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VOICE OF AUROVILLE

News & Highlights from the Auroville Community



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Cover image: Auroville Unity Walk, 6th May 2023

Closing image: Auroville's 50th anniversary, February 2018.

— Introduction

'Voice of Auroville'?

Voice of Auroville is a bimonthly journal to inform wellwishers and friends of Auroville across India and the globe with **factual updates** and **concise articles** on the unfolding events in Auroville. The contents convey the diverse perspectives of a majority of Auroville's residents, who comprise the Residents' Assembly of the Auroville Foundation. All information in this journal is based on **reliable sources**, and is verifiable by writing to voiceofauroville@auroville.services.

What is Auroville?

Founded in 1968 by Mirra Alfassa, more commonly known as the Mother, Auroville is an international 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. You can find a quick introduction to Auroville in the first issue of *Voice of Auroville*, by visiting auroville.media/voa or by scanning the attached QR code.



A Dream

(written by the Mother in 1954)

"There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment.

...

In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood."



— *Introduction*

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In this second issue, we present a summary of **recent happenings**, along with articles and testimonies that reflect Auroville's **achievements** and **ongoing challenges**.

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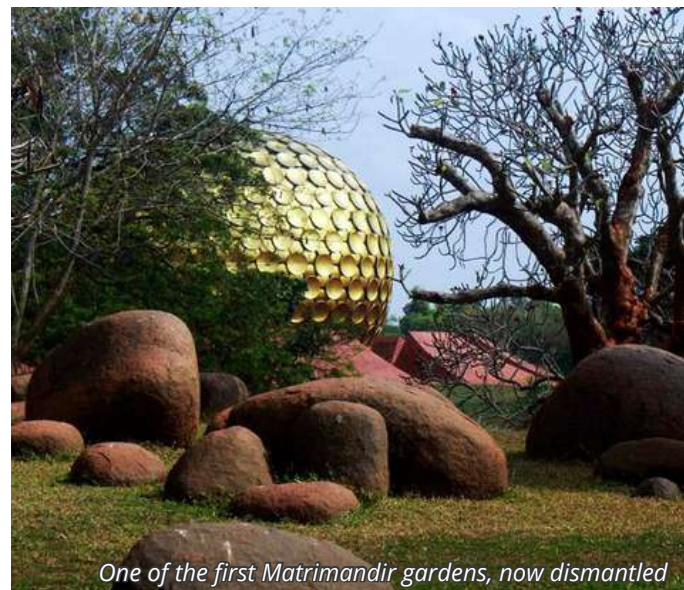
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International Youth Center and Bliss Forest, 2023



Crown road 'works', April 2023



One of the first Matrimandir gardens, now dismantled

— *Editorial Note*

Urban development in harmony with Auroville's ethos and ideals

Over the last 55 years, Auroville has become a world leading exemplar of regenerative processes - breathing new life into depleted earth, fauna and flora, experimenting how to nurture individual and collective consciousness, and developing the physical infrastructure for the city of Mother's vision. As this material development picks up speed, it is more important than ever to maintain the spirit of innovation, flexibility, and openness that has always been its unique hallmark while incorporating global best-practice principles for sustainable urban planning and development.

These include building a broad consensus that is inclusive of ecological and local considerations; following legal requirements for detailed plans and environmental clearances; and priority setting and implementation that is resource efficient.



Auroville land art



Auroville Bharat Nivas, drone view

Auroville aims to become “a living embodiment of an actual human unity” (*Auroville Charter*). This means working in “collaboration and real brotherhood” (the Mother, *A Dream*) through difficulties and apparent opposition, to find solutions and ways forward to achieve unity in diversity. If Auroville's authorities, resident experts, and different community groups can work in this spirit, together we can build ‘the city the earth needs’.



Highlight: Exemplary Practice

Darkali Forest Park: Beautiful, Essential, Endangered

Foreword

On the west side of the Auroville plateau, the land slopes from two directions to form a major gully at a canyon in a forest park called Darkali. The forest is a beautiful haven with a maze of aesthetic landscape features, dams, and a popular walking track full of peacocks and other wildlife. Darkali has undertaken remarkable water conservation efforts, yet it faces challenges due to proposed development plans.

How it all started

35 years ago, much of the land intended for this park belonged to the neighbouring village of Kottakarai. It was a barren wasteland when three Aurovilians first began digging, planting, and bunding by hand. After a year, they dug a borewell, installed a hand pump, and began living there, funded only by their own small personal means. Over time, enough water and topsoil was held on the land to nourish the growing trees through the dry

— *Highlights: Darkali*

season. When Auroville purchased the plots adjacent to the canyon, it suddenly became possible for the caretakers to envision water harvesting and ground water recharge on a much larger scale. They began constructing earth dams in the canyon at key points and planted around the canyon to stop erosion. They used stones to build solid spillways for six dams and created a huge water catchment area with a mini-excavator.

Harvesting water for Auroville and beyond

From the forested park down to the canyon, rainwater run-off from each landscape feature is guided into another area, and another, until all of the water is guided into the catchment area of the largest dam.

On an average year with 1.4 metres of rainfall, Darkali sees almost zero runoff from its 50 acres, and an estimated 4 million litres of water are harvested. At present, water from more than 60% of the area at the top of the Auroville plateau drains through Darkali during monsoons. The canyon's overflow travels through neighbouring villages and connects finally to the Kaliveli wetlands 10 kilometres north of Auroville. Technical reports and water strategy recommendations stress that this is a sensitive area for water catchment and recharge strategies, both for Auroville and the sub-watershed (covering approximately 135 sq. km.).



Endangered water dam, Darkali Forest Park



Monsoon rains, Darkali Forest Park

— Highlights: Darkali

Crown Road and Right of Way

Before Auroville's chief architect, Roger Anger, passed away, he had agreed to enlarge the boundaries of this particular green area. The new boundaries, including the canyon, were finalised on paper by the town planning group of the time, and officially signed in 2009.

Over the years, Auroville has seen multiple markings and surveys for an internal circular corridor around the area designated as the Crown. The caretakers of Darkali forest park regularly sought out clear indications of where this corridor was meant to pass, and kept the dedicated strip of land free of major plantation in order to accommodate it. In 2012, a Technical Design Study of the Crown Road (commissioned by Auroville) plainly stated the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment of sensitive areas - defined as canyons, water recharge areas, and the entirety of Bliss and Darkali Forests - along the projected path. This has yet to be done, and is a legal requirement before large-scale development can take place.



Destruction

In 2021, the Town Development Council ('ATDC') wrongly appointed by the Office of the Secretary, Auroville Foundation (AVFO), revealed Crown Road plans with the Right of Way (ROW) newly mapped as a perfectly circular corridor. In Darkali, this means ploughing straight through and filling in important water harvesting structures, as well as clearing and eventually paving over much of the intended park area. Darkali's caretakers repeatedly proposed a highly practicable solution - a six metre deviation that would keep the route within the overall 30 metre Right of Way, preserve water harvesting capacity, and save 75% of the trees.



Darkali Forest Park, 2023

— Highlights: Darkali

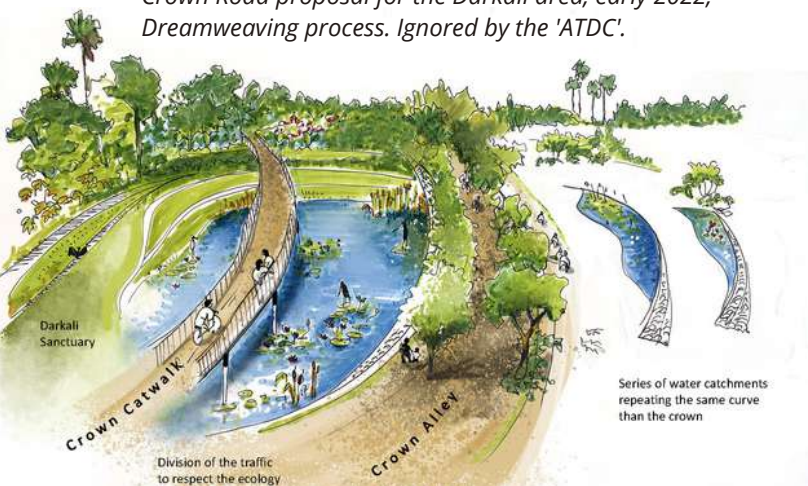
Nonetheless, bulldozers were sent to Darkali without notice in December 2021. A significant number of trees were cut down or uprooted before the National Green Tribunal issued a Stay Order that halted the destruction. Then, in March 2023, following publication of the NGT's Joint Committee report, the AVFO 'ATDC' sent in untrained labourers who destroyed 197 trees, including protected species, beyond the corridor width permitted by the report. This 'ATDC' has made it clear that they intend to push ahead with a developmentally short-sighted approach.

The future is now

As much of India withers under a deadly summer heatwave, Darkali's value as an ecological haven seems starkly evident. Auroville must learn how to flexibly incorporate such life-giving spaces into the urban fabric to ensure its own future.

The Voice of Auroville editors, June 2023

Crown Road proposal for the Darkali area, early 2022, Dreamweaving process. Ignored by the 'ATDC'.



— *The Spirit of Auroville*

Below is a selection of quotes from *The Spirit of Auroville*, a recently published compilation of letters from Aurovilians to the Chairman and the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. In these letters, Aurovilians express their deepest understanding of Auroville's *raison d'être*, and how and why this experiment must be allowed to continue.

The Spirit and Nature of the Auroville Experiment

"Auroville is a place for karma yoga, and the spiritual progress of Auroville is intrinsically linked to the material and social achievements of this place. The sense of beauty everywhere present in Auroville - whether in buildings, forests, arts and culture, even in people's personal stories - is the best testimony of Auroville's spiritual progress over the years."



"Auroville is essentially a laboratory - an experiment - wherein enough representatives of the positions, approaches, attitudes and modes of action and thought that are current in the present human condition must be presented to the Consciousness which has come to take the lead of evolution."

"Auroville is not a community of like-minded people gathered for some research in, for instance, some alternative way of life, although discoveries may be made on the way that will be useful for the whole; it is not either a selective "spiritual" endeavour with its own precepts and regulations. Its *raison d'être* and purpose are more profound and crucial; it is meant to become an environment for the birth of a new being, an environment of comprehensive harmony in all fields of human existence, so that the new being may be welcomed upon earth."

"Auroville is a laboratory of evolution of consciousness whose diversity of human types is the condition for the success of the experiment. It must have the rajasic element as well. The whole human spectrum needs to be present. The secret in truly understanding Auroville is to perceive how The Mother's Force is Acting in the community to work on it from inside out..."



— *The Spirit of Auroville*

Possible ways forward

"Auroville wants to be the place of "a youth that never ages", and unending education is a core component of Auroville's *raison-d'être*. It is therefore with great dismay - and symbolically evocative - that we saw that in December 2021, the first target for bulldozing was the International Youth Center. My suggestion and appeal is to place again the youth at the centre of Auroville's development as emphasised by Shri Kireet Joshi, for it is [the younger generations] who will continue to make Auroville grow closer to its aims and ideals - however long the journey may take."

"I truly believe - it is every day confirmed - that Aurovilians are committed to building Auroville according to its original vision and ideals; and I hope that a fruitful collaboration based on mutual trust can be rebuilt between the Auroville Residents' Assembly and the Governing Board. Auroville is far from perfect, and the Aurovilians are the first ones to admit it - residents are critical of Auroville's current limitations and keep looking towards the future. However for the past 54 years, Auroville has been growing every day closer to its true self, and Aurovilians are dedicated to this continued flourishing. I truly hope that the Governing Board will join the residents' efforts in this endeavour, and contribute to it by restoring the sense of safety, security and stability that is necessary for the experiment to take place truly and integrally."



"When the Mother declared that "the true Spirit of Auroville is Collaboration and must be more and more so, true collaboration paves the way to divinity", she obviously didn't mean a collaboration which would be imposed by a section of the community upon another, but a spontaneous, genuine and joyful collaboration where each one of us could naturally find its place in the manifestation of Auroville. And that is why if we truly, sincerely, wish to work for our ideals there could be no other way than to, first of all, come to some common ground and a common vision."

"A large majority of Aurovilians know well that they have not attained the high level of realization that the Mother asked; they are acutely conscious —and more than anyone else from outside — that there are deficiencies in Auroville. But the Mother said that what we are doing here is something that had never been done in the history of humanity: to search and find the spiritual within the most material... It took 1000 years for Bhagiratha to make Ganga descend on earth. Permit we take a few more years for achieving the goals of Auroville."

— Summary

April, May, June 2023

As temperatures hit extreme highs, Auroville's usual summer calm was disturbed by the continued heavy-handed approach of the Office of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation ('Auroville Foundation Office' - **AVFO**) and its appointees. Below is a short summary of what has happened since the release of the first issue of *Voice of Auroville*.

Takeover of Auroville key services and units

In April 2023, executives of several units and services were dismissed overnight by the AVFO without reason or due process. Their access to their professional mailboxes and financial accounts was removed, and in some instances, employees were also fired without notice or explanation.



Auroville Visitors Center



Auroville Ecoservice, 2017

Some of the affected services and units are: the **Visitors Centre**, which receives and channels tourists visiting Auroville; **Ecoservice**, which manages waste within Auroville; the **Auroville Arts Service**, a hub for most Auroville artists; and the Board of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research (**SAIER**), the umbrella organisation under which all Auroville schools and other educational and cultural activities function and funds are channelled. Other services that have been threatened with take over include the **Auroville Safety & Security Service**, which is responsible for responding to emergency and safety concerns within Auroville; and the **Residents' Assembly Service**, which organises all decision-making processes, including selection of community representatives for the Auroville.

— Summary – April, May, June

In response, the Madras High Court has been approached to nullify these unlawful actions and a verdict is awaited.

On 6th May a silent **Unity Walk** was organised in support of the executives and workers of services and units whose management had been replaced. Around 150 people attended, despite the AVFO appointees circulating an email that threatened the organisers and participants, stating that they would be “followed up for necessary reprimand”.



Auroville Unity Walk, May 2023

Expulsion of dissident voices

In April 2023, the Secretary announced the removal of Maël, an Aurovilian and member of the duly-appointed Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly, from the Register of Residents, using the justification that he had to leave India for visa-related reasons. Hundreds of Auroville residents signed a petition to oppose this arbitrary decision.

Towards the end of June 2023, another long-standing member of the community, Satprem Mäini, an Aurovilian for 34 years and founder of the globally-renowned Auroville Earth Institute, was served with an Exit visa and asked to leave the country within two weeks, following a letter written by the Secretary to the Indian immigration authorities. Satprem had been documenting the substandard works executed by the AVFO's appointees to build the 'Crown Road'. A collective letter signed by over 2800 Aurovilians and well-wishers, and over a hundred letters of support from around the globe, have appealed to the highest authorities for this decision to be reconsidered.



Auroville Unity Walk, May 2023

— *Summary – April, May, June*

New legal developments

The legal cases filed by Auroville residents and their representatives in the Madras High Court, National Green Tribunal and Supreme Court of India against the AVFO are still in process and final verdicts are awaited. The Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly also filed a new writ petition that requires the AVFO appointees to justify before the court why they are usurping the name 'Working Committee'. Additionally, two legal notices were sent to the AVFO and their appointees who had repeatedly violated the judgement of the National Green Tribunal by continuing to clear land.



Road 'works' continue

After dismantling the existing roads, the AVFO appointees dismantled Auroville's main roundabout, next to the Solar Kitchen. The lack of clear warning signs, diversions or substantial barriers and poor lighting for night driving demonstrate a lack of concern for the community's safety and has led to several minor accidents. The paver blocks which were previously used for Auroville roads are being replaced by large concrete slabs which have a calculated carbon footprint of 952% more than the previous roads, and which do not allow for rainwater to percolate and recharge the aquifers. This is in direct contradiction to Auroville's effort towards sustainable development.

Clearing protected areas

From the first week of June 2023, appointees of the AVFO began clearing Revelation Forest, one of Auroville's largest forests containing protected fauna and flora, in preparation for the creation of an Outer Ring Road. Parts of this clearing work extended into the Sanctuary, an area with no human interference as it is home to local wildlife species that require an undisturbed habitat. This Outer Ring Road is not defined in the Gazetted Master Plan, Perspective 2025, and the feasibility of this road is in question since it would cut through neighbouring villages. Additionally, construction of this road is not permitted until legal requirements imposed by the National Green Tribunal have been fulfilled.

— *Summary – April, May, June*

Farms ‘restructured’ without farmers’ consent

The AVFO created a new “Farm Service” to oversee the management of existing Auroville farms, appointing individuals who have little on-the-ground expertise in farming in Auroville. This new service abruptly dismissed the long-standing executives of Foodlink, the Auroville intermediary between farms and end-consumers. It has also stopped all farmers’ monthly stipends, and dismantled the organisational structure that supported the farmers’ rights to gather, share, and organise their own work independently.

New digital services for Auroville

The AVFO took over the @auroville.org.in email domain in May 2022, and progressively excluded a large number of Aurovilians from using their personal and professional email addresses. As a response, the Working Committee of the Residents’ Assembly recently created a new email service, registered under the domain @auroville.community, which is freely accessible to all members of the Auroville community, and which is managed in a transparent and ethical manner.

Forests’ finances cut

In June 2023, AVFO appointees announced that Auroville forests would no longer receive their monthly budgets. This will not only impact the maintenance of these world-renowned forests, it also immediately impacts about 50 Aurovilians who are dependent on their monthly stipends to cover basic survival expenses, and about 60 external workers, who will lose their jobs. Many of these foresters have spent their life savings on the greening of Auroville and the exemplary afforestation work carried out over decades.



Darkali Forest Park, 2023

— Summary – April, May, June

Auroville 'News & Notes' revamped

In December 2022, the Auroville News & Notes, a weekly gazette for the residents of Auroville, was threatened by the AVFO and began censoring announcements and statements from the committees selected by the Residents' Assembly. In response, a new "community edition" of the News & Notes was created in April 2023 by the Auroville residents, which is inclusive of all views. This community edition is slowly replacing the old News & Notes, and reaches over 3000 recipients - most of whom are Aurovilians.

Youth Center targeted, again

In May, the Auroville International Youth Center had its monthly budget cut by the AVFO appointees, and was asked to stop all activities and told that its team would be replaced. In response, the Youth Center team again expressed goodwill to continue their work to create a Vocational Training Centre for Auroville's youth but this was ignored once again.



Capitalising on tourism

In June 2023, the AVFO announced its intention to restructure the hospitality sector of Auroville via the appointment of an external hotel consultant, in order to create an "Auroville hotel chain". This followed the replacement in April of the executives of Visitors' Center, and the reappointment by the AVFO of a Guest House Trust executive who had previously been dismissed from the role for proven mismanagement. In parallel, an entry fee was requested from tourists visiting Bharat Nivas - the Pavilion of India in Auroville, which had always been a freely accessible public space. All these elements seem to indicate a clear intention to capitalise on tourism.

— *Summary – April, May, June*

Residents co-creating the Auroville city

In March 2023, the Town Development Council of the Auroville Residents' Assembly proposed participative processes to underpin the 'Detailed Development Plans' required for city development. Since then, preliminary meetings with different stakeholders have taken place and funding has been received. Residents and their representatives are committed to developing the city of Auroville in a participatory and sustainable way, based on the ideals of Auroville.

Facing future challenges together

As Auroville continues to face these unprecedented challenges, the community continues to aspire for the deep transformational change envisioned by the Mother.

Residents, who have committed their lives to the manifestation of its ideals, continue to call for the help and support of well-wishers in India and the world to safeguard and ensure the survival of this highly regarded and unprecedented adventure called Auroville.

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

“

Auroville is based on Sri Aurobindo's incredible vision of the unity of mankind behind its diversity. It is an attempt to break or to reverse the deep historical trend of interpreting diversity as oppositions, as something to be afraid of. ... You are constructing a new human tapestry where each thread, each individual, nationality, will retain its specificity, its beauty, while contributing to the tapestry as a whole. You are not there yet, this is the ultimate, but you are definitely on the way.”

Dr. Doudou Diene,

former Director of the Division of Intercultural Projects, UNESCO, addressing the Aurovilians during his tenure as member of the Auroville International Advisory Council (2004-2008).



General Meeting on participatory planning process, April 2023

Towards a service economy?

Auroville aspires to be a city in which "money would no longer be the sovereign lord", a "place of peace, concord and harmony" (The Mother, *A Dream*). As such, the service sector of Auroville is essential to the wellbeing of the project: it helps move away from a profit-based system while providing for everyone's needs and ensuring a healthy collective life. Auroville services usually receive their budget from common funds, which until 2022 had always been managed by representatives of the Auroville residents.

Here are some of Auroville's important and innovative services - and there are many more!

Ecoservice

Coordinates waste collection, sorting and disposal. It collects 12-14 tons of waste monthly, and micro-segregates it into 84 different categories. Only 5-7 percent of non-biodegradable waste is assigned to landfill.

Auroville Library

Auroville Library is the largest and most general library in Auroville, which contains more than 50,000 volumes in ten languages. Books cover a variety of subjects such as spirituality, sciences, arts and culture, education, and more.



Youth Link

Youth Link is a service which supports the integration of youth into the Auroville community and aims to be a bridge between Auroville and the world. It organises community gatherings, skills trainings and workshops, awareness campaigns, and more.



AVSST guards on duty, Auroville Certitude entrance

Free Store

The Free Store is a moneyless outlet for members of the Auroville community, where second-hand clothing can be found, along with other items.



Concert and exhibition in Kalakendra, Bharat Nivas



Youth Link event in Pavilion of Tibetan Culture

Auroville Safety & Security

The Auroville Safety & Security Team (AVSST) is a 24/7 service for emergency response and prevention. It also deals with traffic monitoring, amongst other activities.

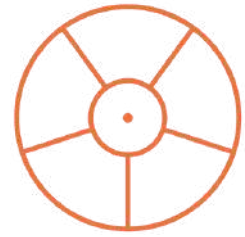


Fashion show featuring Free store products

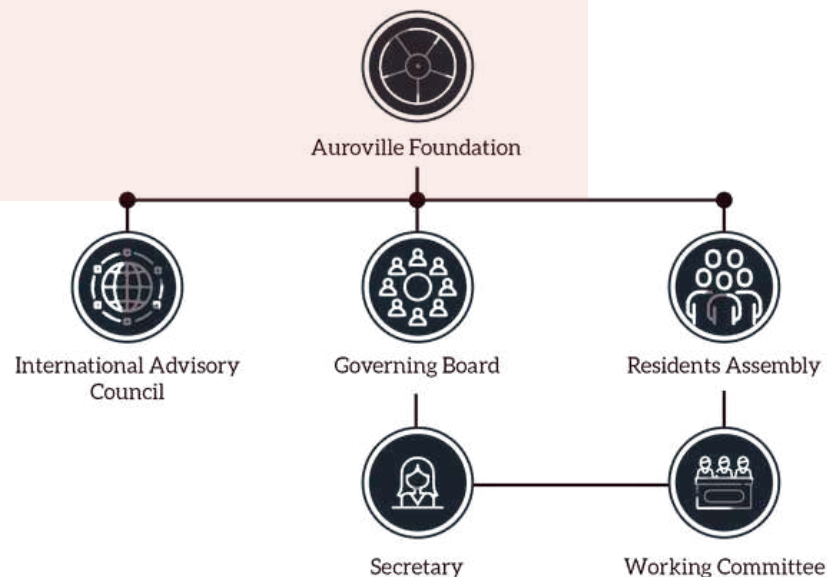
Auroville Arts Service

The Arts Service is an umbrella service for Auroville's artists. Its mission is to nurture and support the arts in Auroville, and to create an integration of the arts with other disciplines, deep in this community, and in the world.

Auroville Foundation in a nutshell

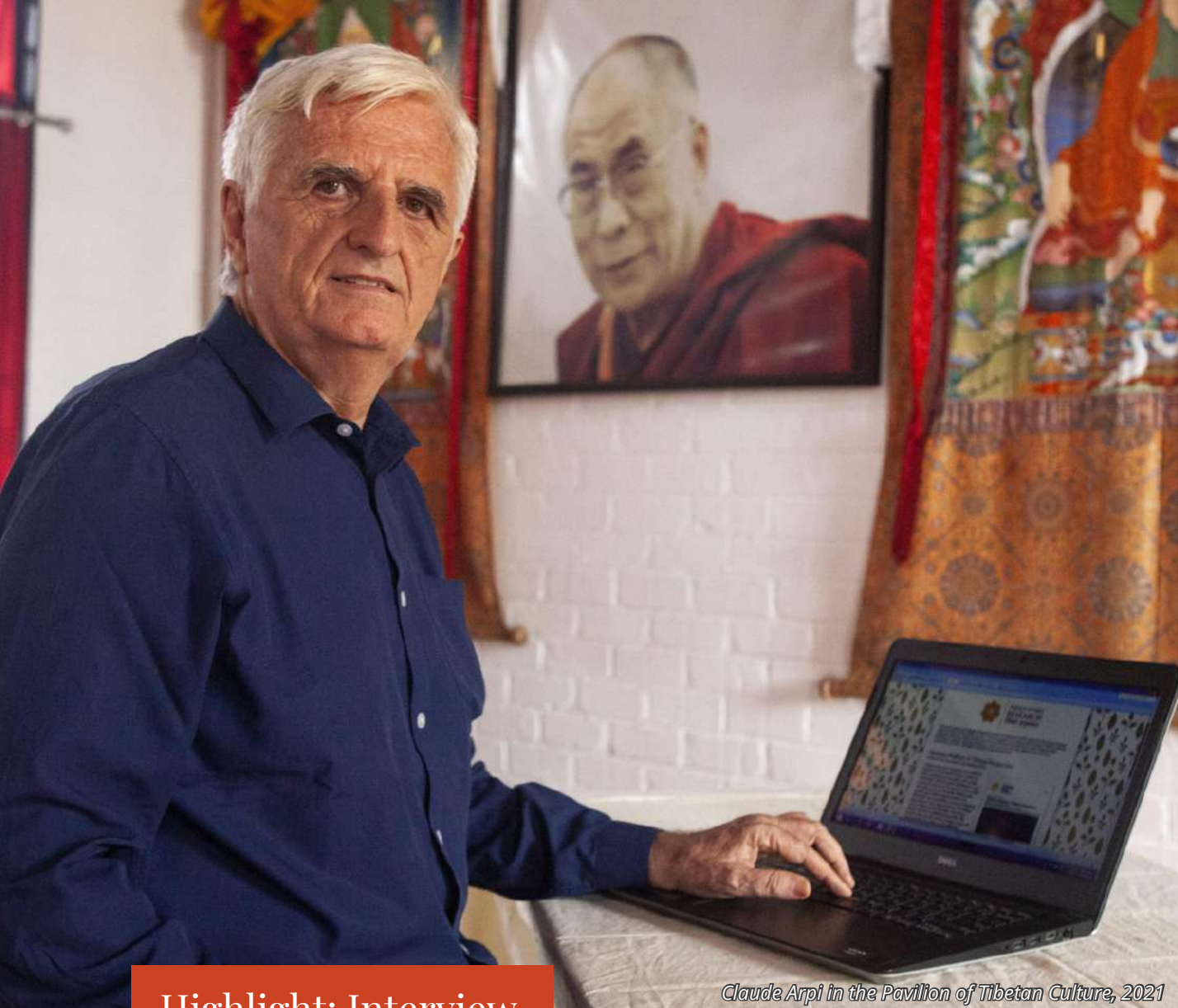


The Auroville Foundation is an **autonomous body corporate** created by an **Act of Parliament** in 1988. All the undertakings of Auroville are vested under the Foundation, with a view to making long-term arrangements for the better management and further development of Auroville **in accordance with its original Charter**. The Foundation has **three authorities**: the Governing Board, the Residents' Assembly and the International Advisory Council. The Auroville Foundation Act of 1988 envisages that the three authorities will work in **harmony** and **coordination**, with minimal governmental interference, except the requirement of auditing of the Accounts by the Comptroller and Auditor General in order to ensure transparency and accountability.



The **Residents' Assembly** is in charge of the daily management of Auroville, ensuring that the voice and experience of the Aurovilians is at the core of decision-making for Auroville, while the **Governing Board** provides direction, policy decision and oversight for the general development of Auroville. The **International Advisory Council** advises the Governing Board on any matter relating to the development and management of Auroville.

Equilibrium is maintained through **collaboration, consultation, and shared decision-making processes**, particularly between the Residents' Assembly and the Governing Board. All three authorities complement each other in their roles, and their interactions should help ensure effective governance and representation of the residents' perspectives and aspirations, for Auroville to become a "living embodiment of an actual human unity" (*Auroville Charter*).



Highlight: Interview

Claude Arpi in the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture, 2021

Reflections from a pioneer on Auroville's governance

Claude Arpi is a French-born Aurovilian who has been living in Auroville for the past 49 years. He is well-known as an historian and Tibetologist and was instrumental in the creation of the

Pavilion of Tibetan Culture in Auroville. Here he reflects, among other things, on the role and functioning of the current Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, appointed in October 2021.

— *Reflections on governance*

How would you assess the present Governing Board?

Claude: The Board members hold strong views about how Auroville should develop, which in itself is a good thing. At the same time, we know that many, if not all, Board members have negative views of the Aurovilians. The narrative in government circles in New Delhi is that Auroville is not developing as it should, that accounts are cooked, and that there is a lot of fighting going on between various Auroville factions. This narrative is mostly false.

Could you explain?

It really upsets me that Board members say that 'Aurovilians have done nothing' in the past 55 years. They ignore that in 1968 Auroville was a desert which has been greened by the Aurovilians; that the Aurovilians themselves built the Matrimandir; and that all the land has been bought with private funds, and nearly all the houses, all the commercial buildings and most of the service-oriented buildings have been built with private donations. All the people I know have worked hard, very hard, for Auroville.

What has the government contributed in all these years? The Government has helped manifest some infrastructure, such as part of the former Crown Road, which recently was dug up to make place for the new Crown Road, helped create several school buildings and CRIPA (performance art space, eds), and funded two apartment



Auroville in the 1970s

buildings. But other major public buildings have been funded privately or received funding from national or international organisations.

Then 'cooking the books'. I believe that the Governing Board is mistaken in its views that huge mistakes have been made. In the last one and a half years, the Board has initiated forensic audits of the accounts of many commercial units, even re-auditing accounts that had already been audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). But nothing substantial has been found and, as far as I know, no commercial unit has been accused of any serious wrongdoing.

— *Reflections on governance*

Lastly, the in-fighting. It is true that Aurovilians often disagree on things, and that this has hampered Auroville's development. But this is not unique to Auroville residents. I would say that it is regrettable that the Secretary, who announced when she joined Auroville that she was good at harmonising people, hasn't been able to do so, and instead has imposed her own preference by not taking into account a truly collective effort like the Dreamweaving process.

How do you evaluate the functioning of the Board?

There are a number of problems. Firstly there is the question to what extent the Board members understand the spiritual background of Auroville. Many present members may have read some of the works of Sri Aurobindo, but have they read Mother's Agenda and have they read all that the Mother said about Auroville?

The present administration consists of people who seem to think as technocrats. In that thinking, there is a hierarchy where they give orders which are to be obeyed. This explains the stand of the Board that they are Auroville's supreme authority. The appeal the Board filed in the Madras High Court against the judgement of Justice Abdul Quddhose shows this view. The Board disagrees that the three authorities mentioned in the Auroville Foundation Act, namely the Governing Board, the International Advisory Council, and the Residents' Assembly, jointly manage the

Foundation. The Governing Board argues that it alone has the power, the superintendence and the management of the Foundation, and that Auroville cannot be administered by the people of Auroville. We have yet to see if the appeal bench of the High Court shares this view. But in my opinion, it goes against what the Mother wanted for Auroville.

Since then, several other cases have been filed, all with the same purpose: to show that the Spirit of the Auroville Foundation Act is disregarded by the new administration.

Secondly: it is a problem that the members of the Board are not approachable. Usually they receive information only from the Office of the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and their appointees. Previously, the Board members would stay 3-4 days in Auroville and individual Aurovilians could approach them directly, and there would always be a joint dinner at the end to which many Aurovilians would be invited. That personal interaction is not happening at present. Moreover, the community is not informed when and where a Board meeting is scheduled to happen; many Board meetings are held outside Auroville or on Zoom; and the minutes are published months afterwards... So we can't interact directly with them, tell them about our work, our problems, our concerns, our aspirations; neither do they have an opportunity to

— *Reflections on governance*

share their observations directly with the residents. Most of the Aurovilians are very much aware of their own limitations, and would always welcome constructive criticism, which is very different from defamation.

How do you see the role of the Governing Board and the Government of India?

Let's make it abundantly clear that the Auroville Foundation is an independent statutory organisation, and not a part of the Indian Government.

Regarding the Government's role: We can only be grateful to the successive Indian governments for their unmitigated support of Auroville, starting with Prime Minister Ms. Indira Gandhi who gave her full support in the 1970s and early 1980s, the more so as she was dedicated to the Mother. It was her government that submitted the first resolutions on Auroville at UNESCO.

Subsequent governments continued that support, such as in the form of creating a special visa policy for Auroville and through grants. Prime Minister Modi too has been very positive, as we learned from his speech on the occasion of Auroville's 50th anniversary.

The Government's role, in my opinion, should be to protect and support Auroville – which means protecting the lands of Auroville against speculators, helping to acquire lands to consolidate the city and greenbelt areas, helping to build accommodation for those who want to join Auroville, but do not have the funds to contribute to a house or apartment, and giving a protection for visas to the foreign-born Aurovilians who have chosen to live here.

And the role of the Governing Board?

To give the freedom to the residents of Auroville to grow and develop, including the freedom of making mistakes. And, of course, to support the full functioning of Auroville's Residents' Assembly and the working groups chosen by it, such as the Working Committee, the Town Development Council, the Entry Board, the Auroville Council and the Funds and Assets Management Committee with its subgroups the Budget Coordination Committee and the Housing Board. We have shown between 1988 and 2021 that we could harmoniously work with the Governing Board and the Government.



Claude Arpi welcoming Shri Narendra Modi in Auroville, 2018

— *Reflections on governance*

The Secretary has spoken about bringing 1,000 volunteers to Auroville. What is your view on this?

Those who complain about the slow population growth of Auroville should realise that, to join Auroville, you have to find accommodation. People have to make a non-refundable donation to the Auroville Foundation to the value of the house or apartment, in order to become its 'steward'. Nowadays, we are talking about amounts between 30-60 lakh rupees [US \$ 35,000 – \$ 70,000]. Most importantly, what would be the motivation and the quality of aspiration for these people to come to Auroville?

What are your thoughts about the future?

I am worried because who would want to join Auroville in the present circumstances, particularly from abroad? Whatever the outcome of the court cases, we must find solutions for solving the disharmonious situations that have arisen.

Another issue is that Auroville must find new ways of functioning and introduce more freedom and less control. A former Secretary once said that Auroville had added its own bureaucracy on top of the horrendous Indian bureaucracy. That has to change.

In the larger perspective, I rely on what the Mother said when she started Auroville:

"The city will be built by what is invisible to you. The men who have to act as instruments will do so despite themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger Forces. Nothing depends on human beings – neither the planning, nor the execution – nothing! That is why one can laugh." [September 1969]

That is our only support in these difficult times.

***Adapted from Auroville Today
April 2023, Issue 405.***



Claude Arpi welcoming His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in Auroville, 2009

— Thank you!

Thank you for reading our second issue of *Voice of Auroville*! We hope you enjoyed the content 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 strengths is its national and international support network. Thank you for being with us. You can subscribe by emailing voiceofauroville@auroville.services
- 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.
- 5 Support the residents' processes for developing Auroville.** Follow and encourage participatory planning initiatives by getting in touch with tdc@auroville.services.



Aurovilians singing 'One Day', February 2023



Aurovilians singing 'One Day', February 2023



"For each problem there is a solution that can give satisfaction to everybody; but for finding this ideal solution each one must want it instead of meeting the others with the will to enforce one's own preference. Enlarge your consciousness and aspire for the satisfaction of all."

— The Mother, 1971



WORKING COMMITTEE
of the Residents' Assembly
AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

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