long departed the physical plane. It was stated by The Mother that a particle of force can be transmitted through an object or a photograph provided one is receptive enough. When spiritual knowledge and experience emerge, it is seen that the creative energy in matter is a movement of the power of the Spirit. So, these cards are precious tools to touch the receiver's heart.

For many the Darshan cards offer hope, love and inspiration. They affect human consciousness in a way that is quite different from religious messages or objects. The cards can be seen as an invitation and guidance to the inner worlds as well, not only for a sadhak but for everyone who is receptive and open to developing a new perspective. One could even consider the cards a divine invitation to tread the path of 'seeing'.

The exhibition Darshan messages was meant for everybody. One does not have to be an advanced practitioner of the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother or possess a special spiritual knowledge to experience an inner nearness to the Divine as the Darshan cards can be seen as tiny vehicles carrying the vibration of the forces that act through them, and guide the viewer to make the first attempt to look inside, to develop his 'inner seeing'.

Thus, viewing a Darshan card offers a unique opportunity to make a profound connection with the Soul within and experience proximity to the Divine through our psychic senses. It can result in getting a feeling of the Presence more intimate than sight.

Willemine Pernette

- **The deeper causes of conflict**
- **Barbara - An enormous shift is happening**
- **Alain Bernard - Another Auroville is needed**

- **Manoj Pavithran: The four layers of the Auroville crisis**
- **Alan: Another explanation?**
- **Kristen: What we create**
- **Angad: The larger learnings**

- **Palani: Committed to Auroville**
- **Seza: The quest for meaning**
- **Sang: Embracing the unexpected**

- **Passings: Bindu, Goupi, Kratu, John Mandeem, Gajendran, Lakshmanan**
- **News in brief**



## The deeper cause



On the battlefield of Kurukshetra: Krishna explains the causes of conflict to Arjuna

For the past three years, we have seen the arrival of another type of Secretary, a new top-down style of governance, and an imposed vision of development of Auroville. Propaganda has been circulated that ‘Auroville has failed’, which has led many people outside Auroville, as well as some government officials in New Delhi, to believe that the way the administration operates is justified. The present Governing Board, which is tasked with the overall management of Auroville, is unapproachable. Earlier, the Working Committee would organise meetings with the Governing Board and at their request various Auroville working groups could interact with the Board members. All that has disappeared.

The community is not informed that a meeting of the Board will happen, and Aurovilians are not invited to present their issues and concerns, while minutes containing momentous decisions of the Board are not, or very late, communicated.

The International Advisory Council which, under the Auroville Foundation Act, has the function of advising the Governing Board, has likewise been ignored; its attempts to protest at questionable and destructive actions, like the excessive cutting of trees and the opaque land exchange and purchase policy of the present Foundation administration (resulting in a conservatively estimated loss of over INR 200 crores or approximately US \$ 24 million to Auroville, in addition to the loss of important parts of Auroville’s physical body and legacy), having met with no response from the Governing Board. The present administration also hardly or insufficiently responds to the Right to Information requests made under the RTI Act.

A number of Aurovilians have stood up to the present authorities of the Foundation, contesting their arbitrary decisions directly and in the courts with some success – but it is a lengthy process full of uncertainties. The Madras High Court found that the present administration has been acting in con-

travention of the Auroville Foundation Act but, instead of accepting the verdict, the administration is appealing against it.

Meanwhile, the present administration has replaced Auroville’s working groups with their own working groups, and the Working Committee selected by the Residents’ Assembly has not been recognised. The majority of the community’s internal and external communication channels have also been taken over, some, like Auronet, by groups which remain anonymous.

There has been a huge increase in the administrative staff of the Auroville Foundation Office to more than double or triple its previous size, which is now staffed by people with little or no knowledge of Auroville. At the same time, many Aurovilians have been removed from their work

and maintenance without explanation.

The outcome is a botched execution of the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan Perspective 2025, whose emphatic prescriptions of flexibility and adaptations and community participation are totally ignored, and a climate of fear and insecurity has been caused by the insistence upon adherence to the views of the governing bodies on pain of punishment, which includes the withholding of visa recommendations without giving the affected persons the opportunity to be heard, cutting the income security of many Aurovilians and their employees, and threatening to move some Aurovilians out of their homes without any relocation assistance.

Now, more than ever, money has become the sovereign lord. Payment of the city service contri-

bution has become mandatory and, for non-Indian nationals, is linked to visa recommendations. Units’ profit contributions are now calculated five years backwards and linked to the right to receive donations. Only since April 2024 has the Budget Coordination Committee of the Auroville Foundation begun to release a monthly statement of Auroville’s accounts,

Unsurprisingly, given the immense material and psychological upheaval the community is experiencing – by far the worst in its history – some Aurovilians, including long-time pioneers, are considering leaving, while there is no way of knowing how many potential applicants or donors have been put off applying or donating by the actions of the present regime.

We can all see and experience the surface manifestations. But what is the deeper cause of this immense turmoil? For Sri Aurobindo wrote that “Possibly because we start from an external view of things, we tend to fixate on the external forms rather than the inner causes,” and “the play of the forces is very complex and one has to be conscious of them and, as it were, see and watch how they work before one can really understand why things happen as they do”.

The supreme example of this was Krishna’s explanation to Arjuna of the need for him to fight his own kinsmen on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, immortalised as the Bhagavad Gita.

For the danger is that without understanding the deeper cause or causes, symptoms will be confused with the underlying issue, and superficial explanations of the ‘why’ of what is happening may drive people’s responses.

Therefore, Auroville Today decided to mark the month of Sri Aurobindo’s birthday by asking various Aurovilians to step back from the heat and dust of conflict and reflect upon the deeper causes of the present turmoil. The hope is that new understandings may emerge which will lead to different ways of dealing with the present crisis.

## “What is happening is an enormous shift”

For many years, Barbara has been doing what she terms “consciousness and energy work’ with Aurovilians.

*Auroville Today: What do you think is the underlying cause of the present turmoil in Auroville?*

**Barbara:** The chaos we are experiencing at the moment is not only happening in Auroville, but all over the planet. The new Light, Consciousness is active everywhere exerting pressure. Individual realisations are no longer enough, there is a need for a collective and global realisation.

What is happening is an enormous shift, which on the surface can appear destructive and catastrophic, but Sri Aurobindo tells us it is the “Hour of God”, and God knows what to do.

Thank god.

So while the outer atmosphere of Auroville appears chaotic, I know when existing systems like democracy break down, chaos comes, but if we choose to stay creative and connected, out of the chaos the real answer will come.

Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have helped bring the Supramental into the earth field, and now the Earth is waking up. This is a huge integral process, and we can see that everything done so far, even the best, is no longer enough and doesn’t

work. Before, we could use our mental possibilities to organise ourselves and the environment, but now we must learn to see and accept that the Divine is organising better and truly. That is now the difficulty: to make people realise that the Divine organisation is already happening in a new way and knows how to deal with everything better than any human organisation does.

*So how can we participate in this new movement?*

The law of evolution has changed: from the law of duality (oppositions) into the Law of the new light and truth and unending progress.

“A new world is born, born, born...,” Mother says. If we have trust and faith and surrender, Sri Aurobindo and She can do everything needed for us and “the work will be done automatically”.

But we have to free ourselves from the ego automatisms: the ego has to go by opening to eternal frequencies and the presence of the psychic. This is an ongoing process of purification and by that we become transitional beings. It happens in

our daily life and work, and the psychic can grow into a psychic being by which we become true and loving beings for all life.

But we must be patient. We have to learn to connect to everything and all forms on Earth in a true way, and at present we receive the Light in small doses. This one can only do step-by-step: it is a huge work which cannot be rushed.

The experience of ignorance, falsehood and perversions etc. bring symptoms of painful inner and outer attacks, confusions and depressions... so what to do with all this?

Now a lot of things trouble us, but we must be careful that we don’t get pulled down by them. We must learn not to get into the wrong vibration, which happens when we are fearful and the body shrinks. We need to slow down, become silent in the mind, peaceful in the vital, and very still in the body so that nothing moves anymore, everything becomes quiet and the cells can rest in stillness. This is the way of purification and transformation: individually and collectively. This is the Yoga of the Earth and the Adventure of Consciousness... a big on-going work.

*Is evolution speeding up?*

Yes, the whole planet is progressing to a higher frequency. Now the world is becoming more and more light, and with this light everything is possible. And what has to leave is breaking away.

We are in the vast field of on-going free progress without beginning and end. The past is disappearing and the future comes nearer to the now. After all, the Universal Mother has taken up a human body which started an accelerated process of evolution on earth and brings back the original purity and joy.

“If Earth calls and the Supreme answers, the hour can be even now for that immense and glorious transformation,” said Sri Aurobindo.

We have the opportunity to enter into a field where we can collaborate together and realise that we all come from the same source, the divine source. This is how I want to be with Aurovilians and everybody, to share the joy of living in the presence of That.

*From an interview with Alan*

## There is an imperative need for another Auroville

Alain Bernard first came to Pondicherry in August 1972 and was privileged to see The Mother. A few days later, his application to become Aurovilian was approved by Her and he joined Auroville in July 1973. Together with other Aurovilians and Kireet Joshi, the former Registrar of the Sri Aurobindo Centre of Education who, after The Mother’s passing, had joined the Government as Educational Advisor and later became Special Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Alain conceptualized the Auroville Foundation Act. At present he is an executive of the Auroville Village Action Group.

Auroville Today asked him about his views on the present times in Auroville.

*AVToday: What, do you think, are the reasons for this present situation?*

There are of course outer and inner reasons. Starting with the outer ones: there were many defects in the way Auroville functioned, which we were unable to address, as the community was weary to give ‘authority’ to its working groups for fear of abuse. We created an organizational structure which prescribes much discussion, in attempts to come to consensus. But results have mostly evaded us. Take, for example, the Retreat. [see AVToday # 309, April 2015, eds.] In the course of these rather intense three days with nearly 200 participants, we jointly identified many ‘elephants in the room’, but none of them was resolved by us afterwards. In a way, we were stuck.

*And the inner reasons?*

I have started re-reading *Mother’s Agenda*, and chanced on Her explanation of the brutal attack on the Ashram by hundreds of rioters on February 11, 1965. Mother said that the protection had been weakened by collective imperfections: “I had a microscopic (but absolutely precise and exact) perception of all the lying points in the atmosphere of the Ashram, which established the contact [with the negative forces],” She said to Satprem.

Surely, Auroville too has many of those ‘lying points.’ Our many imperfections are obvious, especially in relation to the ultimate goal of transformation which is something so incredibly high. Didn’t Mother herself say that Aurovilians were supposed to already be in permanent contact with their inner being? She made it a condition for becoming a true Aurovilian: “The first necessity is the inner discovery in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the centre there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville.” I suppose we can rightly assume that most present Aurovilians, if not all, do not fulfill this condition. But how otherwise can one be truly the ‘willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness’ mentioned in Auroville’s Charter? This is not to say that all are equal in this. I have always felt that the true ‘hierarchy’ in Auroville is beyond our perception and that some souls here do protect Auroville through their quiet but intense aspiration.

There are most probably other reasons as well. In the *Agenda*,

Mother speaks about asuric beings; She recalls that one of them had told Her that he knew that She would one day destroy him, but that before that happened, he would destroy as much as he could in the world. Mother spoke about Auroville as a Dream of the Divine. I think we may assume that such a Divine Project is likely to be attacked by such forces. I feel it is happening right now, and we don’t know how long this attack will continue.

*You said you don’t think that many people have made the inner discovery. Could you elaborate?*

Mother said that the inner contact with the psychic is a concrete fact and those who once experienced it know this as an undeniable truth. But it is not mental. I believe that I have seen some otherwise nondescript people whose psychic appears to be a tangible influence in their day-to-day lives. But those people do not speak about that. I myself long ago went through a period of a few weeks where things were really different. Obviously I was not ready for anything permanent and it slowly dissipated. I remember a feeling of ‘being present’ which was special. When I mentioned this to Kireet, he told me it is a promise and it will come back. I am still waiting. But clearly, such a way of being, if established, would have made a huge difference in my participation to Auroville’s work.

I suppose the same may have happened to many Aurovilians. Radical transformations like ‘new births’ we have not seen so far.

*continued on page 3*

# “The four layers of the Auroville crisis”

**An Aurovilian since 1995, Manoj is an educator, filmmaker, and the director of Purnam Centre for Integrality in Auroville. Here he presents his views on the current crisis in Auroville.**

*Auroville Today: What is the underlying cause of the present turmoil?*

**Manoj:** In my view, Auroville’s present turmoil stems from a confluence of issues, not a single root cause. The powerful intervention by the GB and the Secretary is only an external instrumentation, not the cause. The intervention brought out very old hidden layers that are the deeper causes. The first layer is our decades old conflict between the forest and urban development, two differing world views. Over the decades this conflict was in a status quo with foresters having an upper hand but that has now been forcefully disrupted.

The old status quo was held in place by the second layer beneath it - the ineffective system of governance. Due to excessive decentralisation and non hierarchical approach, we were stuck in decision making and execution paralysis and incapacity for collective action even on pressing issues. Now the officials have brought in centralisation and it is in conflict with the old way.

Beneath this is the third layer, the wounded relationship with power. Historically, across the world, the abuse of power has left deep pain in the collective memory. This was present as a collective shadow in Auroville making people hypersensitive and emotionally reactive when dealing with power and authority. Our excessive decentralisation was a defence against this angst. This collective shadow has now erupted as an open raw wound unleashing a great deal of psychological violence and fear.

The fourth and the deepest cause is the fundamental disconnect from the soul at an individual and collective level. On one hand the emotional

being is mistaken for the soul and this misconception is held in place by lack of self-awareness. As a result the collective evolution is stuck at the level of the emotional being. The intelligent will - *buddhi* - is not able to mediate between the group soul and the vital and physical parts to translate the soul’s vision into reality. Despite the abundance of theoretical discussions about the “psychic being,” inner discovery remains elusive.

These are the causes at varying depths.

*What are we being asked to understand, or the lesson we are being asked to learn?*

The pressure on Auroville is not asking for ecological sustainability but something deeper. Even when spiritual ideals govern Auroville’s vision, we have been largely driven by global narratives based on materialists’ view of sustainability. There is a tendency to reduce inner growth into our carbon footprint and ecology.

Wars, weaponisation of all things and ecological destruction are symptoms not the root cause of human crisis. As E.O. Wilson said, “The real problem of humanity is the following: We have Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions and godlike technology.” Ego’s sense of separation, territoriality and fighting instincts are lurking within us along with the shadow of our wounded relationship with power. Until we cleanse and transform this inner state and heal those inner wounds, true outer harmony and unity are impossible.

The pressure is on us to truly delve into inner transformation, a transformation that will ripple outwards and change how we behave. Just like

we’ve regenerated the outer landscape, we need to regenerate the collective inner landscape – that’s the real call we’re facing. Auroville’s *dharma*, its purpose, is to be a living laboratory for this kind of transformation, a place for inner discovery. This has to be our top priority.

*How may this change the way we behave in the present situation?*

Expecting the government officials to lead the inner transformation is naive. The transformation won’t come by compliance with government laws and regulations just like it is not about the carbon footprint or ecology or the curvature of the roads. These are important but only secondary and outer factors.

On the other extreme, demonising the officials is a trap of our own shadow as we end up manifesting what we fear the most. The so-called authoritarian out there lives within us as our shadow but it is hard to comprehend and resolve. It is easier to fight with outer reality, file court cases, crank up RA machinery, weaponise the media, and play the victim card. Through all this we are only aggravating the wounded relationship with power, not healing it. We are going through a recurring karmic pattern and it is time to dissolve its grip.

As long as our actions are born out of fear, anger, anxiety, sorrow and pain, we remain the agents of these forces, propagating its toxic effect. We can generate as many narratives, counter narratives, facts and counterfacts as we want, but as long as the animating consciousness is not transformed, nothing has been fundamentally changed even if

you win all the court cases.

The invitation to Micheal Bonke and his team to take up unfinished work of CPWD is an important signal of collaboration. Whether you like his ideas or not, his substantial contribution to Auroville is undeniable. The future belongs to those who have not only knowledge and love for the divine, but can also reasonably and diplomatically negotiate boundaries and collaborate for finding win-win solutions. This is possible only when you have healed your relationship with money and power and it is no more an uneasy shadow. I hope more such solutions emerge.

There are only two things fixed, the vision of Auroville and the land. Everything else, including the Auroville Foundation Act, are transient and evolving forms in between the spiritual and material end of things. But the material end is yet to be secured. We do have a realistic possibility of securing it with the help of the GB and the Secretary if we collaborate. Formally empowered officials can provide great support in land consolidation. However, we have to let go of many transient forms of the past, even if it is emotionally painful for those who invested their time and energy in shaping them. It is a sacrifice for the sake of the larger good. This is where the behavioural shift is critical.

On the side of government officials, the tendency to turn Auroville into a government department will be a fundamental disservice to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I expect such tendencies to subside as it has no alignment with the soul of Auroville.

*Manoj Pavithran*

## Another explanation?

For more than two and a half years, Auroville has experienced deep turmoil. It has divided Aurovilians and even led some to doubt whether Auroville itself has a future. What is the cause? There is no shortage of explanations. Some explain it as resistance from certain Aurovilians to a change in the status quo, or in their resistance to the construction of the city in the face of a renewed push for its materialisation. Others blame it on the attempt to impose dogmatic and outdated ideas, or clumsy attempts to impose what some people believe Mother wanted, on an evolving experiment. Conspiracy theories include suggestions that this is a deeply laid plan to rid the community of foreigners, or an excuse for a complete government takeover, or for the Sri Aurobindo Society to take control of Auroville again.

Yet none of these explanations seem sufficient to account for the scale and depth of the disruption.

What, then, could be the deeper reason for what is happening? Mother understood that everything that happens is, ultimately, the Divine’s way of hastening spiritual evolution, even though it may not appear like that to us. But

within that overarching trajectory she also made it clear that there are choices to be made at the individual and collective levels, choices which can affect the speed at which that evolution can take place. In that sense, the present disruption of our accustomed way of living could be taken, at the individual level, as an opportunity, as a spur, to dedicate ourselves more completely to the ideal and to practice what Mother advised:

*All thoughts, pre-plannings, arrangements and all that, are very favourable to much disorder. To live almost minute by minute, to be like that (gesture upward), attentive only to the thing that is to be done at the moment, and then to let the All-Consciousness decide.*

At the collective level, one of the present narratives is that Auroville has gone ‘off the rails’, that it has drifted far from the ideal Mother set before us, and that the present disruption is actually a necessary course correction. Few Aurovilians would dispute that in many areas we have failed so far to fully materialise what Mother had intended for Auroville. It is unclear, however, if the present attempt at course correction, however well intended, is making things better, as the means chosen is

causing considerable collateral damage.

It is totally understandable that those who fear for the integrity of Auroville should do all that they can to promote or protect it. In fact, the present turmoil is seen by some as a struggle between ‘asuric’ forces which wish to destroy Auroville and those who are trying to protect Mother’s Dream. The problem is that each of the opposing orientations in the community seems to believe that they are the ‘true’ Auroville while they characterise the others as the destructive force. The result is that we are trapped in a circular dynamic where the action of one leads to reaction from the other, and so on in an ever escalating way.

Perhaps there is another possible explanation. And that is, indeed, that we (as well as the larger world) are engaged in a struggle, but it is the struggle of the old world as it resists the new. And even though we would all like to believe we represent the new, the hard fact may be that all our present understandings and actions, however fine, may actually be ‘old world’, even including the way we interpret and use Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s words.

For this new consciousness, according to Mother, is unlike anything we

have been used to before, the expression of a ‘new world’ which has already been ‘born’. And one of the changes it has already brought about is that the old ways are no longer effective.

*There’s really something new – things are NO LONGER what they were. All our common sense, our human logic, our practical sense – collapsed, finished! No longer effective. No longer realistic. They are no longer relevant. A new world, really.*

This threatens many of us who rely heavily upon our minds and on the Enlightenment proposition that everything can be solved rationally. But how are we to access this new consciousness? Mother gave hints:

*There is one essential condition: the ego’s reign must come to an end. The ego is now the obstacle. The ego must be replaced by the divine consciousness” – but, essentially, there is no workshop manual for how to do this.*

*The road to it is a completely new road which has never before been traced out – nobody has gone there, nobody has done that! It is a beginning, a universal beginning. So, it is an absolutely unexpected and unpredictable adventure ... It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all*

*the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails, a real adventure, whose goal is certain victory but the road to which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored... One must put aside all that has been foreseen, all that has been devised, all that has been constructed, and then... set off walking into the unknown.*

When Auroville’s very integrity appears threatened, it seems illogical, even dangerous, to begin exploring other ways of solving our problems, to embark, in other words, upon this new adventure. No doubt, we will have to begin with small steps as we cannot easily abandon a lifetime of assuming that we know how the world works.

But begin, I think, we must as a collective (no doubt some individuals are already on the way). We cannot keep saying we are not ready yet, that we have to keep using the old methods, for this will continue to encase us in the old world.

Mother expected something more from us:

*Auroville wants to be a new creation expressing a new Consciousness in a new way and according to new methods.*

*Alan*

## There is an imperative need for another Auroville

*continued from page 2*

Let’s hope it may manifest more in the future as, surely, it would help tremendously our painfully slow collective progress. Still, whoever and whatever we may be, I feel that it is the deep faith of most Aurovilians about Mother’s force and presence despite the awful appearances which help them face and go through the present ordeal.

Besides the individuals, there is also a question of a collective intensity in aspiration.

We all go about our lives and our projects but do we keep at the same time a constant concern and prayer for Auroville’s true development? Like a living background present behind at all times? Maybe some do and if so, it is great. As Satprem, that intensely intense being said so simply and luminously – in Auroville people do many beautiful and good things, precious researches, they create beauty in many different ways, they organize life — but that’s the outside appearance. There is a secret. They do these activities, but at the same time they are in search of the ‘new world’. That Secret can sometimes be shared with those who can understand. It is not necessary to speak about it with everybody, but it is at the heart of all we do.

Or, rather, let’s say that it is how it should be. I do feel that building up the ‘collective’ meaningfully and intensively may be the next important effort after the acute crisis ends. I don’t really know how it can be done but is it not significant that in more than 50 years of

Auroville’s development during which we built many large buildings, we have not been able to create a big, beautiful place in which we can all meet regularly and easily, in all weather patterns, with adequate infrastructure?

So the psychic discovery is essential for all Aurovilians. For example, when Mother was asked what political organization She wanted for Auroville, She replied, “*An amusing definition occurs to me: a divine anarchy. But the world will not understand. Men must become conscious of their psychic being and organize themselves spontaneously, without fixed rules and laws - that is the ideal. For this, one must be in contact with one’s psychic being, one must be guided by it and the ego’s authority and influence must disappear.*” And on its relevance for the future, She replied: “*The Divine manifests in man under the psychic influence, and that is how the coming of superhumanity is prepared.*” Last but certainly not least there is that conversation of March 22, 1969, where She spoke about the effect of the descent of the Overman Consciousness on January 1 that year:

*“Two days ago (not yesterday, the day before), this Consciousness said something to me, and then I said, ‘Fine’... but it went on saying the same thing over and over again until I finally wrote it down! So here it is [Mother hands him a note]. And it explained to me why it had used ‘we’. “We shall endeavour to make Auroville the cradle of the superman.” [the intermediate species between mankind and the supramental being, eds.] And then I said, ‘Why we?’ and it said, ‘Because we’re*

*going to try to get the people who will be in Auroville to collaborate’.”*

We know from experience – yes, despite our limitations – that the more we grow internally, the more needs of all kinds diminish. Being in permanent contact with one’s true being is the supreme lightness: this is why The Mother begins with that with her enumeration of the characteristics of this still unknown being that she reveals to us: the True Aurovilian. That new race which alone can really make Auroville the city that the earth needs.

*Do you have any expectations for tomorrow?*

No, I don’t know what tomorrow will bring. Who knows? What is known, however, and shared by many, is the imperative need for another Auroville. Even if this Auroville that we have known and loved is a luminous memory compared to what we see today, it is not at the level of the true Auroville, we know that. It is why it had to be broken, dislocated, and crushed. And of one thing we must be convinced: As Sri Aurobindo and Mother have repeatedly said, all that happens is exactly what must happen in order to lead us and the world as quickly as possible to the goal—the union with the Divine and ultimately the manifestation of the Divine. This other Auroville must become a living body composed of hearts and souls united towards the goal of becoming “the cradle of the superman”.

*In conversation with Carel*



# The larger learnings

Angad is a long-time Aurovilian who manages Mantra Pottery.

*Auroville Today: What do you think is the deeper cause of the present turmoil, and what can we learn from it?*

One of the things that has become very clear to me is that everything that is happening to me every day, every moment, is my tutorial. And since I've been looking at things like that, I'm more able to accept things, my inner life has improved and my outer life has improved. I believe that everybody is getting experiences in their life precisely according to their need for growth, and that some are recognising it, but most don't.

*So what can we learn from the present situation?*

In Bangalore beautiful big trees are sweetly preserved by the planners when a road gets widened, but one day, when the road needs to get even wider, they take the trees out because the cost and inconvenience of not doing that is a no-brainer.

Cities mean change. Mother's city has to come here, so why would we want to create problems for ourselves many years later by not preparing for those changes now? It can be done. In 2009, one of our planners came to me and said they were thinking of starting the Crown. I asked him to mark the route precisely and then make a fence on my side of it so that whenever I did work on the land or built something, I knew that it would not be destroyed later. He agreed, and the Development Group paid for the fence. So when the Crown happened in this area, I had virtually no disturbance.

You can't block planning just because you've planted trees. That's one lesson we need to learn. At one time I also thought this would be a city with meandering lanes and winding narrow roads, with no motorised traffic. I liked this concept because I'm also one of those who are escaping from cities. But in the last year I spent time in a town in the UK where all the essential services are provided in walking distance, and I really like that concept. Isn't this how Auroville is meant to be? I was even telling the Youth Centre people how lucky they are because they will be on this main thoroughfare and this will be part of their contribution to the vibrant life of Auroville's High Street.

People fear the Crown will attract traffic, but it doesn't have to be like that. There could be one part that would be accessible for deliveries between fixed hours, and an inner part could be for cycles or an electric tram or something. We are building radials with a width of only 4 ½ metres, but lorries delivering building materials, buses, and children on bicycles etc. will be using them. This makes no sense. We seem to be stuck in a warp between what we think is a wide road and what is required. In fact, in India it is mandatory for such roads to be at least six metres wide to allow access for emergency vehicles.

*But accepting that cities have to develop and Mother's city has to come, do you support the way it is happening at present?*

I don't think anything was wrong with the way the present Secretary acted. When she came she tried to engage with everybody with walks around the Crown road, but then some people started saying, how dare she do this? I was so happy that night when an email came from the Youth Centre saying that they accepted the Crown and inviting everyone to come the next day to dismantle their structures. But then a few people who wield a disproportionate influence told the youth not to move. That's what created the situation that day. They expected that the Secretary would buckle, but she didn't. Almost all the present differences of perception/difficulties etc are a consequence of that day's actions.

I don't like *diktats*, or the Foundation muscling in and replacing our groups. This is not the society we are here to build: we are here to build a society where we inspire people to do things. But I think the *diktats* are a result of our resistance. The Secretary and Foundation wanted to get the Crown started, and when they encountered resistance, they had no more creative way to do this than by imposition. Meanwhile, by then they had already attracted those people in Auroville who wanted to do it at any cost, with force if necessary. So what do you expect?

I myself wonder if the radials have to be so rigidly curved, but

we have shut ourselves off from the possibility of modifying these things by being so rabidly against them. With the conflict becoming so fixed with court cases, we have shut ourselves off from these options and perhaps the Crown has been deliberately built in a way that it cannot easily be changed.

This is a collective tutorial! I think the first thing we need to recognise that it is our own shit that has to be worked upon, and not keep blaming somebody else for what is happening.

But there are certain things I am pushing back against. For example, the Finance and Assets Management committee has become a tax collecting group, rigidly collecting money from units without considering, for example, their need to offset losses incurred during COVID.

I also feel strongly that we should be developing the infrastructure of the villages inside the Master Plan, which are an intrinsic part of Auroville and whose population is expanding rapidly. I'd hazard a guess that there are already over 15000 people living in the Master Plan Area of our City (mostly in the Green Belt to be precise) and there's no talk of any relocation, whether outward or inward. Isn't it better, then, to think of building sewage and waste management systems there, where the population density is already present, and then, look at the learnings that will emerge before doing big projects inside the Residential Zone or even along Lines of Force?

*In conversation with Alan*

## What we ourselves create

Kristen came to Auroville from California in 2012 and is grateful to be here.

The core issue is that our soul-forces are not as strong as the other forces. Imagine if they were:

"It's time to move houses."

"Oh good, new neighbours, and I can get rid of all this junk!"

"You have no budget."

"Free from money, at last!"

"Someone not in your tribe has benefitted from this."

"Wonderful, their happiness is part of my happiness."

"You no longer work here."

"All right, time to learn something else."

An important action needs to be taken – you know exactly what it is and do it perfectly. Someone needs help – you feel it and respond without being asked. You are told a falsehood – you recognize it, smile and know the truth behind.

A subtle network forms of conscious beings who know when one among them is not okay, and can channel to him what he needs to be okay. Each feels the wellbeing of the whole integral with the wellbeing of himself.

A challenge posed by a bigger entity is met with clear eyes and welcome. Where it is compatible with the truth of the collective being, it is integrated. Where it is

incompatible, an alternative is expressed so coherently and powerfully that the bigger entity feels, "Oh, this is actually much better."

No one is rejected, but each one takes their right role.

I suppose what we are all being asked to do is to decide what is really important to us. Is getting along important? Is goodwill even toward someone who has hurt you important? Whatever is happening around us that we don't like, all of us are responsible for it: vibrations both low and high are contagious. Make the experiment today!

*Kristen*

## PROFILE

# Committed to Auroville

Palani is the executive and product manager of Aureka, Auroville's engineering company. Here he talks about his upbringing, his work, and his plans for the future.

*Auroville Today: Palani, when did you come to Auroville?*

**Palani:** I was born in Kottakarai, one of the villages that border Auroville. The year was 1968, Auroville had just been inaugurated. My father was fascinated by the new neighbours. After a few years he decided to move to Auroville with his entire family. He started working for Jaap who, at the time, was managing a big farm stretching all the way from what is now Kottakarai to Ilaigarkal school. He planted, drove a bullock cart to water the seedlings and had the joy of seeing the barren lands gradually turn green. He also worked at the Matrimandir, first at the excavation, later in the Matrimandir Nursery.

We children, my brother Vinayagan and I, were sent to school in Kottakarai and Thiruchambalam, and I managed to stay on until the 9th standard. But by then my family felt that we had to learn something practical. I was 16. I met Robi who asked me to join Aureka, the metal workshop that had initially started with Mother's name 'Toujours Mieux'. I was fascinated seeing that workshop and being allowed to work with machines I had never seen before. I started at the lathe, then worked with a milling machine and so on, until I had a practical experience of all the machines of Aureka. My brother became a contractor and built many houses in Auroville.

*So your entire family became involved with Auroville?*

Yes. My father Murugesan contributed in another way as well. In his free time he was a poet. His most famous work is the re-writing of the story of the Kaluveli Siddhar, the sage who lived in Irumbai and whose curse, after he had been insulted, split the Siva lingam in the Irumbai temple and created the barren lands of what later became Auroville. The story is



Palani in the Aureka workshop

ancient, but my grandfather added the ending, the promise of Siva to the desolate people that the curse would be lifted and the lands become green again when foreign people would settle. And that's the story of Auroville. The Bharatanatyam dancers Krishna Kumar, his wife Gita and their daughter Harini, together with Johnny and other Aurovilians, once enacted this play in the Irumbai temple itself, at which occasion my father was lauded. [see AV Today #240, February 2009, eds.] I still have copies of his story book which he made with the help of Meenakshi from the Matrimandir nursery.

*You continued working at Aureka?*

I never left. I developed a specialisation in wind pumps. In those early years, water was not pumped using electricity but by using wind mills, also known as wind pumps. Robi, a Swiss engineer and executive of Aureka, specialised in these wind pumps and improved their design

continuously. This led to the Auroville Multi-Blade Windmill, which has evolved from practical experience over the last 33 years. Robi invited me to be part of his team, and for more than 30 years I have been installing and maintaining wind pumps all over India. It was a very dynamic time for Aureka and a great time for me personally. Nowadays, the demand for these windmills has lessened as more and more people go for electric, diesel or photovoltaic pumps. But we have scientific proof that the Auroville wind pumps deliver the lowest cost per water unit as compared to other systems. In Auroville, there are still ten of these windmills pumping water.

While the windmill business is slowly fading out, the manufacture of earth construction equipment is on the upswing. Initially designed by Auroville architect Satprem, Aureka built and later improved on the Earth Block Presses. The first were manually operated; now we also manufacture electric hydraulic presses. Aureka

also makes the accessories for these presses and the handling and rammed earth equipment. The products are sold all over the world in collaboration with companies such as Innotec, USA; Dwell Earth, USA; Earthworks Construction, Gambia; Fam Engineering, Gambia; AnyWay Solid Environmental Solutions, Israel; and, of course, Auroville's own Auroville Earth Institute. Aureka's website is well-visited and instrumental in getting most orders.

Apart from these two main product lines, Aureka is also involved in making things for Auroville offices and residences, such as window grills. But that's a minor part of our work.

I have now become Aureka's executive and production manager and oversee the work of our 40 employees.

*Has Aureka been able to keep up with the times, e.g. by renovating its workshops and rejuvenating its machines?*

Over the years, Aureka has created some office and auxiliary buildings, and we built a high compound wall out of necessity. But the main workshop still dates from the beginning. The machine park is getting older, but the machines are sturdy and it would be an unwise investment to replace them with modern equipment. Such investments would only pay off if the new machines would be used 24/7, for which they have been designed. But Aureka's employees work 8 hours a day. It's more economical to outsource certain products, and continue using the existing machines to make the main parts of the earth block presses.

*How do you see your future developing?*

Definitely in Auroville. My wife, my daughter and my son are all involved in Auroville one way or the other. And that will continue, come what may.

*In conversation with Carel*

# The quest for meaning

**Seza is Auroville’s first Newcomer from Türkiye (Turkey). She moved here 1.5 years ago after her first visit eight years earlier. She describes her journey from Istanbul to Auroville as a quest for meaning, self-discovery, and transformation.**

*Auroville Today: What was your early life like?*

**Seza:** I was born and raised in Istanbul, now a city with over 20 million people. Life was always a hustle, focused on being competitive and successful, and I was very much a part of that trend. However, this led to a period of depression for me. I was doing everything I was told to do: getting top scores, working for big companies, earning a big salary. But I felt shallow and couldn't find meaning in my life. I went through an existential crisis in my late twenties, which I am now grateful for because it pushed me to search for the true meaning of my life.

Interestingly, life seemed to help me along this path. I was considering quitting my job but was unsure how to manage financially. One day, my manager pushed me to speak up, and although I lacked the courage, it just happened. Then, my landlord decided to sell the house, forcing me to move. This was in 2016. I quit my job, packed my belongings into a container, and bought a ticket to Auroville. India hadn't been on my mind at all, but somehow, I was drawn to it. A friend suggested Auroville as a good place to transition from city life, instead of going straight to an Ashram, and that's how I ended up here.

*Why India specifically?*

I wanted to change my life but didn't know how. When searching for something spiritual, India is often the first place that comes to mind. While some people are drawn to shamanic practices or ancient teachings from South America, India appealed to me.

*Did you have any spiritual influences growing up?*

I was born in a very non-religious family in Turkey, where roughly half the population is liberal and not particularly religious, while the other half is more conservative. I grew up in the liberal part and wasn't exposed to religious practices. Even though the majority of the population is Muslim, Turkey is not a Shariah state. In fact, I was already 22 when I learned about the Friday prayers in mosques. My family had a vague sense of faith, more about connection with creation than traditional practices. Things were unclear to me. I realised at 30 that I didn't have genuine faith. Coming to Auroville has been part of my journey to practise a deeper spirituality.

*What did you study?*

I studied political science and public administration, with a minor in psychology. I've always been attracted to philosophy, but my university studies were focused on Western philosophy. Over the past seven years, I've become more engaged with yogic philosophies, particularly Samkhya. My vocabulary has expanded, especially with Sanskrit concepts, which has profoundly changed my connection with the divine.

As a yoga teacher and coach, I offer sessions on emotional regulation, embodiment, and boundaries based on nervous system theories which I initially started in Bodrum, Turkey. These practices, along with yoga, have allowed me to guide both groups and individuals, expanding my perception and approach.

However, after COVID, I felt stagnant in my life and realised I needed a change. I saw myself as a creator, someone who brings different elements together to feel more embodied and connected. I wanted to explore new environments and get inspired by other facilitators and spaces. Bali came to mind as an ideal place — a vibrant hub for spirituality and holistic practices, offering a blend of financial opportunities and spiritual growth. My plan was to observe, participate, and perhaps even facilitate sessions there, aiming to find a genuine way to merge my financial and spiritual pursuits.

This was in December 2022. But a group of friends were planning to come to Auroville and invited me along. I also had a few ashrams in mind that I hadn't visited before, like the Art of Living and Isha Foundation. So, I thought I would spend Christmas and New Year in Auroville and then move on after about a week or ten days. I planned to spend some months in India before heading to Bali. So, I came to Auroville with my group.

However, on the second day, I came down with a severe fever. At first, I thought I had contracted COVID on the plane, but it turned out to be Dengue fever. This illness, like many in my life, ended up being a period of intense introspection and purification for me. Although it was painful and isolating, it gave me an opportunity to look within. I remember on New Year's Eve, I was sitting under the banyan tree, overwhelmed by the pain, and I asked The Mother for help for the first time. The next day, the pain was gone. Even the doctor at the medical centre was surprised at how quickly I had recovered.

After that, we had to leave our guest house at Vérité. It was the high season, so finding accommodation was difficult. I happened to still have the contact of Creativity Guest House and reached out. They had availability, so we moved there. My friend decided to go to Bali earlier than planned, but I felt compelled to stay. I cancelled all my plans to visit other ashrams in India and remained in Auroville.

*So you initially just came for a visit?*

Yes, I came for a visit, and it's quite an interesting story. Auroville's websites and accommodations are scattered, and somehow I ended up at Creativity Guest House. Interestingly, I'm now the manager there.

My journey feels like it's coming together beautifully and mystically. The dots are connecting in beautiful ways and I never question

this flow. I have full trust and surrender in my connection with Auroville.

When I first visited eight years ago, it felt like something out of the TV show "Lost"— it was mystical, confusing, with hidden aspects. The architecture and daytime emptiness were striking, but during events, if you were lucky enough to know about them and then find the location, it was bustling with people.

Back then, Auroville felt mysterious and energetic to me. Now, I understand it's a place rich in symbolism and spiritual journeys, both personal and communal, without being codependent. It offers immense freedom and inspiration. Initially, though, I felt alienated and spent a month here thinking it was nice for massages and such, but it didn't really touch me back then.

After several months in India, I returned to Turkey and moved from Istanbul to a smaller city. There, I met my yoga teacher, a disciplined follower of Ashtanga Yoga and a student of Pattabhi Jois. She is also a literature teacher, over 70 years old. We translated sutras into Turkish, including the Bhakti Yoga Sutras and the Patanjali Sutras. Now, she's working on the Bhagavad Gita, and I am offering my help online.

*What were you looking for?*

At that time, I didn't have a mature sense of spirituality. I was looking for a more structured, organised way of practising — how to pray, how to meditate. This is why ashrams were more attractive to me. I spent a lot of time at the Sri Aurobindo Ashrams in Pondicherry and Delhi.

I didn't fully understand the philosophical side of yoga or what integral yoga meant. It was a valuable experience, but it was clear that I wasn't in tune with the vibrant energy there.

I often visit the Matrimandir. It holds such a special place in my heart. One day, while meditating there, I opened my eyes and saw the pond. It was a profound moment of connection for me. The pond, with its flow and symbolism, felt like a divine representation of Sanskrit terms just in front of my eyes. That was when I knew I belonged here, at least for now.

*How did your interest in Integral Yoga develop during this time?*

Well, I began going deeper into Integral Yoga through reading and study. I was and am curious to explore further, through various spiritual paths like Shaivism, Samkhya, and Tantra to truly understand how to relate with the divine. In Integral Yoga what particularly resonated with me was the concept of being an instrument for the descent of the light. In many other spiritual perspectives, enlightenment can feel like a personal achievement, something you do for yourself, liberation and ascending. But in integral yoga, it's about becoming enlightened and then using that enlightenment as a channel to manifest the divine. This revelation prompted me to dive deeper into my studies.

Shortly after this realisation, the guest house manager offered me a volunteering opportunity, which I eagerly accepted. I returned to Turkey briefly to sort out my visa, and when I came back, everything seemed to fall into place. I officially became a newcomer to Auroville. It's interesting to note that I received my newcomer card just before the entry board closed. This has made me feel incredibly protected and supported as if everything was meant to happen exactly as it did.

*And what is this new phase of your life like?*

Now that I'm here in Auroville, I find myself in a continuous state of observation, seeking to understand how I can best contribute to this community. There's so much here that inspires me on my spiritual journey. It's remarkable how we can maintain a connection to the material world while also recognizing the divine essence within everything around us. This perspective enriches my experience and deepens my sense of connection. I am working as a guest house manager and also working in the Matrimandir gardens for the New Earth. On one side organisational, commercial and communication skills are required, on the other the unique nonverbal connection is there with the significance of the flowers and subtle energies.

I draw inspiration from various tools and practices available here. Like a curator, I blend qualities from different schools of thought to enhance my personal journey and contribution and offerings. I believe that the first step towards deeper connection lies within our own bodies. Our bodies serve as vessels for sincerity and genuine connection, offering a pathway to perceive the divine within ourselves and in the world around us. It's fascinating how our bodies, despite being the most tangible aspect of our existence, possess such inherent magic.

Activities like sound baths, dance sessions, and jamming sessions further deepen this connection for me. They allow me to immerse myself in the present moment and experience the beauty of existence.

During my entry process interview, I was asked how I would describe Auroville to my friends. The concept of an intentional community is difficult to convey, especially considering the potential hippie connotations associated with the word "community" in my culture and in Turkish. However, Auroville truly embodies this idea of intentionality in community-building. When there's a specific



Seza

intention, whether it's chanting, celebration, mourning, or any other purpose, individuals come together seamlessly, creating a sense of community. However, once the intention is fulfilled, everyone returns to their individual lives. It's a unique dynamic that characterises Auroville as a truly intentional community.

***You mentioned that Auroville allows for the integration of various aspects of your life and skills. Could you elaborate on how your past studies and experiences have converged here?***

Absolutely. It's akin to what Steve Jobs famously said about connecting the dots backward in life. My journey has been shaped by my academic pursuits in political science and public administration. While those studies didn't lead me directly into a career in diplomacy or brokerage, they profoundly influenced my analytical skills and worldview. After navigating profit-driven and competitive environments, I felt drawn towards spirituality, eventually finding myself here.

And Auroville is where I find a perfect synthesis of my past experiences and academic background in public administration and political science. The community allows me to take on responsibilities and contribute ideas for communal living, drawing upon my insights from the university. Additionally, Auroville also has its commercial aspects, where I can leverage my expertise to contribute effectively.

And there's something I mentioned earlier that I'd like to touch upon as well. In Auroville, I've come to appreciate the material world in a different light. All aspects of life, from material objects to routines, are seen as expressions of the divine. This perspective has been deeply inspiring for me and has further fueled my spiritual journey.

*How do you experience the current conflict in Auroville?*

First of all, being Turkish, I've grown up in a region marked by political conflict, so navigating tension is not unfamiliar to me. I believe Auroville could benefit from individuals like myself, who are resilient in the face of political challenges. If we harbour resentment, who will sustain the community spirit? So, I hold onto faith that the intention of Auroville will prevail over external pressures.

The ecological and communal aspects here provide an incredible space for practising the evolution of consciousness. It's not about following one leader but rather fostering collective growth. Additionally, the spiritual dimension offers diverse paths, whether one resonates with Integral Yoga or other practices. This freedom deeply resonates with me. There are numerous aspects of Auroville to appreciate, and I'm keen to explore and engage with more of them.

So I remain genuinely curious and open hearted about Auroville. Beyond its beautiful blend of spirituality and daily life, there's another aspect that I find equally captivating. In Auroville, you witness how one can live in harmony with nature, embracing ecological practices. It's a place where you can grow, learn, and deepen your connection with Mother Earth. Auroville isn't just a place for individual decisions, as it might be if one was living in New York or Berlin. It's a community where collective decisions shape its path forward.



# Embracing the unexpected

**Sang first arrived at the Matrimandir Camp in 1996. Adopted from South Korea and raised in Denmark, she is a skilled and seasoned massage therapist whose global travels led her to Auroville, where she discovered a profound connection with its people and where she continues to explore diverse avenues of learning.**

*Auroville Today: How was your early life in Denmark? Has adoption shaped your sense of identity?*

**Sang:** That’s actually one of the most interesting parts. I always knew I was adopted. My parents told me I was adopted, and nobody questioned it. But as soon as I started to travel, you know, you sit around singing Kumbaya, and people ask, “Where are you from?” I’d say, “I’m from Denmark.” And nobody would believe me. I’d have to get out my passport because they wouldn’t just accept that I was from Denmark.

They wouldn’t think beyond the obvious. In Denmark, they didn’t question it because so many adopted kids are from Korea. But when you travel, people only think of Danes as blonde-haired and blue-eyed. It was very strange to have my nationality questioned. That didn’t happen until I started travelling when I was 18. Before that, I never questioned my sense of self.

*You never felt different from your siblings?*

No, not really. The only thing that made me uncomfortable was my name. People would question it, like, is it a boy’s name? A girl’s name? How do you pronounce it? But no one questioned my appearance. My family always made me feel like I belonged, and my siblings treated me no differently than any other family member. We shared everything, from toys to experiences, and there was never a moment where I felt like an outsider in my own home.

It helped that I wasn’t living in a big city. Everybody knew everybody. There were other parents in my community who adopted children from Korea too, so it was normal, I wasn’t the only one. In our small town, diversity was embraced in a way that made everyone feel like they were part of a larger family. The sense of community was strong, and people supported each other regardless of background.

*You weren’t bullied because you looked different?*

No. The only time I experienced racism was in America, working at a restaurant where some Spanish people didn’t want to be served by me because I looked Asian. It was quite a shock because I’d never faced that kind of judgement before.

In Denmark, there was a level of understanding and acceptance that I had taken for granted until I encountered prejudice elsewhere. When I came to south India, people were just curious about me. They thought I was from north India and treated me very nicely.

*Travelling in India was a different experience for you?*

Yes, in India, people are curious but very welcoming. They treat guests with curiosity and respect. It was very different from travelling in European countries where people often thought I was Japanese. In India, the curiosity was genuine and often led to enriching conversations. People wanted to know about my background, my journey, and my experiences, which made me feel valued and seen.

Sometimes when travelling, just saying I was Korean was easier than explaining that I was adopted. People would ask if I remembered anything from Korea or if I wanted to go back, but I never had that desire. I looked at my adoption papers and talked to my parents about it, but I always wanted to travel to India. I felt a unique connection to India that I couldn’t explain.

*Why India?*

India is so mad, so vibrant. You can never be bored here. It challenges you on all levels. Coming from Denmark with its punctuality and order, it was a big adjustment, but I learned to embrace the chaos. It’s a land of wonders. The colours, the sounds, the smells—everything is intense and alive. In India, every day is an adventure. You wake up not knowing what the day will bring, and that’s exciting. It pushes you out of your comfort zone and makes you grow in ways you never thought possible.

*Do you miss it when you're not here?*

Sometimes, yes. Denmark can make me restless after a while. Here, I enjoy roaming around on my e-bike, meeting people, and being part of a small community where people accept you for who you are. There’s always something happening. It keeps life interesting and full of possibilities.

*How did you first come to Auroville?*

I was playing chess in Puri on the beach. Someone suggested I visit this community, they thought I’d really like it, so I did, and within two days I knew this was where I wanted to be.



Sang

It was 1996, I stayed at Matrimandir Camp, and immediately felt that I became part of the community.

I was renting a room there for 50 rupees a day, and at night I would go to sleep under the Matrimandir, which was still a skeleton, and I would fall asleep watching the stars through the beams.

But eventually, I needed another place to stay because my funds had run out. Marush was heading to Germany at the time and offered me her house. So I ended up being part of the Certitude community. They were incredibly welcoming, and since it was the hot season, everything seemed to slow down a bit. I started giving massages, and that opened many doors for me. It was through massage that I met many of my friends and now consider them my family.

*Were you doing massage therapy in Denmark too?*

No, I was trained in Australia. I worked there and learned different styles of massage. When I came back here, I started training others and volunteering. It was a very open and learning-focused environment. In Australia, I discovered my passion for healing and helping others. It was a transformative experience that set me on a path of continuous learning and growth.

*How long did you stay in Auroville on your first visit?*

I stayed for three months, then travelled around the world and came back in 2000. I was involved in various projects, giving massages, and working in different areas. Auroville was vibrant and open to me. I felt a sense of belonging that I had been searching for. The community was diverse, and everyone brought something unique to the table.

*So you’ve always been involved in different things here?*

Yes, that’s the magic of being here. There are always new opportunities. In Auroville, I’ve been involved in various projects, from sustainable living initiatives to community health programmes. I teach yoga, give massages, and work on projects that promote holistic well-being. Every experience has taught me something new. It keeps life dynamic and fulfilling.

*And now you’re looking to become a doula?*

Yes, I want to specialise in pregnancy care. It’s magical working with pregnant women. I’ve been fortunate to support women through their entire pregnancy, and supporting women during pregnancy is a deeply rewarding experience. It’s a time of profound change and growth, and being part of that journey is incredibly fulfilling.

Working with pregnant women requires a deep sense of empathy and understanding. It’s about being present, listening, and providing the support they need at every stage of their journey.

I want to do more research and learn how to better support them. I’m waiting for admission to a doula course.

*What will this course allow you to do?*

It will certify me as a midwife’s assistant. I’ll be there for women throughout their pregnancy, supporting them in various ways. We’re already participating in prenatal classes and learning a lot. The course will provide me with the skills and knowledge to offer comprehensive support, from prenatal care to postpartum recovery. It’s about empowering women and helping them have a positive and healthy pregnancy experience.

The aim is to equip doulas with the skills to offer pregnancy massage, providing relief and a special time for pregnant women to relax and alleviate some of the physical and mental stresses of pregnancy.

*So this is almost like an extension of your other work?*

Yes, it’s a natural extension. I’m very excited about it. With Morning Star, we are working on applying officially for this course at a maternity hospital in Hyderabad, so that we can be certified through them. But the process has been delayed for many months for bureaucratic reasons that are beyond our control.

Instead of being frustrated, and impatient, this is teaching me patience and acceptance..

*What else in life gives you joy?*

Auroville. It’s a special place. I fell in love with it immediately. It’s a community that accepts you for who you are and offers endless opportunities for growth and learning. Auroville is a place where people come together to create a better world. It’s a community based on shared values of peace, sustainability, and human unity, and the community in Auroville is very supportive. People come together to help each other in times of need, whether it’s through sharing resources, offering emotional support, or working on community projects. There is a strong sense of solidarity and mutual respect. People work to create a harmonious and sustainable community, and that spirit of collaboration is what makes Auroville so special.

Being part of Auroville has given me a sense of purpose and a place where I can truly be myself.

*How has Auroville shaped your journey?*

I often describe this place as a melting pot of black sheep. It’s where individuals who might not fit in other environments find their place. I find that this place resonates with me deeply. I consider myself a simple person, and here, simplicity makes sense. My way of living, which includes a relaxed sense of time and a focus on the small joys – like walking barefoot in the garden, chatting with my cats, observing birds, and dealing with ants – feels natural to me.

In Europe, I never quite fit in. My priorities and lifestyle are different from the fast-paced environment there. Here, I feel like I’m creating a personal utopia, even though it’s still a work in progress.

*What challenges have you faced in your journey?*

One of the biggest challenges I’ve faced is balancing my personal life with my various commitments. It can be difficult to manage multiple projects and responsibilities while also taking care of myself. However, I’ve learned the importance of self-care and setting boundaries. Another challenge is dealing with the uncertainties and unpredictabilities of life in India. But these challenges have also taught me resilience and adaptability.

*How do you overcome these challenges?*

By staying grounded and focused on my goals. I practise mindfulness and meditation to maintain a sense of inner peace. I also rely on the support of my friends and community in Auroville. They provide a strong network of support and encouragement. Additionally, I remind myself of the reasons why I chose this path and the positive impact I’m making, which helps me stay motivated and committed.

I’m excited about the future. I’m looking forward to completing my doula course and continuing my work with pregnant women. I’m also planning to expand my involvement in community projects in Auroville, focusing on sustainability and holistic well-being. There are so many possibilities, and I’m eager to see where the journey takes me.

*In conversation with Chandra*

## Bindu

Bindu Mohanty, one of the contributors of Auroville Today, passed away on July 28th in a hospital in Germany at the age of 56.

Bindu had joined in 1994 and was working in Auroville as the Lead Faculty of the *American Living Routes - Study Abroad Programs in India* for more than 11 years. She gained a Ph.D. in Sri Aurobindo studies from the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in 2008 with her thesis *Spiritual ideals and social psychology of Auroville: A transdisciplinary interpretive inquiry*. In later years she was also active as Senior Coordinator (Research and Partnerships) of the Indian Revitalizing Rainfed Agriculture Network.

In 2023, she went to Germany to be with her husband, an Aurovilian of German nationality, where it was discovered that she had cancer. She then shared this reflection.

### A brush with mortality / immortality

“As kids, my brother and I would lie for hours on the terrace of our house, captivated by the star-studded skies of summer nights. Even though I was in awe of this majestic splendour, I would wonder what’s beyond. It depressed me slightly that I could not escape the universe. I would always be contained by it.

In retrospect, I believe that these childhood thoughts laid the foundations of the alternative life I built for myself. Job, career, husband, and children, all seemed a bit mundane, attracted as I was by the deep mysteries of Life, Death, and an inexplicable ever-expanding universe. And while I have had peak experiences, moments of

great tranquillity, where I felt united with some universal primal force, it was never really a daily lived experience. And given the inexorable demands of life, like most people, I allowed myself to be chained to the hum-drum routine of work and feeding myself 3 times a day.

Then, out of the blue, while treating a persistent cough and chest pain, the doc announced that I had a malignant tumour that needed to be operated on. I had already gone through other scary prognoses of pulmonary fibrosis, pulmonary embolism etc., but cancer? Cancer was in its own league, and had the evil, ultimate ring of something life-threatening and terminal (even though most forms of cancer are treatable). And while I may have grandiose thoughts and experiences, I was a coward when it came to pain. I did not want to live out the rest of my days dealing with pain and disease management. All my plans for the future, of reinventing my life in Germany, crumbled before me, as I was forced to confront this death sentence that had been laid on me. I did not know then, and I do not know still, how bad the cancer is. But I found myself pondering on the reasons to live, whittling down all sentimental thoughts. For instance, I know I have a very, very caring circle of friends and family, but I also know with the relentless passage of time, I will soon fade away from the memories of my loved ones. Truly, everything in this life is marked



by mortality . . . if we put aside all religious and spiritual explanations of death, death seems to be a nihilism. A negation of all that one’s life stood for, and that kind of makes the struggle to live pointless.

I found myself, as I did as a kid, wondering about the immortal primal forces of our universe, and our connection to it. On days when I struggled with pain, discomfort, and sheer lack of energy, I struggled with fear and on good days, I held on to hope. I smiled at myself for oscillating thus between dualities—hope and fear; life and death. And I told myself that the ultimate miracle would be to be free from the grip of these dualities that run through all existence.

Coming out of anaesthesia after the surgery, my first thought was that “I am part of the force that started this universe.” And that was the most comforting and freeing thought I had. Death comes to all—sooner or later. But the power that made the universe could well be immortal—this seems to be borne out by science as well—and well, if one were part of this force then death would merely be a change from one dimension to the other. As mentioned earlier, there are times when I have felt a calm, vast, primordial force, transcendent and yet united with my being. And I realised that knowing this force intimately, being able to connect with it at will, would be a reason to live. It would endow whatever days I have left on this life with meaning.”

## Goupi



Long-term Aurovilian Goupi (Jean-Pierre Bunel) peacefully passed away at Marika’s Home in the evening of Monday, June 24th. He had just turned 82 years old.

Goupi originally studied Tibetan Buddhism in France and wanted to live in the Himalayas. When he came across some writings of Sri Aurobindo, he changed his mind and sailed in 1966 by boat to Pondicherry where he met with The Mother and was allowed to stay in the Ashram. Mother gave him the name Guru Prasad, which was later abbreviated to Goupi for short.

In those early years, Goupi taught at the Ashram school and had regular meetings with The Mother. Before coming to India, he had been a physics teacher at the university in France. When the well-known physicist and Nobel Prize winner Georges Charpak visited the Ashram, Goupi met him and Georges offered him a lifelong subscription to the CERN Courier magazine, which was greatly appreciated throughout the years.

Naturally, Goupi was present at Auroville’s inauguration ceremony on 28 February 1968.

In 1977 he decided to move to Auroville with a few others from the Ashram and started the community Djaima, in honour of his lifetime’s mantra “Jay MA”. At that time, he noticed a need for physical care for the first pioneer Aurovilians who worked long days in the sun. His good friend and mentor Biren-da, a renowned masseur in the Ashram, encouraged his interest in massage and taught him “to talk to the body”, a skill with which he has helped many Aurovilians and others throughout the years. During the massages, Goupi would empty himself and let Mother do the work, while chanting Aum or Jay Ma, leading to remarkable results.

His interest in massage went along with his great interest in studying different languages such as Tibetan, Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali and Tamil.

It is with gratitude that we will remember him, as many of us have passed through his healing hands. It was not only for physical healing but often also for his guidance and understanding of Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s yoga that people would approach him, like a road sign on the way.

For Goupi, the dream of The Mother has become true in the Auroville he lived in. He saw it as a privilege and realisation of how to live differently on this planet. For those who have met him, he truly represented a different way of living.

Goupi’s joy, simplicity and sincerity in his surrender to the Divine made him live with a constant presence of The Mother in his heart.

Goupi’s remains were cremated at Auroville’s cremation grounds on June 30th.

A brief video on Goupi can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkBdoXrdM14>.

## Kratu



Kratu, an Aurovilian artist, passed away on July 7th.

Kratu was born on the 2nd May 1942 in Lonigo, Verona, Italy. In his early twenties, his passion for art led him to live in various countries and to hitch hike around the Mediterranean. At a certain point, while living in Belgium, he came to know of Sri Aurobindo and wrote to the Mother expressing a wish to come to live in the Ashram.

In 1969 he started his journey towards India and Nepal overland, hitchhiking all the way. When he arrived in Nepal, he explored Tibetan Buddhism for a year, after which he directed his steps towards the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where he arrived in December 1970. There he met the Mother.

While living in Pondicherry’s Auroville Guest House, he worked with Roger Anger at the Aurofuture office in Pondicherry for about a year. Towards the end of 1971, he asked Mother to accept him in the Ashram, which She did. Until 1987 he worked with Nata in the publication of the Italian magazine *Domani* where translations of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were published. During this time he met his life partner Aloka, for an adventure that lasted 52 years.

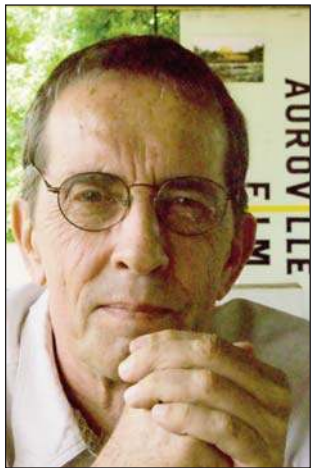
In 1991, they moved to live and work in Auroville with their younger son Virya. Kratu set up a ceramic unit where he expressed himself through sculpture, until its closure in 2016.

He crafted many beautiful pieces with his hands, which many of us will always enjoy.

After a long struggle with cancer, he peacefully liberated himself from his body with a smile. He now rests in the Love and Light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Kratu’s remains were buried at the Auroville Burial Gound on June 11th.

## John Mandeem



John Mandeem left his body on July 7, 2024.

John Mandeem came to Pondicherry from California in October 1968 as a young man of 24 and was accepted by the Mother as an Ashramite.

He helped set up the first screen printing workshop in the Ashram Press. All birthday cards with the Mother’s symbol in those days were screen printed there, besides book covers.

He took up photography in the late 1970s and got seriously into it by the 80’s, extensively documenting Auroville in all its aspects, including the Matrimandir. From 1980 he was part of the PRISMA team with Franz and Tim and they did all the publicity work for Aurelec. In 1994 he took photos for the first Auroville exhibition at the Visitor’s Centre which was updated several times over the years. He also was one of the photographers for the Auroville Today monthly magazine and designed the front cover for its first compilation. He taught photography in Aspiration school to many Auroville children, all adults now, some of who ended up becoming photographers themselves.

Most of the initial publications of PRISMA, like the architecture books and calendars, carry John’s photos. Later he was involved in doing pre-press work for other Prisma projects as well as projects of the Ashram Archives. Recently he had been working with the Ashram Archives on a new book they are bringing out.

John’s extensive work of seeing the Auroville of earlier years, and capturing it for ages to come, is truly priceless.

## Gajendran



Gajendran Karunanidhi suddenly passed away on July 1st due to cardiac arrest.

Gajendran (known in Auroville as Gaje) was born in Pondicherry in 1963, and joined Auroville in 1987. His father was a police officer when Pondicherry became a Union Territory, and initially Gaje trained as a police officer as well. His father then realised that Gaje was meant for something else, and suggested that he go to Auroville. From the start Gaje worked at the Matrimandir, in various areas and lately as a garden maintenance coordinator. He worked there nonstop till the end, 35 years later. In 1996 he saw the need to create a kitchen to provide food for the units of the Industrial Zone such as Shadhanjali, Aurosarjan, Auromode and Imagination, and with the support of Prema of Auromode and Abha of Shradhanjali started the GP cafe, to which he, together with his wife Latha, and his son Auroananda and his daughter Nithya up to his last days dedicated all his time and energy when not at Matrimandir. He took great care to make the lunches affordable for people on maintenance. He was also much into fitness routines. In the early years he used to teach gymnastics at Certitude. And before he trained to be in the police he worked more than 3 years with Ilayaraja Music Director for several of his films. He was always proud of that past.

People remember him as a gentle, very dedicated person. Many people visited his house at Prayatna and attended his funeral at Adventure on July 2nd.

## Lakshmanan



Lakshmanan Krishnan passed away on July 12th at JIPMER hospital after an accident, at the age of 44. He was a true Auroville youth, born and educated in Auroville. Lakshmanan devoted more than 20 years of his life as a computer teacher at Transition school, where his gentle behaviour and support touched many young lives. Beyond his role as a computer teacher, Lakshmanan was helping and supporting the office team and last year, he had become one of the school’s executives. During

his years at Transition School he simultaneously worked at Dehashakti as a sports teacher.

Apart from his work at school, he was also active in the Entry group, a member of the Farewell Team and of the Road Clean Up group. He left behind a legacy of kindness and dedication.

Lakshmanan was known for his generosity and willingness to lend a helping hand to anyone in need. His warm smile and gentle presence will be deeply missed by his family, colleagues, students and the community he served so faithfully.

His happiness was infectious, spreading warmth and comfort to everyone around him. Within his family, he stood as a pillar of strength, offering unwavering support and love through both good times and bad.

Lakshmanan’s body was cremated at the Auroville Cremation ground on July 13th.



Emergency RA decision against land sales and exchanges

The Working Committee selected by the Residents' Assembly (RA-WCom) called for an emergency decision of the Residents' Assembly (RAD) regarding the sales and exchanges of Auroville owned lands. The RA-WCom alleged that the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation (GB) has approved the proposal by the Secretary to exchange all Auroville lands outside the Master Plan area, totaling 1054 acres. This information had already been shared with the community in January of this year and started circulating again on the day of the most recent meeting of the GB, which took place on the 31st of May. The minutes of this meeting have not yet been published.

The RA Wcom stated that the land sales and exchanges will impact all Aurovilians on various levels, cause irreparable damage to Auroville's physical body and will incur the loss of a number of areas of historical significance. It recalled that since 2022 there have been an unprecedented number of land exchanges that have been carried out by the current Secretary and her appointees with the approval of the GB, and that all these exchanges have been carried out without transparency or due process and without any consultation with those living and working on these lands. The RA-WCom stated that these exchanges have resulted in a conservatively estimated loss of over INR 200 crores (USD 24 million) to Auroville, in addition to the loss of important parts of Auroville's physical body and legacy.

On July 8th, the Auroville Residents' Assembly Service (RAS), which is charged with Emergency RAD processes, reported that the community had approved the following resolution: "(1) An immediate pause on any further sale or exchange of Auroville properties; (2) A thorough review of the land deals undertaken by the current Secretary and authorized by the Governing Board, with a focus on reversal and restitution for any wrongful transactions; (3) A comprehensive investigation into all land exchanges conducted by the current administration since 2022; and (4) That future land deals are to be made with all due process, respecting the Auroville Foundation Act and its three authorities, namely the RA, the International Advisory Council (IAC) and the GB, and Indian law. These are necessary steps to protect Auroville's land and ensure its use aligns with the original purpose and ideals of peace and human unity."

The RAS stated that a total of 945 valid votes have been submitted online and in-person, which exceeded the 10% quorum required for validating the decision (240 votes). 98,7% (933) participants voted in favour of the above resolutions, 0,4% (4) participants rejected it while 0,9% (8) participants didn't know.

In a message to the community, the Working Committee supported by the GB (GB-WCom), now consisting of five members, claimed that this RAD will be "catastrophic for Auroville". This view was contested by both the RA-WCom and the Auroville Council (AVC), which replied in a joint statement that land consolidation is an important goal but must be done transparently, ethically, and in accordance with the Indian laws, the Auroville Foundation Rules, 1997 and the Due Diligence Procedure (SOP) approved by a previous Secretary which was in use until 2021. They stated that recent exchanges have not met these standards causing significant financial losses to Auroville.

Felicity and Happiness land exchanges

Residents of Felicity and Happiness, two outlying communities having a population of about 20 to 30 residents, have informed the RA-WCom that they are facing challenges since they learned in March of this year that a prime parcel of land of approximately an acre and a half which faces the old Auroville Road had been exchanged for land in the Master Plan area. The communities' water line, water tank, electricity line, and access road are located on this land.

Alarmed by this exchange, of which they had not been informed, the residents contacted the Land

Board which promised them verbally and multiple times that they would update the legal document and keep the electricity line and the water access out of the exchanged land parcel and that the land board would build a new access road and a new entrance for these two communities. The Land Board started building a new access road but this work was not complete when the new landowner abruptly closed off access to Felicity, installed a new chain link fence, locked the gate and summoned the police to warn residents against entering his land. The residents also learned from the new landowner that he plans to fence off the water line, water tank, and electricity line, in contradiction to the promises made by the Land Board.

The residents complained that the Land Board has either repeatedly and willfully misled them or is simply incompetent and unable to match its words to its actions. They also complained about the dismissive and contemptuous way the Land Board has responded to the residents: calls are not answered, and emails are not acknowledged or responded to. In meetings with the residents, the Land Board stated that the residents have no standing; that the Land Board has the right to proceed as they see fit; and that the residents' concerns amount to a violation of the purpose of Auroville. The residents are objecting to "the opaque and insolent outlook of formal bodies" and question if "the willful misdirection, incompetence, and an insulting disposition befits a senior office of Auroville".

Auro Orchard land exchange

The RA-WCom informed the community that a critical situation has been unfolding at Auro Orchard. On 18th July, employees of the buyer closed fences, cutting off access to the home of of two residents and members of the farm. This action also separated the farm's cows from their shelter, food, and water sources. The root of this issue lies in a questionable land exchange brokered by the Auroville Foundation Office (AVFO) in November 2023. Despite previous assurances from the AVFO that the residents' house and essential farm infrastructure would not be affected by the land exchange, the situation has been deteriorating with increased pressure from the buyer to vacate his land. With many broken promises to replace the affected infrastructure, Auro Orchard finds itself in a distressing situation. Attempts to negotiate with the buyer to restore access for one month, while administrative solutions could be worked out, failed. In addition, on 20th July, drinking water supply to the entire farm was stopped until it was noticed the next day that the electric fuses for the pump (now on the buyer's land) were "removed/missing". The fuses came back three days later). The RA-WCom has written to the GB, requesting it to address the situation and to uphold the assurances that homes and infrastructure would not be affected. The RA-WCom deems it unacceptable that the AVFO has effectively pitted residents against the buyer due to their mishandling of the exchange, and wrote that the AVFO's and GB's continued silence, despite repeated requests to intervene in a situation they have caused, is deeply concerning.

@auroville.org.in

The RA-WCom has issued a warning that the email address @auroville.org.in is no longer safe as it is currently under unknown administration. The Working Committee approved by the Governing Board (GB-WCom) publicly objected to this warning. Accusing the RA WCom of misleading the community. This in turn evoked a strong response from the RA-WCom which stated that the announcement of the GB-WCom was made by people "impersonating the Working Committee with the support of the Office of the Secretary" and that "as often with AVFO appointees of the AVFO, the management of the domain @auroville.org.in and the associated workspace is indeed opaque and secretive." The RA-WCom recalled that the difficulty in extracting information about the management of the @auroville.org.in administration has been immense. A Right To Information (RTI) request had been filed in August 2022 seeking this very information. Amongst other things, the

RTI asked for the identities of the administrators of the auroville.org.in mailboxes, details of their scope of duties, letters of appointment, lines of managerial reporting and information regarding who authorised the appointment of Administrators. This information was however denied. An appeal was filed against the non-disclosure with the Central Information Commission (CIC). On 13 February 2024, the Information Commissioner judged that "...the replies given by the respondent [i.e. the Auroville Foundation] in all the cases were evasive and misleading." However, the information requested has still not been provided.

Auroville Urban Planning & Development Repository - AUPDR

A group of resource persons, helped by research assistants and web developers have developed an on-line repository of documents pertaining to Auroville's Urban Planning and Development. This repository contains archival materials from 1965 to 2024 pertaining to the vision, concepts, proposals, studies, and administrative and other documents. The site can be visited at <https://auroville-urban-planning-and-development-repository-v2.netlify.app/>.

Community gathering

On July 6th, a community gathering and potluck dinner took place at the Certitude sportsground. The event was organized by the RA-WCom and the Auroville Council. The event aimed at bringing the community together in support of the lands of Auroville. Important information on land exchanges, concerns and aspirations were shared. This gathering followed several smaller meetings, organized by the AVC in some of Auroville's communities located outside of the Master Plan area including Aspiration, Aurelec, Evergreen, New Creation and more. In addition to the AV Council, members and resource persons from the RA WCom were present to inform residents about the ongoing land exchanges and their possible impact on Auroville residents - starting with those living on outlying Auroville land.

Summary of CPWD Tenders regarding Auroville

The Central Public Works Department (CPWD), in its E-Tender Portal, stated that in the period from June 2022 to June 2024 an amount of almost Rs 60 crores (approximately US\$ 7.3 million) has been allocated for 50 different civil works in Auroville. Major works include development of the visitor parking area; providing streetlight poles and fittings to the Crown Road; construction of four additional guest suites in Swagatham Guest House; construction of the Crown Road; and the construction of the Outer Ring Road from the Secondary Service node to the Visitors' Centre parking area.

WasteLess needs support

WasteLess, the Auroville unit that for the last 12 years has specialized in developing education on waste management, in its first Newsletter writes that it is in financial difficulty and is struggling to stay afloat, even though many community members have pledged their generous support. In July 2023, WasteLess concluded the launch of its educational programme 'Sea Change', addressing the issue of micro-plastics in the world's oceans. In collaboration with various Tamil Nadu Government Schools, WasteLess reached over 13,500 students. WasteLess plans to scale 'Sea Change' through collaborations with partner NGO's. For more information and support, write to [info@wastelessindia.org](mailto:info@wastelessindia.org).

SAIER budget cuts

In a note to the community, the Auroville School Board shared that schools' financial situation has become more difficult since July of 2024. Pre-Creche, Nandanam, Kindergarten, Deepanam, Transition School, Last School, and Future School all received reductions in their budgets from SAIER / BCC, both in allocated maintenances, and in monthly recurring expenses. The cut originates from FAMC's direction for higher effectiveness and efficiency; SAIER was requested to work out the distribution. The School Board noted that

while there may still be some changes, the new budget reflects a reduction of 19% on the allocated Maintenances (-22.5 full-time equivalent maintenances) and around 14% reduction of monthly recurring expenses (-Rs.93,683 across schools), fully effective from August onward. As schools are affected in different ways by these changes, the School Board requested the community to contact individual schools for more information. The School Board concluded by stating it remains committed to providing integral education to the children, and while the financial situation is challenging, they will "rise to the occasion and be creative about funding". The Board further requested the understanding and support of the community and the parents as schools address this new situation.

Sri Ma beach erosion



On July 15th, residents of the Sri Ma community received an "Emergency Evacuation Notice" signed by the Deputy Secretary of the AVFO, mentioning that "the sea erosion has reached a critical situation today and the buildings may collapse at any moment". The notice advised that "all the residents and establishments running in the Srma community shall be evacuated immediately so that loss to life and property is avoided". While it is true that sea erosion has affected Sri Ma dramatically over the last few months, there is mistrust of the AVFO's motives due to their many land exchanges and rumours that Sri Ma may be targeted. The AVFO did not offer alternative housing for the affected residents. Sri Ma community have requested daily assistance with laying a geotextile to help slow down the erosion.

Maintenance cuts continue

The Budget Coordination Committee of the AVFO (BCC) is continuing its programme of stringent maintenance cuts with an estimated 170 Aurovilians now affected. Recently, members of the AV Council and the Entry Board had their maintenances removed. Additionally, most requests for waivers of the mandatory Auroville contribution are being refused, even to those who have had their maintenance cut and have no income whatsoever, or to those who work for the community in a voluntary capacity. Whereas in the past it was accepted that people could make a contribution to Auroville 'in kind' through their work, it now seems that only a financial contribution is recognised. The refusal to waive the contribution particularly affects foreigners who rely on a visa, since the AVFO will not issue a letter of recommendation until they receive a 'no dues certificate' from the BCC.

Changes in AVFO appointees

**Secretary:** The Secretary of the AVFO, Dr Jayanti Ravi, ended her three-year term on 4th July 2024. On July 31st, the Government of Gujarat notified her appointment as Additional Chief Secretary to the Government Revenue Department, Sachivalaya, Gandhinagar.

**GB-WCom:** In recent months, two 'members' of the GB-WCom have removed their names from the signature of the group's mass bulletins, which could indicate their resignation; however there has been no communication in this regard.

**New AVFO staff:** The AVFO, which was until recently running with less than 10 employees, has grown into a larger administrative structure. Sources indicate that it now has about 50 employees, many of whom are active or retired government officials. One concern is housing as it seems that several Auroville assets, including the homes of deceased Aurovilians and the SAIER teachers' staff quarters, were repurposed and granted to these AVFO employees instead of Aurovilians and Newcomers on the housing wait list.

<b>About Auroville Today</b>  Auroville Today is an activity of the Kattidakalai Trust of the Auroville Foundation. The GST number is 33AAATA0037BXZV  Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India, Phone: +91.413.2622572. Email: <a href="mailto:avtoday@auroville.org.in">avtoday@auroville.org.in</a> .	<b>Subscription information</b>  Subscription rates for 12 issues: India: Print + digital edition: Rs 850 Other countries: Print + digital edition: Rs 4,000 equivalent. Digital only edition: Rs 3,000 equivalent.	<b>How to subscribe:</b>  1. Through our website: Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through <a href="https://auroville.today">https://auroville.today</a> and <a href="https://www.auroville.com">https://www.auroville.com</a> .  2. By cheque: Cheques must be payable to <i>Auroville Maintenance</i> , reference <i>Contribution Auroville Today</i> , and need to be sent to	Auroville Today, Surrender community, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.  3. By bank transfer. Bank transfers are to be made to account # 163101000118 of Auroville Maintenance at ICICI Bank, Auroville Branch, IFSC Code ICIC0001631, Swift Code ICICINBBCTS, reference: Contribution Auroville Today.	<b>Editorial team:</b>  Alan, Carel, Chandra, Gita, Peter. Proofreading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Print Editing: Jean-Denis. Digital Editing: Krishna V Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.
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