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VOICE OF AUROVILLE

News & Highlights from the Auroville Community



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Cover image: Tree cutting around the Matrimandir, December 2023

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

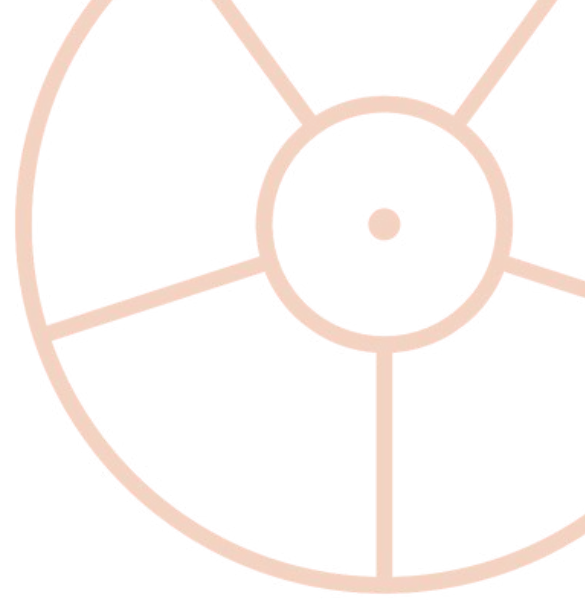
— Introduction

About us

Voice of Auroville is a quarterly 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.



At last a place where...

Auroville:

At last a place where one will be able to think only of the future.

At last a place where one will be able to think only of progressing and transcending oneself.

At last a place where one will be able to live in peace, without conflicts and without rivalries of nations, religions and ambitions.

At last a place where nothing will have the right to impose itself as the exclusive truth.

The Mother,
February 1968



— Introduction

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In this fifth issue, we focus mainly on a summary of **recent events**, along with articles that reflect Auroville's **ongoing challenges**.

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— *Editorial Note*

Grim news from Auroville

Auroville has been built on the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as 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”, based on relationships “of collaboration and real brotherhood” (The Mother, *A Dream*). For over 50 years, this dream has been sustained by its first custodians, the residents of Auroville, together with wellwishers in India and worldwide. Nothing was ever perfect, but one could feel that the dream was alive and slowly taking shape, with trials and errors, with hopes and frustrations, and more importantly - with goodwill. Today, all that Auroville has achieved and stands for is on the brink of destruction.

In recent months, there has been a significant acceleration in the administrative, financial, and ideological takeover of Auroville that began more than two years ago after the appointment of a new Governing Board and its Secretary, Dr Jayanti Ravi. Considering the magnitude of these developments and the threat they pose



Tree cutting on the planned Radials, January 2024



Tree cutting on the planned Radials, January 2024

to Auroville, the fifth issue of *Voice of Auroville* will exclusively address the ongoing crisis. Although we had intended to highlight Auroville's bioregional accomplishments in this edition, we must instead direct our readers' full attention to the tremendous challenges currently facing our community. What is jeopardised here is not merely the well-being of individuals, but the very existence of Auroville itself.

— *Editorial Note (continued)*

The aggressive takeover of Auroville's governance seeks to nullify the freedom and autonomy required for the project to experiment and develop in accordance with its original purpose. The privatisation of Auroville and the abusive cutting of budgets and funds is undermining the spirit of service and self-offering that was so precious. The imposition of wide concreted roads and high-density concrete buildings contravenes Auroville's commitment to sustainable development and ecological restoration. The commercialisation of spirituality indicates a shift from the experimental aspect of Auroville, moving away from its collective dimension, to the benefit of a 'spirituality' based on appearances and words more than on shared lived experiences. All of this - together with the active threat of Auroville being appropriated by private and financial interests - is causing irreversible damage to the social fabric and physical landscape of Auroville.

Quoting from a recent letter of two International Advisory Council members, and endorsed by eight eminent international personalities:

"Abandoning the Charter, issuing unilateral and arbitrary diktats, brushing aside all advice received, indulging in opaque and unethical practices, will certainly not create the Auroville of Mother's dreams. Auroville was not intended to become a real estate project with the appearance of a regimented 'spiritual' community."

Despite the chaos and destruction that has been imposed onto Auroville for more than two years, the community perseveres. Residents continue to stand for Auroville's experimental, universal and pioneering aspects. But, to stand a chance, the support of all - whether in India or abroad - is needed. Auroville is a collective adventure that can only unfold through joint efforts and consolidated actions, united by the same aspiration. The Mother once said: *"I know that Auroville WILL be"*. This is what many Aurovilians cling to, in these challenging times.

Please, join us in collectively protecting the 'City the Earth Needs'. We need your presence and support. You can learn more about how to help on the last page of this edition.

***Voice of Auroville editors,
February 2024***



Collective meditation at Tibetan Pavilion, 31st December 2023



Current Crisis

Clearing at Revelation forest sanctuary, December 2023

Summary of events Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

The aggressive takeover of Auroville - which started more than two years ago after the appointment of a new Governing Board and its Secretary, Dr Jayanti Ravi - has intensified in the last few months. Previous issues of Voice of Auroville have covered these events up until October 2023, a summary of which can be found here:

www.auroville.media/crisis.

Recent news from Auroville has been shocking, alarming, and threatens Auroville's existence as a place for

experimentation, dedicated to the growth of human consciousness according to the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The Office of the Secretary to the Governing Board (also called 'Auroville Foundation Office' or **AVFO**) and their appointees have continued to bulldoze Auroville's natural resources and social fabric while appropriating the community's funds and assets and muzzling any objections. Here is an overview of events from November 2023 to January 2024.

Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

Governing Board's takeover of Auroville escalates

The Auroville Foundation is an autonomous body made of three authorities (the Governing Board, the Residents' Assembly and the International Advisory Council) which are meant to work together, in collaboration and mutuality. However, the current Governing Board and its Secretary have been taking over all aspects of Auroville's administration, decision-making and development, ignoring voices of the Residents' Assembly and International Advisory Council, and seizing control of functions far beyond its mandate.

Taking control over who joins Auroville, and who should leave

One such change pertains to the admission of new people into Auroville and the exit process for residents to be asked to leave. Until now, these matters were handled by committees constituted by the Residents' Assembly. Indeed, the Auroville Foundation Act of 1988 clearly stipulates that allowing admission and termination of Auroville residents is a responsibility of the Residents' Assembly.

Moreover, the Mother had clearly stated in 1971 that "only those who have resolved to stay in Auroville for good have the right to intervene in its organisation". Bypassing this law that was unanimously voted by the Parliament of India, and ignoring Mother's guidelines, the Governing Board has published in the Gazette of India a new set of Regulations pertaining to Admissions & Terminations, without any consultation with the Residents' Assembly.

According to these December 2023 Regulations, all matters relating to admissions in Auroville and the termination of Auroville residents would be dealt with by a new "scrutinising" committee of 5 members, appointed by the Governing Board. Only two members of this committee need to be Auroville residents, other positions likely being filled by officers nominated by the Governing Board. This new committee's responsibilities would extend not only to Aurovilians and Newcomers, but also to volunteers visiting Auroville for a shorter duration.



Chairman, Secretary and member of the Governing Board, 10th August 2022

— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024



Clearing at Revelation Forest sanctuary, December 2023

The Governing Board, by publishing these new Regulations, grants itself the exclusive right to decide who is allowed to live in Auroville, and also who should be removed from Auroville. Based on the AVFO's track record over the last two years (Those who do not align with it are regularly harassed through refusal of visas, fabricated police complaints, repeated account audits, or loss of housing and monthly stipends), the implication is that all those who express disagreement with the current administration will sooner or later be expelled from Auroville, and new residents whose views or interests are aligned with the current administrative culture will become fast-tracked Aurovilians. This would undoubtedly imperil Auroville's sociocultural diversity and the free expression of wide-ranging perspectives.

Shortly after these Regulations were published, the Residents' Assembly resolved to refuse these new Regulations as they are inconsistent with the Auroville Foundation Act and are an overreach of powers by the Governing Board. Nonetheless, the AVFO locked the offices and blocked online accounts and files of the existing community-appointed Entry Service and Board (operational for over 35 years). The Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly and other Auroville residents approached the Madras High Court, seeking to uphold residents' rights in deciding matters related to admission and termination. The cases were admitted by the court; hearings on these new matters are currently ongoing and a judgement is hoped for soon.



Breaking News: On 23rd February, the Madras High Court passed an interim order to 'stay' the new Regulations, which means they cannot be applied, and everyone must await the final court judgement. This is expected in the coming weeks. The stay also applies to the new Working Committee regulations (see page 8).



General Meeting at Kalabhumi, January 2024

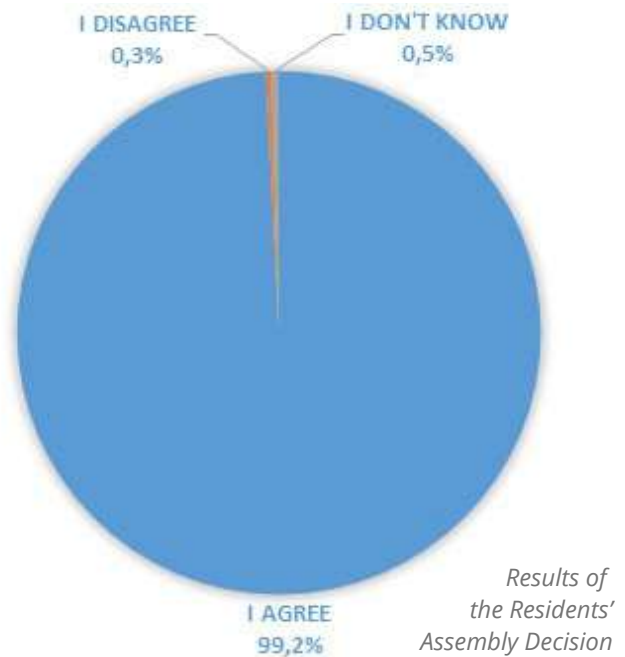
— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

Silencing and controlling representatives of the Auroville residents

Over the past two years, the AVFO has flagrantly exceeded its authority by creating its own parallel groups to replace all of the Residents' Assembly's important committees.

Residents and their Working Committee have approached the Madras High Court in an effort to affirm the legitimacy of resident-appointed committees, such as the statutorily elected Working Committee whose mandate is to represent the voice and interests of the Residents' Assembly.

While the matter is still in the Courts, the Governing Board gazetted in January 2024 a new set of Regulations, giving itself the full authority over the Selection of the Working Committee. These new Regulations, if applied, would effectively and permanently silence the voice of the Residents' Assembly. Auroville's residents are profoundly distressed, as these new Regulations appear to contradict and contravene the spirit and letter of the Auroville Foundation Act, which was in itself crafted to protect residents' freedom to participate in the management of Auroville, and to legally enshrine the Auroville Charter.



The Act states, in its Section 20:

“(2) The Working Committee shall consist of not more than seven members to be chosen by the Residents' Assembly from among themselves.

(3) The manner of choosing the members of the Working Committee and their term of office shall be such as may be decided by the Residents' Assembly.”

Auroville Foundation Act, 1988

The Residents' Assembly has formally rejected these new Regulations and restated its role in appointing its own representatives. The Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly also approached the courts to uphold the Residents' Assembly's decision and right to appoint its own representatives, as per the Auroville Foundation Act.

— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

Gaining full control over Auroville's assets and housing

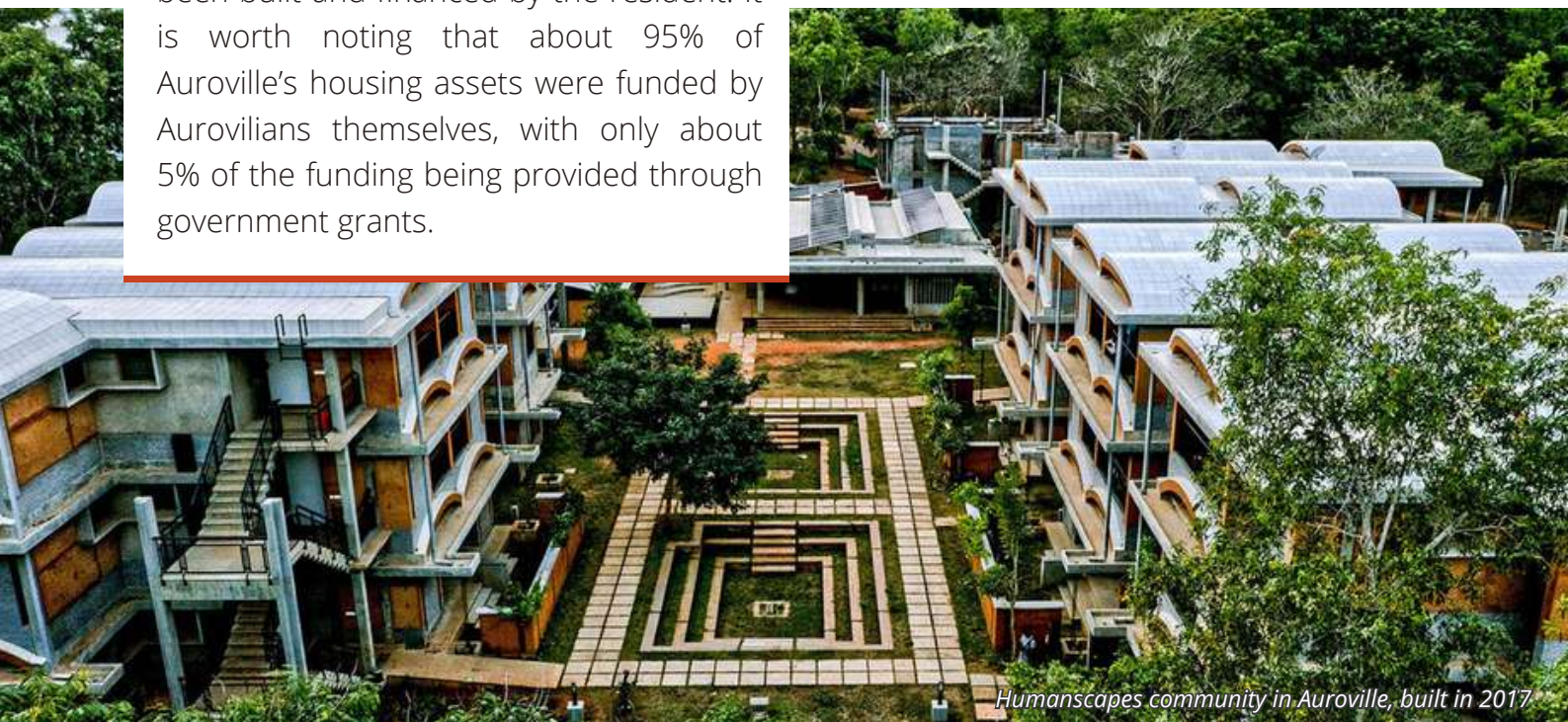
The AVFO's takeover of all matters related to the physical development of Auroville, as well as the management of all its funds, budgets, housing and communal assets, has now been taken to a new level. This includes a new Housing Policy approved by the Governing Board in December 2023. This new policy, written and approved without the knowledge, consent or participation of the Residents' Assembly, is another attempt to grab, appropriate and repurpose the assets built by Aurovilians and well-wishers through decades of work and dedication.

According to this new policy, appointees of the Governing Board can ask Aurovilians to leave the assets they live in with zero due process, even when these assets have been built and financed by the resident. It is worth noting that about 95% of Auroville's housing assets were funded by Aurovilians themselves, with only about 5% of the funding being provided through government grants.

More shocking plans for the future

With so many vital aspects of Auroville under attack and a barrage of new measures and policy announcements by the AVFO, this section lists just a few of the many concerns in a constantly shifting landscape.

After nearly a year of information blackout, the minutes of four Governing Board meetings were finally made available due to Right to Information legal requests. These meeting minutes list a series of shocking *fait accompli* actions and future plans, such as the Governing Board's project to erect a barbed-wire fence around Auroville's city centre which would separate the city from its Greenbelt, neighbours and bioregion. The meeting minutes also feature plans to allocate



Humanscapes community in Auroville, built in 2017

— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024



Tree cutting along the Crown road, 4th January 2024

some Auroville land and assets to external institutions, transforming Auroville into an institutional and income-generating campus in the hands of private interests.

Recent meeting minutes of the Governing Board's Finance Committee have also been published. These minutes mention a loan of 132.1 crores (15.8 million USD) for housing development in Auroville, which would need to be repaid with interest "by future residents of Auroville through their monthly maintenance scheme". No calculations are mentioned to explain how future residents should manage to both survive on a monthly maintenance (a modest stipend) and also repay a massive community loan. Nor do the minutes mention any discussion of the possible consequences if future residents are unable to repay this loan or what collateral will be or has been offered for the loan.

Disposing of outlying Auroville lands at massive loss

The considerable patchwork of Auroville lands has been purchased over decades. Residents and wellwishers worldwide have donated their personal funds to acquire small and large land parcels in the Master Plan area. Other parcels of land, outside of the Master Plan area, had been bought earlier by devotees, following the initial much larger plan given by the Mother, and have been an integral part of Auroville in many significant aspects.

Today, the Auroville Foundation owns about 3400 acres of land, over 900 of which are located outside of the Master Plan area. The land parcels within Auroville's city centre and greenbelt are far from consolidated, and land values have also skyrocketed due to speculators. Still, Auroville has been able to steadily increase its land holdings through the generosity of private donors. To be clear, no government has ever provided funds for land purchase.



House in AuroOrchard (Auroville's oldest organic farm) located on a recently exchanged parcel of land, November 2023

— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

Recently, under the rationale of consolidating lands within Auroville's city centre, the AVFO started exchanging outlying lands that belong to Auroville. However these exchanges took place in an opaque manner, at highly unfavourable rates, without consulting the Aurovilians living or working on the land, or the Residents' Assembly. Auroville has incurred huge financial losses as a result.

Let's take a couple of examples.



AuroOrchard is the oldest and one of the most productive organic farms of Auroville. Purchased, named and blessed by the Mother herself in 1966, AuroOrchard has always served its explicit purpose: that of growing food for Auroville. However, in November 2023, 10 acres of the farm - including much of its vital infrastructure and the residence of two Aurovilians - were given by the AVFO to a land speculator in exchange for some of his dispersed plots in Auroville's city and greenbelt areas.

AuroOrchard's steward, who was appointed by the Mother in 1969, and the team of Aurovilians working on the farm were not informed and only found out the extent of the exchange when the new owners began clearing and fencing the area. Furthermore, the current value of the land acquired by Auroville through this exchange is significantly less than that of AuroOrchard's 10 acres, and the loss for Auroville in this exchange alone is valued at 50 to 90 Crore rupees (6 to 10.8 million USD). In December 2023, an additional 2.5 acres of AuroOrchard were given away by the AVFO, and 4 more are now under negotiation - definitively destroying what the farm has achieved and developed over the past 50 years.



Land clearing at AuroOrchard by the new owners, November 2023



In January 2024, Auroville residents and farmers celebrated Pongal under the AuroOrchard Banyan tree, possibly for the last time

— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

Another example is that of **Pebble Garden**. Founded in 1994 by Aurovilians Bernard and Deepika, Pebble Garden is a testament to ecological restoration on previously eroded land, demonstrating the viability of sustainable agriculture without external inputs or hired labour. It features a forest of over 200 indigenous species, endangered tree groves, and a seed conservation garden. Co-founder Deepika Kundaji received the Nari Shakti Puraskar Award in 2018 from the President of India himself; and Bernard founded ARISE, India's first network for organic farming, in 1994, and is widely respected among peers and experts.

Both Deepika and Bernard's achievements have made Pebble Garden a leading example in Tamil Nadu and in India. However, the AVFO negotiated in secrecy to exchange its lands. The planned exchange has not yet been settled, but it is clear that it imperils Pebble Garden's crucial assets, including its main water sources and harvesting ponds.

In both these cases, some of Auroville's exemplary projects and vital assets are under existential threat. These land transactions not only compromise Auroville's central infrastructure but also strike a blow to Auroville's vital efforts towards food security and ecological restoration work. And these may be just the beginning.



Pebble Garden, December 2023



Bernard and Deepika, founders of Pebble Garden



Pebble Garden, 1994

— *Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024*

A document made public via a Right to Information legal proceeding reveals the AVFO's intentions to exchange much of Auroville's outlying lands - which equate to more than 900 acres of Auroville land located outside of the Master Plan area. This includes areas such as Auromodele, the Auroville Health Centre, Quiet Healing Centre, Sri Ma Beach, Eternity Beach, several restaurants and industrial compounds, most of Auroville's farms, Sadhana Forest and many other reforested areas, among others. All these land exchanges incur huge losses to Auroville, which suggests lack of due process, questionable agendas and begs the question: Who is really benefiting?

These land parcels play unique roles in making Auroville a special place, and they all are home to Aurovilians. Without plans to relocate the current inhabitants, it would appear the AVFO has no concern for the well-being of Aurovilians who have spent decades developing and nurturing these sites.

Massive tree clearing following Supreme Court stay

In the last two months, Auroville residents have witnessed unprecedented levels of destruction, particularly tree cutting and land clearing. The speed and scale of the destruction has shocked residents and supporters around the world.

On 13th December 2023, following an appeal by the AVFO, the Supreme Court placed an 'interim stay' on the National Green Tribunal's 2022 verdict. This new decision effectively overturned the National Green Tribunal's previous directive that the AVFO must seek Environmental Clearance and proper township planning before continuing the development of Auroville.



Tree cutting and clearing along a planned Radial road, January 2024

— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

With the previous protections now temporarily removed, it appears that the AVFO is interpreting this most recent verdict as a licence to indiscriminately destroy parts of Auroville and to ignore the need for proper planning and environmental impact assessments – as required by Auroville’s Master Plan. The AVFO’s latest actions also ignore the decision taken by the Residents’ Assembly in January 2022 to pause development on the Crown, Outer Ring Road, and connecting Radials until proper plans are created.

Since 13th December, tree cutting, land clearances and fence removals have taken place in Auroville settlements such as Centre Field, Transition, Revelation, Youth Centre & Bliss, Aurovelo, Anitya, Sve Dame, Samriddhi and the southern Service Node. In some cases, workers did not know where vital community infrastructure lay and damaged important water pipes and telephone/internet cables.

On 4th January, many of the trees lining a 1500 metre stretch of the already built Crown Road were suddenly felled. No prior warning was given and no safety measures were in place. A number of residents narrowly averted accidents as large trees unexpectedly crashed on roads and paths.



“It is with a deep feeling of shock and dismay that we have received the news of the recent unjustified massive tree felling in Auroville ... We believe that this is one action too far against which all Aurovilians, friends of Auroville and also Ecology’s and Nature’s friends must speak out.”

Letter by the **Auroville International Board**, 6th January 2024

There seemed to be no logical reason to remove these trees, which had been planted by Aurofuture, the planning group of Auroville’s Chief Architect Roger Anger, with grants from the European Commission.

No information has been formally shared with Aurovilians about the larger purpose for the widespread and sudden land clearances, although government-employed workers on the ground have stated the intention is to clear space for all of the ‘right of ways’ for the Crown, Outer Ring Road and connecting Radials. This despite much of the necessary land still being privately owned by outsiders and the fact that the plans appear to deviate in many respects from any existing Master Plan for Auroville.



— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024



Tree cutting and land clearing also recently took place at two Auroville farms to make way for a VIP road into Auroville, and an area approximately the size of two football fields has been cleared allegedly for a large visitor car park. The car park and the VIP road are not elements of the Auroville Master Plan.

Despite objections by the Residents' Assembly, by members of the International Advisory Council and by the Auroville International Board, the indiscriminate land clearing and tree cutting continues.

Drastic livelihood cuts continue

At least 170 residents have been affected by the AVFO's sudden cancellation of their already modest monthly stipends. This leaves them unable to cover living costs, and yet they are now also expected to start paying the 3800 rupees monthly city services contribution from their own pockets (even residents who had previously been granted a regular waiver). Budgets for certain services have been cut, even though such budgets have until now been decided by residents and are generated by individual residents' contributions and income-generating units.

For example, changes to educational and cultural budgets for the upcoming financial year mean that a number of people and units working in the field of education, arts and culture will have their budgets and stipends partially or totally cut, and will need to find new sources of funding. Some performance artists were told that their stipends would be cut if they did not commit to performing at Bharat Nivas next year – a venue which has been effectively taken over by the AVFO, and has started to charge an entrance fee to some of its events. The principle of free access to arts and culture, a unique asset of Auroville, is progressively being wiped out.

It now appears that the AVFO appointees will apply this sudden change in policy to all Auroville units and their employees, centralising all stipends and budgets, even

— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

for income-generating units. Such units, which have been self-managed for decades, will most likely now be micromanaged and subjected to further cuts.

This is increasingly worrisome when one observes the way Auroville's funds have been (mis)managed over the past year, with opacity and no accountability. For instance, 100 forest workers have been left without stipends or salaries since June 2023, after the budget supporting Auroville forests was completely slashed by appointees of the AVFO. About 40 Aurovilians and 60 local forest employees were fired en-masse from one day to the next, and left without pay. Additionally, AVFO appointees have refused to pay 'gratuities' to the employees, which has been the Auroville practice after employment is terminated. (A gratuity corresponds to a portion of salary for each year of employment.) The Forest Group has pointed out that the Office's non-payment of the workers is "untenable legally and morally".



An employee working on the Crown road, December 2023

Privatising and outsourcing Auroville's health sector

Recent Governing Board meeting minutes make note of the Board's intention to outsource the management of much of Auroville to private companies and institutions, and to allocate Auroville land and assets to external entities which are unrelated to Auroville. In fact, the AVFO is already moving to outsource Auroville's health sector. On 30th January 2024, the AVFO published on its website a notice inviting private hospitals to share their "expression of interest" in operating and managing a new Auroville hospital. The management would be given to the best bidder, with the purpose "to set up a fully functional allopathic clinic inside Auroville". Alarming, the notice adds that "Auroville will provide a building to run the hospital", and that "the health facility will be set up in the existing building of Auroville and there will be no requirement for construction of any new building for this purpose". It is not mentioned which assets would be repurposed, however sources indicate that some members of existing health facilities - such as Sante and Arka, both dedicated to holistic medical approaches - have already been approached.

This move is the first of its kind to privatise the health sector in Auroville and to outsource activities related to the health of Aurovilians to a private clinic. It is also a move away from integrated health care as is currently offered to Aurovilians seeking a balance between allopathic medicine and holistic approaches.

— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

Transforming Auroville into a site for spiritual tourism

Over the last months, the AVFO has organised a number of large events at Auroville premises without involving the larger community. This includes a week-long 'Shakti Kumbh' - a paid event which appropriates Auroville's spiritual heritage. This also includes a "Spiritual Summit" and a one-week student programme under Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, an official educational curriculum of the Government of India. Earlier in December, Auroville's Savitri Bhavan had covertly hosted an event for a politically-affiliated youth group, raising concerns about threats to Auroville's apolitical nature. In most of these events, 'spiritual' figures unrelated to Auroville and active political personalities were in the list of presenters.

Meanwhile, the Visitors Centre (taken over by the AVFO in April 2023) started distributing new flyers with misleading information to visitors and guests. A new "wildlife" museum in the Bharat Nivas compound presents clay statues of panthers to tourists while the forest habitats of Auroville's diverse living wildlife are being bulldozed and razed. More recently, the Bharat Nivas team announced that a pure silver miniature replica of the recently-inaugurated Sri Ram temple of Ayodhya in northern India would be displayed in the Bharat Nivas compound - the first time a religious icon



"Wildlife" museum in Bharat Nivas, December 2023



Matrimandir viewing point, December 2023

would be publicly displayed in Auroville. This is questionable considering Auroville's explicit intention to be a spiritual but not religious township.

Miscellaneous news

Matrimandir Lake

The digging and construction of the Matrimandir Lake is ongoing (see Voice of Auroville 4 for more information). In response to this, a task force was created to formulate an alternative proposal for the lake that respects the Mother's original statements while maintaining an ecological balance. This proposal is expected soon.

— Summary – Nov 2023 to Jan 2024

Crown Road

The building of the Crown Road has continued at a slow pace, with most efforts invested in undoing existing roads and clearing and felling trees on the Rights of Way. Development contractors are engaged without proper tendering processes. There is no transparency as to who benefits from excavated materials and wood from the thousands of felled trees.

Important documentation

The Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly recently published a report called *[Decades of Dedication by the Auroville Community](#)*, which looks into the development of Auroville's tangible and intangible assets over the years.

It has also released [three dossiers on the ongoing takeover of Auroville](#). These dossiers offer a detailed chronology of events and takeovers that Auroville residents have been faced with since July 2021. These dossiers are: (1) Takeover of Auroville's Internal Governance, (2) Censorship & Takeover of Communication Platforms, and (3) Mismanagement of Auroville Assets & Finances, Natural & Human Resources. They are all available on the www.auroville.media website

***Voice of Auroville editors,
February 2024***



“Given a chance to present my ideas for a sustainable future to a large and distinguished audience during the Blue Planet Prize ceremonies, I pointed to Auroville as one of the most important and inspiring global success stories in ecological and community restoration... In my books and speeches, when I speak of hope for our future on Earth, I always include the story of Auroville.”

David R. Brower, co-founder of the environmental movement, recipient of the Blue Planet Prize, 1997



Service trees blooming on the Crown road, before 2022

— *A cradle for... spiritual tourism?*



Pictures taken in December 2023, on the visitors' new pathway to the Matrimandir



Countering misleading narratives

3

Over the last two years, an increasing number of misleading narratives have been repeated within Auroville and in the media, with the purpose of creating confusion. This section aims to clarify and debunk two of these narratives with facts.

In this issue, we will be looking at the following narratives :

- **Myth: Auroville is a project of the government. It belongs to the government.**
- **Myth: The Residents' Assembly is merely a consultative body; the Governing Board is the supreme authority of Auroville.**

— *Countering misleading narratives*

Myth: Auroville is a project of the government. It belongs to the government.

In recent times, the AVFO and its appointees implied that Auroville is a project of the government of India. This is incorrect. Auroville enjoys a unique status: that of an autonomous foundation created as a protective structure for Auroville as an experimental spiritual township.

While the Foundation is administratively connected to India's Ministry of Education, Auroville's autonomous nature is defined in the intention and content of the Auroville Foundation Act, a law voted by the Indian Parliament in 1988. This Act further recognises the role and responsibility of the community's Residents' Assembly to make decisions related to the day-to-day activities of Auroville. Auroville is deeply grateful for the Government of India's recognition of its autonomy, and the invaluable support it has provided over the years via the Ministry of Education's administrative supervision.

Auroville was established by the Mother in 1968. The township's early pioneers, inspired by the Mother's vision of human unity and 'The City the Earth Needs', toiled under harsh conditions to build shelter and establish some basic infrastructure. Other community needs such as schools, farms and various services were created



Recently, the Secretary has initiated many partnerships on behalf of Auroville without any involvement from the Residents' Assembly

as needed and have been further developed and expanded over time. At that time, Auroville functioned under the auspices of the Sri Aurobindo Society, an organisation affiliated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. The Society, which was then presided over by the Mother, channelled funds provided by donors and bought the early parcels of lands, and so it legally owned the township's assets.

In the mid 1970s, after the Mother's passing, a conflict developed between the Auroville community and the Society concerning the management and direction of Auroville. In order to find a resolution, the Auroville community approached India's Central Government for help. The Central Government recognised the need to provide a long-term legal framework for Auroville. After lengthy legal proceedings throughout the 1980s, the Indian Parliament enacted the Auroville Foundation Act in 1988 with the involvement and support of community members.

— *Countering misleading narratives*

The Act oversaw the creation of the Auroville Foundation, an autonomous body functioning under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. The Act states that the Foundation was established as a new legal entity “with a view to making long-term arrangements for the better management and further development of Auroville in accordance with its original Charter”. Through this Act, the Foundation took over the undertakings of the Society, and Auroville’s assets were vested in the Foundation.

It is important to emphasise that the Indian government has always recognised the autonomous nature of both the Auroville Foundation and its Residents’ Assembly, one of the Foundation’s three authorities together with the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council. Until the appointment of the current Governing Board and its Secretary in 2021, the interaction between these three authorities has been generally one of mutuality, as was the intention.

Introducing the Bill to Parliament in 1988, the then Minister of Human Resource Development, Shri Shiv Shankar, stated that *“the day-to-day activities [of Auroville] will be looked after by the residents through appropriate autonomous arrangements, which will include Residents’ Assembly and its Working Committee. The idea underlying this arrangement is that the residents of Auroville should have autonomy so that activities of Auroville can grow under an atmosphere conducive to harmonious growth.”*

It should be noted that the Government of India has never provided any grants for the purchase of lands for the city or greenbelt areas of Auroville, nor for the Matrimandir. After the passing of the Auroville Foundation Act in 1988, lands continued to be bought with funds donated by Aurovilians and supporters worldwide. Community assets were developed with individuals’ own funds or with the community’s collective fund – which residents have built up through income-generating activities and monthly contributions. Certain grants from the Government of India have been provided for educational purposes and to build specific housing projects and public buildings. This comprises less than 5% of Auroville’s immoveable assets.

In summary, the legal structure of the Auroville Foundation Act was established to protect Auroville and its residents so that this unique experiment in human unity could continue. It emphasises the *autonomy* of Auroville and the Foundation. It never implied government ‘ownership’ of the land or of the entire project of Auroville. Auroville started as and remains a project of the Mother.



Meeting of the Governing Board, December 2023

— *Countering misleading narratives*

Myth: The Residents' Assembly is merely a consultative body; the Governing Board is the supreme authority of Auroville.

An important objective of the Auroville Foundation Act was to ensure, as the Act states, that "the residents of Auroville are allowed freedom to grow and develop activities and institutions for the fulfilment of the aspirations and programmes envisaged in the said Charter of Auroville".

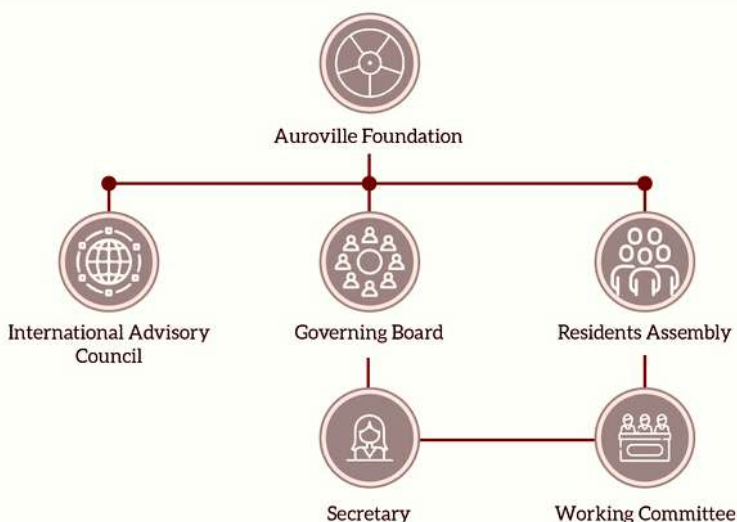
The Act is intended to benefit the residents of Auroville, and to support the activities of the Residents' Assembly in its aspiration towards fulfilling the Charter. The role of the Residents' Assembly is legally enshrined in the Act.

The Auroville Foundation recognises three authorities: the Governing Board; the Residents' Assembly; and the Auroville International Advisory Council. Each has distinct responsibilities and functions and it is expected that all three work in harmony together.

The Governing Board consists of seven Indian citizens nominated by the Government of India based on valuable service they have rendered to Auroville, and their prominence in the fields of education, culture, environment and social service. The responsibility of the Governing Board is to oversee the general affairs of the Auroville Foundation. Its main tasks are to promote the ideals of Auroville, review and approve basic policies and programmes, secure the proper management of properties, prepare the master plan, and coordinate fundraising. These tasks are to be executed in collaboration with the Residents' Assembly.

The International Advisory Council comprises five members also selected by the Government, chosen from people who have rendered valuable service to humanity in the areas of Auroville's ideals. The Council advises the Governing Board in various matters, with the aim to protect the residents' freedom to develop Auroville in line with the Charter.

The Residents' Assembly consists of all the residents of Auroville who are eighteen years of age and above. According to the Act, the Residents' Assembly "shall advise the Governing Board in respect of all activities relating to the residents of Auroville." The Act also states that the residents will look after day-to-day activities through "appropriate autonomous arrangements". The Residents' Assembly is empowered to: establish committees to carry out its functions; allow admission and



— *Countering misleading narratives*

termination of people in the register of residents; formulate the master plan; and make proposals for raising funds. Therefore, the role of the Residents' Assembly is not limited to an advisory capacity.

While the Governing Board may take decisions "in respect of all activities relating to the residents of Auroville", it is required to give due weight to the input of the Residents' Assembly and cannot unreasonably reject this. The Board's decisions must serve the development of Auroville and its residents "in accordance with the original Charter of Auroville" and should advance the ideals for which Auroville was established.

Therefore, the claim that the Residents' Assembly is merely a consultative body is incorrect. The Act explicitly states that the Governing Board does not have supreme authority, and it emphasises the important decision-making and advisory role of the Residents' Assembly.

***Voice of Auroville editors,
February 2024***



"I think this Act has very unique features, which you will not find in any act in the country. If you read between the lines, you will find that the whole Act is so formulated that it would facilitate what Mother had called 'divine anarchy'. ... If therefore you have an Act in which the individuals constituting the totality have the freedom to grow, and if it is laid down in the Act itself that this freedom is to be ensured, the residents of Auroville should feel free. And if any attempt is made to curb this freedom, then there is a provision in the Act itself on an authority whose very duty is to advise the Governing Board in such a way that this freedom is not curbed."

Dr Kireet Joshi,
Architect of the Auroville Foundation Act
and ex-Chairman of the Auroville
Foundation, 19th July 2003



— *Open letter*
from the Working Committee

To the Auroville community

Dear friends and members of the Auroville family,

We are very aware that these last weeks and months have been particularly heavy on most, shaking to the core many residents and Auroville well-wishers.

Attacks on the heart of Auroville have intensified, with callous land exchanges, rushed massive clearing and tree cutting, and new regulations which aim to indirectly change the Act by nullifying the role of the Residents' Assembly.

Plans to exchange over 900 acres of Auroville's outlying lands, moves to take full control over who is allowed to be an Aurovilian and who should be removed, more maintenance cuts, the planned installation of a barbed-wire fence around all of Auroville's city center area (which would unfortunately be cutting Auroville off from the local bioregion), and the allocation of land and buildings to external institutions are all changing the original purpose and scope of Auroville as it was envisioned in the Dream of the Mother.

We have reached out many times to the Governing Board across the last two years,



Under the Matrimandir Banyan tree, December 2023

repeatedly proposing our active support and involvement in manifesting a truly collaborative approach for developing Auroville. Sadly, all these attempts have simply been ignored - never has the Governing Board even taken the time to answer or acknowledge a single one of our emails.

Instead, the authoritarian and regimented takeover of Auroville has only intensified, making it utterly clear that for the Governing Board and its Secretary, collaboration and mutuality - in the spirit set forth by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo - were never an intended venture. To face such a brute force of coercion, censorship and falsehood has been increasingly distressing for many, including ourselves.

— *Open letter (continued)*

However, even if the times we are going through are tough and distressing, we have not lost hope. Sometimes, it takes a very little sparkle of light to change the tides. And, undoubtedly, **Auroville is a land of miracles**. Its very existence would seem to many to be an impossibility; yet, with the Mother's force pouring through the hard work of residents and all those who belong to the extended Auroville family, Auroville has taken off and has grown tremendously in the past 50 years. Nothing in Auroville has ever been perfect, but in retrospect one must acknowledge that Auroville has already achieved an impressive number of milestones. Nowhere else in the world has a small township of Auroville's scale realized so much, with people of goodwill from all across India and the globe.

Auroville is a unique place in the world, an unprecedented experiment in human unity, a gem for all of humanity. The path forward is still long, but much distance has already been travelled and **Auroville will not fail**.

We invite everyone to aspire and act with us for a truer and even more luminous Auroville to manifest, with the goodwill, participation and collaboration of all. This goes hand in hand with protecting the beautiful achievements that Auroville has manifested so far. Let us continue to stand for our truths in the face of forces which seek to appropriate, twist and repurpose Auroville for hidden agendas and private interests.

May Auroville continue to shine as a beacon of hope in the sea of transformational struggles that humankind is facing today, all over the planet. The bigger the challenges, the bigger the faith and aspiration we must collectively live up to and embody. Let us continue to dare the Dream - this is also Auroville's true purpose.

And may we always remember Mother's clear, unshakable and powerful words: "**Auroville WILL be.**"

In Faith,

The Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly, 6th February 2024



— *Aspiring for progress, always*



— *How to help?*

Thank you for reading our fifth issue of *Voice of Auroville*. We hope that you found it instructive and a pleasant read, despite the alarming news it covers.

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.



1 Stay updated and well informed

The new administrative regime has invested much of its efforts in **controlling the narrative** by censoring information, publishing oversimplified propaganda through diverse channels and punishing dissenting views. Today more than ever, we are all invited to be discerning and check the credibility of the information we hear and read.

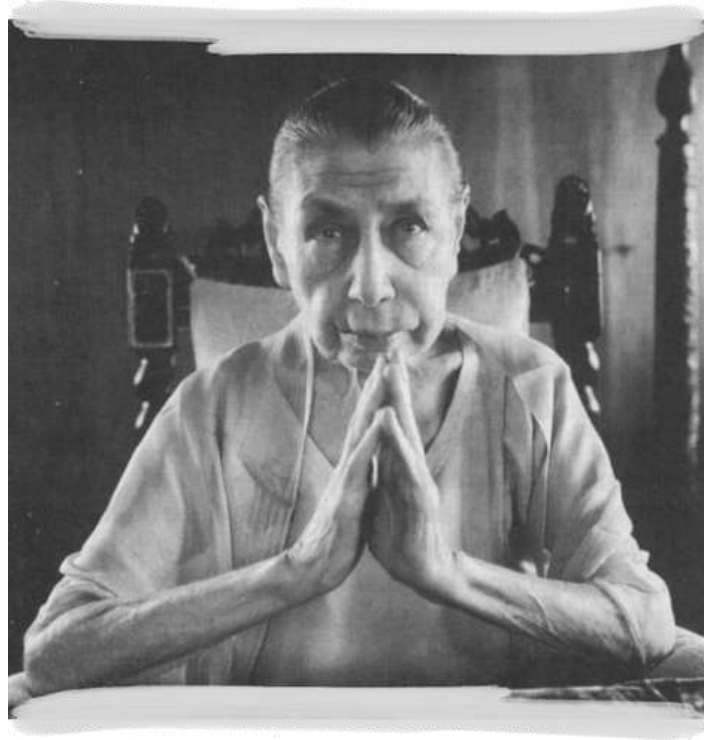
Some reliable and fact-based news sources, other than this journal, include the www.auroville.media website, and a community-led newsletter called "Evolving Galaxy". For more information, contact evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com. To subscribe to *Voice of Auroville*, contact voiceofauroville@auroville.services

2 Spread the word, raise awareness

Share this journal - and other testimonies - with your contacts and friends to make sure the voice of the Aurovilians is not silenced. Everyone should know that Auroville needs help. If you can, reach out to potential change-makers: people with a wide network, journalists, diplomats, artists...

3 Offer your service or financial support

The current struggle for Auroville's survival requires everyone's help and participation. If you are able to offer some of your time and energy, please get in touch with workingcom@auroville.services. If you can offer some financial support to help those whose livelihoods have been impacted by the current crisis, reach out to bcc@auroville.services. Thank you - together we are stronger.



"Organisation is a discipline of action, but for Auroville we aspire to go beyond arbitrary and artificial organisation.

We want an organisation which is the expression of a higher consciousness working to manifest the truth of the future."

– The Mother, February 1969



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



WORKING COMMITTEE
of the Residents' Assembly
AUROVILLE FOUNDATION

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

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VOICE OF AUROVILLE

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