

Editorial

According to the Auroville Foundation Act, the International Advisory Council (IAC), which is the third component of the Auroville Foundation, has the responsibility to advise the Governing Board on any matter relating to the development of Auroville. In tendering such advice “it shall endeavour to secure that a) the ideals for which Auroville has been established are encouraged and b) the residents of Auroville are allowed freedom to grow and develop activities and institutions for the fulfilment of the aspirations and programmes envisaged in the said Charter of Auroville”.

The present members are Ms Dena Merriam (Chair), Ms Gabi Gillesen, Mr. Hasmukh P.Rama, Mr. Michel Danino and Mr. David Frawley.

So far, little is known in the community about how they have been functioning since taking office in October, 2021. Recently, two members of the IAC were in Auroville. Auroville Today asked them how successful the IAC had been in fulfilling its role over the past months, how they view the present situation in the community, and how they envisage the way ahead.

In this issue we also report on the findings and response to a management and change consultant who had been asked by a member of the IAC to assist in creating a space for dialogue in the community, and an Aurovilian explains why he thinks we should be collaborating with the present administration.

## Celebration of Oneness



Images from Youth Center fair and Seeds of Unity festival

## “I’m very optimistic”

**M**s. Dena Merriam, who has been elected the Chairperson of the Auroville International Advisory Council, is the founder and coordinator of the Global Peace Initiative for Women (GPIW), an international network of spiritual and community leaders that builds interfaith understanding and develops leadership in young community leaders concerning climate change. Ms. Merriam has been a student of Paramahansa Yogananda and a practitioner of Kriya Yoga meditation for over 50 years, and a long time student of the great texts of the Vedic tradition. She received her Master’s degree from Columbia University and has served on the boards of Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, and many other international and Indian interfaith organizations. In 2014 she received the Niwano Peace Prize for her interfaith peace efforts

Auroville Today: Dena, how did you come to be connected to Auroville?

Dena: In the 1930s and 40s my guru, Paramahansa Yogananda, spoke of the need to develop spiritual communities. He tried to set one up in California but came to the conclusion that the world wasn’t ready. However, that idea stayed with me because I wanted to live in such a place. In the 1990s, my dear friend Hannah Strong, who at that time was on the International Advisory Council (IAC), started talking to me about Auroville. She was very excited about what was being developed in Auroville and encouraged me to visit.

I didn’t have an opportunity to come right away because I was organizing peace dialogues. But some years later another friend, Doudou Diène, who was also on your International Advisory Council and equally enthusiastic about Auroville, brought me here for the first time in 2008. He took me into the Matrimandir and we had a long, powerful meditation there. When I first entered the Sanctuary I was swept back into the ancient past as well as into the far future. It was as if past and future converged.

I felt something of Atlantis, where there was worship of light and crystals, but also of a vision of what was to come, where people were united beyond sectarian differences around a beautiful effulgence of light.

After that I began coming regularly. About five years ago, I was writing a book that had its beginnings in the Vedic age and I was reading Sri Aurobindo’s *The Secret of the Vedas*. He opened the door to the Vedas for me and became my teacher of the Vedas. Very few of the modern masters speak of the Vedic deities and for the first time Sri Aurobindo brought me into a relationship with them. It was then that my relationship with him took a new turn.

When I was invited to become a member of the Auroville International Advisory Council, I had already stepped back from my work at the Global Peace Initiative and had begun spending most of my time writing. But suddenly I was thrust into a situation where I had to be present, where I had to engage. So here I am!

You’ve been thrust into an exceptional situation in Auroville. How have you responded?

I’ve been involved with a lot of spiritual communities where there have been similar difficulties. Even my own spiritual organisation faced a real challenge when one of the prominent Swamis was asked to leave. It happened many years ago, but it created division and hurt. I didn’t take a position then and this is the key point that I’ve tried to make here in Auroville as well: I can’t be helpful if I take a position because then I will only be adding to the fuel. However, this is hard for some people to grasp because there is a lot of lobbying going on.

Since spending time here, I have come to learn that this polarisation in Auroville is not new. It has a history and that history is repeating itself, perhaps because the initial issue has never been cleared up. The anger and fear here is palpable, but I don’t believe it is about the Crown road or what happened to the Youth Centre, or even the trees. The root cause is much

deeper. But I notice people focus only on these externals, and you can’t solve things that way. The problem will just keep recurring.

What do you think the root cause is?

That will take a longer and deeper discussion.

Some believe that the root cause of the present difficulties is that Auroville is facing a government takeover in which Aurovilians will no longer have the right to decide their own future.



For the city to grow and reach its potential, one chapter must close and another open. You can’t govern a city of tens of thousands in the same way that a small community is governed, where everyone knows one another. What Auroville has achieved so far is quite phenomenal, and on so many levels I applaud that and all the people who have brought Auroville to this point. But now something new is needed, a certain leap has to be taken, and this will depend on the level of consciousness of the individuals. Many spiritual organisations fall into a state of paralysis when the central figure departs because there’s nobody who can hold that consciousness. It must be the

collective that has to hold that consciousness, but the followers are still on the path and haven’t arrived at a place where they can manifest it. Auroville has physically achieved so much, but can it rise to the next level?

Who can judge that?

It’s not a judgment but a question we can all pose to ourselves, and one can only answer for oneself. On this visit I met with various groups and they all said they were not angry. But there was so much anger coming from them, and everybody was feeling they were victims. This anger has an intense vibration, and much of it is being directed towards the Secretary, like thought bombs. Have you considered what it is like to be the subject of such intense negative thoughts? It is a form of violence. This energy doesn’t just dissipate; it has a harmful impact on the spirit, so everybody is suffering at present because of all the anger that is being unleashed.

Clearly, it had to emerge because it was there. Personally I have learned to continually check my own state of consciousness, to see when anger is emerging, and to go deeper into the cause beyond the externals. I want to get to the place where there is no anger, no matter what happens externally. I don’t want to be angry at the rascals in the world, the Ravanases, and there are plenty around today, because while I know the harm that they’re causing and know there will be karmic consequences, if I carry around anger towards them I’m harming myself.

Recently I heard a Buddhist teacher say that when you want to assess how you’re doing in your spiritual practice, observe how you respond to difficult challenges. As long as you blame anything external, you know you have more work to do. It’s a good guideline to follow.

What role do you think the IAC can play in the present situation?

The Governing Board has asked each of the IAC members to make recommendations, and we have done this. My recommendation was to

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# Change has to come from within

**M**ichel Danino is a French-born Indian scholar of ancient Indian civilization, history and culture. He authored *The Lost River: On the Trail of the Sarasvati* (Penguin Books, 2010), *Indian Culture and India's Future* (DK Printworld, 2011), and edited *Sri Aurobindo and India's Rebirth* (Rupa, 2018). Since 2011 he has been associated with IIT Gandhinagar in Gujarat where he is visiting professor, helped create its Archaeological Sciences Centre, and initiated courses and activities related to Indian knowledge systems.

He is also a member of the Research Council for History of Science (INSA); Central Advisory Board on Culture (Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India); and National Steering Committee for the development of National Curriculum Frameworks (Ministry of Education, Govt. of India).

Michel lived in Auroville between 1977-1982 and has kept close contact with the community ever since. He has also translated into English most volumes of *Mother's Agenda* and many of Satprem's books. Last year, he was appointed a member of the International Advisory Board.

*Auroville Today: You lived in Auroville during the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society. Do you think that the present situation is at all reminiscent of that period?*

Michel: It is partly reminiscent in the sense that, back then, the Sri Aurobindo Society was striving to take complete control of Auroville, and now the current administration basically claims that it holds all decision power to manage Auroville. I submitted to the Governing Board several times that it should instead regard itself as a guide, trustee and protector of Auroville, but at present the attempt is to take control, often through dubious or objectionable means, of all aspects of Auroville's life and activities.

In a letter of 1969 to a disciple regarding UNESCO, Mother asserted, "To hand over the management of Auroville to any country or any group however big it may be is an *absolute impossibility*." Her conception of Auroville was a laboratory and an experiment; she called it a 'great adventure' — and an adventure is not a neatly planned project. That is why flexibility is a crucial factor, and also why Mother prodded the early Aurovilians to find solutions by themselves: she clearly wanted the thing to grow organically, as individuals themselves grew. She knew that having put her Force here, it would push things in the right direction. In contrast, the current administration is pushing for a regimented, rigid, visionless structure that will eventually kill that essential freedom to experiment.

Another unfortunate parallel is in the use of fallacious propaganda: the Sri Aurobindo Society would call us drug addicts, hippies, morally degraded etc.; to that vocabulary the present administration has added 'zamindars', 'encroachers', 'lawbreakers', 'anti-nationals', and so on. Each of those terms, if scrutinised objectively, is wholly unfounded. So in both cases we see a strong tendency to denigrate what Auroville has achieved in order to exert control over it. It's a standard strategy: if you can prove that an experiment has failed or that people can't manage their own affairs, then you have legitimized a takeover. Certainly, Aurovilians (and I repeat here what many of them have been telling me for years) have not always lived up to the ideal, sometimes far from it; but Mother did not expect them to be transformed overnight, and overall, the 'experiment' has undeniably met with commendable success in many fields.

One difference I do note, if I compare it with 50 years ago, is that there is much greater maturity today in the way many Aurovilians have responded to the present crisis. Then the fight against the SAS was not always 'clean', there were some extreme reactions; today, residents have on the whole found dignified, mature ways to make their views heard, and to protest calmly if need be. Of course, there is a deep divide in the community, which is partly an engineered divide, but it has not been allowed to degenerate into violent reactions. I see a lot of inner progress in this. I have met many people and am struck by their sincere attempt

to understand things at a deeper level: "What does Mother want us to learn from this?" — but not the way the current administration has pronounced that Auroville 'needs to be shaken'; I find this approach insensitive.

This inner progress, I feel, gives strength, resilience, and will hopefully help the community overcome the current crisis. It cannot possibly last, because on one side we have a blinkered vision, and on the other we have people who have worked very hard for decades and earned respect for Auroville the world over. While the current administration declares that Aurovilians have failed, people have come from India and abroad to learn from their experiments and achievements.

So I think we have to regard this as an unfortunate phase and, as I and Gabi Gillessen (another IAC member) wrote to the Chairman of the Governing Board, a missed opportunity. When the new Governing Board was constituted over a year ago, they had a golden opportunity to unblock certain collective processes which were hampering Auroville's progress. Initially, there was tremendous goodwill; I personally witnessed how warmly the new Secretary was received and taken around. But very soon, measures of coercion and imposition kicked in, and this spoiled the atmosphere. This was quite unnecessary, in my view, a misguided strategy — the community was ready to collaborate at many levels and to offer its experience and expertise, and was dismayed to find it rejected (as were external experts of goodwill, such as Vastu Shilpa).

*The question many of us have been wrestling with is what the root cause of the current crisis is. Some say there is a larger political agenda while Raghu, for example, (see page 4) says he thinks the seeds of this go way back, to things that were not resolved in Auroville in the past. What do you think is the root cause?*

I'm not sure I know the answer to this question. However, concerning Raghu's comment, one could say that the seeds go even further back — even to the beginning of humanity, because these are at bottom issues of coexistence and collective harmony; it's precisely Auroville's mission to solve them.

I think, however, that the unilateral actions of the present administration have had a big part to play in causing the current crisis. In a joint meeting with the Governing Board, Gabi put it very well; she said that if Auroville has to change, the change must come from within. If it is imposed from outside, either it will be short-lived, or it will damage something essential to Auroville. Unfortunately, nobody on the Board seems to be listening to such advice. If the Governing Board were fulfilling its mandate spelled out in the Auroville Foundation Act, it would just be advising the residents: "This is not working", or "You need to streamline that", or "Let's meet to discuss this point", and so on. It should not be, "Do this, or else your visa is in danger or your maintenance will be cut." These methods are unacceptable, not only because they are unjustified and unethical, but because they are contrary to the spirit of Auroville.

So in my view, there is in the present administration a vision deficit, a trust deficit and a deficit of ethical means of functioning, for any administration is expected to work under set norms of transparency, accountability and consultation, none of which is the case here.

*If the Governing Board is not fulfilling its function, the IAC has an even more important role to play. In terms of the Act one of your main roles is to advise the Governing Board. Is that happening at present? If not, why not?*

The IAC has two mandates under the Foundation Act (although we know that Mother would not have wanted her vision to be limited by legal or administrative definitions). One is to advise the Governing Board, the second is to ensure that Auroville residents will have the freedom to conduct their activities in conformity with the Auroville Charter. We have not been successful in either of these tasks.

Within the present IAC, while we all agree on the need for Auroville to develop along the lines envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, we do not necessarily agree on the way to get there.

And so we concurred that we don't necessarily have to speak with one voice. Gabi and I, for instance, have tried to raise issues of immediate concern to the community and propose solutions; other members have emphasized more the need to spread Sri Aurobindo's teaching; one (Dena) tries to promote dialogue, which in my and Gabi's opinion should be preceded by a retreat from unjustified coercive and intimidatory measures.

But having agreed to a *modus vivendi* within the IAC, we encountered other difficulties. Firstly, in the joint Governing Board / IAC meetings, so far very little time has been reserved for significant exchanges. Even when we had a few minutes to express our concern with certain burning issues, no proper exchange followed. Besides, our joint meetings are not minuted (despite my repeated requests), nor are minutes of the Governing Board's own meetings and decisions shared; they are classified information, it would appear — the whole functioning is opaque. And letters addressed to the Governing Board or its Chairman remain unanswered, even when they contain sets of positive recommendations to resolve the impasse.

As regards guaranteeing the freedom of residents to conduct their activities, the IAC can only advise the Board. For instance, when meeting after meeting the Governing Board and the Secretary would make not only contemptuous and disrespectful sweeping remarks on Auroville, but also allegations of 'serious' financial irregularities, criminal activities, drug addiction and so on, I would ask them to give us some evidence. Even in ordinary society, you cannot censure people without providing evidence and giving them the right to respond. But neither has evidence been provided nor have the accused (Aurovilians critical of the administration's ways, it seems) had any right to respond and defend themselves. So even basic democratic norms are violated.

In a 1926 talk, Sri Aurobindo said: "I have no faith in government controls because I believe in a certain amount of freedom — freedom to find out things for oneself in one's own way, even freedom to commit blunders. Nature leads us through various errors and mistakes. When Nature created the human being with all his possibilities of errors and mistakes she knew very well what she was about. Freedom for experiment in human life is a great thing. Without the freedom to take risk and commit mistakes there can be no progress. ... Growth of consciousness cannot come without freedom." This is, in short, Auroville's story — and a striking echo of the Charter. And I have to say that, so far, this Governing Board has made no serious effort to understand that story.

*Is your inability to influence the Governing Board partly due to the fact that the IAC does not speak with one voice?*

I don't think so. It is not that other members of the IAC have disagreed with concerns raised by Gabi and myself. I remember a third IAC member, in our joint meeting of August 12, calling for all the three bodies of the Foundation (the Governing Board, the IAC and the Residents' Assembly) to find ways to work together for harmony to be established. For some time, a fourth member has expressed a wish to help resolve the visa issue (though there is no improvement as yet).

*Practically, what do you see as the way ahead?*

The three bodies of the Foundation have to be in genuine dialogue and work together transparently. We need to go back to the original spirit of the Auroville Foundation Act, which requires the three bodies to interact in a spirit of 'mutuality' (as Kireet Joshi rightly called it), and, if I may add, mutual humility. Nobody should declare that "I have the truth and you have to take it from me" or "I'll hear you out, but anyway will proceed on my set path", which comes to the same. It is perfectly feasible for the three bodies to work together, but for this to happen the current administration has to change its mindset. I think if this doesn't change, litigation will increase and, in the meantime, Auroville will get a bad name, people and organizations abroad will stop getting involved



and sending funds.

But more serious than the monetary aspect is the damage inflicted on Auroville's deeper reality. People have been coming to Auroville drawn by the call to inner adventure, by an aspiration to create something new, to be sucked into this spirit of creativity that Mother outlined in the Charter; for decades, Auroville has been a magnet for such people, included many with high accomplishments. Almost every time you speak to a visitor, you find they have been touched by something here, by the different atmosphere. This 'something' may be subtle, but for me it's the most precious part of Auroville — the invisible item at the end of the list of its impressive achievements that has been circulating of late. It is what makes Auroville what it is, what it can be — and it is this that is now being damaged.

If Auroville can impact tens of thousands of lives in the way that it has, then it is undoubtedly worthwhile, and the government would immensely benefit from giving it the gentle support it needs. That is my conviction. In fact, Auroville already embeds many of the good practices that governments the world over (including India's and Tamil Nadu's) claim to promote — in nature conservation, water management, innovative education, renewable energies, alternative architecture and construction, social work with the villages, alternative lifestyles, etc. — so a genuine collaboration is bound to be very fruitful.

I do hope good sense will prevail and the Governing Board will understand that it's not too late to redress matters.

*You have also written about the need for the residents to draw up a 'road map'.*

Gabi and I had this perception that the residents and their working groups should counter the current administration's misleading propaganda that many Aurovilians are 'anti-city' and 'anti-development'; we know that 95% of the community or more agree on the need for a certain kind of development — but not any kind of development. A meaningful development should do two things: it should respect what Auroville has already accomplished and build upon it; also, it should integrate with the bioregion, because Auroville cannot develop in isolation.

To achieve this, Auroville needs a new master plan, because no master plan can be considered valid after 20 years. But that will take some time; meantime, we have suggested collecting a number of existing projects, eloquent enough in their totality to show that there is a vision, plenty of expertise, and people who can work things out here: something that shows the way forward because these projects exist (quite a few of them are already sanctioned or somehow endorsed by the community) and they do build up into a far-reaching vision of Auroville's development, which is not only ambitious but achievable.

Of course, for this to have a chance, the freedom and internal decision-making powers promised to the residents must be restored. I see no reason why the Foundation's three bodies could not collaborate in this. Micromanagement and total rule by the Governing Board is diametrically opposed to Mother's repeated injunctions for Auroville. It is time we started listening to her.

*Based on interview by Alan*

# Collaboration is the way forward

*Manoj Pavithran is an integral yoga practitioner, educator and filmmaker. He was drawn to Sri Aurobindo in 1989 and eventually joined Auroville in 1995. He co-founded Purnam Centre for Integrality in Auroville (purnam.auroville.org) to develop and offer educational programmes. His film series Evolution Fast-forward can be found at www.sopanam.org. He has authored a book - Pilgrims of the Infinite based on his personal journey.*

We are passing through an intense period of polarisation and conflict in Auroville and it is extremely challenging for all of us. However, regardless of the difficulties, I do have this silent faith that the soul of Auroville is indestructible, incorruptible and mighty. I don't know when this faith got settled in me, perhaps it comes from my faith in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and their words. Auroville is their work and nothing can stop the manifestation of Auroville or the birth of a new creation on earth. This is a certitude without any trace of doubt and everything else is built on this foundation.

Over the years I have learnt that conflict is an opportunity for deep self-reflection and rapid progress if I am willing to step out of the grip of my ego. Another counterintuitive understanding is that I am not building Auroville, instead, the deeper truth is Auroville is building me. Auroville already exists as a force field and when I offer myself unconditionally into the vortex of transformation, the force field will churn and take out all the crudeness from within me and purify and push me forward on a path of transformation way beyond my imagination. These insights are my companions on the way during these difficult times.

## Broken relationships

When I am told that the Governing Board (GB), the Secretary and the International Advisory Council (IAC) are outsiders, often I wonder what it really means. Legally it makes no sense at all, nor does it make any spiritual sense. Yes, emotionally you may feel like that and it implies an emotionally broken relationship. I remember when my bike was broken down on an empty highway at night and a stranger stopped by and helped me to get it started. It gave an instant sense of brotherhood even if it was a stranger. Someone helped me to go forward on my path and that felt like all-pervading divine grace. The GB and the Secretary are meant to support Auroville in its manifestation but for many Aurovilians it is now an emotionally broken relationship and the court has become a go-to place. Even within the community, many bonds that lived through decades are now broken and the laundry of the community is now social media content for narrative wars.

## The destiny of India and Auroville

When I study the last three of Sri Aurobindo's five dreams, it is obvious that the destiny of India and Auroville are woven into each other. In 1968, a week before the inauguration of Auroville, the Mother received a powerful message from Sri Aurobindo and a clear vision. *"India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that the... cure will be found. And then, that is why - THAT IS WHY I was made to start Auroville."* From this perspective, it is clear that regardless of the political leanings, the past, present and future Governments of India and Auroville are destined for shared destiny in the world. We have seen it unfold over the decades and India has gone out of her way to protect the Auroville project.

India had never been a predatory nation in her entire history and dharma had always been

her bedrock of stability and north pole of destiny. India intuitively knows what spirituality is, her spiritual mission in the world and the value of Auroville in that context. India has already begun to play a prominent role in global geopolitics and has developed powerful statesmanship. The timid phase of India is over and there is bold and swift development and the winds of this change have reached Auroville. India clearly knows that Auroville is a crown jewel of India, a gift of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to the world. You can see this in the video on India's G20 presidency, where the Matrimandir is prominently present. It is not surprising that the Government of India has chosen to actively engage with Auroville but how did the shared destiny turn so bitter?

## Our success story

There are plenty of tangible signs of our success, our labour of love over more than five decades that have drawn people from around the world to Auroville. Whether it is Matrimandir, afforestation, water management, organic agriculture, renewable energy, architectural innovations, beautiful handicrafts, or high-quality international cuisine Auroville has established a great reputation for excellence. Otherwise, there is no reason for people from around the world to come to Auroville in thousands every day - a place that was a barren land just five decades ago. Besides all this, after the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) was settled, Aurovilians, regardless of increasing numbers and nationalities, have lived together peacefully for more than three decades. It is a miracle that Auroville not only survived but also grew into a thriving diversity of excellence in a small rural setting. It was the late Shradhdhavan who told me once that it takes tremendous courage to join Auroville and become a stupid Aurovilian, stripped of all the identities and labels of the outside world, to become a nobody in particular. Yes, we have done it with grit and perseverance, regardless of our limitations and imperfections. We are ordinary people with extraordinary dreams and we know the pain and struggle we have gone through to transform this barren land that has now become a magnet attracting people from around the world. That is why it hurts, hurts like hell, when the new chairman of the Governing Board tells us that we have failed.

## Where did we fail?

When it comes to protecting the land of our master plan area or simplifying our complex internal bureaucracy and non-transparent and complex financial system, or governance or building common infrastructure like housing or roads to meet the growing demands, our internal processes have been hopelessly inadequate or even counterproductive. We couldn't go beyond endless discussions and the creation of documents full of ideas for change. The number of studies, workshops, and documents created in the last two decades is enough proof. While we could successfully transform the available land when it came to collective systemic transformation, there was no executive power that could effectively put things into well-aligned collective action. We were living like a collection of fiefdoms that could never come to an agreement on common action for the larger good of Auroville, even if the house was on fire. There is no point in denying it.

Besides such internal stagnation due to disagreements on joint action, we were coming under attack by people like Vikram Ram who were putting pressure on the government at all levels and the GB accusing Auroville of all kinds of misdeeds. In fact, the previous GB had to even initiate an Enquiry Committee. On the other hand, the previous Working Committee had even filed a writ petition in the Madras High Court demanding government protection of the land designated for Auroville. It was in this context the new GB and the Secretary was put in place by the Government for direct intervention to help Auroville to come out of the internal deadlock. So when the new Chairman came and made his sharp observations, it hurt like hell because there was truth in it, the bitter truth of our struggles and failures in transforming

our internal systems and processes that were suffocating us.

## Intervention

The first report of the GB (57th meeting) was accurate with surgical precision on the issues we were entangled with. While I would consider the goal of 15,000 people by 2025 to be unrealistic, overall I saw a great deal of benevolence and goodwill coming from the side of the GB.

The very first intervention was the successful recovery, in July 2021, through eviction of the occupied land at AuroOrchard, a problem that was festering for 20 years, something that our internal processes couldn't resolve. However, when it came to clearing the ground for the Crown development, hell broke out. It is a well-known fact within the community that the Youth Centre was intentionally placed decades ago on the Crown by the people who did not want the Crown, and so was the planting of the trees in the area designated for the Crown. The intentions of the people who did it were loud and clear.



Photo: Manoj

The development of the road was blocked, and the laying of power cables was blocked even when we had a gazetted master plan. There was nothing our internal process could do to resolve this conflict. Rather our internal process was well suited to block any development if you get a group of people together and glorify it as a community process. All Working Groups were disempowered to do anything about it and the dysfunctionality and injustice were well wrapped under the cover of ecology and human unity. Any small coalition of people can impose their will on the collective development based on their self-interest or personal ideologies and there was no internal power to deal with it.

## Breach of trust and the pain under the green carpet

When a piece of land is given to you to be a custodian till the time comes for building the city, and when you intentionally build structures over a planned road or plant trees over them to block the development, and then when the time comes for the development of the planned things, you refuse to give back the plot given to you in good trust, you are destroying the very fabric of trust that builds a society. Behind the facade of greenwash, it is a breach of trust, a rupture in the very foundation of our social fabric. But we had become desensitised and numb through repeated experiences of such violations and had accepted this as a way of life and normalised the pain. Indeed, it benefited a section of our community, it protected their territorial rights and kept the fiefdoms intact in the disguise of ecology and community process. Below this green carpet of our success were the buried dreams of a city, the city the earth needs, the city of dawn, the city of Sri Aurobindo. It was a promise made by the Mother to the world, a promise of building an ideal city for 50000 people, a promise we repeated to the Government of India to protect this land. Unfortunately, the fact is we have not succeeded in protecting the land or in building the city.

## JCB of Change

The new GB took up the land and building of the city as a top priority. When we observe the sequence of events we can see that the methods used by the Secretary with the support of the

GB, were becoming increasingly heavy-handed in direct proportion to the resistance put up by a section of Aurovilians. There was clearly a clash of two cultures - the way the Government officials work and the way our community processes work. After 6 months of unsuccessful discussions, the encounters turned more physical, which included physically blocking the JCB sent to clear the land for the road. This, in turn, brought the police, and the rest is the history of spiralling downward into the pit of our collective shadow. It is a co-created reality and blaming the Secretary alone for the whole thing is irresponsible ignorance. The world is only a mirror showing us what we are and what we find shocking in others is lurking secretly in our own subconscious. The minimum dignity required is to own up to at least 50% responsibility for what happened. But this requires courage and intellectual honesty to face ourselves and put aside the ego and stop playing the victim.

## Shifting from confrontation to collaboration

India and Auroville have a shared global destiny and mission and it is time that we live up to that higher call and follow the path of collaboration. Even though we have already seriously damaged our relationship with the Government of India, I believe it is still not too late to course correct and find ways to collaborate. Our greatest enemy is our fear and it is nothing new, this had been crippling our internal workings by making every Working Group into a scapegoat, and now it is projected onto the Secretary. This is a co-created entanglement in which many are playing the victim role. This is a deep-rooted psychological problem and it can be healed only by handling power not as a teenage rebel but as a mature adult.

There are critically important areas of work where we need help to overcome our difficulties. The first and foremost is to acquire the missing lands for Auroville. Everything else is transient formations on top of the land. Generations of people will come and go, but the land will remain and that must be protected for the future. It is not about us, but about the long-term future of Auroville. This is one area where the new GB and the Secretary are putting in a great deal of effort if we are to judge by the meeting minutes of the GB. Perhaps it is our last chance to protect the land, and that makes it critically important that we collaborate with Government officials in this effort.

The second major area is to simplify the Trusts structure and streamline our financial system for accuracy, compliance and transparent reporting for accountability and insightful collective overview. Our previous FAMCs have tried to do it but there was no cooperation from various trustees and there was no internal capacity to bring such large-scale systemic change. This, too, is an area the Secretary has actively taken up for transformation and it is critically important that we collaborate in this effort. It will be the foundation upon which a thriving start-up ecosystem can emerge that can move towards the financial independence of Auroville, a necessary condition for autonomy.

The third important area is to go beyond lip service to building the city and start serious work on infrastructure and removing the housing bottleneck which is stopping the growth of Auroville. The fourth is to establish university-level education, lifelong learning opportunities and related facilities for the youth to thrive in Auroville. Auroville has tremendous potential as a lifelong learning society. This, too, is a priority area the Secretary is working on and our collaboration is critical. None of this will harm Auroville, rather it will open the doors to higher possibilities for Auroville.

We also need to come out of the tourism-driven individualistic and consumeristic economy into which we have fallen, and get out of the vote bank politics and clan coterie system. All this requires serious efforts and the GB and Secretary are here to provide that. But their work culture and language are different and we need to understand each other's ways without fear and shadow projection.

Patient collaboration is the way forward.

Manoj Pavithran

# Creating a space for dialogue and healing

*Some time ago, Ms Dena Merriam, Chairperson of the International Advisory Council (IAC), approached Raghu Ananthanarayanan with the approval of the Governing Board (GB) to see if he could help in identifying the next steps towards healing and dialogue in Auroville. Raghu's focus is on organisation design and change management and he has devoted almost two decades to transforming the organizational culture of several leading organizations. He has also taught yoga and developed a unique methodology called "Totally Aligned Organisation" that brings together his understanding of manufacturing systems, human processes and yoga.*

*Raghu conversed with diverse Aurovilians, including both Working Committees, as well as with the International Advisory Council and Governing Board, and then made a video presentation of his initial findings – which he called a 'first landscape study to start a conversation' – to the IAC and GB.*

*On 21<sup>st</sup> November, the community was invited to see the video presentation and then interact with Raghu via Zoom. About 100 Aurovilians participated. A subsequent interaction took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.*

*Here are some of his observations from the video presentation which, he stressed, were not based upon experience of Auroville but on his interactions with those who had agreed to dialogue with him. He also pointed out that he is not focusing upon particular events but upon the underlying dynamic, the way that people respond to events and the meaning they give to them.*

## The presentation (paraphrased, not quoted directly)

**Present situation:** The challenge Auroville is facing today has to do with large organizational issues, with scaling up. At present, the overall picture I get is that it is stagnating in small pockets of excellence, and there is no shared view of how Auroville should progress, or how to measure such progress. Each group has its own view, aspiration, but there is no overarching view which includes but transcends these different 'islands', and this prevents Auroville going to the next level. All these personal aspirations have to converge through an organizational process which involves policies to be followed, processes to be respected, and long term goals stated.

At present people are framing the situation as pioneers versus those from outside who don't understand; as spiritual explorers versus structuralists; or individuals answering only to themselves versus those ensuring the system has to operate for everybody. Each pocket has conviction. Can this tug of war become a creative tension? For, in the present situation, if one side wins, the whole of Auroville loses.

People define the ideal Auroville in different ways. For example, as 1) a place where all my neighbours are focussed on integral yoga, inspired by The Mother's dream and a place where the culture continuously supports human evolution and 2) a place where things are working well and infrastructure works efficiently to support the city. This is a critical tension between something very lofty and very mundane. But if these are not brought together, Auroville is not going anywhere.

How to bridge this gap? Each has something to contribute, so dialoguing is critical for the next step. However, I don't think Auroville has invested enough in this. I hear a lot of people saying they have the 'truth', but this is problematic as it leads to dogma and an inability to dialogue. Dialogue requires the ability to say 'I don't know' and to owning up to fears of incapability when it comes to dealing with a hugely difficult task.

However, what I see happening when any dialogue starts is that differences surface, people get triggered, dialogue breaks down, and then people go back to their personal ways of looking at things, or to working on their own sadhana. This energy also creates small kinship groups, of which there are many in Auroville. All this is not great for building an organization.

The large-scale plans for rebuilding the city are provoking people very sharply. There is a lot of anger in the way that people are responding to each other. I don't think this is a culture which will help human evolution.

Now healing is required because some of these reactions come from hurt, trauma, mistrust. What Auroville is trying to do is something unique and very difficult, and precisely because a spiritual aspiration is given, any failure to get to a spiritual collective is triggering deep regression. This to me is the pattern that is getting repeated in Auroville,

One thing many people are feeling very positive about was the way the dreamweaving happened. So can we help the dreamweaving process through healing dialogues? This might be critical going forward.

## Archetypes

*Raghu then explained that he would use a framework from the Mahabharata to illustrate certain archetypal energies which he sees at play, both individually and collectively, in Auroville. Using the five Pandava brothers to exemplify different archetypes, he talked about the functional and dysfunctional aspects of each archetype and their shadows. "The fundamental idea I bring out from this story is there are five kinds of power that people have, and it is a wise use of these five that creates a karmic collective."*

## The various energies

**Nakula** is the energy that allows us to put service before self, harmony, it is a power which is very critical for institutions because it helps build consensus. It also has a dysfunctional aspect which is, when it is very strong, it leads to people avoiding any kind of conflict.

The **Bhima** energy brings a huge level of commitment, excitement, adventure, and willingness to explore new ways of doing things. The dysfunctional aspects of this energy are frustration with too much planning, and people driven by this are very self-reliant, so it does not enable collective dialogue. Also, there is an underlying need for power in this energy.

These two energies are very good for creating small units, for start-ups.

The **Yudhisthira** energy fosters order, structure, predictability, which is a very critical building block for larger organizations. However one of its dysfunctional aspects is it becomes rigid through the application of rules.

**Sahavidha** is very important for bringing together knowledge and expertise, using rigorous analysis and studies before coming to conclusions. Its dysfunctional aspect is getting caught in analysis-paralysis, and refraining from action, even when the situation demands it.

The **Arjuna** energy calls for deep introspection and valuing and understands there are many ways of knowing the truth. This is essential for dialogue. One of the dysfunctional aspects of the Arjuna energy is that it sees so many different points of view it can feel overwhelmed and be unable to act.

## The play of these energies in Auroville

Much of the early pioneering work in Auroville seems based upon the Bhima energy, the ability to commit to an aspiration once a positive emotion is triggered. However, if the power aspect is not expressed in legitimate ways, it gets expressed in all kinds of subterranean ways. Regarding the Yudhisthira energy, many people seem to view rules as intrinsically negative, and any attempt to systematize is seen as oppression. The way the Foundation office is bringing things in at present is immediately seen as rigid, so there is no space for necessary dialogue and negotiation.

Although each small unit in Auroville seems quite willing to experiment and create knowledge, the Sahavidha energy seems to be in short supply at the larger organizational level. People complain that their expertise is not being used, or that Auroville lacks expertise in certain areas, like planning, but is not always willing to bring in people with this knowledge.

The Arjuna energy is an aspirational state in almost everybody I spoke to, but there is a huge gap between the aspiration and actual behaviour. One of the important things that this energy enables you to do is to ask questions starting from the statement, 'I don't know'. When one gets onto this level in an organisation one gets the ability to see oneself in others and others in oneself, to go beyond empathy into actually being the other person. Unless you can do this, there is no possibility of the kind of dialogue that Auroville is wanting, which is about life transformation.

In conclusion, I think the Bhima type of archetypal energy is much celebrated in Auroville, and was very much part of the pioneering era, but doesn't foster dialogue. The Naguna energy which is important for cohesion is available in small groups but not available as a whole. There is not enough respect for the Yudhisthira energy which acts and works with large systems. The Sahavidha knowledge energy is there in pockets, but the Arjuna energy is only there in individual's sadhana.

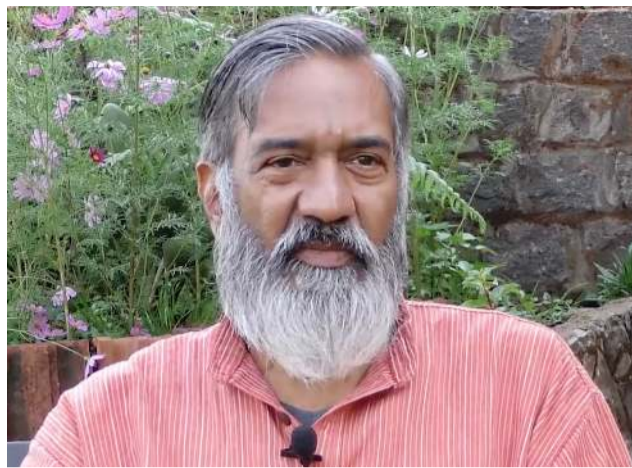
So what are the collective competencies of Auroville? One is commitment to individual sadhana, to freedom and autonomy. There is also an inspirational quality: people are inspired by each other. There's also a lot of willingness to experiment and to fail, but this is held only individually or in small pockets.

However, there are also core inadequacies. One is the inability to negotiate and dialogue with people who have different mindsets and different ways of looking at reality. There is also an inability to commit to long-term plans, which is the Yudhisthira energy. You can't have a large city without policies, and there is suspicion about how to build shared policies. I also think some of the present processes that are happening are because peer accountability has been missing for a long time, so now accountability is being imposed through the governing body. If it had been worked on earlier, we would probably be in a different situation today.

## Collective worldviews

*Each of the Pandava archetypes can be seen as the individual reflection of larger collective ways of feeling, thinking and acting. These are collectives each with its own unique set of worldviews etc. All members of a system significantly embody the core worldview, culture, values and blind spots of the system. Raghu went on to explain these different 'universes' and how they manifest, or don't manifest, in Auroville at present.*

I see a lot of **Clan** energies in Auroville. Here there is high unity in the in-group, but it demonises others. The next level is **Arena**, which is fundamentally tribal. Here the whole discourse becomes a discourse of heroes and villains, which is where I think Auroville is right now. An organization, if it is to succeed, has to move into **Clockwork** which requires strong structure. Here the social system is held together by obedience and conformity to a



"higher truth" that is unquestionable - be it ideology or organized religion. The system is highly efficient, stable and predictable. People who have belief in the fundamental tenets of the system willingly conform to the rules, standards, and boundaries set in the system.

The next level which an organisation has to move to is **Network**, where you are bonded by a shared purpose and everybody is a potential source of knowledge. There is a rational way of dealing with differences. I don't see this in the present collective.

Then there is the **Eco-system** level which is highly inclusive, pluralistic. This is a space where you are friends with those who have different outlooks, and there is a context of compassion. This is where dreams are awakened, everybody is a co-creator, and deep collective contemplation takes place. I've not heard enough to tell me that this exists here.

But I think what Auroville aspires to be is a **Holon**, a space of dialogue where all perspectives are welcome. Power comes from within each of the members and they hold a deep love and unilateral commitment to the system. The individual and the collective are both important and one is not privileged over the other. Collective well-being and evolution are the primary goals of this system. This universe can be inhabited only through lived experience and collective sadhana.

I think where Auroville has got stuck in dealing with the current issue is between Clan and Arena and there is a huge struggle to accept Clockwork. Therefore the rest of the organisational levels are not acted upon collectively. I don't think the stuckness should be attributed to the Secretary, it is also heavily influenced by individual inability to take certain organisational level actions. There seems to be a repetition at present of a previous process where there have been attempts to organise, and every time there has been a huge eruption of resistance, hostility. My suspicion also is that some of the accountability that is being brought in today is the result of the behaviour of some people in Auroville and areas of lacuna and this is being resented. So unless there is some resolution here it will be difficult to have a dialogue.

## Possible next steps

Right now Clockwork is only looked at as a structural imposition. A lot of people have to understand that it should become a very important infrastructure for the community, with roles, responsibilities and rules.

At the policy level, the first thing that ought to be done is to agree upon an accepted idea of success. You keep talking about this magnificent city but it is not translated into any measurable criteria. This is critical. Unless there is some agreement upon what you will achieve in the next few years, taking a progressive step towards the grand picture, you are going to continue to have this problem.

I think dreamweaving is a good first step but without a healing energy, the dreamweaving is not going to go anywhere. I think a healing process has to involve a collective grieving. I heard a great deal of despair about where Auroville is today, people saying Auroville has not happened in the way they wanted. It is important you own up to this and talk about how you feel about this. If you do this, like all healing processes you get away from anger and feelings of betrayal and you can move and live in a different way. But if there's nowhere to dialogue these feelings, they turn into rage which is directed at others. I don't think collectively this has been understood.

The other thing is that each of the three bodies of the Foundation has to understand what the non-negotiables are and what the responsibilities of each are. I think a lack of understanding here is also causing the clockwork space not to emerge. If these are stated, you might be able to start rebuilding trust, because I don't think Auroville can be built without these three groups coming together.

Another necessity is to rethink how to deal with the teachings of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and honestly talk about what one understands and how one interprets the teachings. This is very critical for a dialogue to go forward.

If all this is cracked, Auroville will do phenomenal things.

## Dialogue with Aurovilians (paraphrased and not necessarily in chronological order)

Aurovilian: How was your presentation received by the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council?

Raghu: There was very little exchange. Dena Merriam appreciated it, Gabi Gillessen said she really understand how difficult it is to deal with shadows, while Michel Danino said I lacked evidence for certain of the points I was making. But I was told some things and simply put it together in a framework.

What Dena wants to do now is see if a group of 20 to 25 people are interested in coming together to explore what healing means. Something to support what you have already done in the dreamweaving process, which Dena is provisionally calling ‘heartweaving’.

Av: We are not against authority, as you had suggested, we are against limited lower authority. I think in Auroville we are open to divine authority.

R: I’m using authority in the sense of human authority.

Av: I think there’s a lot of power being exercised arbitrarily at present, so I don’t see how you can have dialogue in that context. Many freedoms have been taken away from us, including the right to be in Auroville when we have been here for most of our lives, so how can we have a dialogue when our very basic human rights are threatened?

R: I agree. I am saying that first you have to create the right context. If you do a dreamweaving or dialogue at this point it won’t work. So I am suggesting that before the dialogue can happen, there is a certain stage that has to be gone through in which everybody has to participate. I’m not suggesting a dialogue, I’m suggesting a healing process first, and if this does not happen there cannot be a dialogue. The dreamweaving should be extended to many other issues but just the dreamweaving will not work in my understanding unless there is work at a deeper level.

How to begin? Let’s agree at this point that I don’t think anybody knows what to do, but from that “I don’t know and I care” can we start? That’s the only hope that I’m speaking about. Healing can only start from there.

Av: I agree that the starting point to finding a solution is a shared ‘I don’t know’. But where are the people from the so-called other side who come with the same quality of not knowing and open heart? This is what is required to heal and to start eventually a dialogue.

R: I agree with you. I have no doubt in my mind that the governing body has to be part of the experiment. So I’m also requesting members of the Governing Board to come to the table with “I don’t know”. But some context has to be created before that happens, you cannot start from where you are today and jump straight into a dialogue because it will only deteriorate.

## “I’m very optimistic”

(continued from page 1)

bring in an outsider to create a space for dialogue. The Aurovilians who live here have to do the work, and it’s unfair of us who come in to say you have to do it this way or that way. We have to create a respectful environment where people can truly listen to each other, which means hearing and respecting the other’s point of view. And not to be so attached to one’s positions.

*For that process to happen there has to be a certain climate of security and trust. All the non-Indians are dependent upon visa recommendations to stay here, and at present the length of these recommendations seems dependent upon whether or not someone is aligned with the present policies of the Foundation office. If that doesn’t change, if this Damocles Sword is not removed, it is difficult to see how the environment for healing and dialogue can be created.*

You can start dialogue even in the present situation. I started dialogue with the Palestinians and Israelis at the height of the Intifada. It was my first peace dialogue, and the first three days were torture. I felt I was not cut out for this work. But I had a group of spiritual teachers who were sitting there, silently holding the space, and after four days there was a real breakthrough and, by the end, the Palestinians and Israelis were dancing together. But you have to go through that difficult period, to get out all the pain and feelings of victimhood before you can come together.

But there can’t be any preconditions. If the Israelis and the Palestinians had said we won’t talk until the border issues are solved, they would still be waiting for the dialogue to begin. This process may not have created peace on the ground, but movement was made in the minds of people. Enemies became friends, and I consider that alone to be an achievement. Movement takes place first in the ethers, in the subtle realm, before it manifests in the physical.

So dialogue can get you where you want to be faster. You want the visa situation to be solved? Dialogue. You want the Residents Assembly to be recognized by the Governing Board? Dialogue. I don’t believe the thinking should be no dialogue *until*, but rather dialogue *so that*.

*What is the first step in that dialogue?*

I recommended an outsider [Raghu, eds.], someone who has done a lot of dialogue, who is very much aligned with Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, who has a lot of compassion and understands both points of view. As I do. I understand everybody’s pain here, that’s why I say I can’t take a side. I can’t say that I have the answers, but I think the only way to get through this is to develop a respectful relationship with the Secretary, otherwise how can you have an impact?

As to the Secretary, she is playing a role and she’s playing it on behalf of her systemic reality. You cannot start a dialogue with somebody playing a role if you begin by demonising them.

Av: I stumble over the way you have interpreted the Secretary as Yudishthira. The Yudhisthira archetype is somebody who is very, very just. But when somebody uses the visa issue as a threat they are not being just. I think a condition to even start talking about dialogue would be to have the threats to visas etc. removed.

R: The Yudhisthira archetype is somebody who knows how to use the book. The book can be used in ways that are constructive or destructive, but it’s a reality that here is a person who is a bureaucrat who really understands how to use the book. She is a government official who has been given a book and she has to play by that book. Demonising the person who is using the book doesn’t help.

Av: Many people know many of the things you have said and we are ready to take those into consideration. Something left out in your analysis of the culture of Auroville is that that culture is very strong and that culture will bring us through. I felt there was a bit of a pessimistic ring in what you are presenting, but this may have come to you from the people you talked to.

Av: I am part of several online groups and meetings have been happening every week and they have reached a depth and maturity where we have all been deeply touched by what is said: it is completely different from the reality which you have described. There is a sense of spiritual depth, wideness, and acceptance and not the demonising you are claiming.

Av: I think that the dynamics you are labelling, like victimisation and demonization, are basically coming only from one side, and this makes your presentation one-sided. I’ve also heard from others that there is a lack of trust in your neutrality, in your ability to hold all the differences in a way that is truly open and that you are justifying the present takeover.

R: I’ve heard a listing of rights and wrongs from both sides. So if my presentation came through as one-sided I am sorry, I don’t experience it that way. The role I have been asked to play is to try and understand the context and make some suggestions. I’m hoping that I have captured the underlying dynamics accurately, but if I haven’t captured the dynamics I can’t do anything to help.

If I’m speaking the truth and the truth has some resonance something will happen.

Av: I feel I’ve been put into a box, on one side, when I don’t actually feel like that inside. There isn’t a feeling of being safe with you. So that for me puts up a wall. I think that these kinds of tools can be really helpful if we can just share the tool and not

*This assumes that there is cooperation from that side.*

I have been talking to the Secretary often about visas and I believe it will be resolved. I can’t affect the Master Plan or the Crown Road but I can help with the visa issue. Now, nobody will get less than one year and that is only a beginning place. Let’s start with that and build from there.

*But people who have lived here for 30 or 40 years and put all their resources into this place, who have no home to return to, are now being told they have to get their visas renewed every year, seemingly as punishment for not agreeing with the Foundation office. If the IAC could make a statement to the Governing Board and the Secretary saying don’t use visas like this, it could have an effect.*

We are five people on the IAC with different opinions and different areas of expertise, and also different ideas of what role we should play. I have been told that past IACs have also dealt with such differences.

*But isn’t your role defined in the Foundation Act?*

It’s all interpretations. We are an advisory group and we have been advising. We have agreed that each of us is free to make their own recommendations to the Governing Board and my recommendation was to bring in an outside facilitator to help create a safe space for dialogue and a process. And the Governing Board agreed to that.

*But what if somebody or some group in a power position disagrees with the outcome of the dialogue? For example, the Governing Board didn’t accept the outcome of the Dreamweaver’s process. So wasn’t that a waste of time?*

I have seen that there’s been a lot of miscommunication and misunderstanding. I sat with the dreamweavers on this visit and saw them interact with the Secretary. I heard her say how supportive and grateful she is of their work. Things have a way of being twisted, especially today in our age of misinformation. But I encouraged the Secretary to clear up this misunderstanding.

*In his presentation, Raghu said that an essential element of dialogue is that people are willing to say ‘I don’t know’ and not stick to fixed positions. He also said that at some point the Governing Board and the IAC also need to be involved in dialogue with the community. Do you feel that the Governing Board and the other members of the IAC are ready to start a dialogue at this point, to come to the table and admit that they don’t know what the answers are?*

There have to be some parameters. If people say, ‘We don’t want the city, we want to keep everything the way it is’, that won’t be well received. For there is a consensus that Auroville will grow into a city, and that intention has to fulfil itself. But if everybody

the analysis. Each of us can do that for ourselves. Yet I’m grateful for this.

Av: I think dialogue can only happen when there is deep listening. At the moment we are in a stalemate because people are not listening to one another.

R: This is fundamental. When there is a difference of opinion, shadows and fears are bound to play up. When this happens, I’m seeing you people getting bounced back into personal sadhana because I think what is happening is the collective shadow is being taken for a personal shadow. But to get to a collective sadhana we have to cross that barrier, and for that the kind of listening you are talking about is essential. But it is not easy.

Av: You have not mentioned the projection of the shadow on others, but this is exactly what is happening at present. The psychic being is there to work on the shadow, and there is no sadhana if you don’t use the psychic being to work on the shadow. But nobody is doing this, which is why the Mahakali blow is falling on our heads.

R: I agree. But what I’m suggesting is that you need to do collective sadhana, which is different from personal sardana. I think that is why Mother said start a city rather than just work on one’s personal sadhana. This kind of sadhana cannot happen without a collective.

Av: What do you see as the next steps?

R: The next step is not to become a spiritual collective – that is far away – but to become a human collective, which means no divisions, caring for others. It’s very easy in the mind to say we want harmony, but to actually touch heart-to-heart without the shadows lying in your heart getting triggered is not easy. If you become a human collective, a lot of the things that are happening now won’t happen.

Practically, what I’m hoping for is you start with a small neutral group of 20-25 people which is interested in dialogue because I don’t think you are ready to have the warring people come and sit for the dialogue. And this group could explore what will make it possible to accept differences and not fall back on the narcissistic ‘I am right’. That’s a huge step to make but I’m willing to help if I’m wanted. I’m not going to come in and say I know what to do because I don’t know: I don’t know if anybody knows. It will be an experimental space and you can only step into that space if you start with ‘I don’t know’. I can’t see anything more than that right now.

*Compiled by Alan*

## INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

is seeking to fulfil those intentions but have different points of view of how to do it – which seems to be the present reality – it’s going to require some give-and-take everywhere.

But it is clear that it is the Aurovilians who are going to build the city. The government will only give a kickstart - and I would love to see the government help make this a truly sustainable place because there’s no place else in the world like that – but you are the ones who are going to create whatever is to be manifested.

*You say you have differences within the IAC. How do you deal with these?*

So far we have never met in person. We have had zoom calls and, as I mentioned, we’ve agreed that each of us can act in the way he or she feels best. We each have a different way of contributing and I think we agree this is the way we want to move forward at the moment. So people have written individually to the Governing Board advocating for certain things. But there is a respectful atmosphere when we come together on Zoom. We will meet in person for the first time in February next year, here in Auroville.

But we see polarisation everywhere in the world today. It’s a very difficult time globally.

*How do you deal personally with that?*

I meditate. I try not to have judgements, try not to be angry at people who are way off in some crazy mind space. It’s very hard now in the U.S. and there’s a lot of inner work we have to do not to get affected by it.

*How optimistic are you that something positive will come out of the present turmoil in Auroville?*

I’m very optimistic because the energy of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo is behind this place. I think we are working through, both individually and collectively, the things we have to work through. What is emerging in the world right now is anger and fear, so there’s a lot of instability. Why should this place be different: you’re part of the world community. But there *is* one important difference which is that the energy of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother is behind this place and the Aurovilians are doing their spiritual work. So while it may take ten or twenty years for the world to work come to a better place, maybe here you can do it in one year.

*Do you think that if we succeed here, it will have repercussions on the wider world?*

I believe India has an important role to play in the future, and Auroville can be a large part of that. If Auroville can work through this difficult period, it could certainly have a ripple effect and demonstrate that human unity can be achieved.

*From an interview by Alan and Carel*

# Brief News

## Human unity gatherings

On 4th December, one year after the demolition of Youth Centre buildings, concerned residents invited Aurovilians, Newcomers and Volunteers to come together at the Town Hall to make offerings of flowers and enjoy peace dances, live music and food.

The annual Youth Center fair was held between 16th -18th December. The organizers invited the community to come together in a safe, joyful and playful space for the realisation of human unity around crafts, food, fun, music, theatre (*more on page 7*).

And on 23rd December, Solitude Farm invited all those who “cherish HER dream, community, and a celebration of togetherness on this land” to come together with no particular agenda but to celebrate our community with people, food, music.

## Survey on restorative processes between RA, CB and IAC

A short survey for residents to fill out was launched in October 2022 and received about 230 submissions. The aim of this survey is not to make any decision, and its results are not binding. It was designed simply to get a sense of how people feel about some kind of reconciliation process being explored at some point. The results are being processed.

## Selection process 2023

The Residents’ Assembly Service has invited all confirmed Aurovilians to take part in the next selection process. 3 members are to be selected for the Entry Board, 2 for the Auroville Council and 6 for the FAMC. The Auroville Council is holding this event and the RAS is organising it according to the Selection Process approved by the Residents’ Assembly.

Nominations will close on Saturday, 24th December and the selection is planned for 29th January 2023. In the meantime, the RAS is forming a Selection Group.

## 61st meeting of the Governing Board

The 61st meeting of the Governing Board took place on 8th November 2022. The RA Working Committee, and the other RA working groups, were not given time to present, despite requests. The Minutes of Meeting for the 60th and the 61st meetings of the Governing Board have yet to be communicated to the RA WC or shared with the Residents’ Assembly.

## Secretary meets Lt. Governor

According to *The Hindu*, Auroville Foundation Secretary, Jayanti Ravi, called on Lt. Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, who is a member of the Auroville Governing Board, at the Raj Nivas on Saturday 25th December. According to a press release from Raj Nivas, the Secretary provided an update on the state of affairs in Auroville and the progress of various development initiatives.

## IAC and AVI meeting

The International Advisory Council (IAC) and the AVI Board met for their second exchange via Zoom on 15th November 2022. Dena Merriam, Gabi Gilleszen and HP Rama participated from the IAC’s side and 13 members from the AVI Board. It was agreed to meet in person in Auroville in mid-February 2023.

AVI explained it is engaged in many fields, while the IAC members said they have many individual contacts in Auroville, and aim to understand all points of view. Now the question is how to move forward, and how to find a concrete way to ease the tensions. The IAC members also explained that until now they are not functioning well as a group, they all have different approaches, and a greater dialogue and clarity about the IAC’s role is needed. The exchange with the Governing Board has been limited so far, and they have not received any Governing Board meeting minutes.

Dena reported that she is working with the Secretary, Dr. Ravi, on the visa issue and that she is willing to discuss all 140 pending cases with her. She said that everyone in Auroville will get a 1-year visa which will allow time to work on 5-year visas. AVI members underlined that it is not only the visa problems and the fear of being thrown out of India, which is creating anxiety but also the fear of losing their voice altogether, of losing their material basis, like homes and maintenances. Dena promised to also look into those problems.

Gabi sees her and the IAC’s role as upholding international laws and standards. Freedom of speech and personal expression must not be silenced by taking control of emails, media, archives, and by threatening people who represent the community. HP Rama shared he has had a relation with Auroville since 1969 and is impressed by what has been achieved. He is committed to help with the American pavilion and exhibitions, not only as a US pavilion but for the continent of the Americas.

AVI members answered that Aurovilians acknowledge freely that they needed “a kick”, but help and support are needed and not a take-over and forced development.

## Visas

Over the past weeks, the RA Working Committee reported that there has been once again an alarming rise of visa issues for a

number of Aurovilians. The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation has resumed issuing short-term recommendations for long-time Aurovilians, and apparently has refused to give a letter for a new Aurovillian on the grounds that he is not doing valid work for Auroville (he is part of an RA selected working group).

## Entering of new Aurovilians into the RoR

It is estimated that approximately 130 Aurovilians who have completed their Entry Process are still waiting to be added to the Register of Residents (RoR). There is no clarity as to why the Office of the Secretary is not doing this. The Council and RA Working Committee clarified that those residents who have completed their Newcomer process and have been confirmed as Aurovilians by the Entry Board, even if not entered into the RoR, are members of the Auroville community and are welcome to participate in Residents’ Assembly decision-making processes.

## Tree plantation

The Foundation appointed L’Avenir/ATDC has written to the community explaining that no tree plantation can take place without explicit permission from them, adding “Any resident found to be planting without permission shall face consequences.”

The RA WC and FAMC subsequently wrote that “This statement is baseless and may be discarded.”

## Crown road works

The FO ATDC announced that the Crown Road work will restart with a stretch of the Crown inaccessible until the end of December 2022. Since 29th November, teams of road workers



Photo: Marco S

have restarted dismantling the existing road. To allow traffic flow to continue, cycle paths have been widened in several places to allow for motorised vehicles. The School Board is concerned for the safety of all the children cycling to and from schools as children are now forced to share the narrow pathways with motorised vehicles and several accidents have been reported.

The RA TDC pointed out that “The seeming inability to properly plan construction in phases and in a manner which would allow for traffic to be rerouted to cause least possible disruption impairs the freedom of movement of many of our more vulnerable residents.” They are also concerned by the number of cables and pipes that have been broken during the digging works and conclude “We cannot help but notice that the current implementation of infrastructure works lack any proper coordination with the infrastructure group, as well any checks on obvious ground realities”.

The FO ATDC clarified that they are aiming to open the Crown soon only for pedestrians and cyclists, once the sub-layers are complete and the road top surface is rough but able to be cycled.

## Cease land exchange

In a letter sent to Dr. Jayanti Ravi and members of the Land Board sent by the four Working Groups selected by the Residents’ Assembly, they point out that they have come to know that land exchanges are in process and at least two have been finalised over the last months. According to different sources, these exchanges have resulted in huge financial losses to Auroville.

One example of a huge financial loss to Auroville concerns a land exchange in October 2022 involving 1.50 acres of highly valuable Auroville land located on the Tindivanam highway. This was exchanged for 2.15 acres of farmland without access located within the Master Plan area. The Auroville land located on the highway is worth approximately Rs. 7.5 Crore while the land purchased inside

the Industrial Zone of the Auroville Master Plan is approximately worth Rs. 1.5. This is a financial loss of approximately 6 crores to the Auroville Foundation.

The letter concludes, “Until such time as there is transparency from and due process being followed by the Office of the Secretary, Auroville Foundation, and the Land Board, we, the four working groups selected by and therefore rightfully representing the Residents’ Assembly, demand that any and all land exchange considerations stop immediately.”

## Housing survey

The Housing Service is responsible for maintaining the database of all the housing assets of Auroville. In the past attempts were made by many Housing Service teams to compile this data through a communitywide survey but were not successful.

There is a database that stores all the information about housing details; however, there are a lot of gaps in the information. To address these gaps in the data, the Foundation appointed Housing Service is commencing a survey of all housing assets, to which they will dedicate themselves for three months. An app has been made to facilitate the recording of the data, including GPS location, and the latest pictures etc. of the assets.

## Foundation FAMC report

The FO appointed FAMC reports that it is taking forward a centralized platform for all Auroville trusts. Also that a total revamp of BCC operations has been done and methods put in place for bringing efficiency in collection of contributions at unit and individual level and streamlining expenditures to municipal

services. During the scrutiny of the contributions to city services, it was ascertained that over six hundred residents do not contribute to the city services, and they will approach these residents to participate in the contributions and hear any concerns.

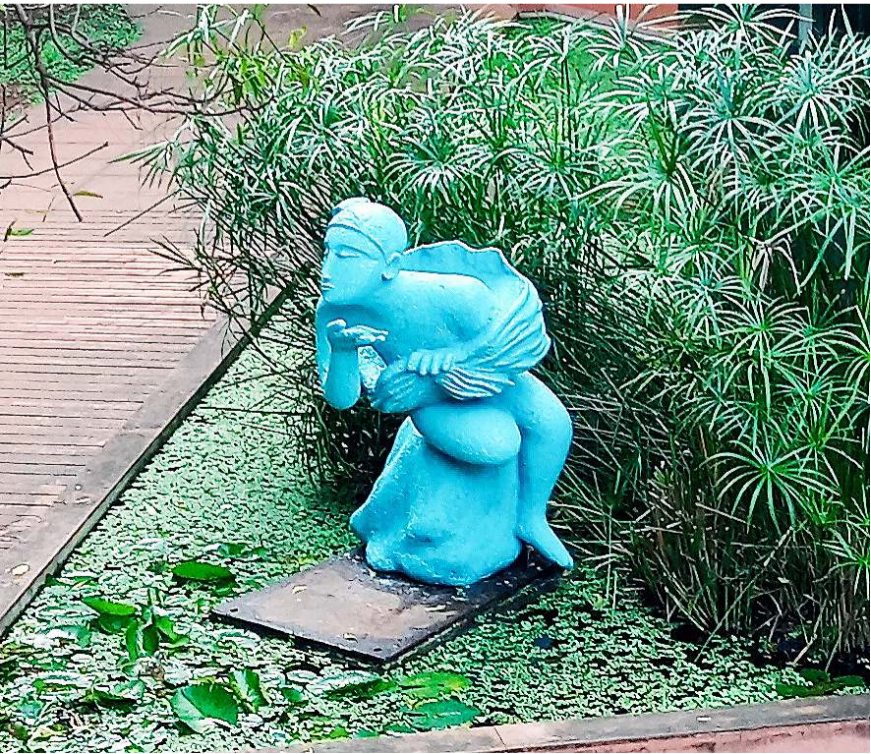
One new initiative is the digitising and centralisation of all Auroville accounts. The Foundation appointed FAMC also remarked that the group does not believe in parallel governance/administration, nor can Auroville’s economy afford the phenomenon of Aurovilians being financially supported when they are resisting the Master Plan. Therefore a few members who were in RA appointed working groups have been put on bridging maintenance to help them find other work in the community than with the ‘working groups’. “This has been a painful process with no other alternative.” Those who have been put on the bridging maintenance will be asked if they need a basic minimum care package at the end of their BM period.

## Legal matters

On 7th December, the FAMC case filed by Namrita Gautier came up in the Madras High Court. The court had a choice to admit the case or to dismiss it outright. As it was allowed, the court directed the AVFO to file the counter argument. On Monday 19th December 2022, the Madras High Court heard a petition that was submitted in July 2022 regarding the appointment of a new FAMC by the Office of the Secretary and the Governing Board. The RA Working Committee subsequently reported that “After careful consideration and with the advice of our legal counsels it was decided to withdraw the petition, in order to submit a new one with updated information.”

## ‘Massacre’

In what one resident described as a ‘massacre’, an elegant bronze statue located behind the Media Centre at the Town Hall was unaccountably painted blue recently. Nobody has yet accepted responsibility.



# Finding oneself in community

The Auroville 'Youth Center's' (YC) annual gathering, themed this year as the 'Find Yourself Festival', took place on 16-18 December. The community was invited 'to come together to celebrate in a safe, joyful, and playful space for the realization of human unity.' The event lived up to its billing with fun offerings for all ages.

There were children running around, shooting basketball hoops, balancing on the flying wire, playing cards, drawing, serving and enjoying food, getting face masks made, playing with balloons, horse and pony riding, acting in the performance, savouring ice cream and simply enjoying themselves. The YC were trading 'Realisations' as a unique (Find Yourself) Festival currency sitting in the original renovated 1972 caravan.

Adults too enjoyed the celebrations, relaxing to sound baths, playing capoeira, jamming with Sargam percussion rhythms, belly dancing performances and kolam making. There was also lots of live music, as well as stalls and activities from many enterprises and individuals including Ecofemme, TLC (The Learning Community), the Auroville Dog Shelter (cute puppies for adoption), and craft offerings. Friday night saw a YC Documentary by Cheenu capturing some of the last two years evolution.

In the deeper forested reaches of the YC, visitors took part in games, testing their balance across a slackline, or via a Lava obstacle course. These activities allowed individuals to win 'Enlightenments' in exchange for their 'Realisations' which were exchangeable for gifts donated by Auroville units.

All enjoyed the food stalls, having to choose among the YC's legendary pizzas, humus pitta breads, healthy snacks, cakes from TLC, ice creams, French brioche - all examples of the international cuisine offerings we are lucky to enjoy here. The event was well organized over the three days with a full programme, and caring touches, with flower petals and colourful flags delineating the paths to walk on.

There was an abundance of joy, that simple barometer of goodwill, and the rejuvenating Auroville communal spirit; creative, original and energetic. It was a gathering of Aurovilians; the young (including the youth that never ages), different nationalities and genders all mixed into an Aurovilian sambar.

A festival highlight in the spirit of pantomime was when Johnny and Jesse narrated and created a play, 'Get Lost, Like Hansel and Gretel.' In the working forest home of Pa and his



Photo: Marcos S

off-spring Hansel and Gretel, arrives a new landlady from the city, Fluenza, with her accompanying crow, 'Murder', and a taste for eating children. After arranging for trees to be cut down, Fluenza kicks them out of their home, and they are banished to the darkest forest corners where, instead of struggling, they build a tree house and – of course – a pizza oven. Later disguised (as a hippy 'Floozy') Fluenza tries to force the children into the oven but falls instead into the 'sludge of humility' and transforms into someone telling the truth. Vibrantly sung and acted by youth and Lili as the witchy antagonist, it offered an enjoyable respite from the politics of the day.

Startlingly at times, though somehow easy to forget, the festival took place in the centre point of our current communal division, with the road gash through Bliss forest separating the YC entrance and caravan from the festival itself. This strange juxtaposition of colourful, vital and diverse activities next to the monoculture of a road to be, showed that Auroville life, like nature herself, keeps vibrantly growing even in the midst of challenge.

Peter

'Get Lost, Like Hansel and Gretel' can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RnKBPFLr0g>

## Singing the way forward



Photo: Aditi

On December 10 and 11 the Auroville Choir, led by Nuria, presented an evening of a cappella 'Spirituals and Gospel Songs'. These originated predominantly in the American South and emerged through the African American community's experience and response to slavery and discrimination. A large choir of about forty men and women performed in the CRIPA hall. An overflowing audience braved the dug-up roads and post cyclonic weather to enjoy a choral evening of a dozen or so songs sung with a familiar high quality.

The evening began with 'The Storm Is Passing Over', followed by 'Shoshone Love Song' which celebrates faith and the relationship we have with the natural world. This was followed by 'The Battle of Jericho' where the city's walls come tumbling down. The highlight of the evening, with a marching beat and powerful call, was 'Stand Up', which comes from the 2019 film about Harriet Tubman, the American abolitionist. The performance ended with 'Lean On Me' from Bill Withers and, lastly, Pete Seeger's version of 'We Shall Overcome'. These songs share a sense of solace whilst in struggle and name some of the elements that help, namely community, hope and the power of voice itself.

Art has often spoken truth to power, and many of these songs come from the slave heritage that speaks to promised Biblical redemption, eventual justice and inner and outer freedom. Nina Simone's 'Mississippi Goddam' is among other examples of this powerful heritage which has also sounded a note of warning for us all.

This was a timely evening of upliftment and hope, shared in community.

Peter

FINDHORN

## Findhorn's 60th birthday

On November 17, the Findhorn community celebrated its 60th birthday, marking the occasion when the founders and their children arrived onto what is now known as 'The Park'. The anniversary week started with presentations, among which was the Carbon Neutral 2030 initiative which received initial funding of £250,000 from the Scottish government's 'Just Transition' fund to prepare an even more detailed proposal to help a green transition. David Spangler, whom the community Founders made co-director on his arrival in 1970, led a beautiful virtual meditation, with the memorable line that "you are the founders for the next sixty years."

In the past, these birthdays were highlights with old members returning, sharing about the good old days. This year had a different feel, as, like Auroville, Findhorn too has been thrust into a time of change. The Findhorn Foundation had been earning 90% of its income from its educational programme, and when Covid struck it was financially devastated, resulting in over 60% of the Foundation employees having to leave and Cluny Hill College, the residence for guests, being mothballed for two years. However, the wider Findhorn community (called the New Findhorn

Association, NFA) who live independently of the Foundation, are growing both in numbers and in the amount they contribute to the running of the eco-village.

Tragically, some months ago there was an arson attack by a disaffected former worker on two of the most spiritually and communally significant buildings in Findhorn, the Sanctuary, the first building to be built as the place of meditation, and the Community Centre, a social and eating hub. During the birthday week the new Sanctuary ground was blessed, planning papers were delivered to the local council and the groundwork of preparing the site for a new building began. As an indicator of how the community could evolve, the new sanctuary is proposed to be shared as a community asset, owned and run by community organizations and members instead of solely by the Foundation.

Auroville and Findhorn, in spite of their differences, also share commonalities, notably the infusion of the 1960-70s seekers looking to create a new world in community. They have also shared similar fates before. In 1973 when Mother passed away, key figures like David Spangler and, Dorothy Maclean and many

others (amicably) left Findhorn for the US. In 1979 Peter Caddy, another founder, left Findhorn, and the community woke up to the realization they were considerably in debt leading to a tightening of belts. The same year in Auroville was the height of the SAS crisis.

In the early 1980s an American millionaire Peter Callaghan had a vision of three centres of light – Arcosanti in Arizona, Findhorn and Auroville – and he set up the Hexiad project which supported exchanges between them. A number of exchanges have happened since.

To witness the shared struggles of both communities was strangely reassuring. Both still have pioneers who are creating new directions and embodying that sense of the spirit that brought life from unpromising beginnings to the vital centres that they are now, while succeeding generations are bringing their unique and contemporary offerings to both centres. A new phase is beginning with churning, but in both places a sense of rebirth – to something as yet undefined – is palpable.

Peter

# Gastronomica

**A**ntonello comes from Northern Italy and moved to Auroville in 2014, where he now lives with his partner and children. He runs 'Gastronomica', an Italian take-away gourmet store - sometimes affectionately referred to as the Italian Pavilion - that has gained popularity within and outside of Auroville, thanks to its handmade pasta, Italian takeaway dishes, and imported Italian culinary products.

## How did it all begin?

What I have previously done in life has nothing to do with Gastronomica. I was almost always working independently because I never liked the idea of being answerable to someone. I only had a boss until I was 19, while I still went to school in the mornings and worked in the afternoons as a metal worker, making things such as tables and chairs. My boss was a mad genius, artistic, eclectic, smart, incredibly spiritual, possessing such finesse, and he opened up the world to me in a certain way. He exposed me to a reality that was new to me. In hindsight he felt like an Aurovilian.

I eventually opened my own metal workshop and then a gym, and competed professionally in kickboxing. I would also take cooking classes in the evenings or cook with my family on weekends, for food has always been a passion.

## How did you find out about Auroville?

I first came to Auroville in 2001 when I was 21, to visit some Aurovilian friends. After coming here, I thought I would never come back to India because I didn't like it and thought everything was too dirty. Then, three years later, I sold the gym and came back to India for three months to learn massage in Kerala, with a teacher who didn't speak a word of English. As I didn't speak a word of English at the time, everything was communicated through massage and gestures.

After India, I spent some time giving massages in Barcelona, by the beach. Doing that all day was physically exhausting, so I decided to look for some work in a restaurant. I showed up at a few restaurants dressed in white Indian clothes with an orange scarf, and they told me that I should come back with a CV, which I did not have.

I eventually found a restaurant which took me in because the chef was an Italian man who was in love with India, and he appointed me the first chef after 20 days of intensive 12-hours shifts, during which time I learnt how to run a high-paced kitchen for a 90-seater restaurant in the centre of Barcelona. I was running the place like a professional chef without ever having done that before, making fresh pasta and dishes every day for lunch and dinner.

I eventually went back to Italy to the metal workshop, and also worked at a bed and breakfast, learning how to prepare food for bigger events.

## What was the turning point?

I had a wakeup call when I realised that I felt stuck in Italy. That led me back to Auroville for a visit in 2008. I bought half a container worth of Maroma, Auroshikha and ceramic products to resell in Southern Spain, after leaving my life in Italy once again. It was only in 2013 that I came back to India, looking at the possibility of settling here. I had been working in Tenerife, in the spas of luxury hotels, and I felt that I needed to do something more with my life.

So, in 2014, at the age of 33, I went to the Ashram and asked the divine, 'What am I to do?'

And I got an answer. I asked and something just came, while sitting there, something very real, exactly in that moment. The question was, since I felt like my life in Europe was being wasted, should I come to live in Auroville or not? I got the answer, like an epiphany. It was very clear, I had to come here.

I sold everything and moved to Auroville. Here I began giving massages again in Quiet. I did this for three years as a volunteer, at which point I felt again I wasn't building anything for my future here, since I was slowly spending all my savings.

So with some friends at Joy Guest House, we opened a bistro café. We spent 7 months and 9 lakhs working on that. Then we opened it for only three months because some Aurovilians did not agree with the project and with the fact that we took cash from non-Aurovilians. We lost so much money, and I wondered why fellow Aurovilians would want to stop a new activity and initiative. The eatery we created was a tourist spot, it was a small scale, lunch time spot, with fresh handmade Italian food.

Struggling because of my debts, I started working for weddings outside of Auroville (through my Auroville unit), and made enough money to buy a pasta machine from Italy. That is when I started making pasta. When I started, all my friends told me I was crazy and that the pasta project would not work. So I found no support from my friends in Auroville, or from Auroville generally.

Working in Auroville for a maintenance is simply not sustainable when you have a family of five to support, so to grow my unit I started going to Indian cities to give free pasta, just to spread the name and story.

## Why did you start making pasta, what was the vision?

I remembered being surprised when I first came to India that there was no good local pasta available, so I felt like pasta could be a good business, and that along with 5-10 other Aurovilians we could build something together. But working with Aurovilians is complicated. Some people who came to work in the kitchen either always had a meeting they had to attend, or some family matters, and they ended up working about 4 hours a day while expecting a full maintenance.

Then I started making take-away Italian food and pasta-making became secondary. We only started making some profit after one and a half years of non-stop work, during which time I had to keep working outside Auroville and asking for financial support from my family in Italy.

And then just before and during Covid, with just a few ammas and friends working together, we finally flourished. We were the only take-away restaurant, and it was not unusual to see 30 people queueing outside for their focaccia and lasagna lunches. It also became an unexpected Italian meeting spot.

## What other challenges have you encountered?

Some people here are under the impression that we use Auroville's name to market our products. But when I go to sell pasta in bigger cities, most people have not heard about Auroville: we forget that we are not the centre of the world.

## What is the future for Gastronomica?

I am actually planning to leave Gastronomica to someone and start something outside of Auroville. The possibilities are limitless. I could run a restaurant in any city without having to invest my own money because there are many investors ready to set up such businesses.

After all of the struggles here, I don't want to share so much anymore, because people seem to want you to share with them when you are successful, but the moment you need help they disappear.

Also, people don't understand how challenging it is to work in an environment like this, how many physical, technical and practical difficulties constantly come up. Sometimes the rented building and kitchen require so much maintenance that we have to use all of our profits and take loans on top of that, just to repair everything.

Although I would like to be Aurovilian in all the meanings of the word, it is just not sustainable for me right now and for many other Aurovilians with similar experiences. It's not the way to go forward.

*So you don't see a way of bringing into Auroville a new business model or innovative way of working?*

No, because every time I've brought in something new, people have just come to take as much as possible from me. It would be completely different if there were the infrastructure within Auroville to accommodate these kinds of units. I've invested all of my savings from Europe to set up the kitchen and to rent the space, because nothing is available within Auroville. New ideas and businesses should not be stopped; instead, young Aurovilians should be encouraged when they try to build a business.



Photo: Courtesy of Antonello

So I'm looking for a big change. I do not feel like I am in my element in the kitchen anymore, as if something were not going in the right direction. That is why I would be happy for other people to take on Gastronomica and create something new, but I would need them to show me what they can do. However, Aurovilians come with great expectations. After two days they ask me what kind of position and maintenance they will be getting. They have great ideas, but no ability to see things through.

At the beginning, Gastronomica was a sort of spiritual project for me, I wanted a collective approach, but now this project has just become a life challenge. I don't see the spiritual aspect of it anymore.

## What do you mean?

When I came to Auroville, I felt that if we work together, we can - without depending on each other - support each other and grow together, and the community can grow through that. If we all work well, we will have time to both work and develop ourselves spiritually.

But our daily reality here is a life challenge, and that is not interesting to me. If I wanted that, I could go out and face the life challenges anywhere. I came here to face higher, more spiritual challenges and to work on those. Realistically, I do not want to end up having no resources 10 years down the line, having invested all of my money in a house that is not mine, and that I have not received any financial support for repairing (because it's by the sea and might be gone with erosion soon). All of this is too much of a challenge: I cannot focus on anything other than basic needs.

Also, people judge the little success we have had by saying we run after money, but they don't see the years of struggle and investment that go into creating something from scratch, working long shifts day in and day out, constantly struggling with endless unpredictable technical problems. There are rules here that do not make sense in the reality of our world today, and that limits us.

I do feel grateful for certain things, such as the schools of Auroville. I'm so happy that my children can get this education. The problem is that we are not in a closed-off ashram, we are not renouncing the world. In some ways, we are obliged to live like in the outside world. We are here, open to the world, and the world is running at such an increased pace of development that we are unable to keep up with that, or match that momentum in our own way. And the Auroville system is such that after spending years here, unless one has external resources one can simply never leave or go anywhere.

I go twice a week to the Ashram and twice a week to the Matrimandir. I'm surprised not to see many Aurovilians at either place. It seems to me that only a few truly focus on doing some spiritual work or change. I do not see a practical spiritual or work commitment. I've been wanting to truly work spiritually, and at the same time work in business, but for both things I don't find a collective commitment that would allow us to grow and work together.

Auroville should be sustainable for everyone, regardless of their financial status. But it is not. You can only sustain yourself here when you are earning money.

*In conversation with Chandra*



Photo: Courtesy of Antonello

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