



**ISSUE 01**

APRIL 2023

# VOICE OF AUROVILLE

News & Highlights from the Auroville Community



This publication is endorsed by the  
Working Committee of the Residents'  
Assembly of the Auroville Foundation.

**AUROVILLE**  
Media Liaison

## — *Introduction*

# Why this new publication?

For almost two years, Auroville has been in the news due to recent turmoil and challenges in this international community located in southern India.

Founded in 1968 by Mirra Alfassa, more commonly known as the Mother, Auroville is a project based on the vision of the great sage and philosopher Sri Aurobindo. This unique experiment in human unity attracts seekers and visitors from all over India and the world.

Our new journal, *Voice of Auroville*, aims to inform well wishers and friends of Auroville across India and the globe with **factual updates and crisp articles on what is unfolding in Auroville**. The contents convey the perspectives of a majority of Auroville's residents, who comprise the Residents' Assembly of the Auroville Foundation.

### **The Auroville Charter**

*(written by the Mother in 1968)*

Auroville belongs to nobody in particular.  
Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.

But, to live in Auroville, one must be a  
willing servitor of the Divine  
Consciousness.

Auroville will be the place of an unending  
education, of constant progress, and a  
youth that never ages.

Auroville wants to be the bridge between  
the past and the future. Taking advantage  
of all discoveries from without and from  
within, Auroville will boldly spring towards  
future realisations.

Auroville will be a site of material and  
spiritual researches for a living  
embodiment of an actual human unity.

## — *Introduction*

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In this inaugural edition, we present three articles that illustrate the **ongoing challenges** and **positive initiatives** at play in these very difficult times in Auroville.

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### Dreamweaving: Bridging Diversity in Urban Planning

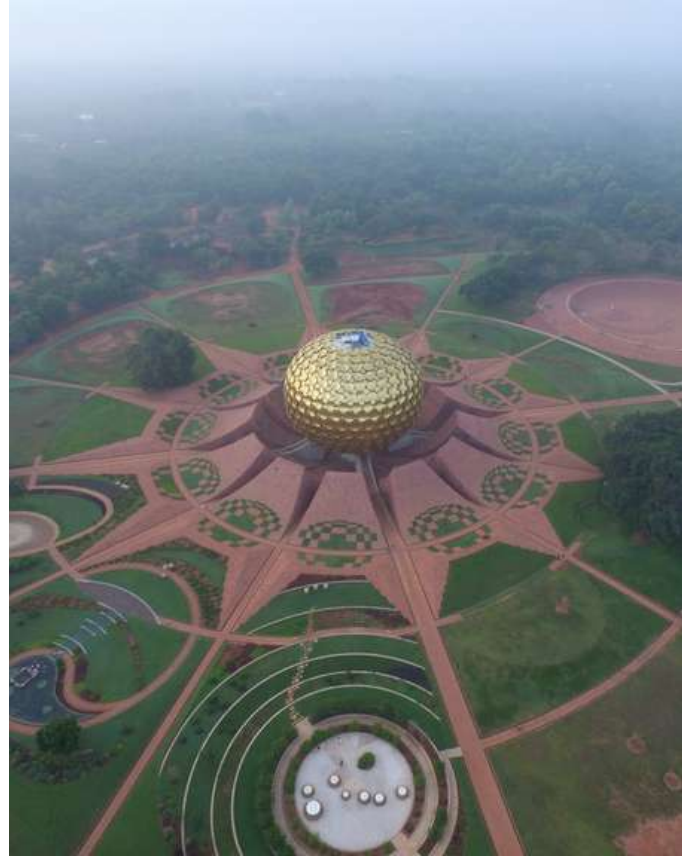
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On the community's unprecedented collective visioning experiment for conscious and ecological development of 'the Crown', a feature of the future city.

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Contemplates the ways in which the community has manifested itself, showing courage and determination in these adverse times.



# — *Auroville in a nutshell*



## **Built from scratch**

Auroville was founded in 1968 on a barren plateau in Tamil Nadu. For more than 50 years the residents of Auroville have built Auroville themselves, mostly through personal savings and resources, and with donations from all over the world. Auroville was nurtured by the goodwill of all those who participated actively in manifesting the dream.

## **3 million trees planted**

With 3 million trees planted by its residents, Auroville is home to one of the largest 'Tropical Dry Evergreen Forests' in south India, as well as to many endangered and protected species.

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"I travelled in this area where you are now and I remember how it was a desert. You have made this desert bloom. Let the spiritual flame that is Auroville always remain an affirming flame in the midst of the sea of despair that we see all around. Let this flame be bright so that darkness can be dispelled. Thank you again for the privilege of serving this project."

**Dr. M. S. Swaminathan,**

UNESCO Cousteau Chair in Eco-technology, Chairman of the Swaminathan Research Foundation, here in his acceptance speech to the Auroville residents as new Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, 27th February 1997





## Rooted in India's traditions

Based on the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, the purpose of Auroville is to realise human unity in diversity – a living embodiment of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, 'the world is one family'. To support this endeavour, the Government of India passed an Act of Parliament in 1988, which defines the structure and status of the Auroville Foundation, an autonomous body supervised by the Ministry of Education.



## Internationally recognized

Nationals of 60 countries have chosen to settle in Auroville. Out of its currently 3300 residents, about half are Indian. Other countries with a high representation are France, Germany, Italy and the USA. UNESCO has passed five statements of support towards Auroville. Additionally, a number of Aurovilians have been the recipients of national and international awards in diverse fields.



## Experimental & innovative

With Auroville's aim being the invention of new ways for the human species to live in peace and harmony while preserving its diversity, the experimental aspect of Auroville is essential. Building the city of Auroville in a sustainable and innovative way is a means for its residents to grow and to evolve, in a spirit of mutuality and unity.

— *Auroville in a nutshell*

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“You are, what I might say, a summing-up of the aspirations of the world of tomorrow.”

**Mr M'Bow,**

Director General of UNESCO,  
1986

## — *Summary*

# 18 Months of Crisis

A new top-down control is being imposed on the Auroville community for the last 18 months, contrary to the collective spirit, values and principles upon which Auroville is based, and which are upheld in the Auroville Foundation Act (1988).

The Auroville Foundation was created in 1988 by an Act of Parliament. It is an autonomous institution constituted of three bodies: the Residents' Assembly (**RA**), the International Advisory Council (**IAC**) and the Governing Board (**GB**). All three have generally worked harmoniously together until 2021, and their role is that of mutuality.

In July 2021, Dr. Jayanti Ravi, IAS, was appointed as the new Secretary to the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. She was warmly welcomed by the 3000 plus residents. Shortly afterwards, a new Governing Board was also nominated. This new appointment to the Office of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation ('Auroville Foundation Office' - **AVFO**) set in motion a systematic and forceful dismantling of the essence and core functioning of Auroville.



Until this past year, the development and most achievements of Auroville over the last half century were largely organised by its residents with the support and collaboration of many well-wishers from all over India and the world. This includes the election of internal committee members, the establishment of collective community decision-making processes, check and balance features for its internal financial systems, and methods of development and progress, all whilst maintaining a collective unity. This new top-down control is contrary to the Auroville Foundation Act, to the collective spirit envisaged by the community's founder and goes against the values and principles of freedom to experiment and self-govern on which Auroville is based.

**The following is a short summary of the issues currently at play.**

# — 18 Months of Crisis

## **An 'indisputable' plan**

Since December 2021, the sudden implementation of an outdated urban plan, called the 'Auroville Master Plan, Perspective 2025', is currently being carried out by force, under the direction of the AVFO and associates, with bulldozing at night, destruction of endangered forest and water catchment areas, and the eviction of residents from their homes with only a few days notice.

Amongst other issues, this recent enforcement fixates on a perfectly circular 'Crown Road' without taking into consideration the social or environmental impacts, disregarding the recommendations of Auroville's experts, and ignoring the ecological, functional and sophisticated alternative plans proposed by the collective. Moreover, it has not undertaken the necessary steps to receive official clearances, such as Environmental Impact Assessments or Detailed Development Plans.

## **Takeover of governance**

There has been a systematic takeover by the AVFO of all of Auroville's major internal working groups and committees that manage the key areas of administration, media and finances, resulting in the concentration of power in a handful of people who were not appointed by the residents and who do not represent the needs and aspirations of the majority.

There is a complete disregard for the decisions made by the Residents' Assembly, normally in charge of organising all day-to-day activities in Auroville. Residents' Assembly Decisions to stop these take over actions were completely ignored, despite 97% of voting residents clearly and strongly expressing their call for correct planning and development processes.

Skilled executives of key services and groups were dismissed and banned from accessing their offices, computers and mailboxes, sometimes without warning or explanation, and their source of income was cut off with little or no replacement. Arbitrary appointments of unqualified people on the basis of their affiliation with the AVFO have become the norm.



# — 18 Months of Crisis

## **Mismanagement of communal funds and assets**

Communal funds, collected with the contribution and work of residents, are being opaquely allocated by individuals who have not been appointed by the appropriate established processes and refuse to answer to the Residents' Assembly. Communal assets, some being funded by national and international grants, are being repurposed without the agreement of the stakeholders involved.

## **Housing and allowances threatened**

Over the past six months, some residents have received threats of losing their housing, constructed with the appropriate permissions and which they have often built themselves. Evictions have not followed processes of Indian law which allow adequate time for residents to relocate with allocation of proper alternatives for housing or workplaces. The monthly allowances of approximately 30 residents have been discontinued arbitrarily, despite their need to cover basic expenses.

In this climate of fear and insecurity, many do not dare raise their voice – for the threat to their livelihood and their dedication to live here is real.



## **Visa pressure**

Visa recommendations, a responsibility of the Secretary of the AVFO, are being withheld despite the applicants adhering to all required criteria, and despite many of them having lived decades in Auroville without any issues. Visas seem to be specifically withheld from those who have publicly expressed disagreement with the actions taken by the AVFO. In February 2023, this escalated further when an Auroville-born resident and duly appointed representative of the community was issued a 'Leave India Notice', seemingly for speaking out about the recent state of events in Auroville.

## **Criminal charges filed on dubious grounds**

In May 2022, criminal complaints were filed by the Under Secretary of the Auroville Foundation against some Aurovilians outspoken against actions of the AVFO, referencing a number of unsubstantiated charges including "rioting" and "cybercrimes".

# — 18 Months of Crisis

## **Censorship**

In June 2022, several essential internal communication networks, including the community's main email server and the Auronet (the online communication platform for residents), were taken over by the AVFO under the pretext of identifying any anti-government or anti-national activities – followed by the deletion of residents' comments and accounts despite their adherence to usage guidelines. The private emails of hundreds of Indian and foreign nationals are, still now, under the control of undisclosed and unregulated individuals with full administrator privileges, and their actions follow no known established code of conduct regarding privacy. Some residents perceived as 'opposers' have fully lost access to the Auronet, and their private mailboxes.

## **Controlling history**

In June 2022, the Auroville Archives – a public service created and run by the residents – was forcibly taken over by the AVFO. Residents fear for the decades of history, multimedia material and records maintained by the Archives, as this intervention allows unsupervised control over the historical narrative of past and present events.

## **Misinformation campaigns**

In January 2022, the Auroville service run by the residents that manages external public relations (Outreach Media) was forcibly taken over by the AVFO and renamed 'Media Interface'. Since then, sustained campaigns of misinformation have been carried out, which distort the narratives of events and denigrate Auroville's achievements over decades.

## **Failure to protect land**

Despite the duty of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation as 'Estate Officer', several land encroachments occurred on Auroville lands with practically no response from the Secretary. Residents gathered spontaneously to face these encroachments on many occasions, often without support from those authorities tasked with the protection of these assets. Land exchanges and deals were made with no consultation or transparency, and without following any established due process – in non-compliance with directives from India's Ministry of Education.



# — 18 Months of Crisis

## Denial of Auroville's spirit and values

This comprehensive interference in the functioning of Auroville is contrary to the letter and spirit of the provisions of the Auroville Foundation Act, which promotes and protects the necessary autonomy of the residents and their right to self-governance, and expects its three constitutional authorities to work in a spirit of mutuality. On 12th August 2022, the Madras High Court upheld this mutually collaborative aspect of the Auroville Foundation Act; a judgement that was appealed by the AVFO, which erroneously claimed in the courts that residents are “miscreants” and the Governing Board “has complete control and management of the affairs” of Auroville. A final verdict is yet to be given.

More importantly, these developments, though imposed by the AVFO in the name of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, are dramatically opposed to their vision of unity, compassion and action on the basis of genuine collaboration and flexibility. How the city will be built remains to be seen, but the recent trends stray further every day from the Dream envisioned by the founders of Auroville, which thrives through its residents.

***The Voice of Auroville editors,  
March 2023.***

“

“Auroville is to be looked upon as a vision which has a great potentiality, and this can be of tremendous service to our country and the world at large. ... As far as the day-to-day activities are concerned, they will be looked after by the residents through appropriate autonomous arrangements, which will include the Residents' Assembly and its Working Committee. The idea underlying this arrangement is that the residents of Auroville should have autonomy so that activities of Auroville can grow under an atmosphere conducive to harmonious growth.”

**Shri P. Shiv Shankar**, Minister of  
Human Resource Development  
1st September 1988  
Introductory speech on the Auroville  
Foundation Act, Rajya Sabha





# *A few numbers* —

55 years of achievements

**67 awards**, both national and international, for works in the field of architecture, sustainability, renewable energies, social service, etc.

**1k+ apartments & houses**, most of which have been built and financed by the Aurovilians themselves.

**3k+ acres of land** bought exclusively with donations from Aurovilians and well-wishers, through fundraising efforts.

**25 schools** and educational facilities for Aurovilians and the neighbouring villages.

**35k+ people directly benefitting** from Auroville on the socio-economical and ecological aspects (highest per capita income zone within the rural area of Vanur block).

**2k+ year-old archeological artifacts** found on Auroville land, and kept in its Museum of Archeology.

**20 organic farms** growing vegetarian food for Auroville and its surroundings.

More data on Auroville's achievements can be found here:  
**[auroville.media/achievements](http://auroville.media/achievements)**



Highlight: Exemplary Practice

# Dreamweaving – Bridging Diversity in Urban Planning

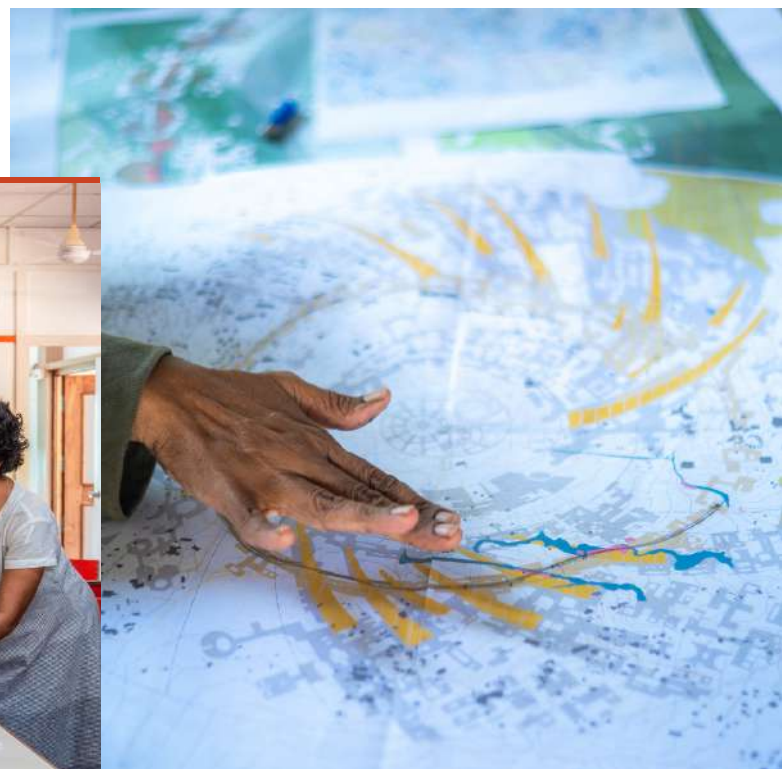
In early 2022, 70 Aurovilians took part in an unprecedented collective visioning experiment: "Dreamweaving the Auroville Crown". With the goal of envisioning a conscious and ecological development of the Crown way, these architects, town planners, multidisciplinary experts, focus groups and randomly selected members of the Residents' Assembly came together in order to advance Auroville's collaborative urban design process.

The Dreamweaving process has been heralded by many experts, including the esteemed late BV Doshi, the Pritzker prize-winning architect and former Governing Board member, as an innovative way forward to co-create ecological and functional plans. Many Auroville residents had hoped that the Dreamweaving would be a positive and constructive solution during a time of conflict, a participatory process to evolve Auroville's development.

## — *Highlights: Dreamweaving*

Eleven teams with different backgrounds and orientations, in collaboration with BV Doshi's consultancy firm Vastushilpa Sangath, participated in the process to plan the Crown way – a special use zone that includes a proposed 4.3 km circular road. A common theme that emerged was the need for integration and synthesis – particularly of the ground and bioclimatic realities – with the Galaxy vision, the city model by the chief architect Roger Anger. Another one was the need for diversity, for the Crown to provide a variety of different experiences as it passes through different zones and environments of the city, for example adapting from a road with a wide right-of-way to a pathway in densely forested zones. Finally, there was a shared emphasis upon the need for the Crown to be human-centred: for pedestrians and cyclists to be prioritised, for the provision of plazas and safe, communal spaces, as well as weather protection at all times of the year.

The final report notes that the key 'takeaways' from the process, according to participants' feedback, were that "involvement and collaboration enriches the process and the outputs developed within it, that the Auroville community has an exemplary capacity to respond collectively to a challenge, and that the educational aspect of the process (including being exposed to a diversity of perspectives) is highly appreciated". In addition, respondents emphasised the potential for this process to be a model to address further planning needs and other community topics in Auroville. A focus group member added that "There is a delight in transcending 'ownership', that seems to be the deeper direction called forth by the dreamweaving exercise. It holds a profound truth of Auroville."



## — *Highlights: Dreamweaving*

They also noted that in the past, there was sometimes an element of concern that the original vision of Auroville might be compromised if the community reached out to external experts or collaborated with very different perspectives. “However, if we don’t reach out for help, we may lose the very thing we are afraid of losing,” they underlined. For, ultimately, at a time when a few would split the community over the way in which the development of the Crown would happen, the positive dreamweaving experience has inspired the community towards an approach in which multiple perspectives are integrated.

Despite the Dreamweaving’s success in drawing together many stakeholders in a collective decision-making process, the outcomes were unfortunately ignored by the Office of the Secretary and the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, and have not been implemented to date. Residents are however moving forward with plans to organise several other participatory planning processes based on the Dreamweaving model, to actively and consciously build the ‘city the earth needs’.

***Adapted from Auroville Today,  
May 2022, Issue 394***



# — *Dreamweaving – Next steps?*

## **And now? What next?**

Auroville continues to look forward, taking steps towards its future using the momentum of the Dreamweaving process of early 2022 and the community's constantly evolving and improving self-governance.

In a General Meeting on the 1st of April 2023, the Town Development Council of the Residents' Assembly announced that BV Doshi's Vastushilpa Sangath architectural firm and the Dreamweaving team were committed to going ahead with the design and planning collaboration despite the recent turbulent events. The several hundred community members present expressed their hearty support for this partnership between external and internal experts, enriched through community input.

**This follow-up to the Dreamweaving process will help give birth to new Detailed Development Plans for the emerging township that take into account the ground realities of the Auroville plateau and bioregion, while honouring the initial spirit and vision set forth by the founders, in order to build a truly innovative and sustainable city of the future.**



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“Ancient India had spoken of the ideal of the whole world as One Family - *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. It is, therefore, heartening that this ancient ideal has been given an experimental field in Auroville, which the Mother founded on 28th February, 1968, in the light of Sri Aurobindo's vision of human unity. ... Auroville stands out as a promise that liberty, equality and fraternity can meet together in a large synthesis.”

**Dr Murli Manohar Joshi**, Minister of  
Human Resource Development,  
January 2003





Highlight: Community Spirit

# Auroville's Resilience at Play

Events in Auroville over the last year have been deeply traumatic for many in the community. Destruction of forests and buildings, groups of unknown men brought in and intimidating residents, systematic and comprehensive takeover of administration, censorship, withholding

of visas; the list is long and grim. Yet all of this is perceived by many as a trial, the revelation of deeper issues within Auroville's social fabric in need of addressing and which are a part of the community's evolution, an invitation for change and progress.

## — *Auroville's Resilience at Play*

Despite these adverse times, the community has manifested itself, showing courage and determination. People gathered to witness these painful events, to stand for their values, yet remained faithful to the spirit of fraternity, advocating for peace and dialogue despite sometimes violent actions and provocations directed at them. They denounced these actions which went against all that Auroville had been created for. A day and night vigil has been carried out over the last nine months by residents to hold a key administrative office, in an act of peaceful resistance against the illegitimate seizure of community assets.

Innovative community processes have been carried out, offered as genuine answers and ways forward, bringing to light new forms of collective channels and upholding Auroville's principles of social experimentation. The Dreamweaving initiative, a novel approach in collective town planning, yielded harmonious solutions and a heightened yearning for participation, further cultivating the spirit of collaboration. Calls for dialogue and synthesis of conflicting views are regularly issued, though often unheard or ignored by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and her small group of collaborators. Residents' Assembly meetings are regularly held, the community keeping itself informed and aware of the situation, a pulse for the body of Auroville.



## — *Auroville's Resilience at Play*



Aurovilians have rallied through unprecedented levels of participation in decision-making processes, appointing new people to take charge of fundamental aspects of organisation, and clearly standing together against violence and the takeover of the community's mechanisms of self-governance. The outcome of these processes were ignored, and announcements of the voting results were censored from the main internal communication networks, bypassing basic democratic channels. To ensure the voice of the Residents' Assembly is heard and upheld, residents and their Working Committee approached the Hon'ble Madras High Court and India's National Green Tribunal - matters that are still currently being heard and discussed legally. Dire times compelled many to reach out to the external Auroville fraternity, to inform and spread the call for support from national and international friends and well-wishers.

The Auroville family drew closer together in spontaneous gatherings, reaching out to each other in solidarity and celebration, appreciating moments of simple joy during hardships. Potlucks took place with hundreds of participants, meetings and debates, rousing singing events and festivals – all embodiments of what truly defines a community, beyond planning and organisation. As often in history, adversity further lifted a sense of kinship among friends, neighbours, even simple acquaintances, and strengthened the existing care for one another.

# — *Auroville's Resilience at Play*

Auroville is greater than its geography, its residents. It is intimately connected with the bioregion and they stand together, working as a whole. It is part of India, the nation which willingly accepted this experiment and continues to support its realisation, an unparalleled welcoming from a sovereign nation which the inhabitants of Auroville deeply appreciate and aspire to honour. The idea of Auroville is international: it has spread and still does, upheld by friends and supporters working from afar to help it manifest, and supported five times by UNESCO through formal resolutions. The dream of human unity lives on, the binding principle which calls out, remains the ideal which guides collective and individual action, as intended by its founders.

***The Voice of Auroville editors,  
March 2023.***

“

“We are deeply impressed by the spiritual aim behind the building of an international city called Auroville. The importance of the effort to achieve human unity and international cooperation by the creation of such a city cannot be overemphasised; nor can we neglect the immense benefit to be acquired from it.”

“Auroville has a spirit of community, irrespective of religion, culture or race. This is really what we need.”

**His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama**  
during his two visits to Auroville  
in 1973 and 1993



## — *Auroville's Resilience at Play*



# — Thank you!

Thank you for reading our first issue of *Voice of Auroville*! We hope you enjoyed your read, and that you found it instructive. The aim of our journal is to uphold and give voice to the Residents' Assembly of Auroville, without whom 'the city the earth needs' would only be a dream. Given the events covered in this issue, you might be wondering what can be done to help the Auroville Community. Here are a few immediate steps.

## What can you do to help?

- 1 Keep in touch with Auroville.** One of Auroville's biggest strength is its national and international support network. Thank you for being with us.
- 2 Stay informed & spread the news.** Listen to all perspectives. Share this journal - and other testimonies - with your contacts to make sure the voice of the Aurovilians is not silenced.
- 3 Visit Auroville regularly.** Meet the residents, hear their stories. Auroville is a lived reality.
- 4 Connect with representatives** of the Residents' Assembly at [workingcom@auroville.services](mailto:workingcom@auroville.services).
- 5 Support the residents' processes for developing Auroville.** Follow and encourage participatory planning initiatives by getting in touch with [tdc@auroville.services](mailto:tdc@auroville.services).

## Pictures featured in this issue

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| Page 05<br>- Page 08<br>Page 09         | • December 2021. Destruction at the Youth Center and Bliss Forest.<br>• Meeting around the Peace Table, Unity Pavilion.  |
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| Page 18<br>- Page 19<br>Page 20<br>Back | • February 2023. Aurovilians gather to sing "One Day".<br>• Meditation under the Banyan tree.<br>• February 2018. Meditation for Auroville's 50th anniversary. |



*"Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity."*

*— The Mother, 1965*



**WORKING COMMITTEE**  
of the Residents' Assembly  
AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

This publication is endorsed by the  
Working Committee of the Residents'  
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# VOICE OF AUROVILLE

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