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VOICE OF AUROVILLE

News & Highlights from the Auroville Community



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Cover image: Sri Aurobindo's 151st birth anniversary, 15th August 2023

Closing image: Auroville's 50th anniversary, 28th February 2018

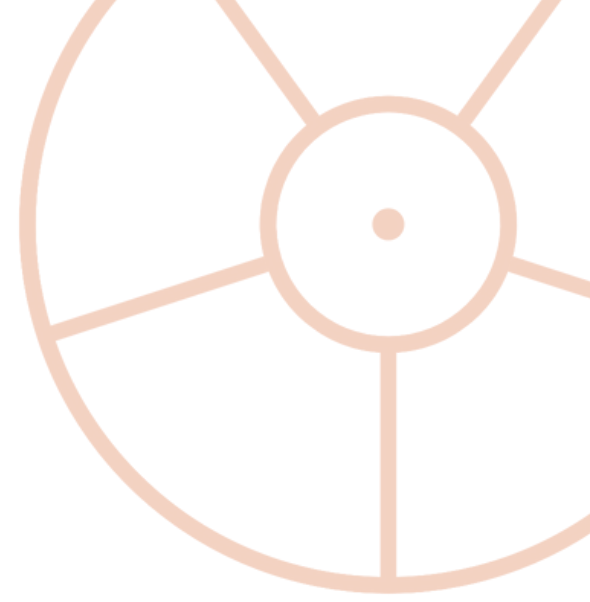
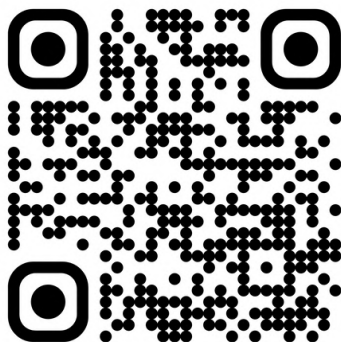
— Introduction

About us

Voice of Auroville is a bimonthly journal to inform wellwishers and friends of Auroville across India and the globe on the current unfolding events with **factual updates** and **articles**. The contents convey perspectives from the majority of Auroville's Residents' Assembly (one of the Auroville Foundation's three statutory bodies).

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.



To be a true Aurovillian

(written by the Mother in 1970)

"The first necessity is the inner discovery in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the centre there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville.

...

Work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not put his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let the consciousness organise a bit of matter by means of one's body is very good. To establish order around oneself helps to bring order within oneself."



— Introduction

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

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One of the last Matrimandir neem trees, September 2023



A banyan tree cut by the AVFO, August 2023



Highlight: A Way Forward

*Dreamweaving to broadly align our worldviews,
30th July 2023 presentation*

Dreamweaving 2.0: a participatory process for holistic planning

The Dreamweaving Core Team has put forward a proposal to expand the participatory Dreamweaving process of 2021. The intent is to help bridge polarities in views and approaches around Auroville's urban development, and to foster inclusivity in the manifestation of Auroville. Dreamweaving itself is a collaborative, holistic approach, conceived as a means to weave together diverse ideas for Auroville's urban design from multiple architects, a cross-section of multidisciplinary experts and diverse members of the community. (For more

information, read [our first issue](#) which covered the "Dreamweaving the Crown" process that was held in early 2022.) In their presentation on 30th July, the core team outlined an ambitious yet pragmatic method aimed at widening participation and cultivating shared stewardship of the city's future, initially through four interconnected community-led initiatives. This evolving model shows potential to help realise Auroville's vision of an urban environment consciously shaped by ground realities, serious climate concerns and residents' lived experiences.

— *Dreamweaving 2.0*

Dreamcatching for community alignment

As the prelude to Dreamweaving, 'Dreamcatching' is conceived as an open participatory space for any resident who feels drawn to engage in a visioning process to consciously call down Mother's Dream. Through this forum, Aurovilians are invited to share their understanding of the city's vision and express how they might imagine the diverse values of the community could be reflected in the lived experience of the future built environment of Auroville.

The aim is twofold. Firstly, to broadly align how Auroville's purpose would be reflected in its urban design, with a focus on nurturing a new way of life and nurturing the Charter through the manifestation of a conscious city. Secondly, to expand upon how the planned city might practically support its inhabitants.

Feedback body for informed oversight

To facilitate ongoing community feedback, the proposal also suggests establishing a representative body of 30 randomly selected Aurovilians. This group would first participate in an educational orientation on urban planning concepts. Their mandate would then be to receive and comment on planning initiatives from an informed grassroots perspective. If needed, they could use the support of additional inputs gathered through focus groups and expert panels.

Dreamweaving architectural visioning

The third process aims to channel creative energies towards problem solving and would be led by the next generation of Auroville architects. Potential focus areas include finding solutions for development pressures on the city boundaries and transforming the Crown road into a pedestrian- and cycle-friendly backbone.



Dreamweaving to bridge polarities, 30th July 2023 presentation

— Dreamweaving 2.0

Self-education for participatory planning

In the fourth process, residents would come together in small self-organised groups for in-depth exploration of topics such as spatial justice, sustainable densities, green transport networks and other planning concepts. After several months of internal study, each group will then present their key findings to the wider community. The objective is to empower grassroots participation in an informed planning process.

Connecting the dots for cohesive outcomes

Together, these four initiatives seek to optimise participation throughout the process - from shaping visions to designing solutions to critiquing proposals. This stems from the understanding that Auroville naturally contains differing viewpoints that have tended to cause divisions in the community. However, past instances where residents came together through hands-on issues beyond division show that a 'central ground' does exist and can be strengthened.



Dreamweaving presentation, 30th July 2023



*Dreamweaving for collective social transformations,
30th July 2023 presentation*

This new method aims to cultivate this 'central ground' even amid present divisions. The four proposed initiatives would be interlinked via an informal coordinating group which would merge valuable inputs, facilitate dynamic interlinking within and between workstreams for mutual learning, and foster cohesion. This balanced, flexible, non-prescriptive approach seeks to bring more nuanced discussions around holistic planning, and to nurture collaborative stewardship and progressive refinement of Auroville's urban development vision. It is also hoped that potential new forms of organisation might emerge through the unfolding interactions among the different processes.

— *Dreamweaving 2.0*

A long road towards the future

Over 50 years, Auroville has shown that building a sustainable township grounded in human unity and consciousness is an ambitious goal. While challenges persist, steady gains demonstrate its potential. The Dreamweaving exercise echoes one of Auroville's founding principles of prioritising residents' experience in shaping their environment and society.

If we embrace diversity of views through respectful dialogue, community-led processes will help address complex realities. Future growth depends on our shared willingness to walk together, learn from mistakes, and lift each other towards our highest ideals. One step at a time, programmes like the Dreamweaving will undoubtedly move us closer to realising Auroville's transformative dream.

***Voice of Auroville editors,
September 2023***



“If the people who come for this profession of faith are not able to build their own environment it would mean that Auroville is a failure. It is essential that it is being built at the level of individual experience. One could say that the Auroville concept is the opposite of a contemporary urbanism. In our urbanistic conception, one makes a city on paper. The conception is as intelligent as it can be and then one asks people to come and live there. Here the process is inverted: people live the experience and it is from this experience that the environment is created.”

Roger Anger,

Chief Architect of Auroville,
in an interview for a French TV channel
with the reporter J.-P. Elkabbach, 1973



The Auroville Master Plan was designed with flexibility in mind, to embrace the evolving process of Auroville.

— Summary

July & Aug 2023

Along with unusually high heat and humidity, Auroville continued to encounter unexpected challenges due to the administration led by the current Secretary of the Auroville Foundation Office (**AVFO**). This article sets out the events in Auroville during July and August 2023, focusing on both community-led efforts and the AVFO's forceful approach.

Celebrating Sri Aurobindo's anniversary

Auroville celebrated Sri Aurobindo's 151st birth anniversary with two bonfires: the traditional fire at dawn at the Matrimandir Amphitheatre; and as was the case last year, a dusk bonfire organised by residents, held at the International Zone's Inuksuk statue. At the latter event, a large symbol of Sri Aurobindo was created with candles and flowers, harmonious music was played, and refreshments were provided by the many volunteers. During the day, Aurovilian filmmaker Olivier Barot's new movie on Sri Aurobindo's early life, 'Sri Aurobindo and the Earth's future', was screened while the Tibetan Pavilion organised many games and activities for children.



Sri Aurobindo's 151st birth anniversary, 15th August 2023

The same day, the AVFO invited spiritual leader Sri M to Auroville and organised a controversial 'Unity Walk' along the Crown; the event was poorly attended.

— Summary – July & August 2023

Hon'ble President of India visits Auroville

The Hon'ble President of India, Ms Droupadi Murmu, visited Auroville on 8th August 2023. In a speech at the Bharat Nivas Auditorium, Smt. Droupadi Murmu emphasised the impact of the teachings and philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother upon seekers worldwide. Due to the nature of the arrangements made by the AVFO, it was impossible for many Aurovilians to attend the main event. The President planted a tree in the Matrimandir gardens, accompanied by a signboard - the first time a public figure's name has been officially displayed within Matrimandir premises as an enduring homage. In an earlier speech in Puducherry, about 10 kilometres away from Auroville, Smt. Droupadi Murmu reportedly said: "Spiritual tourism is fast becoming a global trend... The Union government has taken several measures to promote tourism in Puducherry".



Smt. Droupadi Murmu planting tree at Matrimandir, 8th August 2023



A focus on visitors and guests

Recent actions by the AVFO signal a shift towards tourism and financial profit in Auroville's hospitality and information sectors. In July 2023, guest house managers were ordered to stop taking reservations and hand over their guest lists for a "restructuring" aimed at creating a centrally managed "Auroville Hotel Chain", alongside "budget accommodations" for volunteers and long-term guests. This move, which threatens the financial stability of individual guest houses, was not accompanied by plans for financial support.

In August, the Visitors' Center Information Service team was directed to remove all written material available for visitors at their desk, most likely in an attempt to rewrite the narrative presented to visitors. These changes indicate an effort by the AVFO to centralise control and potentially alter the public understanding of Auroville.

— Summary – July & August 2023

VIP road puts Auroville Dog Shelter and farms at risk

On July 29th, a week before the visit of the President of India, the Auroville Dog Shelter, home to over 300 dogs, was informed that a proposed 'VIP access road' would cut through the facility in the coming days and half of the dog enclosures would require immediate demolition. This posed not only an animal welfare concern but a public health risk, as some of the dogs carry contagious diseases. A temporary solution was found to redirect the road, but the shelter's long-term future remains uncertain. Additionally, the proposed road also threatens substantial sections of three long term Auroville farms - Buddha Garden, Shambala, and Siddhartha Farms - impacting the community's agricultural sustainability. Concerns have been raised that the road is not part of any approved Master Plan and contravenes the National Green Tribunal's verdict.

Land exchanges

Recent reports reveal that the AVFO and its illegitimately appointed 'Land Board' continue to engage in controversial land exchanges that have significant repercussions for the community. Exchanges have already taken place in the Auroville Djaima settlement and near the Tindivanam Highway, lacking due diligence, internal procedure, and legal compliance, and incurring a loss of around 6 crore

rupees to Auroville. One such exchange led to the displacement of award-winning stone sculptor Murthy without any of the promised compensation, leaving him without an income. There are also indications that further exchanges are planned, which threaten other areas in Auroville, including Forecomers, one of the first settlements of Auroville named by the Mother. This situation raises concerns about the transparency and ethics of the AVFO's land management, and potential mismanagement of funds.

Over a year of presence

Marking over a year since the Auroville Council was unexpectedly asked to vacate its office space in Town Hall, a group of dedicated Auroville residents has maintained a 24/7 presence in the Auroville Council meeting room. Despite challenges, including an instance of physical violence against the Auroville Council secretary and sporadic utility cut-offs, this effort has ensured that Residents' Assembly committees still have a place to meet in the Town Hall. This is a symbolically important assertion of the Residents' Assembly's right to organise itself as a statutory body of the Auroville Foundation.



Dogs at the Auroville IACC Dog Shelter

— *Summary – July & August 2023*

Farms' financial support cut

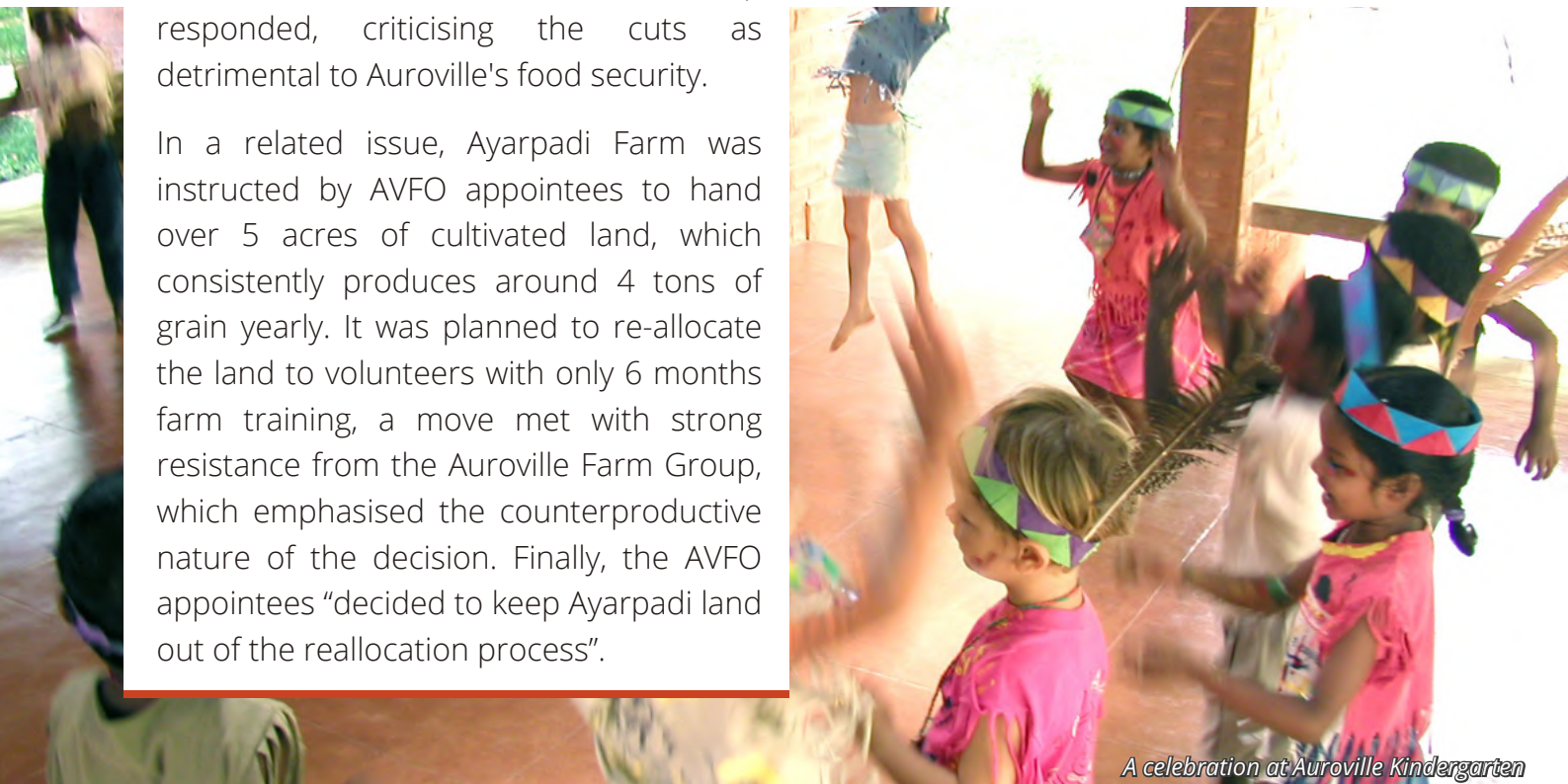
In July 2023, AVFO appointees cut all financial support to Auroville farms, effectively transforming them into commercial units responsible for generating their own income. This decision contradicts the community budgeting recommendations made in 2022, which identified Farms/Food and Social Support as high-priority budgetary areas. Over the last year, a total of 121 adult Aurovilians working in many domains including municipal services, farming and forestry have seen their monthly stipends cut by AVFO appointees, amounting to 13.6% of the Aurovilians financially supported by the City Services' common fund. In addition to impacting adults, this is the first time that children's stipends have also been cut. The Auroville Farm Group responded, criticising the cuts as detrimental to Auroville's food security.

In a related issue, Ayarpadi Farm was instructed by AVFO appointees to hand over 5 acres of cultivated land, which consistently produces around 4 tons of grain yearly. It was planned to re-allocate the land to volunteers with only 6 months farm training, a move met with strong resistance from the Auroville Farm Group, which emphasised the counterproductive nature of the decision. Finally, the AVFO appointees "decided to keep Ayarpadi land out of the reallocation process".

Auroville education

structure under threat

Two 'open meetings on education' were held in July 2023 at the request of the AVFO. A number of community members expressed concern and confusion about the meetings since they followed a May announcement that the AVFO-appointed finance committee had announced a significant restructuring of Auroville schools, including budget cuts and a reduction in the number of teachers. The current set up of small schools with diverse approaches would be consolidated into a single school for each age bracket. It was also suggested to further increase pupil numbers by actively admitting non-residents, which may indicate intentions to cash in on Auroville's educational work.



A celebration at Auroville Kindergarten

— Summary – July & August 2023

Matrimandir lake development raises concerns

Excavation and tree cutting has been taking place at the Matrimandir gardens to prepare the ground for a lake. However, the test phase of the lake is incomplete, and the viability and impact of the lake on the environment are still unclear. The engineer in charge of the test phase of the lake recently wrote that “barging ahead with the next sections of the lake” without completing the first section would “create a gigantic maintenance nightmare and lead to a monumental waste of resources”.

This hasn't prevented the Matrimandir executives, allegedly under pressure from the AVFO, to uproot the many trees that were surrounding the Matrimandir gardens. 125 trees are endangered or have already been cut, including some valuable Neem trees that were over half a century in age. These actions go against the National Green Tribunal's judgement, and diverge from collaborative community participation, as the Residents' Assembly of the Auroville Foundation has not been consulted in the process.



Uprooting of trees in Matrimandir gardens, 28th June 2023



One of the last remaining Matrimandir neem trees, September 2023



Test phase of the Matrimandir lake, August 2023

Dreamcatching restarts

The Dreamweaving Core Team held a community meeting in July 2023 to restart the Dreamcatching sessions “to explore a more unifying action-oriented planning process for the development of Auroville.” Dreamcatching is a form of collective imagining that actively seeks to allow creativity to flow from a higher space. You can read more about the Dreamweavers' proposal for holistic planning on page 3.

— Summary – July & August 2023



Meeting of the Residents' Assembly, April 2023

Auroville residents vote on emergency functions

On August 14th, the Residents' Assembly took two important decisions focusing on emergency powers. The first decision empowers the Residents' Assembly to call for emergency voting at the request of 300 residents, and was approved by 98% of the 409 participants. The second decision granted the duly selected Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly emergency powers to appoint interim members to other working groups, and was approved by 93% of the 405 voters.

The Working Committee clarified that these "Emergency Functions" currently equate to "Crisis Management Functions". They added that interim appointments, which could last from 2 months to 18 months, are not intended to replace the formal selection process but will serve as a stop-gap measure only. The yearly selection process that is organised by the Residents' Assembly to appoint its own representatives is planned to take place as usual.

Court proceedings still ongoing

Recent court rulings have presented a mixed picture for Auroville's Residents' Assembly. The Madras High Court dismissed a case challenging new executive assignments to various services by the AVFO, leaving the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly to explore further legal options. Meanwhile, on 4th September, the appeal bench of the Madras High Court gave a ruling upholding the Residents' Assembly as a statutory body and recognising its role in Auroville decision-making processes, bringing some relief to the Auroville community. On the other hand, another petition by a resident related to the 'Outer Ring Road' was not admitted, seemingly reinforcing the Governing Board's authority over Auroville assets.

These rulings exhibit some contradictions concerning the powers of the Residents' Assembly and the Governing Board, leaving the community hoping for further clarity from ongoing legal proceedings. Amidst these legal ups and downs, the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly expressed that they remain optimistic about the resolution of issues through the judicial system, and through further support from India and abroad.



Auroville residents at the Town Hall, May 2022

— *Summary – July & August 2023*

Destruction along the Crown continues

Tree cutting executed by AVFO appointees continues to take place along the Crown area of Auroville and in other zones, and are in direct violation of the National Green Tribunal's judgement. The work is being done at irregular times, such as on Sunday mornings or after dark. Destruction has also affected or threatened important infrastructure, including the water supply for several Auroville residential settlements. Furthermore, the holes left in the completed sections of the road pose injury risks for people and animals and encourage mosquitoes to breed. Concerns remain high about the ongoing environmental degradation and emerging health hazards.



Tree cutting next to Auroville's Unity Pavilion, July 2023

Visa intimidation continues

The Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly recently disclosed that visa issues continue to plague the Auroville community. Ten individuals, including members of committees selected by the Residents' Assembly, are currently in India without visas, awaiting letters of recommendation from the AVFO - some for over a year. Eight residents, including a family with young children, are 'in exile' outside India due to withheld letters of recommendation.

Additionally, over 80 residents have received one-year letters of recommendation instead of the five-year term for which they are eligible, often accompanied by a notice accusing them of "obstructing the work progress as per the Master Plan". There is little factual basis to such claims, and no justification is ever given, nor any hearing offered to the concerned residents by the AVFO.

Satprem Maini has received much support after he was asked to leave India despite having lived in Auroville for over 34 years and having contributed tremendously as a renowned and respected architect. A collective letter in support of Satprem was signed by over 2700 individuals, including about 900 Aurovilians. Additionally, around 150 individual messages and appeals from India and around the world were sent to various ministries.

— Summary – July & August 2023

A new channel for staying updated

Auroville Media Liaison, an activity approved by the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly, announced in August the launch of a new audio series called *Auroville News Podcast*. The first episodes of this podcast series, which delves into the latest happenings in Auroville, are available on auroville.media/podcasts as well as on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), and [YouTube](#). The auroville.media website includes two new pages that summarise the current crisis, by looking at the [current threats](#), and how the Auroville community has responded to these unprecedented struggles [with resilience](#).

Auroville supporters are warmly invited to share these two web pages with their friends and contacts in India and world-wide. Auroville is an international experiment in human unity that can exist both thanks to India's generous welcoming, and to the entire world's support - and both are currently needed to face and overcome the challenges at play.

***Voice of Auroville editors,
September 2023***



"Auroville stands as one of the most courageous and hope-giving models of what is possible when the human will and spirit unite in a common action. (...)

Though Auroville has been endorsed by the United Nations and is recognised by an Act of Indian Parliament, it essentially remains a grassroots project. (...)

I encourage you to assist this unique global community venture in its determination to reverse the tide of environmental destruction, demonstrating how to restore hope and compassion on the only Earth."

David R. Brower,

Chairman of the Earth Island Institute,
United States of America, 1997



Sri Aurobindo's 151st birth anniversary, 15th August 2023

— *A new type of cyclone?*





Highlight: Exemplary Practice

© Ever Slow Green, 2020

Auroville green spaces: a labour of love

Following our profile of Darkali Forest Park in the last issue, we present here the 'bigger picture' of Auroville's afforestation work and greenery: how it came about, the regeneration of the native Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF), the important documentation undertaken, and the contribution to the wider ecological picture.

The 1250 acres of Auroville's forests and green spaces have been nurtured for more than four decades by the Auroville Forest Group - a collective of about 80 Aurovilians. But now, with the group's entire budget abolished and with continued unauthorised land clearing, the future of Auroville's greenery and its caretakers are in question.

— *On Auroville green spaces*

A red desert

In the late 60s, the Auroville plateau was an extremely harsh environment with its highly eroded red lateritic soil that was as hard as iron. The summer temperatures reached over 40°C with a humidity of 90%, and the long dry season was prone to dust storms. At that time there was no larger environmental wisdom or vision; it was the basic necessity for water and shade that spurred the initial environmental restoration effort. Later, in 1982, the Auroville Forest Group was formed as the land pioneers grouped together to work in a more efficient and coherent way.

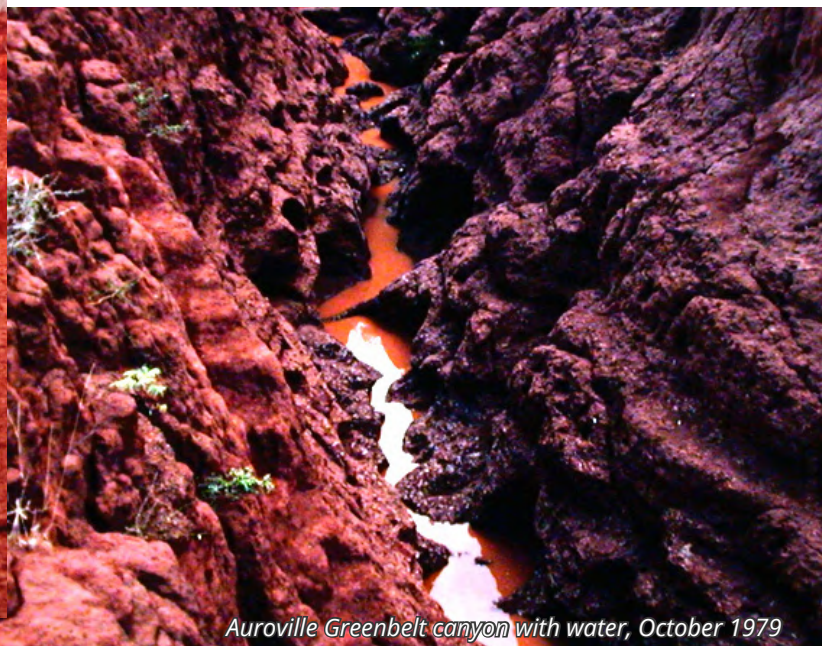


Auroville as a red desert, between 1968 and 1975

“Zero run-off” mission

Soil and water conservation were fundamental to ensure the seasonal monsoon rains would infiltrate into the subterranean aquifers, providing water security for the whole of Auroville and a good part of its bioregion. With the intensity of the Northeast monsoon, where 300 mm of rain can fall within a 24-hour period, the success of any sapling plantation depended on halting rainwater run-off. To address this, many kilometres of contour bunding were dug by hand on the open land that slopes from 50 metres to sea level over a distance of 4.7km. Gully plugs, earth dams and granite check dams were constructed that carried rainfall runoff across the watershed.

This effort to maintain “zero run-off” has continued as Auroville developed and as impermeable surfaces, paths and roads were built. To this day, soil and water conservation remain essential.



Auroville Greenbelt canyon with water, October 1979

— On Auroville green spaces

Planting in the early days

In the early days, tree planting was a collective grassroots movement where saplings were planted in a passionate, albeit haphazard way. Much was learned from the local villagers, and vice-versa. Slowly, plant nurseries were set up and challenges such as seed germination were overcome.

The plantation areas were nurtured with manual watering and mulched whenever possible. The plantations were not contiguous, which made care and protection from grazing and browsing by the local livestock very challenging.

As the yearly seasonal plantation continued, the pioneers experimented with many species of plants, but most failed to get established. Certain species like the *Acacia auriculiformis*, an exotic wattle from Australia, outperformed the others. With its nitrogen fixing capacities, it thrived and grew rapidly even with very little topsoil. And when it died naturally after 25-35 years, it provided firewood and timber.

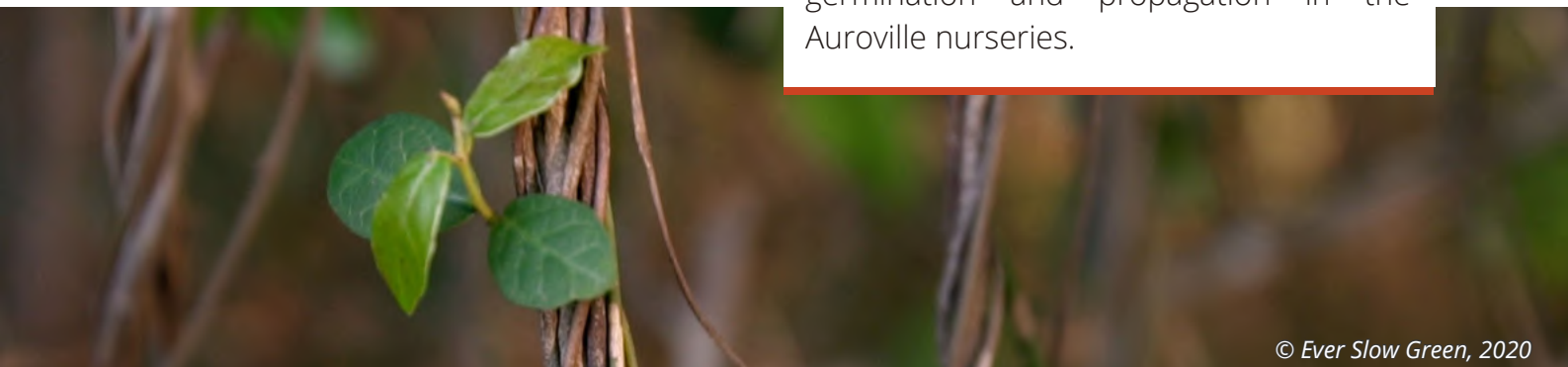
By the late '80s, a hybrid forest with an assemblage of exotic and native species emerged.

Researching the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF)

The newly grown 'pioneer' forest created optimum conditions for the next stage of development. After an in-depth study of the tropical indigenous vegetation type of the area and its dynamics, the native species of the area were planted in volume in the mid to late 90s.

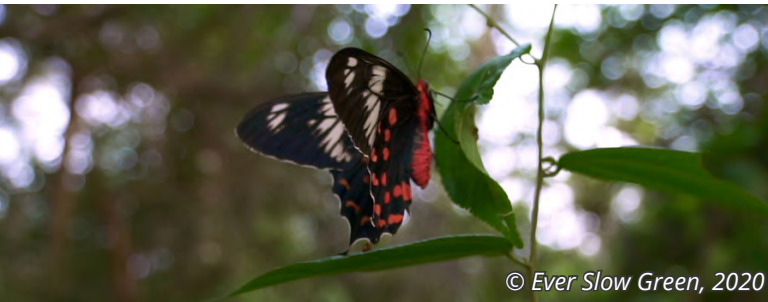
Supported by the Pitchandikulam Bio-research Centre and the Shakti Herbarium (two Auroville forester initiatives), and with funding from the Foundation for the Revitalization of Local Health Traditions (Bangalore) and the European Commission, work began on researching the native Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest.

During this research period, with guidance from the French Institute in Pondicherry and Pondicherry University, a team from Auroville set out to locate potential remnants of the TDEF. These remnants were found in sacred groves surrounding temples and other small pockets which had escaped urbanisation or complete deforestation. Visits to 85 sites were then arranged for plant identification, phenology, sample collection for the newly created herbarium, and seed collection for germination and propagation in the Auroville nurseries.



© Ever Slow Green, 2020

— On Auroville green spaces



© Ever Slow Green, 2020

Restoring endemic diversities

It was during this period that the work of interplanting the hybrid Auroville pioneer forest with the native TDEF species in volume was initiated. One key advantage of planting these native species is that they are adapted to the conditions of the geographical location and are drought resistant. This means there is little or no watering required after planting under the pioneer canopy. With minor aftercare, mulching and management of opportunistic species around the sapling pit, a survival rate of 90% has been achieved.

As these TDEF species have become more established, there is a natural transition from the hybrid forest to a more native TDEF prominent ecosystem. This has become the single planting focus of the Forest Group, and as of today, half a million TDEF saplings of over 200 species have been planted.

Presently more than half the TDEF species reach maturity and regenerate on their own, a clear indication of success. The vibrant growing forest has become a valuable TDEF gene bank, securing these rare species for the future.

Flourishing fauna

As the forest flourished, birds returned quickly, benefiting from a diverse set of flowers, fruiting plants and an increasing variety of insects. Today, the bird list has reached over 100 species. More than 200 species of butterflies have been attracted to this new environment. The reptile population has also increased, and the common mammal population has grown, making the forest a habitat for the Indian mongoose, civet cat and the jackal. In recent years, even the porcupine and spotted deer have made their way back to the area and the occasional sightings of the jungle cat and the rusty spotted cat indicate a thriving ecosystem.



Auroville is home to many mammals, including mongooses

— *On Auroville green spaces*

Funding the venture

Funding support over the decades has come through various beneficial partnerships. Governmental and non-profit sources have at times provided much needed resources. Auroville units, carbon offset programmes, and the generous donations of well-wishers - starting with Auroville International centres across the globe - have also contributed greatly to the forests' advancement.

Still, what is needed to establish and sustain such vast natural areas has regularly exceeded available funding. Though creative income streams (like a Forest Fund and sales of forestry products) have helped, meeting the costs has always been a challenge. Through it all, the dedication of Forest Group members has gone above and beyond, with some drawing from personal life savings, inheritances or seasonal work abroad merely to keep environmental progress moving forward.



© Ever Slow Green, 2020

And now?

The Forest Group continues their important documentation work to comprehensively survey the land. By recording details of species' maturity and regeneration, their goal is to develop thoughtful long-term management plans to preserve these forests for generations to come, and to serve as an example for other such places in India. Studies have shown that the expansive Auroville green spaces represent a verdant oasis — one of the largest contiguous tropical dry evergreen zones in the region. Recently it was estimated that: the annual value in Indian rupees of the carbon sequestered in Auroville forests is Rs 3,56,32,360; of air pollution removed is Rs 36,22,334; and of run-off avoided is Rs 41,192.

For years, Indian forest officials, researchers from around the globe, and school groups have come to learn from the Auroville forest model. This work to establish and protect the biodiversity of the TDEF within the Auroville green spaces benefits both Auroville and the surrounding bioregion, and has larger benefits for future generations.

And yet, in June 2023, the AVFO cut all communal budgets allocated to forestry work in Auroville, including foresters' monthly stipends and employees' salaries. Today, the survival of these precious green resources relies entirely on the selfless generosity of all.

***Adapted from a report by the
Auroville Forest Group, July 2023***



Myths & Facts

Aerial sculpture at the Auroville Center for Urban Research (Town Hall)

Countering misleading narratives

1

In June 2023, the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly published their rebuttal to a highly misleading report earlier circulated by AVFO appointees, which contained a number of narratives that continue to be spread by the AVFO to justify the ongoing takeover of Auroville's assets. This section draws inspiration from this rebuttal.

In this issue, we will be shedding light on the following topics:

- **Setting the record straight on the Galaxy concept**
- **Challenging the myth about land 'ownership'**

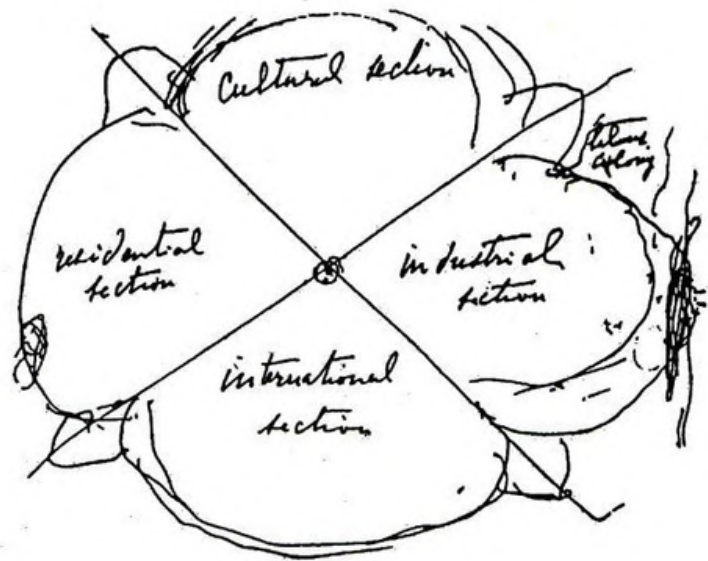
— *Countering misleading narratives*

Setting the record straight on the Galaxy concept

One prevalent narrative suggests that the Galaxy concept proposed by Roger Anger and approved by the Mother is directly equivalent to a Master Plan for Auroville. This shows a lack of understanding of architectural and town-planning realities.

The Galaxy represents an architectural model and symbolic vision for the city's growth - not a detailed plan nor a rigid blueprint. Leading town planners and Roger Anger himself, the architect who worked closely with the Mother, have clarified that it requires translation into reality through a collaborative planning process. Actual plans emerge from evolving community realities, not static imposition of models.

Equating the Galaxy with a rigid plan goes against recognising it as an inspirational starting point, not an end in itself. Calling it a "plan" ignores the flexibility integral to all future-oriented designs handling complex social and environmental dynamics. Rather than denial or dismissal, embracing the Galaxy's essence of guided yet malleable evolution honours the spirit of Auroville's progress via participatory, consensus-based development through cooperation. Initiatives such as the Dreamweaving (see page 3) contribute to a holistic planning for Auroville that is in line with the ideals of Auroville and with the Galaxy's true purpose and meaning.



The Mother's sketch for Auroville's development, 1965



The Galaxy Concept of Auroville, 1968

— *Countering misleading narratives*

Challenging the myth about land ‘ownership’

A narrative that is often repeated by AVFO appointees is that Aurovilians “have taken possession” of Auroville’s land and are acting like “landlords”. They claim that fencing the land and naming communities is evidence that Aurovilians believe these areas belong to them, and that they want development to go in “a non-Galaxy Masterplan direction.”

Auroville’s development has taken place according to the availability of funds, most of which have been contributed by residents and well-wishers from around the world. Three generations of Aurovilians have contributed energy and resources to developing the land and infrastructure for future residents. They have established units and services that support the growth of the community, such as schools, health centres, income-generating enterprises, farms and forests. Many initiatives aim to discourage the human tendency of ‘ownership’, such as the principle of house stewardship, the free store, the maintenance system, the Pour Tous cooperative and other efforts towards an alternative economy. These developments are not in any way ‘anti-growth’. Fencing and community-naming are common-sense measures: fencing helps to manage animal grazing and encroachment; grouping of communities enables efficient use of shared infrastructure such as borewells and solar panels; and naming helps with navigation

and administrative tasks. Protecting land and naming communities also reflects Aurovilians’ deep love for the land, shared resources and community. This leads to better care and stewardship, and does not imply ownership.

***Voice of Auroville editors,
September 2023***



Many roaming cows and goats graze on Auroville land

— Thank you!

Thank you for reading our third 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?

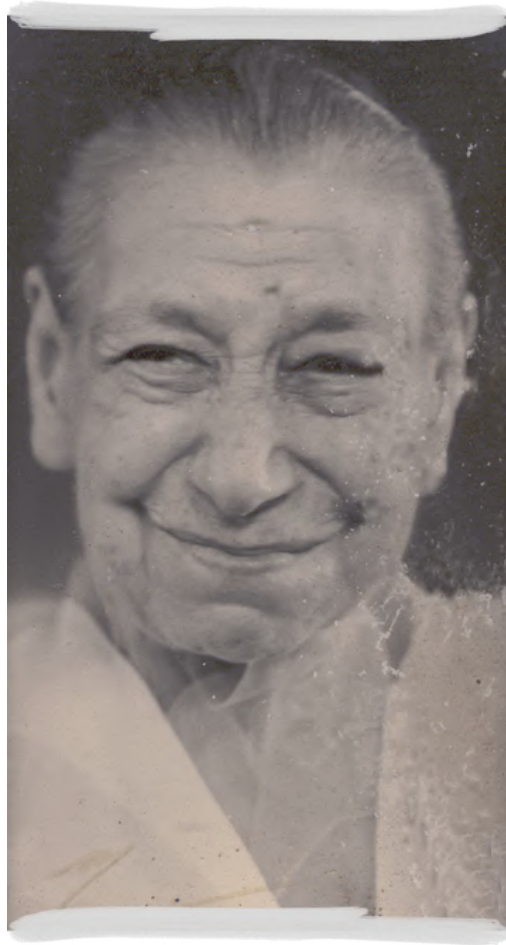
- 1 Keep in touch with Auroville.** One of Auroville's biggest strengths is its national and international support network. Thank you for being with us. You can subscribe by emailing voiceofauroville@auroville.services
- 2 Stay informed & spread the news.** Listen to all perspectives. Share this journal - 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



Sign found at Matrimandir after the lake-digging, August 2023



*"Auroville should be at the service of
Truth, beyond all social, political and
religious convictions.
Auroville is the effort towards peace, in
sincerity and Truth."*

— The Mother, 1966



Auroville's 50th anniversary, 28th February 2018 ↗



WORKING COMMITTEE
of the Residents' Assembly
AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

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