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VOICE OF AUROVILLE

News & Highlights from the Auroville Community



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AURVILLE
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Cover image: Matrimandir Lake digging, October 2023

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

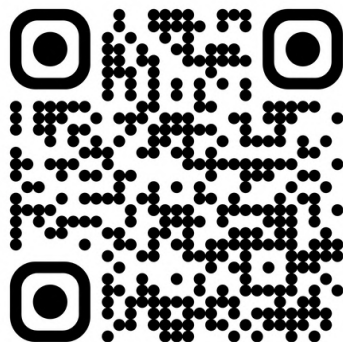
— Introduction

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.



“The City the Earth Needs

Earth needs

a place where men can live away from all national rivalries, social conventions, self-contradictory moralities and contending religions;

a place where human beings, freed from all slavery to the past, can devote themselves wholly to the discovery and practice of the Divine Consciousness that is seeking to manifest.

Auroville wants to be this place and offers itself to all who aspire to live the Truth of tomorrow.

The Mother,
20th September 1969



— *Introduction*

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In this fourth 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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Evolving approaches to Integral Education

Education and the need for growth of consciousness in every part of the being pervade every aspect of life in Auroville. According to the community's Charter, Auroville is a place "of an unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages", a learning society that is dedicated to "a living embodiment of an actual human unity".

Schooling in Auroville

From the beginning, the Mother made it clear that Auroville's residents should explore and try to find out how to create 'schools' appropriate to its unique mission. As the community has grown, structured educational processes have developed

and evolved over time. At present, around 30 schools and educational spaces serve over 2500 children and youth from Auroville and the surrounding areas, all evidence of a healthy multitude of ideas, approaches and sizes along with continuing challenges.

Most of these initiatives function under the administrative and financial umbrella of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER). Funding is received from India's Ministry of Education, the Foundation for World Education (USA), Stichting De Zaaier (Holland), and numerous units and individuals from within and outside Auroville.

— *Integral Education in Auroville*

From unschooling to structured schools, from 'free progress' to schools that offer either Indian or international board certification, the range of options available to families living in and around Auroville reflects different needs. Approximately 500 Auroville children attend Auroville schools, while 2000 children from the region attend outreach schools. There are seven facilities for the youngest children, six for primary and middle school years, four high schools, and one post-secondary degree programme. There are three facilities dedicated to physical education, four dedicated to the arts, and one dedicated specifically to STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) learning. Another four facilities focus on complementary needs in the region around Auroville, such as programmes for children and youth with disabilities as well as after school, school drop-out and adult-centred programmes.

Integral Education of the Being

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother refer, in their works, to the different components of the Being: the physical, the vital, the mental and the spiritual. In Auroville, Integral Education aims at developing the multifaceted personality of each child and thus encompasses all of these - while developing tools to educate the body, the life-force and the mind.

Spirituality in education

Spirituality is a vast domain open to exploration, an inner discovery. While not being taught in conventional ways, spirituality can become a living reality in the environment of the child. In accordance with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's words, this needs to be done far from all dogmas.



Many forms of art are explored in Auroville schools

— *Integral Education in Auroville*

Education of the mind

The education of the mind emphasises the faculty of analysis and critical judgement. These capacities are trained within Auroville through usual educational means, and go hand-in-hand with teaching knowledge - be it in the field of sciences, history or literature. However, the capacity to discern and judge with clarity is not enough. A new way of knowing is needed, more holistic and intuitive - a method that synthesises thought in a manner that can reconcile different perspectives and different cultural influences. That is, finding how two points of view that seem antagonistic to each other can be seen as complementary to each other in a deeper view and higher synthesis of things.



A student in maths class, The Learning Community, 2016

Physical education

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo considered physical education to be an essential component of growth, an integral part of one's development. Physical education develops indispensable values like disciplined effort, team spirit, the joy of progress and self-exceeding, as well as sincerity, honesty, courage, and perseverance. Auroville offers a wide range of daily sport activities, including martial arts and dance. Awareness through the Body (ATB) is a program created and developed in Auroville, which explores breathing, sensory awareness, states of consciousness, and play. It is aimed at the refined management of one's mind, emotions, and body. ATB is included in the educational programs of the Auroville schools until high school level. Additionally, workshops and sessions are offered on a regular basis for the wider community.



Children of Auroville in a sports class



Awareness Through the Body (ATB) class in Transition School

— *Integral Education in Auroville*

Refining the life-force through art and beauty

The life impulse, what we call the vital being, is cultivated in Auroville's education, primarily through art, poetry, drama and music, which deepens and refines the emotional part of our nature. Art also liberates the creative energies of the students and forges a capacity to perceive shades of subtlety. As art and beauty are intrinsically part of the Yoga set forth by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, they pervade most aspects of Auroville. The most common opportunities to express oneself are performing arts such as singing, dancing, music and theatre; visual arts such as painting, sculpture and pottery; and also less-known artistic mediums such as Ikebana, traditional kolam-making, or creating fashion with trash.

Free progress as a process of self-becoming

The primary aim of education in Auroville is a matter of drawing out what is already latent in the child: an awakening to a process of self discovery, self-becoming and self-perfecting. It is an individualised process, but not one that aims to produce either participants or leaders in competition. Instead, the aim is to foster creative individuals who can work in a disciplined manner away from competitive pressures which exhaust and deplete the faculties. Children can progress freely where there is an entwining of these two processes: of self-discovery and self-becoming (awakening consciousness) on the one hand, and of cultivating skills of an instrumental nature on the other.

As such, teachers in Auroville schools aim to serve as guides rather than authority figures. They help the students in their own progress and support their emerging selves. Schools value communication and collaboration, and teenagers are included to varying degrees in the constitution of their individualised programmes and in school decision-making. Classes are generally small in size, allowing flexible and collaborative approaches.



'Roots from the Sky' collective artistic performance, March 2023

— *Integral Education in Auroville*



Diverse approaches

Auroville is home to a very diverse set of people with equally diverse belief systems. This creates a fertile ground to search for a common spiritual essence and to actively research ways to embody Auroville's ideal of human unity in diversity. Sometimes conflicts have led to a regressive clash of exclusivisms rather than to a progressive line of harmonising synthesis (but never enough to shatter an underlying sense of togetherness for the majority).

This issue touches upon the core of Auroville's purpose and mission, and the exploration is still in its early stages. Auroville has encouraged the emergence of a variety of approaches rather than allowing one prescriptive authority to dictate any limited idea of Integral Education. This variety of approaches, which reflect our underlying diversities, needs to be celebrated for it is the only way to explore, step by step, the adventure in the unknown that Auroville seeks to cultivate.

Unending education, beyond schooling

Auroville's ethos is based upon the need to study, learn and experiment in order to create conditions that lead to a higher and truer life. Progress is an ever-evolving journey, which Aurovilians undertake consciously, each in their own way. Education is therefore interwoven with all dimensions of Auroville's reality. The community culture of Auroville encourages an environment of open and extensive interpersonal exchange.

Student groups from external establishments regularly visit to discover and study Auroville's broad range of activities and innovative projects. At any moment there are hundreds of interns and volunteers participating in its progression, bringing additional insight and experience, and taking Auroville's vision with them when they return to their own settings.

Auroville is a nexus for research. Its aspirations and initiatives are the subject of numerous studies ranging from social science to psychology to sustainability. It hosts action research projects and programs around conservation, agriculture, art, energy, health, forestry, and more. A specialised research platform facilitates cooperation between Auroville and researchers from universities all over the world, and a team manages the resulting repository of academic work focused on Auroville.

— *Integral Education in Auroville*

Fostering the emergence of conscious beings

Despite challenges, Auroville has created a solid infrastructure for a value-oriented education in an international environment, where different cultures and languages co-exist. Integral Education's inherent freedom is explored from a multitude of viewpoints, which enriches the findings. The Auroville learning network has grown from simple homespun classes into a more stable, diversified environment, fueled by the selfless service of many in a decentralised, cohesive spirit.

The mission of education is not to produce ready-made citizens for a system that cannot find solutions for the problems it has created; it is to help the emergence of people who are able to consciously build themselves on a truer basis, while building a new world in which they choose to live together without exclusion, around common aspirations.

Auroville is often compared to a laboratory in its commitment to research and experimentation. The wide spectrum of ideas and activities it supports are an expression of its ideal of human unity in diversity, a healthy and precious cradle for what is yet to come.

(This article is partly based on a report presented to the UNESCO on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Auroville, October 2008)



“Even the word itself “educate” means to bring out from within. And that is the most powerful tool in education.

Each one, each being on Earth, has something extraordinarily wonderful about them. You are not less, you are not small, you are not underdeveloped. You may just miss a certain amount of information, which can be given to you, but you are a wholeness. So when you are treated as being a wholeness from the beginning, not something empty to be filled up, I think that forms you in a different way.”

Deepti Tewari,
Teacher at Auroville's Last School, 2017.



Children of Auroville climbing trees and a geodesic structure, 2016

— A sampling of Auroville schools

Transition School is a primary and middle school created in 1985 for Auroville children. Subjects are viewed as a tool for self-discovery as well as an aid to help the children express themselves and gain knowledge. Awareness Through the Body plays a central role in the school's educational approach.



Future School campus

Last School, whose name was suggested by the Mother, started in 1985 to explore Mother's free progress philosophy with Auroville teenagers. The students can design their own course of study. Special emphasis is placed on art.

Future School is a high school which enables Auroville teenagers to take international standard exams in a wide range of subjects, facilitating access to higher studies outside of Auroville while maintaining a core philosophy in keeping with Auroville's ideals.



Students at The Learning Community, 2022

The Learning Community is an ever-changing space co-created by children, parents, and teachers since 2009. It actively makes use of the wider Auroville community as a learning resource.



Last School campus

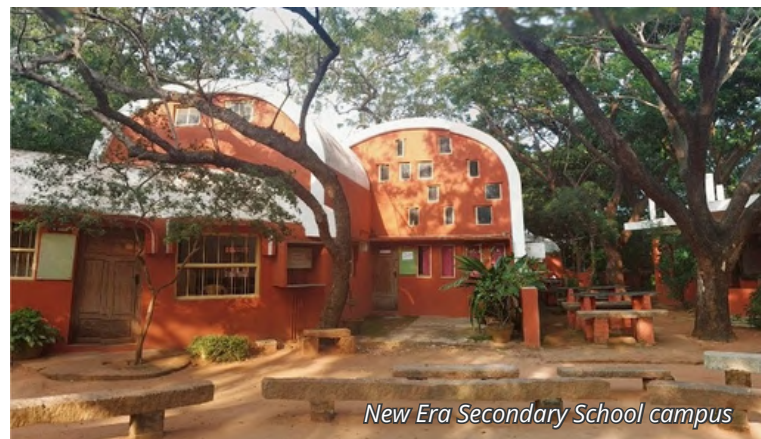
Oli School is an outreach kindergarten started in 2011 based on the Montessori and free progress philosophies. Its teachers are Tamil women trained in these approaches.



New Era Secondary School is an outreach high school affiliated with India's Central Board of Secondary Education since 2008. It prepares bioregional teenagers from socially deprived circumstances as well as Aurovillian teenagers for Indian exams. Many of its students come from **Transition School** and **Aikiyam**, a CBSE accredited elementary school nearby that serves younger students from kindergarten to grade 8.



Udavi School is an outreach school started in 1972 that follows the Tamil Nadu board syllabus up to 10th grade. The syllabus includes courses in Tamil, English, mathematics, sciences, and social sciences. It also offers a wide range of other activities, such as sports, Awareness Through the Body, Odissi dance, painting, drama, tailoring and vegetable gardening.



Thamarai started in 2006 as a village outreach centre primarily for children. Education, health care and community, including issues of illiteracy, debt, and addiction are addressed through two after-school programmes, complete with physical activities, digital literacy, culture, and arts complemented by a well-being program.

— Summary

Sept & Oct 2023

Following the appointment of a new Secretary to the Governing Board in 2021, Auroville has faced a series of takeovers that endanger its unique achievements and experimental nature. Previous issues of Voice of Auroville have covered these events up through August 2023, a summary of which can be found here:

www.auroville.media/crisis.

Despite some encouraging news in September from the Madras High Court, which upheld the status and function of Auroville's Residents' Assembly, the Office of the Secretary to the Governing Board (also called 'Auroville Foundation Office' or **AVFO**) and their appointees continued to roll-out new policies that threaten and undermine the Auroville community. Here is a short overview of events during the months of September and October 2023.

News from the Courts

The Madras High Court, in a significant move, upheld the status and functioning of the Residents' Assembly in Auroville. On 4th September 2023, the appeal bench, including the Hon'ble Madras High Court Chief Justice, noted in an interim order



A rainbow over the Auroville landscape, October 2023

that the Residents' Assembly, as a statutory body, cannot be restricted from performing its duties as per the Auroville Foundation Act. This decision effectively nullifies the AVFO's justification for curtailing residents' rights to make decisions for Auroville. Subsequently, the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly emphasised that while the legal journey is ongoing, this development serves as a pivotal milestone and they remain committed to ensuring that the Residents' Assembly's role is fully recognised and respected. A final verdict from the Court is still awaited on the matter.

Other hearings and legal developments are ongoing. One of these concerns actions by the AVFO which are in contempt of the National Green Tribunal's ruling of April 2022, according to the lawyer for the Auroville petitioners.

— *Summary – September & October*

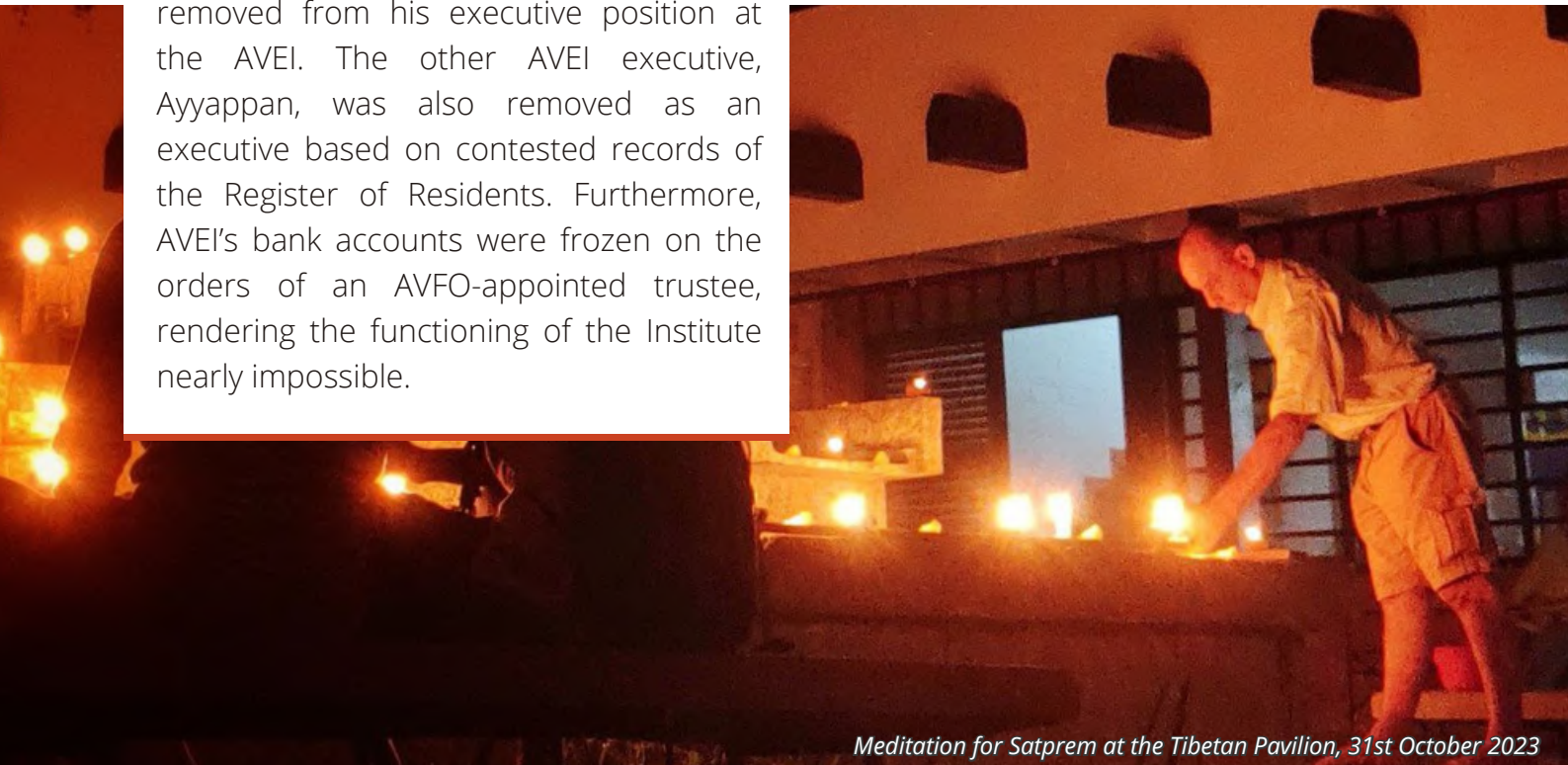
Targeted actions against Earth Institute executives

Satprem Maïni, an executive and founder of the internationally renowned Auroville Earth Institute (AVEI), faced a series of actions initiated by the AVFO and its appointees. After he presented a number of detailed technical reports criticising the Crown Road works and other related actions, Satprem's visa recommendation was revoked by the AVFO in June 2023 and he was subsequently issued an Exit Permit by the immigration authorities. At the end of September, the AVFO and its appointees used the visa situation to justify removing Satprem from the Register of Residents and blocked his access to his Auroville financial accounts and Auroville's internal communication channels. Satprem was also summarily removed from his executive position at the AVEI. The other AVEI executive, Ayyappan, was also removed as an executive based on contested records of the Register of Residents. Furthermore, AVEI's bank accounts were frozen on the orders of an AVFO-appointed trustee, rendering the functioning of the Institute nearly impossible.



Sharanam Conference Hall, built by AVEI in Pondicherry, 2015-2018

In October 2023, Satprem was instructed by the Indian immigration authorities to leave India at the earliest and he finally left on 31st October. This may result in the Auroville Earth Institute shutting down completely, an abrupt end to one of the finest training centres responsible for the largest growing network of earthen construction in the country and the world.



Meditation for Satprem at the Tibetan Pavilion, 31st October 2023

— *Summary – September & October*

Residents rally against controversial expulsions

On 23rd October 2023, the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly initiated an emergency Residents' Assembly decision-making process, inviting all residents to vote on a resolution pertaining to the Register of Residents. This was prompted by the unauthorised removal and omission of at least three Aurovilians (Maël, Satprem and Ayyappan) from the Register by the AVFO and its appointees. The Residents' Assembly resolution, available in seven languages, challenges these removals, particularly in light of the Madras High Court's recent order that confirmed the Residents' Assembly's sole prerogative in deciding admission and removal of individuals in the Register of Residents.

This emergency Residents' Assembly decision-making process concluded with impressive participation. Out of the 741 voters, there was an impressive 98% approval of the resolution, asserting that the actions taken against Ayyappan, Mael, Satprem, and any others were invalid because there was no due process, as is required by the approved regulations and according to principles of natural justice. Again, the Residents' Assembly showed solidarity and a spirit of community despite the ongoing challenges.

Matrimandir Lake developments continue to cause concern

A large part of the Residents' Assembly has repeatedly voiced concerns that the recent expansion of the lake construction is in violation of the National Green Tribunal's ruling and is insufficiently planned and researched. Representatives of the Residents' Assembly have sent several letters to the Matrimandir Executives which have yet to be adequately addressed. In a feedback process following a General Meeting on 2nd October, over 80% of 273 respondents shared their main concerns: the lack of planning related to water management and the commencement of the next phase before the test phase has been completed and reviewed, as previously agreed.



Tree clearing at Matrimandir, between 15th and 22nd October 2023

— Summary – September & October



On 30th September, the lawyers for the National Green Tribunal petitioners sent a legal notice to the Matrimandir Executives regarding their “wilful and wanton violation of the judgement of the Hon'ble National Green Tribunal”. Two meetings were held on 19th September and 10th October with the community and Michael Bonke, a non-Aurovilian long-term Matrimandir donor and the main driver behind the lake construction. While his presentation was intended to address some existing concerns (such as fixing future leaks), a number of major questions remain unanswered (such as how the lake will be filled). These answers are crucial to understanding potential environmental impacts, not only for Auroville but for the bioregion as well. Concerns of a potential conflict of interest regarding Michael Bonke’s role as the main donor of the project, the deciding party, and the main executor, have yet to be addressed. Recently, new efforts have been initiated to collaboratively work out solutions and harmonise different approaches.

Visa recommendations linked to financial contributions

The AVFO has made the extension of residents’ visa recommendations contingent upon whether or not the applicant is up to date with their monthly financial contributions to the community. In the past, the Budget Coordination Committee, responsible for Auroville’s communal budget, had granted contribution waivers in particular instances. Residents working full-time for the community without a monthly stipend, or those who had invested a large amount of their own funds to buy land or develop projects for Auroville usually qualified for a waiver if requested. The new policy of the AVFO is not based on any legal requirement or approved process and appears to target only Aurovilians who require a visa to stay in Auroville. This is deeply concerning as it effectively imposes a residence tax without consideration for an individual’s financial situation, which is antithetical to the community’s ethos.



Matrimandir lake concept by Paolo Tomasi, 2002. This landscape design concept would avoid the felling of many additional trees.

— *Summary – September & October*

Auroville's oldest lands under threat

The situation surrounding the controversial land exchanges led by the AVFO and its 'Land Board' has grown more urgent. Not only have these transactions demonstrated a disregard for established internal procedures and legal norms, but they also lack the essential transparency and ethical considerations that the Auroville community aims to uphold.

Among the areas under threat are the settlements of Forecomers, a cornerstone of Auroville named by the Mother herself, as well as Hermitage and Aranya. Both these lands, bought with the Mother's blessings prior to the inauguration of Auroville, are an essential part of Auroville's legacy. AuroOrchard, one of Auroville's oldest, biggest and most productive farms, and blessed by the Mother, is threatened with land exchange as well. Other valuable lands such as Pebble Garden, a pioneering project in wasteland regeneration and research that is well known throughout India, are also under threat. These lands, located on the outskirts of Auroville, have undergone careful re-afforestation over the years, and are now playing a crucial role in sustaining the region's ecological balance.



— *Summary – September & October*

Incidents around Housing

Since the AVFO took control of the Housing Service in August 2022 and disbanded the Housing Board as an oversight body, there have been heightened concerns over Housing Service operations. Historically, the Housing Board served as a regulatory mechanism, ensuring accountability and fair practices. Lately, there have been alarming instances where appointees of the AVFO forcibly entered or sealed off a home following a death without consulting the other family members residing in the space. In another instance, the renewal of a family's housing agreement was unexpectedly annulled. In addition, despite a large number of residents being told there is no housing available, employees of the AVFO are being given housing in Auroville that has long been designated for residents. The ongoing situation illuminates potential oversight gaps and shows a disregard for ethical guidelines in the AVFO's management of housing matters.

Tree cutting still ongoing

In recent months, Auroville has witnessed significant tree felling, with the Town Development Council of the Residents' Assembly documenting multiple instances across the community. Their reports show that between June and August 2023, over 50 trees were removed along the proposed Crown trajectory alone. More alarmingly, by 7th September 2023, at least 378 trees had been felled on the proposed Crown and Outer Ring Road paths, flagrantly violating the National Green Tribunal's ruling from April 2022. Another 150 trees have been removed for development of the Matrimandir Lake. (Some of these have been transplanted but may not survive). An additional 1,000 trees are at risk to make way for the lake, while the Crown road project jeopardises thousands more.



Tree cutting along the planned Crown road, September 2023

— *Summary – September & October*

It's important to note that tree cutting often occurs discreetly, early in the morning or on weekends, hindering the intervention efforts of vigilant residents. The green cover of Auroville is tremendously important for both the immediate community and surrounding areas. The clearing activities authorised by AVFO appointees seriously threaten Auroville's commitment to conscious, environmentally smart urban development for which Auroville is globally recognised.



Update from Auroville farms & forests

In the wake of financial cuts to Auroville's farms and forests, the situation remains dire. The Forest Group has approached the AVFO regarding pending gratuity payments for about fifty forest workers, which total over 46.5 lakh rupees. Some of these workers, dismissed from one day to the next by the AVFO, have dedicated over four decades of their lives to the growth and conservation of Auroville's forested areas. In addition, the Farm Group's September report notes that, after the AVFO cut their budgets and stipends, many farmers and foresters are now relying on personal savings or pursuing non-farming activities just to make ends meet. It has also become increasingly difficult for the Forest and Farm Groups to guard against encroachment, tree cutting and other damage.



— *Summary – September & October*

Attempts to reach all residents continue

In response to the takeover of most internal communication platforms by the AVFO in 2022 and ongoing censorship, residents have been creative in setting up alternative information channels. As such, an alternative community intranet forum, a community News and Notes, an Auroville News Podcast and community email service were put in place, as previously reported in this journal. Recently, this has extended to a new WhatsApp broadcasting channel, and in the case of the latest Residents' Assembly decision-making process, to multilingual videos addressed to fellow Aurovilians. Efforts continue to try to ensure that communication channels are inclusive of all Aurovilians.

Call for support

While standing for the experimental, international and pioneering aspects of Auroville, its residents and their representatives continue to call for the support of all - whether in India or abroad. Auroville is a collective adventure that can only unfold through joint efforts and consolidated actions, united by the same aspiration.

***Voice of Auroville editors,
November 2023***



"The significance of Auroville can be understood properly only when we fathom into the very heart of the crisis through which humanity is passing today. As Sri Aurobindo points out, the crisis of today is evolutionary in character and can be resolved only if humanity turns upward towards the next step of evolution and realises universal fraternity."

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



An unexpected visitor in the Matrimandir test lake, October 2023

— *Reflections on the Lake*



Recently dug surface for the Matrimandir lake, October 2023



*Matrimandir garden
and lake design
by Paolo Tomasi, 2002*

Current plans for the lake have already resulted in the removal of **over 150 trees** (some of which have been transplanted but may not survive), and would lead to the removal of **about 1,000 more trees**.

In 2002, the architect Paolo Tomasi created a design for the Matrimandir lake which features organic shapes, and would allow for islands to shelter the compound's oldest trees. This design is currently sidelined; instead there seems to be an insistence on a **90 to 140-meter wide and 10-meter deep lake** that is rather circular.





Highlight: Interview

Dr Debashish Banerji in August 2023

An external perspective on the **present crisis**

Dr. Debashish Banerji is the Haridas Chaudhuri Professor of Indian Philosophies and Cultures and the Doshi Professor of Asian Art at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), San Francisco, where he also chairs the Department of East-West

Psychology. In August 2023, he visited Auroville with a group of CIIS students and speaks in this interview about his own and their perceptions after several weeks in Auroville and at the Ashram.

— Interview with Dr. Banerji

"I think the students got a good view of the present situation that is informed by facts. Most Aurovilians they spoke to felt they had come here to realise an ideal, but that their work of many years was in jeopardy because of external forces impinging on their lives.

The conditions for 'divine anarchy'

The students felt that the core issue is ownership. Many of the people who came to Auroville in the 1960s were products of the counterculture and were looking for a new kind of life. The Mother appealed to this sense. She said that the existing world is based on wrong foundations and those who come to Auroville should have an aspiration for a new kind of life. Connected with this is what the Mother calls 'divine anarchy' and Sri Aurobindo calls 'spiritual anarchism' in his social and political texts. It involves an aspiration for a grassroots sense of oneness that has no need of ownership or governance from the top.

That's the aspiration with which the Mother created Auroville as a social experiment in human unity founded on her and Sri Aurobindo's vision for a future civilisation. Of course, others have had such a vision, for example Marx dreamed of a future of collective self-governance but these thinkers lacked the psychological knowledge for its achievement. The Mother based this social objective on the development of a consciousness of unity and harmony



Dr Banerji and his students during their visit in August 2023

through yogic praxis. That's why the very first article in the Charter of Auroville says that Auroville belongs to nobody in particular, it belongs to humanity as a whole. In other words, it was not intended to be a place that is 'owned' by any institution, individual or group, but rather a place which would provide the freedom for a collective growth of consciousness that develops the conditions for divine anarchy.

The problem of 'ownership'

However, the Mother was very conscious that the world was not ready for this, that there are legal realities which could not be ignored, so for practical purposes, such as buying land, she arranged for the Sri Aurobindo Society to legally own Auroville, although this ownership was meant to be only in name. But the will to own and control Auroville proved too strong, and the Government of India had to step in, so to say, to protect the Mother's dream.

— Interview with Dr. Banerji

When the ownership of Auroville shifted, the feeling was that the government would be like a benevolent Big Brother which would keep Mother's dream alive and allow the Aurovilians to develop in the way that they needed to achieve this, while, at the same time, ensuring that no others would claim ownership. For many years, this seemed to be the case.

But we now see a government that has a strong sense of ownership of the cultural identity of India, and, seemingly, also wishes to shape Auroville according to this identity.

Politically, the Auroville Foundation Act of 1988, framed at the conclusion of the conflict of the 70s, seemed to provide a governing structure that empowered the residents of Auroville, but with the current administration's interpretation, the Residents' Assembly has been sidelined in favour of government-appointed persons. This clash of approaches to ownership seems to be at the core of what's happening now. It is a return to a struggle for ownership over a community which has been envisioned to have no ownership.

And ownership of Auroville has suddenly become very attractive. Not only from the viewpoint of consumption with its world cuisine or products and services of the New Age world market, but also Auroville is beginning to look like an experiment that is offering solutions to larger world problems. From this point of view it is a bud ready to bloom, both materially and culturally, offering an attractive prospect for ownership leading to material and ideological exploitation.

Polarising rhetoric

Around this central issue of ownership, there are other oppositions that complicate the polarisation. For example, postcolonial insecurities. You hear this rhetoric repeatedly, that these Westerners are culturally blind towards India, are arrogant and insulting towards its culture.

There are those who claim to know exactly what the Mother wanted for Auroville, quoting texts that they weaponise like commandments. Several of these arguments owe their genesis to the conflict of the 70s that remained unresolved and have re-emerged to group themselves around the central problem of national ownership and identity politics.



Dr Banerji and his students during their visit in August 2023

— Interview with Dr. Banerji

Emerging answers?

Regarding alternative futures, the students see Auroville as fulfilling its purpose by becoming a model town that can solve the problems of humanity through its power of consciousness, for this could be the seed of something that is replicable. Some feel this possibility could only be protected by the kind of federated world union Sri Aurobindo envisaged. But that is a seemingly impractical dream today; the hope for a world union or even a world conscience has never seemed more distant.

Otherwise, they are looking for the answers emerging from Aurovilians themselves. One of these is dependence on the courts. In our times, many hold the judiciary as the last incorruptible institution that may vindicate humanism. We see this here too. Despite recent legal setbacks, a number of people in Auroville are hoping that the judiciary will prove to be its saviour.

Another view they heard repeatedly is the need for faith in the Mother. I think the level of helplessness is very great at present – that's the most tragic aspect of the present situation – but people who were here in the 1970s when Auroville was threatened by the Sri Aurobindo Society felt that Mother acted and saved Auroville then, even though she was no longer in her body, and she will do so again.

The need for a new language

Many of the students, as well as myself, feel that Aurovilians have not developed the ability to express why they are here, what the place is about, and why it is important to the world. This can't be done by simply repeating the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo because that turns it into a mere personality cult and a religion. It has to be done from personal experience through creative expressions of clarity and conviction in various circumstances and to various audiences here and now.

Although many people feel powerless, I believe one has to stand up against the forces which threaten Mother's vision of freedom in Auroville, and find those avenues of power which one can utilise. But to do this while understanding the gravity and complexity of the situation. One is up against an antagonist who seems too big and powerful, a Goliath.

I feel there is a need for a new language to validate as widely as possible the reality of Auroville, and why the Mother has created it. It's very important that more people in the world understand this at this moment both inside and outside Auroville, starting with Aurovilians themselves."

***Abridged from Auroville Today
Issue 410, September 2023***



Countering misleading narratives

2

In June 2023, the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly published its rebuttal to a highly misleading report earlier circulated by AVFO appointees, which contained a number of false 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 looking at the following narratives :

- **Myth: Those 'opposed to development' have never offered alternatives for building the city.**
- **Myth: The 3500 current residents are blocking 46,500 new residents from joining.**

— *Countering misleading narratives*

Myth: Those ‘opposed to development’ have never offered alternatives for building the city.

This is simply untrue. Many planning studies and elegant development proposals have been presented by Auroville's resident experts over the years [see <https://aurorepo.in>].

The community conducted the Dreamweaving collaborative planning process in 2022, which brought together a sizeable group of Auroville architects and urban planning experts to work in collaboration with the Vastu Shilpa Foundation architectural firm (under the guidance of renowned architect Shri B V Doshi). The initiative draws on demonstrated expertise and practical experience in the community in order to integrate the galaxy concept and Master Plan framework in a way that is sensitive to current local conditions and environmental standards. This expert group presented its proposals to the community in April 2023 [see [*Voice of Auroville*, Issue 01](#)], and announced that Vastu Shilpa was committed to going ahead with the design and planning collaboration with the community. However, the Auroville Foundation Office has given no commitment as to whether it will take this forward, and has more generally sidelined proposals by town planners and other experts within and outside the community. Despite this, in



July 2023 the Dreamweaving core team launched a participatory process for holistic planning of Auroville's development [see [*Voice of Auroville*, Issue 03](#)].

In another example, stewards of Darkali's 50-acre forest put forward a detailed proposal that showed how the Foundation's planned Crown route could be slightly adapted by a mere six metres to save 75% of trees (some of them preserved species), and to preserve vital water catchment systems that harvest an estimated four million litres of water per year. This proposal is in line with the National Green Tribunal's directive that the least damaging measures should be used regarding the trees, green areas, water bodies and ecosystems of Darkali. Yet the contested 'Town Development Council' ('ATDC') appointed by the Secretary's Office (AVFO) has ignored this alternative proposal [see [*Voice of Auroville*, Issue 02](#)].

If Auroville is to realise its founder's vision of being "the city the earth needs", the way it develops must be exemplary: collaborative and upholding the community's core value of human unity; following 'best practice' standards of urban development; and implementation that is environmentally conscious and responsive to ground realities and local cultural sensitivities.

— *Countering misleading narratives*

Myth: The 3500 current residents are blocking 46,500 new residents from joining.

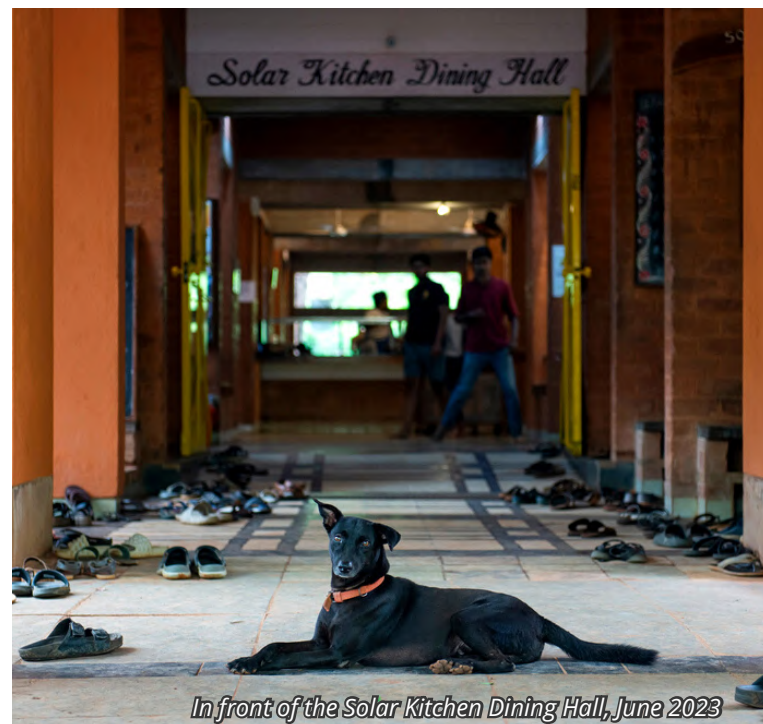
This is again false. In the past 50 years, much hard work has been undertaken by residents to prepare the city to significantly expand. Land consolidation and the scaling up of infrastructure and buildings has taken place when funds were available. Social infrastructure as well as economic and governance systems have been developed so that the community can build its capacity to absorb more members. Over half a century, Auroville's social fabric has depended on sustainable and integrable growth, which has cultivated a sense of family and community spirit. New residents need to be included in a way that reflects the ideals and values of Auroville, not just to fill up a city.

Some argue that the figure of 50,000 inhabitants represents some kind of critical mass below which Auroville's ideals cannot be achieved. But different quotes by the Mother seem to contradict each other - in turn mentioning **up to** 50,000 inhabitants, and saying that the quantity is not important but that a handful of truly dedicated Aurovilians would suffice. Another often-repeated narrative is that the Mother had set a goal of five to ten years for developing the city, but this again is not backed by any evidence and is contradicted by other references.

Auroville does attract many extraordinary people with significant skills and capacities. However, a notable number leave within five years, because of the day-to-day hardships and difficult ground realities, such as a lack of financial resources or housing. These complex issues need to be addressed.

People who join Auroville come not only to help build the city - they come to participate in the individual and collective transformation required to forge human unity and a new way of life. It is essential that new community members understand and contribute to this goal, so that Auroville can be the city the earth needs, through an evolution of human consciousness.

***Voice of Auroville editors,
November 2023***



In front of the Solar Kitchen Dining Hall, June 2023

— Thank you!

Thank you for reading our fourth 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



"Humanity is not the last rung of the terrestrial creation. Evolution continues and man will be surpassed. It is for each individual to know whether he wants to participate in the advent of this new species.

For those who are satisfied with the world as it is, Auroville obviously has no reason to exist."

— The Mother, August 1966



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



WORKING COMMITTEE
of the Residents' Assembly
AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

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