

Two judgements of the Supreme Court of India

On 17 March 2025, the Supreme Court of India delivered two judgements. One was on the appeal of the Auroville Foundation against the verdict of the National Green Tribunal passed in April 2022; the other on the appeal of the Auroville Foundation against the judgement of the Madras High Court of March 2024 regarding the Auroville Town Development Council. [A brief summary of the NGT verdict and the High Court judgement is published on page 3]. Here we publish the responses from the Auroville Foundation and from the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly.



Response from the Auroville Foundation

The Auroville Foundation welcomes the recent landmark judgments delivered by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India on 17th March 2025, which have reinforced the Governing Board's authority to implement Auroville's vision as envisioned by the Mother and approved through a statutory Master Plan, and has clarified the role to be played by the Residents' Assembly. The Auroville Foundation was represented by the Attorney General of India, Mr. R. Venkataramani, Adv. Mr. Vaibhav Venkatesh, the Legal Counsel of the Auroville Foundation, and Adv. Mr. Balaji Srinivasan.

Verdict on Environmental Clearance and the Auroville Master Plan

In the case of The Auroville Foundation vs. Navroz Kersasp Mody & Ors. (C.A. No(s). 5781-5782 of 2022), the Supreme Court:

- Set aside the National Green Tribunal's (NGT) directions that had stalled the construction of Crown Road and other essential infrastructure projects aligned with the Auroville Master Plan.
- Affirmed that the Auroville Master Plan—originally envisioned by the Mother, approved in 2001 by the Governing Board and the Government of India, and notified in 2010—has statutory force and does not require fresh Environmental Clearance (EC).
- Held that the Crown Road and related projects were part of an approved statutory plan and could not be halted by invoking the Precautionary Principle where no substantial question of environmental law was involved.
- Recognized that the area in question (Darkali) was not a forest and did not require clearance under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

Relevant excerpts from the judgement:

Para no. 17 "...it is equally true that while the right to clean environment is a guaranteed fundamental right under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India, the right to development through industrialisation equally claims priority under fundamental rights particularly under Articles 14,19 and 21 of the Constitution of India. There is therefore a need for "Sustainable Development" harmonising and striking a golden balance between the right to development and the right to clean environment."

Para no. 18 "...in the instant case, no substantial question relating to environment had arisen, nor violation of any of the enactments specified in Schedule-I was alleged. The Tribunal therefore had committed gross error in assuming the jurisdiction and giving directions untenable in law."

Para no. 19 "In that view of the matter, the impugned Orders passed by the Tribunal being without jurisdiction and legally untenable deserve to be quashed and set aside, and are hereby set aside."

In summary, the Court's verdict recognises that the Auroville Foundation has been acting fully in accordance with the law and that its development efforts are aligned with a legally approved Master Plan that requires no additional approvals or environmental clearances.

Verdict on Standing Orders and Governing Board's Powers

In a separate case, The Auroville Foundation vs. Natasha Storey (C.A. No. 13651 of 2024), the Supreme Court:

- Set aside the judgment of the Madras High Court that had wrongly invalidated Standing Order No. 01/2022 issued by the Auroville Foundation for reconstituting the Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC).
- Reaffirmed that the Governing Board of Auroville Foundation has full authority under the Auroville Foundation Act, 1988 to constitute and reconstitute committees, including the ATDC, for the efficient implementation of the Master Plan.
- Clarified that the Residents' Assembly's role is advisory in nature and does not extend to claiming a right to nominate members to committees formed by the Governing Board.
- Noted that repeated litigations by certain residents aimed at obstructing Auroville's progress constituted abuse of process, and imposed a ₹50,000 cost on the petitioner for filing a frivolous petition.

In short, the Supreme Court has reaffirmed the supremacy of the Governing Board in overseeing Auroville's development and validated the Standing Order 01/2022 aimed at ensuring smooth implementation of the approved Master Plan.

Relevant excerpts from the judgement:

Para no. 16 "From the conjoint reading of the provisions of the A.F. Act and the said Rules, there remains no shadow of doubt that the Governing Board is vested with all the powers and is empowered to discharge all the functions as may be exercised or discharged by the Foundation, and that the general superintendence, direction and management of the affairs of the Foundation vests in the Governing Board alone."

Para no. 17 "Having regard to the statutory provisions in the Act and the Rules, we are of the opinion that the impugned Standing Order 01.06.2022 containing the Standing Order No. 01/2022 does not suffer from any legal infirmity. There is no legal or statutory right conferred upon the Residents' Assembly or upon an individual resident to be part of any committee/council constituted by the Governing Board in exercise of its powers conferred under Section 11(3), 16(1) and 17(e) of the said Act read with Rule 5(1) and 5(2) of the said Rules. The functions of the Residents' Assembly are confined only to advise the Governing Board in

Response from the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly

Dear Community Members,

The Supreme Court issued, on 17 March, two judgements on appeals made by the Secretary, Auroville Foundation – one against the NGT ruling of 28.04.2022 regarding environmental clearances, and another against the Madras High Court order of 15.03.2024 on the Town Development Council matter.

Regrettably, the Supreme Court has accepted the Auroville Foundation's appeals in both cases. While we acknowledge these decisions, we note with concern several factual inaccuracies in the Supreme Court's considerations.

Nevertheless, we must, for the time being, live with these rulings and find ways forward to safeguard Auroville, its environment, and our community values. New challenges create new situations and we are convinced that out of this apparent setback, we will find the ways and means to generate a better outcome over time.

We have observed misleading newspaper headlines and other communications that attempt to diminish the role of the Residents' Assembly and its statutory prerogatives. It's important to clarify that the Supreme Court has affirmed the Governing Board's right to nominate members to committees constituted under Section 16 of the Auroville Foundation Act (1988), while also acknowledging the RA's right to appoint committees under Section 19. These fundamental principles were not in dispute.

The statutory rights and responsibilities of the Residents' Assembly as outlined in the Auroville Foundation Act and its rules remain intact. What was at stake was the principle of cooperation and mutuality between the Governing Board and the Residents' Assembly that was established by the Madras High Court order of 15 March 2024. While this principle has unfortunately been set aside for now, it cannot be permanently disregarded, as Auroville was always envisioned as a collaborative effort.

We remain committed to working for the best interests of Auroville and its community, respecting both its founding vision and its legal framework.

In Service,

The Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly
Aravinda, Bharathy, Chali, Maël (TOS), Matthieu, Prashant, Valli.

respect of the activities relating to the residents of Auroville and to make recommendations as specified in Section 19 of the Act, and not any further."

Para no. 18. "In that view of the matter, we are of the opinion that the High Court has thoroughly misdirected itself in misinterpreting the provisions of the A.F. Act and in setting aside the impugned Notification containing the Standing Order dated 01.06.2022. The impugned Order being highly erroneous deserves to be set aside, and is hereby set aside."

Para no. 19 "As demonstrated earlier, some disgruntled and discontented residents kept on filing petitions one after the other dragging the Appellant-Foundation into unnecessary litigations. The Writ Petition filed by the respondent before the Supreme Court was one of such ill motivated petitions filed by her to abuse the process of law, to hamper the development of Auroville and to cause obstructions in the smooth functioning of the Governing Board of the Foundation. Hence, the Appeal is allowed with cost of Rs.50,000/- to be deposited by the respondent before the Supreme Court Legal Service Committee within two weeks from today."

Commitment to Auroville's Vision and Growth

The Auroville Foundation remains steadfast in

its commitment to realising the vision of the Mother—establishing a universal township dedicated to human unity. With the Court's endorsement of the Master Plan and the Governing Board's powers, Auroville can now move forward without unnecessary hindrances or legal obstacles.

Way Forward: Implementing Auroville's Vision

Auroville will resume all pending infrastructure projects aligned with the Master Plan, including the Crown Road and related developments. The Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC) will continue its work in line with the reconstituted structure approved by the Governing Board. The Foundation remains committed to ensuring transparency, accountability, and growth while advancing Auroville's mission.

Gratitude and Appeal for Collaboration

All residents and stakeholders are invited to join hands in this journey of growth and progress by supporting all efforts to implement Auroville's vision. Collective cooperation and harmony are essential to fulfilling Auroville's destiny as a beacon of an Actual Human Unity.

Issued by: Sindhuja, AVF Legal Coordinator
Date: 17 March 2025

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Observations on the minutes of the 67th GB meeting

In the previous issue of Auroville Today we published the major considerations and decisions of the Governing Board as reported in the minutes of its 67th Governing Board meeting held in Auroville on 31 May 2024. These minutes were obtained on 3 January 2025 from the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education, in response to a Right to Information request. On 6 March, the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly published its observations on these minutes. Here is a slightly edited version.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

1. GB Agenda not shared. It is regrettable that once again the agenda for a meeting of the Governing Board was not shared beforehand with the Residents' Assembly, which, in the Auroville Foundation Act, has been given the right to be consulted and give advice to the Board on all matters relating to Auroville that now have been decided by the Board.

2. IAC Advice not sought. We also observed that on none of the issues mentioned in these minutes has the Board sought the advice of the Auroville International Advisory Council, which is yet another sign of disrespect for the Auroville Foundation Act.

3. Advice of RA not sought. It appears that the Board only considers issues brought up by the Secretary, who shares with the Board her own views and who tries to create the impression with the Board that there are only a few Aurovilians who object to her actions, which is untrue.

According to Sections 17 and 19 of the AVF Act, the Governing Board has the obligation to consult with and take the advice of the Residents' Assembly on all matters related to residents and activities of Auroville, and therefore it is expected that the Board will invite agenda points from the Residents' Assembly through its selected Working Committee, as was previously the norm.

4. Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly and residents ignored. It is regrettable that the Board has not responded to nor acknowledged any letters or reports sent by us, as the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly chosen as per Section 20 of the Auroville Foundation Act. Neither has there been any response to letters and reports sent to the Board by other residents expressing deep concern about matters such as the land claim by PKS and the many instances of environmental destruction and hurried and haphazard construction of roads.

SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS:

5. Regarding the RTI. We regret that the minutes of this meeting of the Governing Board have only been published by the Auroville Foundation Office on its website in February 2025 and have not been shared with the Auroville residents. We remind the Board and the Secretary of a decision of the Information Commissioner, the authority responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, made in December 2023, that the Auroville Foundation's Central Public Information Officer (CPIO) is obliged to ensure that the Governing Board's minutes are published for the public through the internet, in an easily accessible electronic format and in a timely manner. By not following the instruction from the Information Commissioner, the Board and its Secretary are violating the RTI Act.

6. Secretary's Report. It is noted that the report is not included in the Minutes and has not been shared with the Residents' Assembly or its Working Committee.

7. Status of court cases, pending issues and AVF regulations. Regarding regulations created and approved by the Board, two sets of Regulations have been stayed by the Madras High Court for being of the parent Act. In spite of this, groups have been appointed by the Board under these regulations and these groups are going ahead with functions under the stayed regulations.

8. Zonal development plan for all four zones of Auroville. This plan has not been submitted to the Residents' Assembly or the International Advisory Council for input. It is requested that this is shared with all authorities of the Auroville Foundation.

The Master Plan Perspective 2025 has not gone through the required updating followed by approval from the Residents' Assembly, thus the Zonal Development Plans presented to the Governing Board cannot be implemented.

9. Various observations on Auroville maintenance (financial service). Auroville Maintenance is a unit that manages approximately 4,000 accounts of Aurovilians and 2,000 of various business units. The Board concluded that the Financial Service is not licensed and therefore not

allowed to carry out these operations.

We would like to point out to the Governing Board that the activities of the Financial Service do not fall under the category of banking as envisaged by section 5 (b) of the Banking Regulations Act, 1949. The activities of the Financial Service are limited to the scope of the Auroville Foundation Act and are not extending further. As the Financial Service consolidates funds of individuals and units for the purpose of furthering the objectives of Auroville and for the benefit of Aurovilians, the Financial Service cannot be considered to be a bank.

The Board is evidently unaware that a large part of the monthly income of Auroville comes from interest generated on the deposits of the accounts managed by the Maintenance Fund. Individual Aurovilians do not receive any interest. Transferring the transactions to any outside bank implies the closure of Auroville Maintenance and of the internal accounting systems of Auroville, leading to a substantial loss to Auroville and to much discomfort of the Aurovilians. Moreover it will affect the basic principle of a collective economy for Auroville.

Lastly, the ZOHO accounting system is not suitable for Auroville Maintenance/Financial Service.

10. Setting up of an Integral Medicine Institution and Integration of Medical Facilities in Auroville Foundation. The Board's decision to set up this institute synthesising the Indian system of Medicine with allopathic systems in collaboration with Institutes of National Importance (INIs) such as ITRA and JIPMER ignores that the Auroville population is too small to be of any meaningful importance for these institutions.

The input of Auroville's own medical institutions and experts may be sought before any MoU's with any INI is entered into, and the results of these inputs shared with the Residents' Assembly and IAC. These changes to Auroville's healthcare system could greatly impact the health of all residents, and would thus require a comprehensive sharing of information and consultation with those who will be affected.

11. Important decisions taken by the current Working Committee, Funds and Assets Management Committee and Town Development Council. It is to be noted that these 3 bodies have not been selected or approved by the Residents' Assembly and they have not issued any reports to the community that they are claiming to be serving and representing. Moreover, these undisclosed "important" decisions underlines the need for transparency and comprehensive communication from these groups with those affected.

12. Organogram of the O/o. Secretary, AVF. This organogram by the Secretary, "to channelize and streamline the entire procedures in Auroville for planning, documentation and integration of data, accounting, procurement, visas, farms and administration to function in a more organised manner" has not been shared with the community for its comments. Once again, we see the tendency of the Board and its Secretary to try and run Auroville as a government department, ignoring the authority of the International Advisory Council and the Residents' Assembly.

13. Creation of three posts of Deputy Secretary to facilitate the appointment of officers to handle Administration, Accounts, and Security matters. Concerns over the inordinate number of added personnel within the AVFO have been shared with the Governing Board though no response was received. In parallel, there has been a significant number of layoffs, budget cuts to services and maintenance cuts within Auroville's internal organisation that have been done since the start of this current administration's term, causing great financial hardship to many residents.

14. Approval of the budget for the year 2024-2025 (first quarter). It is noted that this and all other budget requests since 2021 have not been presented to the Residents' Assembly and its groups for input or approval, as was the practice previously.

15. Approval of changes proposed in the Auroville Foundation Act 1988 and Rules 1997. The motivation for this decision ("in the recent court cases filed by the residents, the Foundation faced a pattern of misinterpretations of certain sections of the Act 1988 and the Rules 1997") seems to us incorrect and misleading. It is the Board which

consistently has refused to accept both the judgement of the single justice Quddhose in August 2022 and the equally exemplary judgements of the Chief Justice of the Chennai High Court of September 4th, 2023 and March 15, 2024, which both followed the letter and the spirit of the Auroville Foundation Act. If it is the Board's intention to remove both the International Advisory Council and the Residents' Assembly from the Act, Auroville will be reduced to being a government department and the purpose for which Auroville was created will be destroyed.

It is imperative that the Board seeks the views of the members of the International Advisory Council and of the Residents' Assembly on the recommendations of the Additional Solicitor General of India before taking any decision on proposing any amendments to the Act to the Government of India.

16. Approval of model MOUs with Govt. institutions and private firms. We are very concerned about the Secretary's signing of MoU's without seeking the views of the International Advisory Council and of the Residents' Assembly on any of these.

17. Policy for the Auroville social media. We request the Board to submit the draft of the Auroville Media Policy to the International Advisory Council and the Residents' Assembly for their comments. We are concerned that such a policy might lead to arbitrary censorship and to attempts at censoring or even punishing the authors and editors with disciplinary action, up to expulsion from Auroville, in cases where the content of the media displeases the Governing Board or Secretary.

The Board and Foundation Office's current approach to communication with the Residents' Assembly and IAC, their censoring of internal communication platforms, and provable disinformation to news outlets cultivate a deep distrust for the reasons for such a policy to be made.

Note that this Standing Order for Residence Criteria was created under Regulations that have been stayed by the Madras High Court and therefore is bordering on contempt of the court.

18. Approval for appointment of M/s. MSK Prasanna & Co, Chartered Accountants for Accounting & Allied Services. We are concerned about the motivation of the Board in appointing a new Chartered Accountant and discontinuing the work done by Auroville's in-house accounting units, because they "are managed by Aurovilians all of whom are not professionally qualified, and who have not been in a position to submit the accounts in time to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India and who are also not competent to file all required statutory returns". We question the correctness of this statement and we would like to add that the accounting service of the Auroville Foundation itself has not been up to the required standard and has (also) been instrumental in causing delay in the submission of reports. We further regret that the Board so unceremoniously has discontinued the work of the Chartered Accountants from Pondicherry who have contributed so much to the development of Auroville over the past several decades.

19. Approval for the Establishment of Auroville Physical Education Board. We noted the Board's decision to create the Auroville Physical Education Board and for the approval of the approximate budget of Rs. two crore. These matters fall under the functions of the Residents' Assembly to manage the internal affairs of Auroville. Additionally, we have noted an alarming tendency towards a rigid approach, giving inappropriate emphasis on certification, which is against Mother's philosophy for education as stated in the Dream.

20. Approval for consolidation of Green Belt areas of Auroville. It is noted that the minutes here do not relate to consolidation of the Green Belt area but rather about beach land protection. We welcome the Board's decision to protect the beach guesthouse communities of Gokulam, Samarpan and Rainbow by fencing the Gokulam land and building a compound wall consolidating the three Auroville plots. We request the Board to instruct the Secretary to obtain a study on the possibility to regain the now submerged lands of Repos Beach, which have been lost to the sea. It appears that building a groyne will lead to a substantial beach accretion, and may ultimately lead to Repos Beach being revived.

We also request the Board to instruct the Secretary to protect this Auroville asset. Studies for this project have been made by Auroville experts and NIOT (National Institute of Ocean Technology) and submitted to the Board and Secretary.

21. Status of infrastructure works awarded to Central Public Works Department CPWD. We observe that in general the quality of the work and the processes followed by the CPWD are sub-standard and do not reflect the suggestion of the Board in Item 67.02 regarding 'elegant architectural and structural design' with an eye towards aesthetics.

22. Approval of electrical Master Plan at Auroville. Once again we bring to the Board's attention the limited nature of the Master Plan 2025, the need for its updating, and the Board once again bypassing both the Residents' Assembly and the International Advisory Council.

23. Escalation of cost for the construction of new Town Hall Building. We noted the Board's decision approving the revised Preliminary Estimate of Rs. 777,032,000 for the building of a new Town Hall. We question whether the construction of a large administrative building is a priority in the present context of Auroville's development. We observe that it might be advisable to make an assessment of the foreseen built up area for administrative purposes to make an informed decision about whether or not it is congruent with a city that has a projected population not exceeding 50,000 inhabitants. We agree, however, that if the construction proceeds, the new Town Hall will be one of the most prominent public buildings in Auroville, especially considering its location in the City Centre close to Matrimandir. Therefore, we request the Board to ensure that its design is made by an outstanding Indian or international architect with adequate consultations with the residents and architects in Auroville.

24. Approval of Budget for various projects in Auroville 2024-2025. These projects and the budget to fund them have not been presented to nor approved by the Residents' Assembly or any of its representative working groups, as was the usual practice prior to 2021.

25. Liaison office in Delhi. We noted the Board's decision to establish a Liaison Office of the Auroville Foundation in New Delhi to act as an Auroville Information Centre, and to receive dignitaries and officials from various Ministries and Embassies. We trust that knowledgeable and experienced residents will be invited to participate in creating the material that will be disseminated from this office as well as creating exhibitions and participating in any other events related to Auroville.

26. Land consolidation. In view of recent allegations of lands having been exchanged far below their value and without following proper processes, we question the credibility and integrity of the presentation that is mentioned. We are extremely concerned about the Board's apparently blank permission to the Secretary to sell off or exchange lands outside the city area with lands within the city area in order to consolidate land for the development of the city, without first having a full investigation carried out in regards to these allegations and the realities on the ground.

We would like to request the Board to investigate if the Government of Tamil Nadu cannot apply the Tamil Nadu Land Consolidation Act 2023 to acquire the necessary lands within the city area so that these lands can be obtained through transparent mechanisms.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order to move further along the path towards an 'actual human unity', a primary goal of Auroville as stated in its Charter, there must be an open interaction and harmonious collaboration between the three authorities of the Auroville Foundation. The Board's authoritarian decisions and the Secretary's heavy-handed actions do not contribute to Auroville's well-being or to the realisation of the aims for which Auroville was created and the Foundation Act was promulgated.

We once again call upon the Governing Board to engage in sincere and meaningful dialogue with the working groups selected by the Residents' Assembly, with the wider community and with the International Advisory Council.

Madras High Court upholds Auroville Foundation's land exchange transactions

In March 2024, an Aurovilian filed two writ petitions at the Madras High Court. The first petition prayed the court to restrain the Auroville Foundation from land exchanges without following the procedures laid down in the Auroville Foundation Rules 1997 and the General Financial Rules 2017. In the second writ the petitioner prayed the court to direct the District Registrar to cancel all land exchanges from 2021 till date.

The case took almost a year, with the final hearings being adjourned nine times. The hearings concluded on 27 February and the judgement was delivered on 4 March 2025 by Hon'ble Justice N Anand Venkatesh, who was assigned the case a month earlier, becoming the fourth judge to hear the case.

Justice Venkatesh rejected the prayers of the petitioner because the Auroville Foundation Act as well as the Auroville Foundation Rules 1997 mention the word "sale" and not "exchange" of lands. Sale of land requires the previous sanction of the Central Government if its value is more than Rs 5 lakhs. But this sanction is not applicable in the case of an exchange. Also the General Financial Rules 2017 only mention that Government sanction is required for sales. The judge then examined the communications between the Government of India and the Auroville Foundation and concluded that the transactions had been



conducted under the guidelines provided in the Government of India's Office Memorandum dated 6 November 2023. The judge therefore refused to interfere with the exchange deeds and stated that the land exchanges are "in line with the Auroville Master Plan and that such exchange of lands is well within the powers conferred on the Governing Body".

The judge also did not examine the submission by the petitioner's counsel that valuable lands had been exchanged with third parties who subsequently were able to sell these lands for huge amounts of money. The judgement stated that the Central Government, till date, has not even questioned the exchange of land done by the Auroville Foundation and that therefore, the court, based on the *ipse dixit* of the petitioner, cannot look at the transactions like a Doubting Thomas.

The judge, however, refused to throw out the writ petitions. This had been asked by the legal counsel of the Auroville Foundation, stating that "no one has authorised the petitioner" and that she "approached this Court only with a view to put spokes into the functioning of the Foundation". The court rejected this contention and said:

[...] Ultimately, the Foundation is a Statutory Body under the management of the Central Government and it performs its function with funds allocated by the Central Government. Hence, if any serious complaints are made, this Court cannot shut its eyes and throw out the writ petitions on the technical plea of maintainability. Hence, this Court is not inclined to close these writ petitions on the ground of maintainability.

COURT JUDGEMENTS

Summaries of the verdict of the National Green Tribunal and of the Chennai High Court judgement, both now dismissed by the Supreme Court

The National Green Tribunal verdict and appeal

The Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspective 2025) is a perspective and directional document that was approved in 2001 by the Ministry of Human Resources Development (HRD) – now Ministry of Education (MoE) – and published by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation in the Gazette of India in 2010. It came officially into force on the date of the publication. The Plan states that 5-year development plans and annual plans have to be made. However, these have never materialised.

A critical problem in the envisaged implementation of the Master Plan was that some of the roads and infrastructure were planned in areas where for decades extensive afforestation and green work had been done. For many years there was heated debate and disagreement within the community on whether to adjust the alignment of the roads to preserve the vegetation or not. With the appointment of a new Secretary and a new Governing Board, a major crisis erupted in December 2021 with the forceful execution of development works in some forested areas, in some cases with police and hired enforcers [see *AVToday* # 390, January 2022].

After the Foundation had felled many trees in the Bliss forest area and demolished structures in the Youth Centre for clearing a path for the Crown Road, two residents filed a petition with the Southern Bench of the National Green

Tribunal (NGT) in Chennai. The Tribunal issued an immediate Stay Order on the felling of trees, clearing land and all new development work, and gave its verdict in April 2022. The Bench directed the Auroville Foundation not to fell any more trees for the Crown Road until a Joint Committee, appointed by it, had inspected the area and made a report concerning whether, by reducing the width of the road at suitable places or through a slight realignment, the number of trees to be cut could be minimised in accordance with The Mother's vision of creating a green cover. It also directed the Joint Committee to spell out the way in which the road would have to be constructed without affecting any water body / water flow. The Foundation, moreover, was directed to plant trees in the ratio of 1: 10 for the number of trees to be cut, in order to protect the environment and to maintain the green cover in that area.

The NGT, considering it an exceptional circumstance, granted conditional permission to the Foundation to complete the Crown Road in the remaining stretches where there were no trees and to take action against unauthorised occupations, if any, in accordance with the law, even before obtaining environmental clearance for further activity. But it directed the Foundation to prepare a proper township plan, which would need to outline the locations where the roads would have to be laid, along with their width, and the nature of industries and other activities planned and then apply for Environmental Clearance (EC).

The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation appealed the Tribunal's verdict in the Supreme Court of India, in August 2022. In December 2023, the Supreme Court ordered an Interim Stay to the verdict. Since then, thousands of trees and undergrowth have been cut, including protected species, so as to clear the paths for the Outer Ring Road and the radial roads, even though their locations had not been defined in the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspective 2025).

The Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC) judgement and appeal

According to the Auroville Foundation Act, both the GB and the RA have a role in the preparation and formulation of the Master Plan. A Town Development Council (TDC) was constituted in 2011 for its implementation. The Aurovilian members in the TDC were selected by the Residents' Assembly and their nominations were confirmed by the Governing Board through an office order.

In 2021 the GB issued a Standing Order reconstituting the TDC, renaming it ATDC (the A stands for Auroville) and appointing its members without any consultation with the RA. Two cases were filed in the Madras High Court on this matter. One judgment was in favour of the GB, when the Court sustained the Standing Order on the condition that the Auroville Foundation would issue a corrigendum as to under which provision of the Act the Order had been passed.

Another was in favour of the RA. Both cases were then appealed at the Division Bench of the Madras High Court.

On 15 March 2024, the division bench of the Madras High Court struck down as *ultra vires* and illegal the Standing Order of the GB. The bench judged that the Auroville Foundation Act (Act) entrusts the functions of formulating the Master Plan to the RA and the final preparation and approval thereof to the GB. It also found that the Act does not authorise the GB to constitute committees that have no GB member as committee member. The bench found that the Standing Order enabling the GB or the Secretary to appoint ATDC members, without the nomination/selection emanating from the RA, does not align with the Scheme of the Act, nor with the scheme laid out in the Auroville Master Plan. For the same reason, the court also judged the constitution of the ATDC Advisory Group by the GB as *ultra vires* of the Act. The bench stated that with the Standing Order, the GB had arrogated the entire powers of the RA to itself and had virtually nullified its existence and role vis-à-vis the Master Plan. The bench, while setting aside the Standing Order, stated that it will be open for the GB to frame fresh regulations in tune with the provision of the Act and the observations made in the order of the bench.

The Auroville Foundation appealed the judgement in the Supreme Court of India.

(From *AVToday* issue 418 May, 2024)

REFLECTION

Perspectives on the Auroville Foundation act

As I was looking through the minutes of the last Governing Board meeting regarding proposed changes to the Auroville Foundation Act, I recalled that when the Act was originally being prepared, there were already two different tendencies.

One perspective, represented by Kireet Joshi and, to some extent, Satprem, emphasised not fixing Auroville's evolution into a rigid structure – keeping it open for flexibility. Others, like JRD Tata, Fali Nariman, and Palkhivala, argued that if something is written into law, it must be clear and cannot be left open-ended, as that would invite misuse.

Originally, the Act recognised only the Residents' Assembly. However, a parliamentary secretary questioned what the Residents' Assembly was and insisted that it needed a clearly identifiable group to represent it in Parliament when necessary. To address this, the Governing Board was inserted in between – though its role was never meant to be one of governance in the traditional sense.

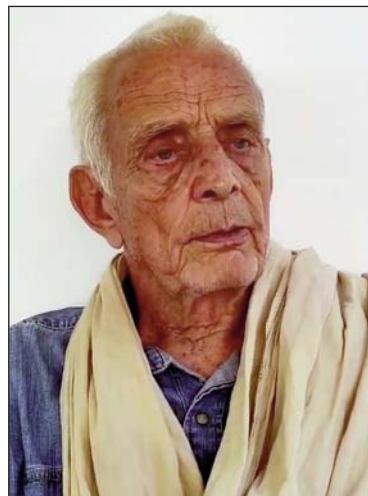
Indira Gandhi, having seen what happened to Shantiniketan when the government took control and turned it into a department, wanted to prevent the same from happening to Auroville. To safeguard its independence, she created the International Advisory Council, which was initially meant to advise the government to ensure Auroville did not become a government-run entity. However, it was not legally possible for an international body to advise the Indian government, so the Council's role was redirected to advising

the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation instead.

Now, looking at these minutes, two major concerns stand out – both of which violate the very spirit and intention of the Act. The two biggest concerns that stand out are the emphasis on "ambiguity" and the push for "strong administration".

At the time, what is now being called ambiguity was actually understood as flexibility – leaving space for Auroville to evolve in its own way, in its own time, in the Grace. The idea was that Auroville would find its own structure as it grew, rather than having one imposed externally. JRD Tata had questioned how the Residents' Assembly would make decisions, warning that if it was left completely open, it might never function effectively. And indeed, over 45–50 years, we have seen how difficult it has been to reach consensus or even a majority decision. But that is precisely the challenge Auroville was meant to take on – a model of collective self-governance that the entire world is struggling to develop.

It is painful to now witness this original openness being reinterpreted in a hostile and anti-spiritual manner, turning the vision of



mutuality – these three bodies working in harmony and with respect for each other – into something seen as a flaw. We can only hope that if any new framework is to be developed, it emerges from within – through the collaboration of Auroville's three constitutional bodies – rather than being imposed from above.

The second major concern is the push for strong administration. This has always been the issue with the Sri Aurobindo Society and the very thing Auroville has fought against – a top-down approach to governance. The signs are clear: selling off land outside Auroville, enforcing a rigid administrative structure, and reshaping Auroville's identity into something that aligns with today's dominant political ideologies. The painful reality is that falsehood is not always the direct opposite of truth. More often, it is the truth – twisted. And that is what we are facing now.

I do not know what the next future for us is. But I do believe that India, at its core, holds the wisdom to recognise Auroville as a gift to the world. If it is allowed to evolve from within – rather than having something imposed from above – Auroville can fulfill the vision it was meant to embody.

Frederick

It Matters

Curating Auroville's creative spirit

It Matters is a space for artists and the community to connect, collaborate, and create. Rooted in Auroville's spirit of exchange, it fosters dialogue and new ideas beyond the local art scene.

Auroville Today: Can we start from the very beginning, at the inception of *It Matters*? How did the idea first come to each of you?

Sandra: While working with the Art Service, I saw the need to promote Auroville's artists more actively. Nicole from the Visitors Centre had long suggested using an upstairs space for art, but no one had taken the lead. Then I met Bhakti, who was developing an artist residency, and we realised Auroville needed a curated platform to represent its artists beyond the community.

Bhakti: With the residency, I wanted to create a space where visiting artists could engage with Auroville through their work. When Nicole suggested I take on her long-standing idea, it felt bigger than anything I had imagined, but I was open to it – to doing it with the right people. That is when I met Sandra and we decided to take on this new adventure together.

We began as an online gallery and shop before securing a physical space, refining our concept by visiting artists' studios. Launching just before COVID, it took two years to shape our vision: not just supporting artists financially but energising Auroville's art scene and creating real connections with the outside world. Unlike existing galleries and art spaces, we aimed to curate and showcase selected artists while staying true to Auroville's values. To expand our reach, we started attending art fairs across India, starting with the India Art Fair in Delhi. That fair is highly commercial, but it was a valuable experience because we met so many people – artists, curators, gallery owners, and collectors.

We also attended the Kochi Biennale, which is much less commercial and more deeply connected to India's artistic soul, with involvement from art schools and experimental projects. That was a fantastic experience. And then there was the Madras Art Weekend as well.

Sandra: The first time we attended the India Art Fair in Delhi, we weren't sure how to introduce ourselves, as we hadn't officially launched our project yet. But I was amazed to discover how many people had already heard of Auroville, wanted to visit, or had been here before. That was my first big surprise – it reassured us that we had a place within this niche.

We don't want to create just another "white cube" gallery. Our vision is something with a sense of humour, something unconventional – yet still deeply rooted in Auroville's values. In many ways, this approach is counterproductive within the commercial art market, but because it's so niche, it's not about being a small fish in a big pond – it's about being in a completely different pond altogether.

And from our conversations in Delhi, we realised that not trying to replicate the existing market was actually a strength.

How did it all come together?

Bhakti: After two years of COVID and developing our project, we finally launched it within Auroville at the Botanical Garden. We had conceived an interactive installation in the large maze, which became the setting for our debut.

That marked the beginning of a series of exhibitions we curated in collaboration with different spaces, since we still didn't have a place of our own. We started online, but then gradually moved into physical exhibitions – one at the Alliance Francaise in Pondicherry, another at Centre d'Art, and our launch at the Botanical Garden. That was 2023.

By the end of that year, we realised that having our own space was essential. It wasn't just about convenience – it made collaborations much easier. And thanks to our networking efforts, we got some collaboration opportunities, but without a dedicated space or budget, there were limitations. That's when we decided to look for a place of our own. And, in many ways, 2024 became the year of opening our space.

Sandra: Yes, and for more than six months, we put enormous effort into making that happen. First, we had to find a space to rent, then prepare it, and finally, bring it to completion. When we first took it on, it was just an open structure – there weren't even doors. Everything had to be done from scratch.

In March 2024, we presented the space to the community during a pre-launch event. The idea was to showcase the empty walls, full of potential, before anything was installed. It was a sort of "mystery opening". Then, our official launch happened in mid-January this year.

A question we get asked a lot, since we now have a space in Kulpalayam is, "Why not in Auroville?" Our original plan was absolutely to be inside Auroville, but we never found a suitable space. Initially, we had our sights set on a space at the Visitors' Centre, but that fell through due to management shifts and changes in their intentions for the area. We explored several other options, but nothing materialised. Meanwhile, we had projects that couldn't move forward due to the lack of a venue for exhibitions and collaborations, so we felt the calling to open something.

Bhakti: Another factor was accessibility. Since Auroville has access restrictions for certain vehicles, it poses challenges for visibility and engagement. That led us to consider a location along the Auroville main road – where there's a natural flow of people – while still being surrounded by other Auroville-based initiatives.

Sandra: When we started looking, we found this large space – much bigger than what we had originally envisioned. At first, we imagined something small and intimate, but this forced us to expand our mindset. Instead of scaling back, we decided to grow into the space, finding new ways to use it.

We split it into two floors: the ground floor would be the gallery and a small boutique, while the first floor needed something more. After a lot of brainstorming, we came up with creative ways to utilise it, including cultural and art-related activities that would also help sustain the cost of such a large venue.

Would you say that has been a success, given the wide variety of activities now taking place?

Bhakti: Absolutely. We've hosted everything from painting classes and expressive therapy to Tai

Bhakti Mills (top) is an Auroville-born graphic designer and curator with a background in visual communication, illustration, and motion design. After studying and working in Paris and Brussels, she co-founded Pouce-pied, a Brussels-based design agency focused on ethical projects. In 2019, she established an artist residency in Auroville to foster creative exchange. She later co-founded *It Matters* in 2021, initially as an online gallery, before expanding it into a physical space in 2024.

Sandra Bauser (below) is an art curator with a background in international law, human rights, and cultural management. She worked in Singapore and pursued studies in art therapy before managing Bruno Gallery, a contemporary art space. After many years, she returned to Auroville where she grew up and co-founded *It Matters*.



Chi, voice healing, research talks, sound baths, dance-related activities, cacao ceremonies, and even laughter yoga. Over the past year, we've explored so many different topics.

In the beginning, we had to actively seek out facilitators, but soon people started approaching us, wanting to offer something. This space naturally evolved into more than just an art gallery – it became a platform for people to share and connect through culture.

The feedback we have been getting has been really encouraging.

As Sandra mentioned, our vision expanded beyond just an art gallery. We now have a shop, workshops, activities, and we're in the process of opening a small café. We're also considering a co-working space, and we offer a photo studio for shoots.

What started as a simple gallery has grown into something much larger – something truly dynamic and evolving.

So far, what have been the positive things, and what have been the challenges?

Bhakti: I would say the positive is that we've managed to set up a place, build up a team, and propose activities. That in itself is a huge success – to have manifested it all, while also adapting and evolving the purpose, vision, and scope of the place as we go.

The challenges would be that there's not yet enough traction – enough people walking in. We don't have the visibility or the steady flow of visitors that would make the space feel bustling and viable. But then again, we just opened. The urgent challenge is that we have high monthly expenses, and sustaining the space is difficult right now, as we self-funded the major part. We did receive a small grant from the FWE (Foundation for World Education), which was a big help, but it's not enough to secure long-term sustainability.

Sandra: Another challenge we face is our status as a commercial unit. While our way of operating is clearly non-profit in spirit, it's difficult to qualify for funding because we are technically categorised as a commercial project. And yet, we do need support. That has been a tricky space to navigate.

We would also need to hire people dedicated to marketing and communication, but at this stage, we don't have the budget. We keep exploring ideas, trying different things, but so far, nothing has consistently generated the revenue we need. We haven't yet found the key to financial sustainability – how to cover our basic expenses so we can fully focus on our core intention: curating exhibitions and setting up a structured annual programme.

We would love to be able to send Auroville artists to other galleries across India, where we've already built relationships and have partners eager to collaborate. Right now, the gallery features a curated selection of artworks, but before we can think about expanding outward, we need to stabilize our own monthly costs.

So you would need external support to take it to the next level?

Bhakti: I think, like with any project, we

need a few years to find our rhythm and adapt to become self-sustaining. But as of now, we only have the budget to keep running things until the end of this financial year, in March.

What would really help is knowing that we can cover our running costs for the next two years. That would require about one lakh per month, meaning we'd need around 20 lakhs in total to secure the project's foundation.

Are you fundraising for that?

Bhakti: Yes, and there are different ways to support us. One way is to buy the art we have on offer from Auroville artists. These pieces are available at *It Matters*, online through our website, or on our Instagram page, where people can contact us directly if they're looking for something specific. By purchasing these artworks, people are not just supporting us but also the artists themselves.

The other way, of course, is through donations.

What has been the motivation that has kept you going through all these years?

Sandra: Everything we've done so far has been out of dedication – it's something we've done from the heart.

Bhakti: Yes, for me, it's the idea that this could really support so many people in Auroville. There are many talented artists here who need help and a platform. But right now, in order to help them, we need help ourselves.

Sandra: Artists often struggle to make a living from their art. My motivation is to promote and develop the arts in Auroville, to spread joy and a love for art, and to foster collaboration – both within Auroville and with the wider world. When we first started speaking to artists, I was surprised by the fact that some artists did not know each other, even within the same community. Networking itself is a key need.

Bhakti: Amid Auroville's uncertainty, launching this project has been seen as something uplifting, and we've poured our energy, time, and personal resources into making it happen. Now, we need a boost to organise our first full exhibition cycle and establish our calendar programme. In some places, cultural initiatives like this receive funding and support, and projects that uplift an entire community of artists deserve the same – Auroville included. What many don't realise is that we're doing this entirely on our own. We planned one year of financial backing but didn't secure the two to three years a project would usually need, which, in a sense, is our weakness but also our strength because otherwise we would have never started. This platform isn't for us; it's for the artists, and with the right support – through donations, art purchases, spreading the word, or simply visiting our website – it can truly take off.

In conversation with Chandra

For more information visit <https://itmatters.auroville.org> or <https://www.instagram.com/auroville.curated>.



The inauguration of *It Matters* on 11-01-2025

Auroville stories 1968 - 2068

On Saturday, 1 March, the community was invited to come to Cinema Paradiso to hear community members telling short stories; transformative memories of the past or hopeful dreams about the future of Auroville. Eleven stories were presented, seven from the past and four imagining a very different future.

The inspirer and coordinator of the exercise was Daniel Greenberg, a frequent visitor and Friend of Auroville with experience of running courses in storytelling.

Auroville Today: Where did the idea come from?

Dan: When I came back in November I felt the heaviness, the depression. As a visitor I have the privilege of being able to come and go and my visa and my living situation are not threatened, so I had the opportunity to connect to the essence of this place, the vision. And I felt that the vision hadn't changed, it still feels inevitable, but I think it's the attachment to form – the trees, the Master Plan etc. – which is keeping us stuck, and maybe we need a little shaking up.

I recognise that such a statement is triggering for some people. After all, I am not suffering as they are, and if I was in their place I would probably be feeling as they do.

So I wondered what I could offer in the present situation. One thing I have done in the past is courses around storytelling, which I've found very useful for freeing up different ways of looking at things. So I thought I could try this here. But it wasn't easy.

Why not?

It was hard to get across to the community what I was trying to do. The first couple of weeks I wondered if anything would happen because I was putting out the invitation for people to come and tell their stories, but nobody was coming.

I learned that it is not in the culture of this place to share personal stories. Also, I wanted to engage students in dreaming about what a fully manifested Auroville would look like, but a teacher told me that they do not want to pull students into the present crisis. But I said it's not about that, it's about what they want Auroville to be.

There's also a lot of self-censorship at the moment because people fear repercussions if they express themselves in public.

I think that's the biggest challenge: there's a lot of fear around. I understand the fear but I also know that that fear is holding us back. In this context, I don't think the present polarisation is around roads or city or forest but because people are feeling constrained, not able to say what they think or do what they feel called to do. My dream for Auroville is that it becomes a place where everyone can do what they feel deeply called to do. This, for me, is divine anarchy.

This is where imagination comes in because I think essentially we always have access to divine anarchy. The image I have is that when we are doing what we are called to do, we become neurons in the heart of Gaia, we become wholly ourselves while serving something larger. For me those are the conditions for building a city that the world needs; that we all have the ability to follow our bliss, to wake up every day and feel what divine anarchy is calling us to do today.

So organising this storytelling was something I felt called to do at this time to help us move forward.

What do you mean by 'storytelling' in this context?

I mean a short, inspirational narrative about an important moment in an individual's past in Auroville or about their vision of a future Auroville.

My original intention was just to put the idea out there and then people who were interested would work out how to take it forward: I would just be part of the team. But I soon realised that those who wanted to participate needed some guidance. For example, some people were so encyclopedic in their knowledge that they found it impossible to cram what they wanted to say into a five minute story. Others didn't want to personalise it but just give a factual chronology of events.

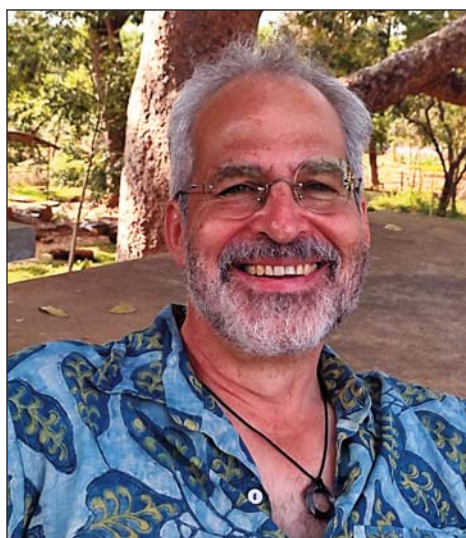
What kind of guidance did you give?

I gave all the participants one page with my best tips for storytelling, about how there should be a beginning, a middle and an end, and how it should be personalised, not just a recitation of events. There was also a section around how to give and receive feedback, for this was another part of the exercise: we worked on each other's stories through giving respectful feedback. As a result, some people reworked their stories three or four times.

Soon we established a routine. For six weeks on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons those who were interested would meet, we would do a little attunement in silence and then see who had a story to share. After that, time was allocated for feedback.

The people who went through this process said it was incredible to be able to share something personal, to listen to other's stories and to be able to give feedback. That alone made the whole thing worthwhile.

I feel that the crisis we are experiencing in Auroville as well as in humanity as a whole is a crisis of imagination because, when it comes to envisioning the future or an alternative way of being, it's very difficult to imagine something very different from what people are experiencing today. Imagination is the ability to step outside of that, it's releasing the attachment to all of that. And my experience is that it is this that actually allows wisdom, the deeper me, to come through. Imagination is opening to a bigger way of being, which, for me, is



Daniel Greenberg

what Auroville is all about.

While the stories from the future were the highlights for many, the personal stories from the past were also appreciated. After the final storytelling presentation, a number of people commented that they had known a particular person for 40 years but had never before known their story.

One thing I missed was a sense of engagement with the present situation, about changes that can

happen now that could lead to a very different future, for the stories we heard were either about the past or about an idealised future.

I don't feel we could have brought the present directly into the stories. I just wanted to see how we could get creative again, and have a little fun, in envisioning our future because I felt we have lost some of that creativity. But I think that in future stories we can also include looking at the present, including honouring the grief, as one of the audience suggested.

However, I do have a story about changes we could make today which could lead to a very different future (see box).

Regarding the present difficulties, I believe that human unity can only happen when we have a collective faith that we all are trying to do the best that we can. And, rather than judging others who are thinking differently from us, we realise that if we had been born and grew up in the same way as they did, we would be thinking and doing the same things as them.

Do you hope that the storytelling will continue?

Very much so. I hope that next year there will be a hundred stories because it is important to honour our history and the reasons why we came to this place, and, even more importantly, to dream into the future to help transform and transcend the present issues.

From an interview by Alan

Dan's story

Back in the mid-2020s, Auroville was like a caterpillar dissolving in our cocoon, unaware of what was to come. Over the next few years, as climate catastrophes became commonplace, as local and global politics grew even worse, and it became clear that AI was coming for ALL our jobs, we more and more realised we were in the painful transition phase, like in birth, just before the impossible becomes inevitable. To create space for the new, we were called over and over again to release all of our attachments ... to our achievements, to our beliefs and to 'being right', to our sense of home and security.

You see, we thought our goal was to build Human Unity and a City the Earth needs, but it was always, really, to heal ourselves. We realised that consciously evolving towards the supramental consciousness actually required us to dig deep into our individual, collective, and ancestral traumas. It required us to expand our compassion and empathy towards each other and ourselves, beyond what we thought was possible.

A big shift started simply – when we separated maintenances from working in units. Some worried that Aurovilians would become lazy, but it turned out, when we didn't have to do anything, everything started to flow. As we surrendered to Divine Anarchy and shed our capitalist baggage of scarcity, exploitation, and separation, we started to follow our bliss and become like cells of a larger body; like neurons in our communal heart. We joyfully planted gardens and forests; we expanded and implemented our vision for the city beyond what anyone dreamed; and, most importantly, we began to really see each other as "spiritual beings having human experiences", which allowed us to all feel safe, significant, and free. And that widened our circle of love to include those who see the world differently... the global movement of change-makers... other species... the oceans and rainforests... the entire planet...

We collectively imagined what we could become and now, in 2060, I feel Auroville as a catalyst of an emerging planetary consciousness. I feel our butterfly emerging. I can feel Gaia awakening.

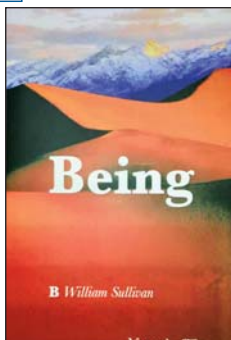
BOOK LAUNCH

On Saturday, 8 March, It Matters hosted a book

launch event. B (Bill Sullivan) was launching his book *Being* which, he explained, is to prepare young children for modern life: "The new ones who are coming now really need to get the best start because the world is in crisis. I wanted to warn them about the road ahead, offer solutions, offer hope that all would be well. Certain things in my life that really impressed me or helped me in some way I put in the book. It's my whole spiritual journey."

Such books are often dry, pedagogical, reading like a Victorian improvement tract, or else they try too hard to be uplifting. *Being* is not like this. It is light, fun, endlessly entertaining. "Wake up and piss boy, San Francisco's on fire," is how B describes his wake-up call, courtesy of a US Army captain. And so he dropped out of university, climbed a mountain, joined a seminary, tried changing the 'corrupt' church, was declared a heretic and finally lodged up in Auroville. Where, of course, his adventures have continued.

The learning from each



we have a choice between living in heaven and living in hell, depending upon how we approach and live our lives. "The startling imperative for me is just to be."

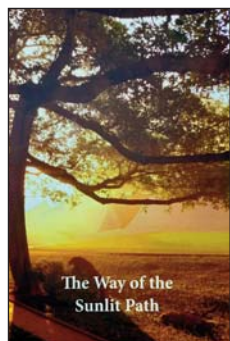
This segues smoothly into the second book he was launching, or re-launching. For the 2nd edition of *The Way of the Sunlit Path* is a compendium of quotes on the path which, he says, is a "neglected and even misunderstood energy in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother". As he puts it, most people do not realise that in this yoga suffering is optional: or, as The Mother put it, "you don't need to suffer; it's not necessary." In fact, she

experience, from each of his adventures – and there are many of them – is summed up in pithy quotes like "Every past can be healed in the present", "You can deliver your own baby", "Rule out the rules". Every day, as he puts it,

revealed she had a sort of 'spiritual ambition' "to bring to the world a sunlit path to eliminate the necessity for struggle and suffering". Satprem had no doubt about the importance of this path: "This sunlit path may be the evolutionary contribution of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother to humanity."

So what is the sunlit path? Sri Aurobindo defined it in these terms: "There is a sunlit path as well as a gloomy one and it is the better of the two – a path in which one goes forward in absolute reliance on the Mother, fearing nothing, sorrowing over nothing. Aspiration is needed but there can be a sunlit aspiration full of light and faith and confidence and joy. If difficulty comes, even that can be faced with a smile."

Alan



Being, 2024, printed in Auroville, India by Nirami Print Studio. Rs 1200 from the It Matters gallery, Auroville. itmatters.auroville.org.in

The Way of the Sunlit Path, 2nd edition 2024, published by Prisma. Available from Visitors Centre bookshop or Prisma, Rs 200

LETTER

Comments on "Time for integration?"

A reader comments on the article *Time for integration?* [AVToday # 427, February 2025] in which Alan interviews Divakar about his recently circulated paper entitled *Auroville and its destinies*.

From what I have read, there is a logical consistency in Divakar's proposal, i.e., having coexisting levels of mindful energy interpenetrating freely in various degrees; each level is functioning differently and each has, I guess, its own individuality. In other words, I find three intermediate stages of development weaving together the many-colored strands of Auroville; each, under different conditions, serves as a platform for the two others and gives new tone to the functioning of the ensemble.

While musing at portraying the entire community stuff and efforts along these lines, I added a time factor to look at the potential effects of the suggested structure. Considering that freedom also refers to a trial-and-error experimentation toward creative advance, have we then compartmentalised our creative evolution and our freedom to act and react? Are we not putting a plurality of individuals interacting upon each other in a conceptual-box channeling the stream of reality into a hierarchy of levels? Just wondering.

Besides I believe that when, owing to a defective organisation, some undreamed internal conflicts occur, it creates a crack of vulnerability at the core of the interacting field of the whole. Obviously, something ought to be done ... ensemble. Yet there is no ready-made solution for a problem of organisation while

resurrecting the past leads nowhere. Hence, we must try to discover what is beyond. But how?

Realistically, the trigger lies dormant within our selves. For, when I look at the cosmic evolution of life, I simply cannot deny that the realm of nature always produces within very life-giving form a formative Idea: an entelechy that guides the gradual development of every particular process over time; some kind of psychic potencies that make possible the sudden appearance of adaptive characters in life's dynamic patterns and moments.

Fine, but how to unleash these latent forces? I think that they require something to call them forth: us. And that is me and you and numerous others: a potent number of forward-looking people awakening to the meaning of our environment and concentrating their full heartfelt attention on a devout call to the 'unmoved mover'; individuals, eager for Light, ready to respond in kind and to adapt to a different way of being under newly arising conditions.

Man is a bridge, not a goal, and I believe that my role, my scaffolding truth, is to conscientiously cross the bridge that will take me to a more limpid space as playground. As for the shape and expression that such concrete flow will take in our cumulative history, let's wait for the momentousness of a thrilling surprise.

The way out is within.

Denis Henley

The Mother: A life of Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual Collaborator

A few weeks ago a new biography of The Mother was published. *The Mother: A Life of Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual Collaborator* is written by Peter Heehs, a reputed historian who has been a researcher in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives for over 50 years, writing biographies of Sri Aurobindo and publishing papers on related topics. This new biography covers familiar ground, but it also includes interesting new information on Mirra Alfassa's (The Mother's birth name) parents and relations and on her artistic career and relationships with artists in late 19th century and early 20th century Paris, all of which situate her very fully in that milieu. There is also fascinating new information on the background of Max Théon and his wife as well as on the fin-de-siècle occult revival movement which had an important influence upon The Mother's early spiritual development, as well as on her life in Japan between 1916 and 1920.

In fact, what the new biography does very well is to create the 'texture' of the different milieus – Paris, Tlemcen, Japan – in which The Mother developed herself and became aware of her spiritual mission. It also touches upon the political pressures, both local and national, which influenced life in the Ashram, and highlights her attention to the daily details of running such an institution even while she continued her groundbreaking spiritual work.

During a recent informal interchange Peter expanded upon why he had written a new biography of The Mother and why he adopted a rather different approach from that of her earlier biographers.

Auroville Today: *There are already a number of biographies of The Mother. Why the need for another?*

Peter: I wouldn't have taken this up if I hadn't been invited to do so in 2020 by the historian Ramachandra Guha, who was starting a series called Indian Lives about extraordinary individuals who had been active in different fields.

Right around this time a few things came together. Firstly the papers of a friend, Francis Bertaud, came to Pondicherry after his unexpected passing. He had spent several years in the Ashram, where he was known as Pushan. While here, and later in France, he did a great deal of research into the Mother's ancestry and early life. In Paris he became close to the Mother's granddaughter, Janine Panier, and she shared some material with him. I helped Pushan sort through his material while he was in Pondicherry and resumed this work after his papers arrived in 2020. I also did a good amount of research on my own both before and after 2020 and wrote a couple of papers about aspects of the Mother's life, in particular about her relationship to Théon and his wife.

For this sort of research, the internet is an invaluable aid. I have a particular interest in late 19th century and early 20th century French art. The Mother was part of that scene so I wanted to situate her more fully in that world. Of course, she wrote about this herself, but a historian cannot be satisfied with just one person's account of

where things stood at that time. One has to go to the sources and many of these are now online. I was able to learn a lot by, for example, searching for references to 'Alfassa' and 'Morisset' on the online site of the French National Library.

Guha's invitation came around the time that I was immersing myself in this new material, and I began to feel it was possible to write a new biography in order to fill in some of the gaps and write something that would do justice to all aspects of The Mother's life.

I had more time for this than I might otherwise have had because the invitation came while Pondicherry was under partial lockdown owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, and I wasn't going to the office as often as usual.

In addition to including new material, did you also wish to present The Mother's life from a rather different standpoint?

Yes. People who write about biography use the terms 'contingent' biography and 'teleological' biography. A teleological biography, which I term an 'omega' biography, views events in a subject's life as inevitable steps leading to a preordained conclusion. A contingent biography, which I term an 'alpha' biography, follows the subject's life from birth to an uncertain outcome. It is more like a diary record of events as they happen, day by day, recording the response of the subject to these events.

All the previous biographies of The Mother that I know of take the 'omega' view, which is viewing all the preceding events in her life as leading inevitably to a certain conclusion: they want the 'achieved' person to be present from the beginning.

Which is what hagiographic accounts tend to do.

Yes. This is not to say that this approach is wrong. It's fine and I have learned a lot from such books. But generally, at least among scholars, this approach is not favoured because obviously you're trying to fit the life into a predetermined pattern, and life is not lived like that. Guha, being a historian, wanted something academic, and this suited me fine because I like to present my research in an academic way. So I adopted the 'alpha' approach in this biography.

This makes sense when writing the biography of an 'ordinary' individual where you can assume that their development was contingent upon events which happened to them. But isn't it different when you are writing about a spiritual figure like The Mother who said, among other things, that she had been doing sadhana in the womb and that she had chosen her parents before conception?

I agree that when you write about a spiritual person it's a lot more difficult because you are dealing with somebody whose consciousness is quite different from ours. This is why the teleological way of looking at things is often favoured in such cases.

However, I write on the assumption that she was not born with a prevision that she would take to the spiritual life, that her sense of spiritual vocation emerged gradually over the course of five decades, and that at every moment she had to deal with the contingencies of a complex life. In choosing this approach I was happy to come across a statement by Sri Aurobindo. He had been asked why a spiritual figure like himself had had to go through all that ordinary stuff, like getting married, and he replied, "Do you think that Buddha or Confucius or myself were born with a prevision that they or I would take to the spiritual life? So long as one is in the ordinary consciousness, one lives the ordinary life – when the awakening and the new consciousness come, one leaves it – nothing puzzling in that."

There are also statements made by him regarding the extreme struggles experienced by himself and The Mother. If everything was preordained, these struggles would not count for anything, and nothing could be learned from them.

Could one combine the 'alpha' and 'omega' viewpoints by saying that the spiritual potential of figures like Sri Aurobindo and The Mother existed from birth but that their understanding of that potential developed through circumstances—like The Mother being given a hint about how to read the Bhagavad Gita, or her contact with the Théons which gave her a new framework to make sense of what she had been experiencing?

Sure. You could say that what Sri Aurobindo was identifying in that quote calls for a kind of 'alpha plus omega' approach to their biographies. In other words, once you get into the higher

consciousness there is a fundamental change in outlook, but while you are approaching it you are approaching it step by step.

So, in figures like this at a certain point the spiritual development is no longer contingent upon outer circumstances?

Yes. When Mirra Alfassa is declared by Sri Aurobindo in 1926 to be 'The Mother' and when he writes the pieces which became the book *The Mother*, most members of the Ashram believed – even though he did not say so directly – that he identified her as the individual Divine Mother who mediated "between the human personality and the divine Nature", as he wrote in the sixth chapter of that book. I discuss this in my biography, then pause to consider how a biographer should deal with this identification. One could view the rest of her life as a seamless manifestation of divinity or one could look at how she continued to deal with the contingencies of life.

It is clear that from that turning point, things have to be viewed in a different way, but as a simple biographer who makes no claim to having any special knowledge of what beings like this are like, it seemed the best course for me to view The Mother's development from 1928 until 1973 as a step-by-step process, basing myself on what documents were available.

Any biographer necessarily shapes the material available on their subject by making decisions about what to highlight and what to ignore. One thing I note in your biography is a certain avoidance of what might be termed the later occult work of The Mother. For example, during your coverage of World War Two, which Sri Aurobindo termed 'The Mother's war', you don't mention The Mother taking on the appearance of the Lord of the Nations to deceive Hitler into attacking Russia.

When you take up the task of writing a biography, you have your own view of things, you have the material and you have the intended readership. All of these influence what you choose to put in the book. Regarding the readership, I would tell the whole story differently, say, to people in the Ashram or Auroville, but this is not the readership the publisher is looking at. They are looking at a wider readership. All this shaped the way I went about my research and presented it.

Regarding the occult, apart from it appealing only to a limited readership, I really don't know how profitable it would be for me, a historian, to talk about that sort of thing. It is quite possible to go overboard when you enter into that area and then you end up, as some biographers have done, pontificating about such things without having any real knowledge about them.

So I think it's good to stick to what is solid – tangible things that people can use in their own lives. In writing this biography I had a rather modest goal. I just wanted to put together authentic material that could fill in the account of what The Mother did and present it in such a way that people could use it to build up their own conception of what she was.

My approach is to keep my own feelings about the subject to myself – to be respectful, fair-minded but not excessively demonstrative. It is not up to me to tell people how they should feel about The Mother. But I can tell them, for example, when she exhibited this painting or met that person or had that spiritual experience – things for which I have the documentation.

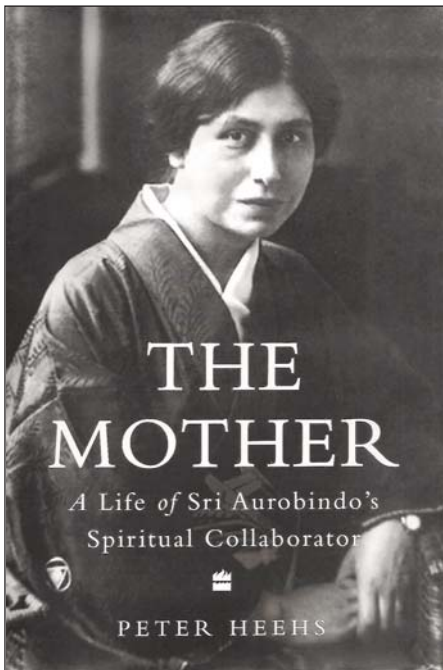
Most 'omega' biographies of The Mother end with statements like she had achieved a supramentalised body, that she would return in this new body and that her death was actually a kind of victory: as one disciple put it, it was a "master-stroke of conquering all while appearing to perish utterly". You do not make any such claim.

Some people may well have had an experience like this. That's okay, but I don't think you can impose it on other people as a 'fact'. For most people things like that are, necessarily, speculative. Everyone is free to speculate, of course, but I tried to stick to what the documents say. One thing that is certain is that she was trying to transform her body in this life and eventually achieve something like 'integral immortality', which was the term she first used in 1904. Sixty-nine years later this was still in the forefront of her consciousness and she was working very hard to achieve it – but what actually happened during the last years of her life is hard for us to determine. People can say they had visions or intuitions about her, and that is fine – for them. People can put together statements that she made and arrive at certain conclusions. That also is fine, but there's really no way to be certain about what actually happened.

However, I think there is quite a lot we can do ourselves which doesn't require us to have exalted notions of what happened. We can keep ourselves busy by contributing to their work and to the aim she set before both the Ashram and Auroville: that of spiritual growth leading in the end to the establishment of an 'ideal society' in which a 'new race' could evolve.

Alan

The Mother: A Life of Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual Collaborator by Peter Heehs. Published by HarperCollins 2025. Available on Amazon.in, around Rs 635.



About the Théons - book extract

“The Mother believed that the Théons' powers were real but she did not think that they had much spiritual value. The most important things she learnt from the teachers were the structure of the human psyche and the presence of the inner divine. The Théons taught that each person is made up of four 'degrees' or levels: The *nervo-physique* or vital-physical (that is, the living body), the *nerveux or vital* (the life-force), the *psychique* or psychic (everything relating to the soul and higher emotions) and the mental (everything relating to the mind). These levels interpenetrate, giving rise to composite levels such as the *degré physico-nerveux* or material vital level I mentioned earlier. Madame Théon had the ability to leave her physical body and entering the vital body, leaving that and entering the next degree, and so forth. She showed Mirra how to do this. Under her guidance, Mirra entered and left her various bodies until she reached the stage the Théons called pathétisme, where she experienced 'complete unity – unity in something that was the essence of Love'. Beyond this level lay the Formless or, in Cosmic-speak, the *Forme sans forme*.

Mirra studied Théon's occult philosophy with great interest. She read his wife's mythology with indulgence. But what truly attracted her to the Cosmic teachings was the idea of the inner divine: 'I was completely against "God"', she explained in 1971. 'The European notion of God was quite repellent to me.' But when Théon showed her how to contact the divine within, she had 'an absolutely convincing experience'. Looking back from the vantage point of 1964, when she had been practising Indian yoga for fifty years, she said that her sessions with Théon marked the start of her 'conscious yoga'. From this point on, she felt she was under the government of her soul or psychic being and her physical body was 'constantly attuned to the Divine Will'."

From Chapter 3, "Cosmic Interlude", p64-65

Born in fire: a residency in wood firing and an exhibition

Founded in 2020, the BORN IN FIRE residency at Phoenix Potteries (Auromodèle) has become an important space for ceramic artists to refine their skills in anagama ('cave' in Japanese, it is a single-chamber, wood-fired kiln, often built into a hillside, known for its unique firing process and the natural ash glazes it produces, creating unpredictable and beautiful results) and wood firing. Now in its fifth edition, the residency provides an opportunity for artists to work with the unpredictable conditions of the anagama kiln, requiring technical adaptability and problem-solving. It serves as a foundation for both emerging and experienced ceramicists, offering a space for learning, exchange, and collaboration.

The residency is directed by Indrani Singh



Cassime, who has built Phoenix Potteries into a centre for ceramic arts and community-building. Co-curated by Russian artist Tania Purans, each edition includes a group of eight Russian ceramicists, alongside an international mix of participants.

Saraswati of HaveFunPottery provides curatorial support. Artists stay and work on-site for nearly two weeks, dedicating themselves to the intensive process of creating and firing their work.

Unlike many funded programmes, BORN IN FIRE is entirely self-sustained. It is rooted in a shared commitment to the craft rather than institutional backing. The focus is on process rather than outcome – on working together, learning from the kiln, and understanding the materials. While each artist brings their own approach, the residency is built on a collective effort to create and exhibit work shaped by the experience of firing together.

The fifth edition of the residency culminated in an exhibition at Savitri Bhavan in March, showcasing the pieces created during the

programme. This exhibition reflected not only the individual skill of each artist but also the shared experience of working with the complexities of wood firing.

Chandra



FOREST EXHIBITION

Mapping Being

It's not easy to describe the emotion felt when stepping into a clearing in the forest, a magical place, perfect for hosting the portraits of 111 Aurovilians who have passed away in recent years. Each portrait is hung at different heights on the thorny trees of the clearing. Each one is illuminated by a small light and faces a central fire. It is only a part of the community, one that can no longer be physically with us but still communicates a sense of belonging to that Auroville that is still alive, yet frozen by the greed for power. It feels good down there.

The installation truly leaves one speechless. This was the most moving piece in a series of artistic works, installations, and perfor-



mances that appeared as if from nowhere in an open space in the middle of the Aurovillian forest, far from bulldozers and political affairs. An open-air gallery that, for a week, hosted about fifteen works created specifically under the theme of *Mapping Being*.

In this exercise of mapping our beings, the artists worked with places, emotions, nature, memory, and imagination. And so, painted coconuts appeared to trace our animal feelings, colourful statistics connecting today's Aurovilians to those of the past, surreal photo montages mapping Auroville's presence in all corners of the world, mushrooms and shiny hearts that grew during the night at

the foot of a tree.

We then encountered the entrance to an underground network that keeps us connected in a subtle dimension; we had our futures read by a group of shamans from distant lands; we felt the possibility of re-harmonising our fragmented world into a single design, and more.

And most importantly, we once again had the chance to immerse ourselves in the forest and follow the traces of our hearts, in a walk that led us to reconnect with nature and its spirit. Along the magical path, two large sculptures awaited us, helping us feel the spirit of the earth, its breath and its power.

That's the Auroville we belong to. Let's forget the rest.



PASSINGS

Daniel Emdin

Daniel of Tanto (Daniel Emdin) left us suddenly on 4 March 2025, due to cardiac arrest. He was 77 years old.

Daniel came to stay in Auroville in 1977, after having visited a few years earlier. At the time he lived at Sri Ma, then called Far Beach. He left in 1981 and returned for good in 2004. From then on he was fully involved in various activities and working groups of Auroville, where he shared his visionary ideas.

Having had experience in France as a correspondent for RFI (Radio France Internationale), Daniel set up, along with Andrea, Auroville Radio (now Auroville Radio TV).

Another of his areas of expertise was managing a pizzeria, and here he showed himself to be a successful entrepreneur, establish-



ing in 2007 a pizza restaurant in Kuilapalayam, called Tanto Pizzeria ('Tanto' meaning 'abundance'), which was one of the first pizzerias in India. Over time, another three Tanto's followed.

He also developed a beach resort in Sri Ma, which is "not a common holiday resort for tourists, but a place for people to meet, learn and relax" as he put it. He always remembered a conversation The Mother had with Satprem on 23 June 1965, as recorded in *Mother's Agenda*, in which she suggested the development of the beach area north of Pondicherry where there could be a "big hotel, the plan of which Roger has already done, a big hotel to receive visitors from outside".

Daniel always emphasised that his motivation for doing business was not to earn money for himself, but as a service to Auroville. He ran the resort in Sri Ma, together with his partner Sheril, with the Auroville economy very much in mind for he felt that the future of Auroville's economy is hospitality connected to education. He thought Sri Ma was the ideal place for this. "What's important is the flow of money – not what you own, but what you let pass through you."

People who knew Daniel found him a person with a big heart, a good friend and a generous spirit. He reserved, in two of his restaurants, one day in the week when Aurovilians could have lunch for half the usual price. This 50% off was to help Aurovilians to get together in a jolly family atmosphere, unlike at meetings or events.

His sudden passing leaves a vacuum in Auroville and in the lives of many, including Sheril and his daughter Lailah.

On the day of his passing, it was announced that the Tanto pizzeria in Kuilapalayam was open as usual, offering the usual 50% discount for Aurovilians. Not closing the restaurant on that day was a fitting tribute to Daniel's memory, for he would have wished it to be like that.

Daniel's body has been taken back to Pisa, in Italy, where he was born, to be buried there according to his last wish.

Auroville Today interviews with Daniel: Developing the Sri Ma resort, AVToday #297, April 2014 The trials of an Auroville entrepreneur, AVToday #400, November 2022

Stephanie Bussman



Stephanie left her body in Frankfurt on the night of Sunday, 10 March, after a long journey battling with her health, surrounded by the love and care of her family. She was 57 years old.

Stephanie dedicated much of her life to Auroville, working with various groups and initiatives. Driven by her deep belief in the power of education, especially for young women, she founded in 2011 the Reach for the Stars programme. This programme aims at giving talented but underprivileged students from the villages surrounding Auroville a scholarship to pursue their dreams of higher education. The funds have consistently been donated by European supporters. The programme continues and has just begun its 14th year.

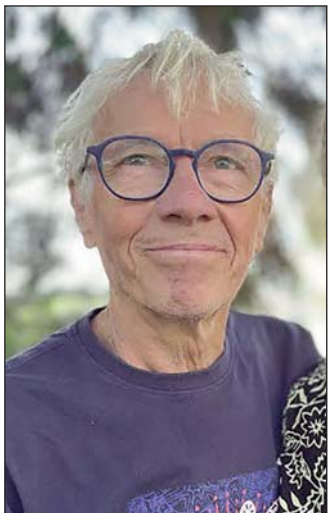
Stephanie had a deep love for the ocean and found joy in surfing. Above all, she was a wonderful mother, an amazing aunt, and a kind soul whose warmth touched many lives.

Jean-Claude Bieri

Jean-Claude Bieri passed away at his home in France, Pyrenees-Orientales, on 11 March. He was 79. He lived with his partner, Marie-Jo, and was the father of two daughters born in Auroville, Hebragui and Mindelai.

We met him in 1967, when we were both landscape decorators in and around Paris. We talked to him about the Auroville project, for which we had just received an invitation to the inauguration. At the beginning of 1969, when we met Vincenzo in Roger Anger's architect office, who was working on the plans and models for Auroville, we became enthusiastic about the idea of a caravan of vehicles to transport people and materials for the establishment of the first Aspiration colony. With Jean-Claude and a small team, we refurbished the second-hand vehicles we had acquired to make them roadworthy, with departure set for 15 August, 1969. In December 1974, he organised a second caravan of cars from France, with around thirty people. A photographic retrospective of the fiftieth anniversary of the event was held last December at the Tibetan Pavilion.

Jean-Claude has invested in Auroville a great deal of time and effort, fulfilling his mission as a pioneer and getting involved in the "Dream". In particular, he has helped Jacques Verre with the technical and electronic realisation of the Kuilapalayam dental clinic. Available to all, Jean-Claude was a good companion, always cheerful and discreet. He was laid to rest on 17 March.



Janaka

Electrical arrears

The Auroville Electrical Service informed the community that the Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (TNPDC) has recently changed Auroville's high tension connection tariff from the existing IIA tariff (meant for places of worship and educational institutions) into tariff V (General Purpose) because Auroville's service connection has a mixed load. TNPDC also sent Auroville an arrears amount notice for Rs. 91.50 lakhs (approximately US \$ 107,000). This amount will be distributed among the consumers connected to the Auroville owned high tension network based on their monthly consumption. On average, the amount payable by each consumer will be thousands of rupees.

Income tax and GST issues

On 21 March, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation called all trustees, executive, managers and accountants of all Auroville units for an urgent meeting at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium to hear about Income Tax (IT) and General Service Tax (GST) issues. A powerpoint presentation was shown which explained the complexities of accounting of the Auroville Foundation and the present problems. The general tax management in India has evolved to become data centric with the Government having wide information and the enforcement of tax laws have become more stringent in the last decade with greater significance on accounting data. Though the Auroville Foundation has been exempted from paying income tax, it currently faces an income tax dispute of Rs. 14.00 crores (approximately US \$ 1.6 million) related to repayment of tax deducted at source (TDS). Also, various trusts of Auroville have faced GST investigations and scrutiny, resulting in a cumulative liability of around Rs. 15.00 crores (approximately US \$ 1.75 million). The reasons for this are lack of clarity and inadequate understanding of regulations leading to inaccurate accounting; not providing timely advice to units when regulatory non-compliances are identified / if identified; and not maintaining sufficient documentation to support representation before GST and Income Tax departments. Gaps in Auroville accounting practices were listed, which have led to questions by from the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, which ultimately audits the accounts of the Auroville Foundation before they are presented to the parliament of India. For these reasons, and others, there is a need for qualified professionals to be deputed as accountants, and Auroville needs to ensure that there is a rotation of accountants and auditors as a matter of good governance process. This has led to a number of policy decisions, such as that audit firms will be rotated periodically to ensure that no audit firm is continuously engaged; accounting support firms will also be periodically rotated; and accounting resources will be developed in-house and provided so that the skill sets of these resources are regularly upgraded.

Chartered accountants changes

Further to the meeting of 21 March, Dr. G. Seetharaman, the Officer on Special Duty of the Auroville Foundation, sent out a mass bulletin informing the community about the changes of Chartered Accountants (CAs) effective 1 April 2025. The existing accountants will do the accounts up to 31st March 2025 and will hand over the accounts to the new accountants. The existing accountants should also hand over the past ten years' accounts backup to the Auroville Foundation and the last one year's backup to the new accountants to migrate March 2025 closing balances to Zoho for the Financial Year 2025–26. They will also support the new accounting firms with respect to compliances like GST, TDS, PF & ESI till 30 June so that the transition happens seamlessly. From 1 April 2025, the trusts cannot engage accountants other than those approved by the Auroville Foundation. Units having individual accountants and not engaging the services of common accounting firms can continue to do so, provided the accountants are capable of handling the accounts in Zoho. These accountants also will work along with their new trust accountants (CA firms), as indicated above, so that compliances can be improved and uniform practices can be established. They can seek guidance from these CA firms whenever required. All other accountants already working with Auroville units, who are eager and willing to work with the CA firms, can approach the accounting firms through FAMC from 24 March 2025. Interviews will be conducted during the week beginning 24 March at the FAMC office to shortlist and onboard these accountants.

IIT Madras Sustainability Campus

An article in the newspaper Business Line of 25 March mentions that the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) is planning to develop a cutting-edge Sustainability Campus on a 100 acre site given to it by Auroville, with 20 acres dedicated to the Centre of Excellence for Zero Emission Trucking (CoEZET). CoEZET will establish a testing and research facility for electric trucks. The objective is to intensify efforts to accelerate India's transition to electric trucking as trucks currently contribute 45% of the country's transport emissions.

Voice of Auroville – issue 08

The Working Committee appointed by the Residents' Assembly (RA WCom) shared with the community the eighth issue of the quarterly journal, Voice of Auroville, which aims to inform well wishers and friends of Auroville across India and the globe on the current unfolding events with factual updates and articles. As with previous issues, this eighth edition focuses on the crisis Auroville is going through, reporting on events between November 2024 through February 2025. People who wish to be added to the subscribers list or be removed from it can email voiceofauroville@auroville.services.

Youth Choir performs



On 29 and 30 March, the Auroville Youth choir gave two well-attended end of season performances of western classical music in CRIPA. The programme featured choral classics, with pieces composed many centuries ago, as well as by contemporary composers.

Concern about bypassing laws

On 19 March, three Residents' Assembly appointed working groups, the RA-WCom, L'Avenir d'Auroville (RA-TDC) and the Auroville Council, sent a joint letter to the Matrimandir Team and the Auroville Town Development Council constituted by the Governing Board, warning about non-compliance consequences with Indian law, which requires obtaining necessary quarrying permits for ordinary earth excavation and approvals and environmental clearances for the creation of water bodies of the magnitude of the Matrimandir Lake. The working groups requested that corrective measures be taken to safeguard the well-being of all stakeholders and restore balance between participatory processes, human development, and the preservation of fauna and flora.

Auroville Cyclothon 2025



The second year version of the Auroville Cyclothon was flagged off on March 2. A total of 294 participants from Auroville, Pondicherry, Chidambaram, Mayiladuthurai, Bangalore, and Chennai had a choice of cycling 100 km, 50 km or 25 km. The Auroville Cyclothon's focus is on joy of cycling inside and around Auroville. For more information visit <https://aurovillecyclothon.com>

ATDC recruits

The Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC) constituted by the Governing Board has advertised for talented and passionate architects and engineers to join its team. The ATDC is looking for individuals who have the ability to prepare working drawings and coordinate with consultants; have excellent design and problem-solving skills with site experience; have the ability to clearly communicate technical information, both verbally and in writing; and who can manage project budgets.

Recruiting for the ATR

The Admissions and Terminations Scrutinising Committee (ATSC) constituted by the Governing Board has called for people to maintain the Admissions and Terminations Registry (ATR). The ATSC members were appointed on the basis of the Admission and Termination Regulations gazetted by the Auroville Foundation on 4 January 2024, which were, however, stayed by the Madras High Court on 23 February 2024. The RA-WCom has sent out a mass bulletin pointing out that both groups are included in the 2023 Admissions and Terminations regulations that have been stayed by the Madras High Court and that, therefore, they do not have any legal validity and that their formation is "bordering on contempt of court".

Secretary meets with residents

On 27 February 2025, at the invitation of Mr. Koshy Varghese, a group of seven residents met with the Secretary, the OSD, Dr. Seetharaman, and the consultant for visa matters, Mr. Koshy. The residents attended in their personal capacity. While the meeting was initially called to discuss the 3 February gathering regarding the PKS case [see AV Today# 428 page 8 Evergreen Land Dispute] the conversation also included various concerns about the AVFO's administration of Auroville. Points raised by the residents included the lack of response to numerous communications sent by the RA WCom and the IAC to the AVFO and GB; concerns about new internal "cumbersome and invasive" visa procedures; issues with linking visa recommendations to payment of "back dues" of what ought to be voluntary BCC contributions; the cutting of maintenances; the removal of competent people from their workplaces without justification; the recent 'Residence Criteria Standing Order'; and concerns about attempts to change the Auroville Foundation Act. Although the Secretary claimed she was open to examining specific visa cases and expressed the need for more regular communication, no concrete promises or actions were made during the meeting. The Secretary did not sign any of the approximately 90 pending visa recommendations while she was present in Auroville.

Reporting arrival and departure dates


The RA-WCom clarified its understanding of whether or not it is required for Aurovilians on a valid Auroville Entry Visa to inform internal groups and/or the RRO/FRRO when leaving or returning to India. Residents were previously asked to fill out departure and arrival forms at the Residents' Service at Town Hall. This was not a legal requirement. It was simply Auroville's internal process of knowing who was out of Auroville and India. The only legal requirement is going through immigration at the airport, upon departure and arrival.

Financial Service operations minimised

B.S. Sathyanarayan, the Accounts Officer of the Auroville Foundation, informed the community on 2 March about the commencement of a centralised common accounting system for the Auroville Foundation, its trusts, units and projects. Changes are to be effected in Auroville's Financial Service (FS) and all Aurovilians are to have bank accounts and hold their money in the bank instead of in the FS account. The FS account will henceforth only be used to the value of maximum two months maintenance per person (e.g. Rs. 40,000) necessary for spending in Auroville so that no cash handling of funds need to happen from the FS. The maintenance which is generally spent within Auroville units only will be credited into the FS account (subject to the limit as earlier indicated) and any amount meant for the Aurovilians to draw cash for use for other purposes will be directly credited to their bank accounts. Banks will setup ATMs in Auroville to provide cash liquidity wherever needed to Aurovilians or others. The FS will continue having community accounts subject to the condition that the total contributions by all members of the community will not exceed Rs. 20 lakhs in a year.

In case of departure

The Working Committee approved by the Governing Board has issued "Procedures and guidelines for the use and allocation of an Auroville residential asset in the case of departure of an Auroville resident from Auroville or the death of an Auroville resident." The document outlines the rights of residents and Newcomers who leave Auroville permanently or for an indefinite period, and the consequences of the approval for their departure or the absence thereof from the HRS (Human Resources Service). Also the consequences of having been asked to leave, following due procedure, have been laid down. The document further specifies what is to be done upon the death of the Auroville resident or Newcomer. In this section the document states that, in case the deceased has not left a will, the Housing Service is authorised to deal or dispose of the moveable assets and personal belongings of the deceased.

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Auroville Today does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.