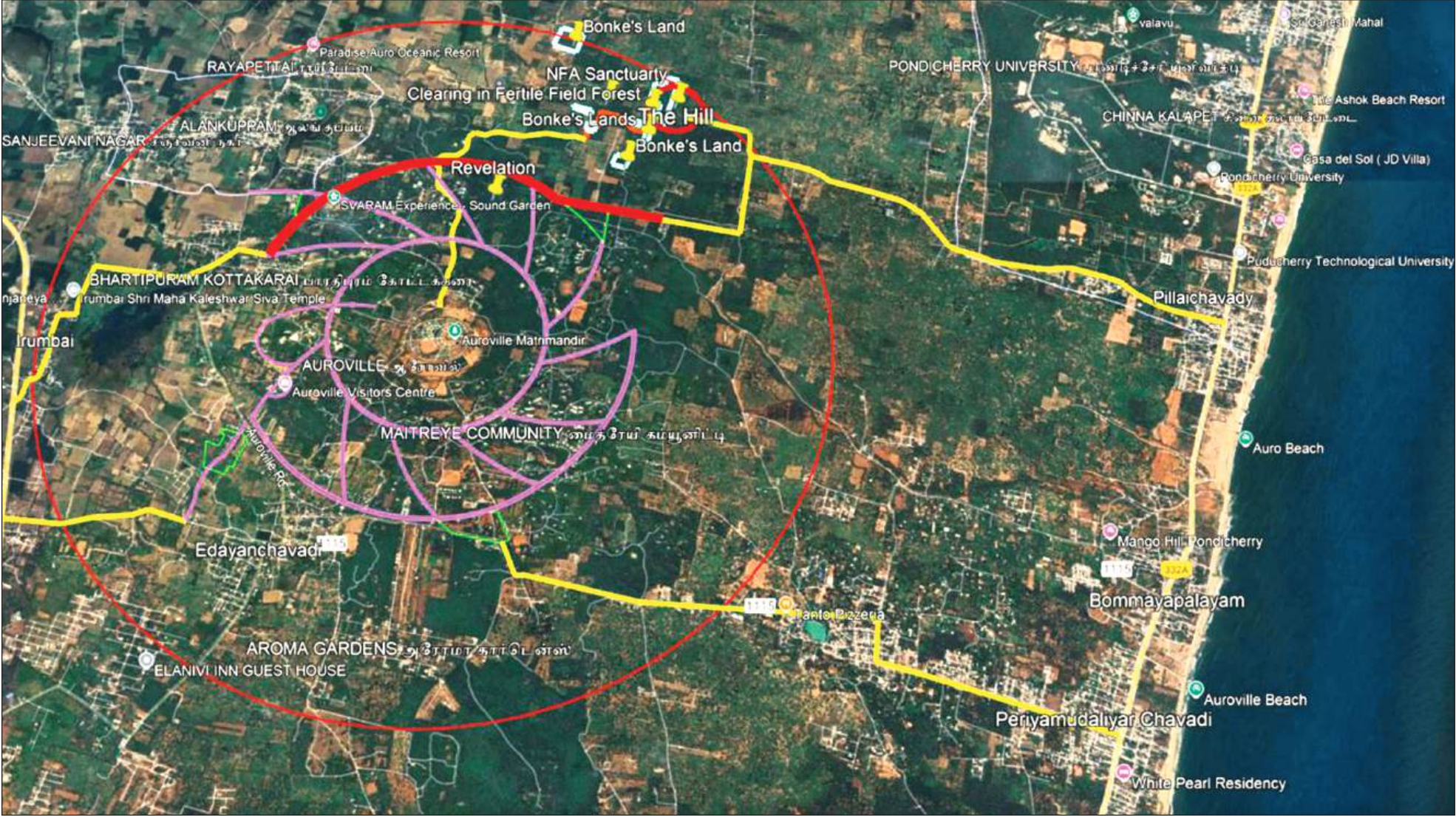


## The bill for the hill



Google map of the Auroville area, overlaid with the Auroville Master Plan outlines. In purple: the City centre. The thin circular red line denotes the border of the Auroville Greenbelt, the thick circular red line a part of the proposed Outer Ring Road. The straight yellow lines indicate existing roads, the winding yellow lines the proposed road through Revelation Forest area.

On 6th January, 2012, Michael Bonke, along with Toine van Megen and Harald Kraft, made a presentation to the Auroville community about Auroville's future energy and drinking water needs [published in AVToday # 271, February 2012]. Michael recalled swimming in a lake in Germany which is part of a pumped storage system. At night, when the electricity tariff is cheaper, water is pumped up to this lake from a lower lake and during the day, when power is expensive, water is returned to the lower lake through a turbine, creating electricity.

Michael pointed out that a way of avoiding power cuts in Auroville would be to duplicate this pumped storage system by building a 30-metre high hill in the greenbelt, about 1 km from Matrimandir, and creating a lake on top with a capacity of 150,000 cubic metres of water. This lake would be connected to the Matrimandir lake which would supply the water for it, and whenever there is a power cut, the water would be fed back downhill through a turbine to provide back-up power to the community.

He reported that calculations showed that the energy storage of such a system would be about 10MWh, or about 25 hours of continuous back-up given the size of the community at that time. However, with a population of 50,000 it would only provide about one hour of back-up, which would mean that more such systems would need to be constructed, possibly using the Matrimandir lake as the higher one to link with newly constructed lakes lower down in the greenbelt.

The hill is projected to be 13 acres at its base, 30 metres tall, with a 200 x 400-metre plateau at the top, and would contain 1 million cubic metres of soil. Michael proposed that the earth from the excavation of the Matrimandir lake would be used to build the hill. "People have expressed concern," he said, "that transporting such a large amount of excavated earth by truck through Auroville would create a lot of dust and aggravation. It is also a very costly option. We plan instead to use conveyor belts to transport the earth from the point of excavation to the site of the hill... If they are situated within the green corridors, there will not be any problem for the Auroville residents." In 2012, Michael hoped that they could begin excavating the lake and building the hill within three years. In actual fact, the excavation of the lake began much later and is still far from complete, and while the excavated earth is being

heaped up on huge hills near the Matrimandir, the construction of the hill has not yet begun. However, a site for the hill in the greenbelt has been identified and a road to it is under construction.

Other changes have also taken place. Recently it was decided that the conveyor belt option was not feasible, so now it seems that something like 1 million cubic metres of excavated soil will need to be transported from the Matrimandir to the site of the hill in the greenbelt through Auroville by many thousands of trucks. Also, the Varuna website now cites three options for how the lake on top of the hill could be linked with the Matrimandir lake, and/or with newly constructed lakes elsewhere.

In 2012, concerns about this mega project were muted, perhaps because it held out the prospect of a back-up power supply to a community which had just experienced widespread disruption to its electricity supply due to cyclone Thane. Also, it was difficult then to imagine the practical impact such a project would have upon the environment and upon our daily lives. Today, however, the mountains of soil surrounding the Matrimandir, the prospect of thousands of trucks transporting it through Auroville, and the fact that yet more trees are being felled in the greenbelt to make a new road to the site of the hill, has led some people to seriously question the wisdom of this project.

One such person is Major Arun Ambathy who, after distinguished service in the Indian Army, became an Auroville greenworker in Revelation forest.

**Auroville Today: What are your concerns about the hill project and associated developments?**

**Arun:** There are many issues. There are social, legal, administrative, ecological, planning and moral aspects, all of which are deeply disturbing. On the social level, this project has run roughshod over the community process. It has never received any larger community approval and it is not mentioned in the 2001 Master Plan, which the current town developers consider as their bible. It has merely received permission from the Foundation Office Town Development Committee, whose legitimacy is still being questioned in the Supreme Court, to construct the hill and make an access road. This sanction makes no mention of tree cutting.

There is no monitoring of the quantity of timber extracted, which includes valuable trees, on the road to the site and on the site of the hill, and we do not know where the timber has gone. The Auroville Foundation is responsible for timber movement, and Michael claims that he received verbal sanction from the Officer on Special Duty for Farms and Forests to cut and remove trees, but nobody has seen anything written from her. Neither the Auroville Forest Group nor the Green Service of the Auroville Foundation was consulted. All this amounts to an administrative bypass.

Moreover, the cutting was not properly supervised. The access road is 24 metres wide in places, wide enough to allow three trucks to pass side by side, while the minimum width is 15 metres. In fact, this access road alone takes up 3 acres of what before was dense forest land.

When the trees were cut, a delegation of RA appointed groups met with Michael and the Matrimandir lake team which is responsible for developing the hill. We wanted to know what was happening and why the road was so wide. However, Michael and the lake team seemed not willing to accept any form of accountability. We were told that this project would have no impact, and that we were paranoid and obstructionist. But it is estimated that 1 million m<sup>3</sup> of soil will be excavated for the lake, and to get this to the site of the hill will require more than 100,000 huge trucks transporting it through Auroville, possibly by day and night. So how can they claim that this project will have no impact?

Then there is the social impact upon the villagers. No mapping has been done of how this hill will affect the surrounding landowners, for 50% of the land around the hill is in private hands. How will its shade affect their crops? How will the cutting of trees, the diversion of the natural water flow and the geological compaction of this new hill affect the underground aquifers? As far as I know, no study has been done to ascertain this.

This touches on the moral issue. What kind of ethical justification does Michael's team have? By creating a dammed lake at Matrimandir and constructing this hill, they are diverting water which would otherwise have flowed partially to the villages and on to village land. Who are they to decide who uses it and how much they can use?

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Another important effect of the hill and Matrimandir lake projects may be its effect on seawater intrusion into the borewells. At present, this is kept at bay because of the infiltration pressure of rainwater from the land. But if you are cutting trees and storing the runoff from the water inside the Crown in the impermeable Matrimandir lake, as is planned, the infiltration which is keeping the seawater at bay is going to get drastically reduced. The rainfall inside this 400 acres is 2 billion litres a year, which will be denied to the villagers and denied to the groundwater.

Moreover, Auroville is about experimentation, but these large-scale interventions in the environment, which are difficult to reverse, rule out much space for further experimentation in the future. Is this fair? Michael and his team want to experiment, and Auroville is for experiments. It is like an insulated 'sandbox' where we can experiment with different financial systems, governance, architecture, etc. This is OK if these experiments are small-scale. But Michael and his team are experimenting on a scale which massively impacts not only the environment but also people's lives.

**But some people argue that Auroville has had over 50 years to experiment and now is the time to build the city.**

The rush of the planners in the Town Hall to complete the city in their lifetime is limiting the ability of future generations of Aurovilians to make their own experiments, while creating huge disharmony in the organisation and governance of Auroville. Is this really the way we want the city to be built?

Then there is the legal aspect. Nowhere in India can you do a project of this scale without any form of Environmental Impact Assessment. The people who are representing town development in the Town Hall seem to believe they can do anything now that there is a stay on the National Green Tribunal order which, among other things, designated the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment on new developments. However, the Supreme Court is still hearing the matter of whether Auroville's planning and development activities should come under the purview of Environmental Impact Assessment or not. They have never stated that Auroville does not need such an assessment.

Moreover, through extensive tree cutting and large-scale lake excavations that are somewhat irreversible in nature, the lake and hill team as well as the Town Hall planners are imposing a *fait accompli* upon the courts of India, not allowing them to adjudicate the matter in a fair manner.

In fact, the ecological impact of this project is potentially the most devastating. To fully develop this hill project, a minimum of 16 acres of land with dense tree cover will likely be bulldozed. Out of these 16 acres, 9 acres have already been cleared. An additional 7 acres will be cleared for the base of the hill as it takes shape. This project will considerably and adversely affect the environment and hydrology of the northern slopes of the Auroville plateau. They have chosen a site for the hill which had dense tree cover with an average canopy height of 12 metres and all this has been cut. Hydrologically this is a very sensitive site. It is on top of a ridge which allows high percolation



**The cleared forest area intended for the hill. "The hill, in providing a wonderful viewpoint of both the Matrimandir and the sea, will encourage real estate speculation and the growth of tourist facilities in the area."**

of rainwater, and it is always better to infiltrate water at the top of the ridge so that it gets distributed equitably, both to Auroville and the surrounding bioregion.

This will not happen here. As Rishi Walker, who has created a sanctuary in this area points out, a hill 30 metres high would result in zero precipitation percolating into the aquifer. The quality and diversity of the vegetation on the steep slopes would be considerably decreased while the overall evaporative surfaces of the land hugely increased. The effects on the surrounding land not belonging to Auroville would also be significant. And Rishi concludes, "Environmentally, this project would be highly destructive and annihilate decades of hard work as well as the manifestation of the land's true potential... There could hardly be a less appropriate place for such an undertaking."

Furthermore, this new road and hill have serious implications for Auroville's consolidation. Half the area around the hill is owned by private parties. The hill, in providing a wonderful viewpoint of both the Matrimandir and the sea, will encourage real estate speculation and the growth of tourist facilities around it. Until recently, this was the only area of the greenbelt where further land consolidation was feasible. As it has no access, land prices are lower than elsewhere. However, the tourist attraction of the hill and the provision of a new road will change all this, for land prices will skyrocket (an Aurovillian who recently sold his land nearby may already be benefitting from this) defeating Auroville's long-term plan to consolidate land in this area. Moreover, it's a given that the new road will encourage those who have private land along it to develop commercial activities, and this development will irremediably change the character and physicality of this part of the greenbelt.

**But we know that the whole greenbelt is already fragmented because of village and other commercial developments.**

But we should still try to consolidate it; we shouldn't discard it so easily.

Furthermore, there is a real risk that if the new hill road is connected to the projected outer ring road, this will create a bypass from the ECR to the new National Highway leading to

Nagapattinam and the south, a bypass running right through the northern part of Auroville. So this road development for the hill has the possibility of becoming the highway which Auroville fought so hard to prevent some years ago.

Again, I'm unaware if anybody has checked Michael's estimate of the back-up power that will be generated for Auroville by this project. But even going by his figures, if it will only provide an extra hour of back-up power when the city reaches 50,000. Does this really justify all the damage, disruption and energy expenditure it will involve? All this calls for a serious feasibility study.

**Michael usually has his figures checked with experts in Germany and elsewhere.**

But what do they know of local conditions? Besides, there is a possible conflict of interest which may influence his interpretation of such research, if it has ever been done. Around the hill there are seven fragments of Michael Bonke's land which will also become prime real estate with the construction of a hill with fine views of Matrimandir and the sea. He has taken care that the road to the hill does not pass through any of his land, even though this would be the most direct route. So what are his plans for this land? Will he develop it and the hill commercially? In 2012 he remarked that the hill would be "a nice place for Aurovilians to go swimming and relax," but he hasn't said that he won't develop this for outside tourism. For the hill, too, will become prime real estate.

Then again, the soil for the hill is Auroville soil, excavated from the Matrimandir. But the hill itself is not on Auroville land. It is registered to Aditi Diamonds, which is owned by Michael himself. Is this a fair use of Auroville's resources?

**I think Michael has said that everything he is doing is for the development of Auroville, not for personal gain. For example, that Varuna, his company, is providing free electricity to Aurovilians while bearing the cost of constructing the Matrimandir lake. And that in all this he is doing what Mother wanted.**

I believe he is interpreting what Mother wants according to his own bias for technocratic solutions. Regarding the hill, Gilles Guigan says the only reference Mother made to it was in a conversation with Huta on 25th June, 1965 – "When the lake will be dug, all the soil will be collected on one side in order to make it look like a small mountain where there will be fir trees. You see, in future there will be snow!" – and on the map she drew at that time it is located to the north west of the Matrimandir, and quite close by. Certainly not far away in the Greenbelt, which Michael claims she intended for the location.

Furthermore, Gilles points out that almost everything in this conversation with Mother was subsequently superseded – including her initial design for the 'Mother's Pavilion' and the provision of Japanese-style gardens – so why is Michael so keen on keeping the hill?

It is probably because it fits with his approach to development, which reflects the development paradigm of the 1960s in favouring big projects. It's a top-down technocratic vision which, in its energy-intensive and extensive manipulation of matter and of the environment, represents all that is wrong with the old world development paradigm. It certainly doesn't harmonise with Auroville's ideals.

In fact, I believe that Michael has his own master plan, which is different from the Auroville Master Plan. It's a plan which includes not only this hill and road, but also a solar power plant and, possibly, a diamond factory on Auroville land. It's a plan which supports the deepening of the lake to provide a reservoir for his desalinated water and to provide the soil to build his hill: they all tie into each other. And it's not clear that all these align with Auroville's interests or that he doesn't benefit in some way from them. I don't think that Mother's vision is a driver of what he is doing. It is merely a way of legitimising his large-scale plans.

**Is there an alternative use for the huge amount of soil which has already been excavated for the Auroville lake?**

Cristo says that Harald Kraft, who advises Michael on the Matrimandir lake, pointed out that the excavated soil can be used for roads and, in the form of compressed earth blocks or poured earth concrete for buildings. For this kind of construction is more environmentally friendly than cement and steel. In fact, it is estimated that if some of the soil is used for roads (where the soil can be stabilised using chemicals or cement and lime), the rest of the earth from the lake could be used to build about half of Auroville.



**Tree clearing for the access road to the hill in progress**

Doesn't this make much more sense than using it to build a hill which has so many question marks over its utility and potentially is so destructive in its social and environmental consequences?

**In conversation with Alan**



**JCBs at work to clear the forest for the hill**



# Annapurna Farm faces challenges

**Annapurna is Auroville's largest farm. Comprising over 35 acres, it is a mixed farm with cattle, paddy and fruit trees, as well as a dairy and food processing unit. Total sales from food in Auroville products in 2023-24 were around 60 lakhs. However, Annapurna is now facing financial difficulties due to a number of factors. We spoke to the manager, Tomas, to get more information about the present situation, his plan to make Annapurna more economically viable, and to hear his thoughts on the present state of farming in Auroville.**

**Auroville Today: Did you have a background in farming before coming to Auroville?**

**Tomas:** Before I came to Auroville in 1983, I had trained to be a conventional horticulturalist in Holland. When I came to India, at first I was involved for six months in an agricultural project in Bengal as a volunteer. Then somebody recommended I should visit the Sri Aurobindo Ashram farms and see organic farming. I soon saw that they were not of interest to me, but Auroville was just down the road and when I visited something clicked. I began to get involved with Kottakarai farm where Jaap was farming, but then he left for some time, during which many conflicts arose within the community; the farmland was split up into pieces, and farming was no longer possible there because everybody seemed to be objecting to it or to something else. I became sick with hepatitis, went through a hard time, and eventually I moved to Annapurna. That was in 1986.

**Was Annapurna Farm already well established?**

No. At one time, before I arrived, the Aurovilian Cow John had been growing fodder there for his cows in Aurobrindavan, but when I arrived there were only some roadside tree plots which had been planted by Peter Clarence-Smith and Bernard (Pebble Garden) to see what would grow on this black clay. I had to begin the farm from scratch. But this was no problem. After the Kottakarai experience, I didn't want anything more to do with endless discussions and dealing with people. I was happy to be on my own, working the land.

**Had you ever worked with a black clay soil before?**

No, I had to find out by trial and error what would grow there. This was very challenging because sometimes the soil is either too hard or too wet to do anything.

**And you had no support in doing this?**

Bernard joined me for some years in 1988 until we had an ideological falling out because I started to explore biodynamic agriculture. Mother had mentioned that Rudolph Steiner, the founder of Biodynamic farming, was an Asura, and my interest in it was a bit too much for Bernard. I also was probably not always an easy person to work with as well; I can get a bit too absorbed in the work and become stubborn. Besides Bernard, different people over the years have been involved in the farm; Krishna Solitude was there, as well as Sydo, Freech, Brooks, Luciano and Nidhin were there for longer or shorter times. Andre (Mom) joined in 1989 and is there still. Madhuri joined a few years back. So three Aurovilians are living there and managing the farm now.

**Is biodynamic agriculture something you still practice?**

Over the years, I have absorbed something from all these people – Fukuoka, Bill Morrison and others – but, of course, nothing fits fully here so I use different elements from each. However, biodynamics still speaks to me because it sees the farm as an organism and the role of the farmer, by collaborating with whatever is there, is to orchestrate nature and get everything working as well as is possible. Humans are the highest part of nature and with that we have the responsibility to work with the natural elements in the best way possible.

**After 40 years of working there, do you have a good sense of what works in Annapurna and what doesn't?**

I'm still learning because there are always new and old unsolved challenges. Today the climate is changing, obtaining and affording labour is a big problem, wildlife is threatening our crops, and, of course, there is the present Auroville situation, which is not at all supportive. Dealing with weeds has been a challenge from day one and we are still grappling with it.

**You have heavy industry close by. Is there an issue with pollution?**

Not so much. We harvest rainwater and our water is not coming from that area, and I'm not aware of much air pollution. We have an Ashram farm close to us which is even bigger, and if we could join these farms together, we would have more of a buffer. However, Auroville is not ready to think about this as now the focus is totally on the city.

**In terms of the challenges you have had to face over the years, is the present situation in Auroville one of the biggest?**

Yes. Initially we wondered if Annapurna was going to be sold or exchanged, which made it very difficult to plan for the future. This threat seems to have receded somewhat, but now the main problem is finance as our financial reserves are being depleted. Since July 2023 the farm's stewards – Andre and myself – have had their personal maintenances replaced by a "care package", resulting in a loss of approximately Rs 27,000 monthly to the farm as this personal maintenance would normally be transferred into the farm account and the community kitchen expenses would be paid from it. Then, in June 2023, the GB FAMC replaced the Foodlink executives from one day to the next. This has resulted in poor management decisions by this unit and currently there are around Rs 3 lakhs owing to Annapurna Farm. There is also several lakhs of project money pending, because the current administration does not want to release it.

Moreover, during Covid the annual price increases for farm

products was not made since the Auroville economy was down, and now with personal maintenance being abolished for a lot of individuals in Auroville it is again very difficult to raise farm product prices sufficiently to cover all the farm's expenses. For the costs of inputs like labour, fuel, machinery, services, compost, etc., have all risen steeply.

Finally, the dairy with its processing unit, which is the farm's economic motor, has been producing poorly for some time now. While things are slowly improving, this has also hit us seriously.

So we're being squeezed at the moment, I am trying to find solutions but definitely we will need some kind of support.

**But you have a plan.**

Yes. Annapurna's strength is land because we have many acres. We use most of the land at present, but we could make it more productive. But making land ready for cultivation and putting a crop on it is expensive. It would require a huge investment – between 5-10 crores rupees – to make the farm fully productive and I'm sure we will not get this from the community soon.

But we have a more modest plan. It involves getting financial support for a few more years to allow us to build up something which, hopefully, will give us financial support after that. If we can receive a yearly budget of 5.2 lakhs for 5 consecutive years, we would create wood lots which would eventually cover around 15 acres.

We would plant fast-growing casuarinas trees in these wood lots. The cost of establishing an acre of casuarina plantation on uncleared land is around Rs 50,000 but the yield after 5-6 years can be 2-3 times that amount, depending on the soil fertility and wood prices. Given our experience of working with casuarinas in the past, we think this is the best way to create an economically sustainable future for the farm. Besides creating the wood lots, the farm will use the rest of the amount requested to back up the running costs and improve the current operation.

Another big need which has arisen recently is the need for a good paddy transplanter. This is a costly machine (around 10 lakhs) but it will help improve the economics, and being less dependent on labour in the paddy cultivation will benefit all paddy growing farms in Auroville. All told, currently we grow around 40 acres of rice.

To make a start with this new plan, the farm has decided to grow 10% less paddy in the coming season. Instead, we have already planted 2 acres of casuarina on the lower-yielding rice plots. After two years we plan to prepare some additional rice land, so the initial loss of this rice land for the wood lot will be compensated.

**But won't casuarinas deplete the soil?**

No, casuarinas are nitrogen fixing and actually enhance soil fertility. After harvesting the crop there is a lot of biomass left in and on the ground. And, of course, we will not keep replanting the same patch.

But I'm not doing this just for the money. For me it has to do primarily with values. I want to treat the land and the animals in a way they deserve. I'm asking for support from Auroville and from outside because I feel it is important to work in a healthy way, instead of letting ourselves be pushed into becoming a commercial operation. Food is more than a commodity and growing it in the right way is important to me.

**Do you think farming in Auroville is given the importance that it should be given?**

No, it's not taken seriously at all. Lots of people prefer to eat exotic and highly processed food rather than food grown on our farms, but they don't realise that these products are not healthy at all. There is adulteration and heavy pesticide use. The body is part of our yoga, so if we want to keep healthy we have to give it good food.

Money now seems to become the determining factor in deciding what we eat: the cheaper the better. But if we want to move towards a healthier community, I'm sure it will be financially beneficial in the long run if people eat Auroville-grown food whenever possible.

**At present, as you say, people seem to be becoming more dependent upon Pandy food and packaged foods, while some Auroville farms are looked upon simply as real estate to be exchanged for land in the city. Given these circumstances, are you optimistic about the future of farming in Auroville?**

At the moment it doesn't look very positive for the farms, given the way they are being treated by the present administration. But the Auroville farms themselves should also be willing to make changes.



Planting rice seedlings

For example, they need to be more transparent in their management decisions if they are to build trust with the community.

Again, we cannot just blame farms and farmers for that. As a community we have somehow not found a way to develop good and healthy producing farms. There is also a cultural element involved where different cultures and backgrounds are making it quite challenging to develop a good food system in Auroville. I think what we really need is a kind of food group to look at this issue from different sides; food production, processing, catering, finance, etc. In short it might need another working group.

**What about the present administration's initiative to create a model farm which could become an inspiration for other farmers in Auroville?**

We were open to learning something from this experiment at Gratitude Farm, but this model farm was a disaster. It was meant to be a two-year project. They took some-

thing like half an acre and they pumped in 4 lakhs or so, and after one year they produced 7.5% of what they projected as income and a yield of 20% of what they had expected. Then they wrote a report about how fantastic it was going, but after another six months the project was abandoned. They also started a farmer training at Unity Farm but, again, nothing much is happening there. Farmers are requesting a meeting with the GB FAMC to evaluate these experiments, but we do not get any response to our communications.

People think we are fooling around and that they know better, but it is very tough to farm well under these conditions. At the moment, one of the most important considerations is to make it possible for people who have the interest to live on our farms and get involved in growing good and healthy food.

**But where will you get these farmers?**

True, at present who wants to farm? However, this is not typically an issue only in Auroville; farmers all over the world are getting older and less young people want to work on the land. And yes, the work is hard at times, but on the other hand, also incredibly enriching. I think a lot of people have lost touch with the elements and the soil. I also think that many people do not realize that working on a farm is not just heavy physical work, but there are many facets to farming nowadays. On a farm like ours there are so many possibilities, ranging from basic farm work, mechanics, research, admin work, food processing, education, PR and much more once you get connected to the world of farming with nature.

In Auroville farming has got a bad name and maybe we should sit together to figure out how to change this.



Preparing the grounds

**So why do you do it?**

I ended up farming because it somehow sticks to me. I never planned to start a farm like Annapurna, it kind of just happened to me. I don't plan my life really, I let life lead me: basically, I work with whatever comes and use a bit of commonsense, of course. In this way, my whole life has a different flavour and there is some space for magic. When I pre-plan life it comes too much from my mind and everything becomes very small. But if I can open to whatever comes and respond to that, it expands me, it gives me a totally different dimension; I feel I'm in the flow and more connected to the deeper meaning of life. And Auroville is still a perfect place for this.

*From an interview by Alan*

For more information about the Annapurna project and how to donate to it visit <https://annapurnafarm-auroville.org.in/>



# From Istanbul to Auroville:

## A conversation on culture, identity, and discovery

**Born in Istanbul, Cansu has always been driven by a desire to explore diverse cultures through travel and the study of philosophical and mystical texts, shaped by her upbringing in the Sufi tradition. At 18, she moved to France to further her studies and first visited Auroville in 2014 as part of her training in qualitative research methodologies and social theory. Over the years, she has been combining academic inquiry with hands-on volunteering to deepen her understanding of Auroville's community-driven projects and relationships with the local Tamil communities.**

*Auroville Today: Can you tell me about your early life?*

**Cansu:** I was born in Istanbul in 1989, into a family with a profound history of social mobility and a diverse ancestry connecting lands that today include Albania, Lebanon, Armenia, Greece and Turkey. My grandparents on both sides were uneducated villagers from Anatolia who migrated to Istanbul, seeking a better life. They were never wealthy, but they worked hard and made sure their children – my parents – had opportunities they never dreamed of.

My mom's story is particularly inspiring. She grew up during a tumultuous time in Turkey, marked by military coups and widespread political unrest. Back then, universities were often unsafe, with clashes between left and right-wing factions creating an atmosphere of fear. Despite all of this, she managed to graduate, and that changed everything for our family. She became financially independent, something incredibly rare for women at that time, and her experiences shaped my future aspirations. She envisioned even greater possibilities for me and pushed me to seize opportunities that weren't available to her.

This led to one of the biggest turning points in my life: attending a French-language high school in Istanbul. It wasn't my decision – she made the choice herself and informed me only when she handed me the school uniform. She said, "This might as well change your life." At the time, I didn't fully understand what she meant.

*Was that a drastic change?*

It was a shock to my system. These Francophone high schools have a lingering orientalist culture. It felt like I was being uprooted. But my mom was insistent. She knew this school would open doors I couldn't even imagine. And she was right. That school gave me access to higher education in France, where I could find opportunities that weren't readily available to me in Turkey.

At 18, I moved to Paris. It was my first time living outside Istanbul, and my second time ever leaving the country. It was incredibly challenging, as I had to juggle my studies with waitressing, babysitting, and working as a salesperson and translator. Even though I had studied French in high school, it wasn't enough to keep up with academic courses. The education systems in Turkey and France were completely different. In Turkey, everything was about memorisation – dates, events, and formulas. In France, it was all about critical thinking and constructing arguments.

I remember one of my first essays in university – a 20-point assignment where I scored half a point. It was humbling, to say the least.

*How did you manage to adapt?*

At first, I struggled to fit into the culture. I felt like an alien, constantly trying to break free from the stereotypes others had of me. But I couldn't imagine leaving empty-handed after all the sacrifices my family had made. So I worked really hard and learned to speak French like a native, and without realizing it, began shaping my identity, the way I navigate the world, and even the way I connect with those who alienated me.

After my bachelor's degree at the University Sorbonne Nouvelle, I felt lost. I didn't know what to do next: whether to go back or stay. This was also a frightening time for Turkey, when civic freedoms began to regress due to escalating state violence. By sheer chance, I learned about a master's scholarship for women from developing countries, focusing on topics like sustainability, journalism, or international relations. On a whim, I applied and I initially got rejected. But I got a call the day before classes started, offering me a spot after all. Little did I know, that spot would eventually bring me to Auroville.

*Really? How did that connection come about?*

At the American University of Paris, Tanya, who is a child of Auroville, was my professor. She organised annual trips for students to explore practical issues related to sustainable development through the lens of social theory. Thanks to my scholarship, I had the opportunity to join one of those trips to Auroville.

When I first arrived in Auroville, I expected it to be a research hub, but it was so much more. There was this narrative of East meeting West, of

spirituality integrated into everyday life. That felt familiar to me – it reflected the identity of my home town, Istanbul, and really resonated with my Sufi upbringing.

Sufism is a subculture within Islam, a mystical tradition that emphasises transcendence over literal interpretations of the Qur'an. My home in Istanbul was often a gathering place for Sufi students and practitioners. We'd read poetry, play music, debate philosophy, and explore ideas about self-transformation and love for the divine.

So while many of my classmates struggled to connect with Auroville's spiritual ethos, to me, it felt like a discovery mirroring my own spiritual and cultural heritage. But more importantly, it marked the beginning of my training in qualitative research methodologies, which eventually led me to pursue a PhD in Sociology at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.

*It sounds like Auroville struck a chord with you in a way that it didn't for others. How did your relationship with the place evolve from your first visit to your PhD journey?*

That first trip planted a seed. Auroville stayed in my mind as a place worth exploring. But I first wanted to deepen my training as a researcher, which led me to work in the development sector.

One of my first projects was on gender and reforestation at a global, non-profit research organisation based in Delhi. Later, I worked on tribal rights issues with the local NGOs and civil society organisations serving the Irula communities near Mahabalipuram. These experiences were eye-opening but also disillusioning. At the large organisation in Delhi, I realised how much research was influenced by corporate and political interests. Critical findings were often omitted, and the entire process felt compromised.

Within the smaller organisations I worked with, the issue was different. They had genuine on-the-ground intentions but lacked resources and political leverage. It felt like no matter how much effort we put in, nothing ever really changed for the communities we were trying to serve.

In contrast, Auroville offered something unique. It wasn't perfect, but it was a living experiment – a space where I could explore the intersection of social and environmental questions in depth. It became my base for thinking about how different cultures and systems of thought can coexist in a dynamic tension.

*You learned Tamil fluently during this time. How did that come about, and what impact did it have on your understanding of Auroville?*

Learning Tamil was transformative for me. Prior to that, I felt completely disconnected from the local culture in Auroville.

I took six months of intensive classes with Prof. S. Arokianathan in Pondicherry, who focused on teaching the spoken form of Tamil, which is very different from the literary form. It was challenging but rewarding. Tamil is such a poetic and playful language largely because it is suffixal, allowing words to be modified and expanded with suffixes to convey nuanced meanings. This adds a depth to the linguistic world, further enriching expression and imagination. Even simple phrases carry layers of meaning. For example, when you say goodbye in Tamil, you don't say, "I'm going"; you say, "I'm going and coming." This is because saying "I'm going" can imply a permanent departure, even death. It reflects a sense of continuity, cyclical in nature, that's deeply ingrained in the culture.

Learning the language also shifted my understanding of Auroville. It opened doors to conversations and observations that wouldn't have been possible otherwise. It's one thing to live in a place; it's another to truly connect with its people and culture.

*Did this change how you view Auroville?*

In many ways. Living with my partner's Tamil family in Pondicherry also immersed me in the local culture, with all the everyday rituals and practices rooted in care and reverence for nature, such as offering food to crows before eating. These seemingly small acts are symbolic and reflective of a people deeply connected to the land.

This experience also made me more critical of Auroville's sustainability culture. Coming from an urban background, I was initially in awe of initia-



Cansu

tives like reforestation, permaculture, solar energy and upcycling. However, my partner, Kishore, a snake rescuer and wildlife conservationist, offered a different perspective. When I took him to a reforestation project I thought would impress him, he dismissed it as "gardening" and asked: "Are the people of the land truly benefiting from this?" His critique opened my eyes to the inseparability of environmental and social justice.

Kishore works with tribal communities and has helped declare large areas between Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry as protected wildlife zones. He doesn't label himself; he just sees it as a natural responsibility to the land and its people. In Auroville, sustainability is often framed in a way that focuses on the individual – everyone is a pioneer, an innovator, or an entrepreneur. But, in many of the same projects, the people of this land are reduced to mere beneficiaries or labourers.

These realisations also brought into focus how disconnected most Aurovilians are from the local people and culture, and even from the land beyond the green insularity that Auroville offers. Understanding this helped me see Auroville in a more nuanced manner.

*How did these insights influence your PhD work?*

It made me more conscious of the relationships between Auroville and the local Tamil communities.

As I switched between different volunteering roles at Eco Femme, Wellpaper, Mohanam, and so on, it helped me make better sense of the complexities I was observing in the field. Auroville undoubtedly has unspoken hierarchies that have lingered even after decades of "working together". It made me realise how important it is to engage respectfully and with full humility with the people and culture of this land, rather than assuming that "spiritual" intentions alone are enough.

*Which other Auroville projects did you get involved in?*

Another project was called Prosperity. The name carries a lot of philosophical weight in Auroville because it's tied to the Mother's original vision of an economy that provides space for spiritual growth. But over time, the term has become controversial, as people debate what it really means and how it should be implemented – much like any other concept that has been part of the community's history.

The Prosperity Team I had joined was a small, self-organised team of Aurovilians – with people like Jocelyn, Anandi, Danny and Pashi Ji – may he rest in peace. The team aimed to create a roadmap for Auroville's economy, aligning it with short and long-term visions closer to the original concept of

Prosperity. We held weekly meetings, presented ideas to key decision-making bodies like the BCC and FAMC, and worked to map out concrete steps involving both service and commercial units, as well as individual Aurovilians. It was an intense but rewarding process, and it taught me a lot about how politics and economics actually function in Auroville.

*Your involvement in Auroville has been both practical and personally philosophical. How does this tie into your background in Sufism and your exposure to other spiritual traditions?*

That connection is very personal for me. My Sufi upbringing and familiarity with concepts like universal love as the feminine principle were reflected in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga and the Mother's teachings. Without that connection, I'm sure I would have seen Auroville in a very different light. Sufism teaches about removing the veil of ego and surrendering to the Divine. It also teaches about ethics, cultivating an inner law that guides how we breathe and move through this world, where we are all sentient particles of the same source, yet we often only see each other through our differences. So, I try to do my best to carry myself in line with those principles that all mystic traditions share, and the same goes for any involvement – even academic.

*It sounds like you've always been drawn to this interplay between philosophy and practice. How does that influence the way you see your future?*

My partner and I often talk about creating a life that bridges different worlds. We dream of doing research and community projects together, connecting land, people, and cultures between India and Turkey, and possibly even Europe, depending on where the funding for our projects comes from. It's an ambitious dream, but it feels grounded in what we both value. But I also try to cultivate a sense of detachment from any possible futures awaiting me, so who knows, maybe it will be something completely unimagined.

*And does family play a role in that vision?*

Yes, family is really important to both of us. For me, my mom plays a huge role in how I imagine the future. She's an old-school, no-machinery ceramist, and she's getting older now, so I feel this urgency to learn from her and preserve the ancestral knowledge she has to offer. The same goes for Kishore. His mom practices all sorts of natural remedies at home, and she repurposes everything from old jars to food scraps; her kitchen is like a laboratory. We picture a future where we can honor both these traditions, passing them down to the next generations.

*What's the biggest lesson you've learned from your journey so far?*

The biggest lesson is that everything is interconnected – whether it's language, culture, land, human and non-human relations, creative expressions or spiritual and philosophical traditions. I've also learned that ancestry shapes everything; you can't just invent or create with an eye on future realisations without understanding the past.

It's a humbling process, but it's also incredibly rewarding. Every step of the journey has taught me more about myself, the world, and the beautiful, messy complexity of trying to make a difference.

*In conversation with Chandra*

Cansu is completing her PhD in Sociology, studying alternative practices in the realms of economy and governance. Through various case studies at both the scale of Auroville and individual projects and units, her thesis aims to unpack the interplay between alternative institution-making practices and dominant systems. Relying on a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods, Cansu seeks to contribute to understanding how these alternatives resist co-optation by statist and capitalist forces and ideologies, or how they fail to do so. She hopes that her thesis will not only contribute to academic knowledge on alternatives but also to Auroville's future developments, informed by its past successes and failures, and further exchanges with other similar experiments around the world.



# “Riding” towards the inner being

**Francesco, once a professional snowboarder (or “rider” in snowboarding lingo) from a mountain village in Italy, shifted paths after a family crisis and a snowboarding accident. Moving to Auroville, India, he immersed himself in Awareness Through the Body (ATB). For over a decade, he’s offered ATB to diverse groups, extending his work to various parts of the world, including Italy, Korea and South America.**

*Auroville Today: This is not your first interview?*

**Francesco:** No. By now I am quite used to doing interviews. It all started when I was 15 years old and passionate about snowboarding. I began doing it professionally, which meant being in front of the camera quite often. We had to do interviews for magazines and big snowboarding events. Coming from a small mountain village, I was very shy. The first few times, it was nerve-racking. But after getting exposed to it repeatedly, one just gets used to it.

*How did you get into snowboarding?*

I was born in the mountains, so the options were either to ski or to snowboard. Skiing was the more popular choice, but I was drawn to snowboarding, which, at that time, was quite unconventional. I remember feeling like an outcast because it was such a niche thing. All the other kids were skiing, and they would tease me for choosing snowboarding instead.

I went to a special high school that catered to people involved in winter sports. It was this pilot project that allowed us to dedicate ourselves to our chosen sport while still attending school. We had the flexibility to pursue our sports seriously. I even got to travel to the U.S. for a month without following the regular school programme. That was a very good deal for a high school student.

I went there for training and for what we called “shooting”, which meant getting the best photos and videos of us on the most diverse types of terrains. Shooting is a big part of the snowboarding culture. It wasn’t just about competing; it was also about capturing those moments and for me was a means of self-expression, similar to an art form.

*At that time, did you imagine snowboarding would become your career?*

To be honest, I never really thought much about what my life would look like in the future. I was simply following my passions. At that time, it was all about snowboarding. I didn’t have a long-term plan yet. I was just fully immersed in the moment, enjoying the process. But that changed during my last year of high school when my brother got seriously ill. That experience shook me. It was like a wake-up call. It made me reevaluate many things. Until then, I was hardly studying. I would show up to lessons, pay intense attention while in class, and do well on tests without much effort.

Then I decided to put my energy into my studies to prove myself capable of good results, through more dedicated effort. That’s when I realised I had an aptitude and love for learning. I wrote my final high school paper on the limits of Western scientific thought, exploring how intellectual and scientific pursuits often reach a point where they confront something infinite, something beyond human understanding. It was surely a philosophical stretch, and it felt relevant to everything I was going through at the time.

*That sounds like a deep shift at a young age. What happened next?*

That was definitely a turning point. I was grappling with all these existential questions, especially about the limitations of what we can know. Around that time, I met someone named Yudi (a family friend, and Aurovilian cartoonist Emanuele’s grandmother), whom we often call the ‘magic grandma’. She was this older woman with a fascinating presence. She was always carrying around a pendulum, using it to measure energy. At first, I was sceptical, but when I saw the pendulum swinging wildly whenever she held it close to her body, it was hard to deny that something was happening.

*How did your connection with her influence you?*

One night, I had this vivid dream where she appeared and she seemed to blow into my heart, which caused it to open up. It felt like an inner opening, which in retrospect I can classify as psychic, due to the permanent effects it had on my life. From that moment, everything became clear to me. I had this newfound certainty about my life’s direction and purpose. There has been no hesitation nor doubt about it since then – it was like a switch had been flipped. That experience set me on the path that eventually led me here.

*Was it after that experience that you decided to leave snowboarding behind?*

Yes, but it wasn’t an immediate shift. I actually had a snowboarding accident that played a decisive role in my decision. I was doing a trick on a half-pipe and fell hard on my clavicle. I should have been in a lot of pain but instead, I felt a strange sense of peace. It was like everything around me was chaos, but inside, I was completely calm. That accident made it clear that I needed to change my path.

At the time, I was studying education at university, but my experience there was really dissatisfying. Then, one day I felt the wish to call my friends who were living in Auroville. They invited me to come and volunteer at a kindergarten. They even managed to get me a one-year work visa, which was an interesting little miracle in itself. I decided to take the leap, and within weeks of arriving, I found myself fully immersed in this new world.

*And that’s when you got involved with ATB?*

I basically landed on it! I had only been here for about three weeks when some people from the ATB team noticed me. They saw how I naturally connected with children and with that type of work, so they

invited me to join them at the Kindergarten. I then got to know Aloka and Joan, started attending workshops and classes and, before I knew it, I was part of the team. It felt like a natural fit, almost like something I was naturally built for.

*Can you explain why ATB became such an important part of your life?*

ATB has really been a crucial part of my life for the past 10 to 12 years. It’s a comprehensive practice that integrates all the various aspects of the being through an all encompassing awareness. It’s based on Integral Yoga and aligns deeply with the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. For me, ATB is surely not just a set of exercises; it’s a way of life. It’s about bringing consciousness and embracing all aspects of oneself and of life.

To me, it’s like a container that can hold the most diverse experiences and perceptions in a cohesive manner. It allows me to explore this integration in a very practical way.

*And you work with a wide range of people, from children to the elderly. How do you adapt your approach based on their needs?*

A key aspect is understanding the rhythm and pace of life. With young children for example, the sessions are very dynamic, full of games, imagination, and quick changes of pace. It’s like go, go, go, with sudden stops for moments of stillness. But with someone who is, let’s say, towards the end of their life, the approach would need to be quite different. In that case it would be more about stillness, presence, and letting go. A beautiful aspect of ATB is that it can be adapted to suit anyone exactly where they are.

*You’ve been living here since you were about 19. What was it that drew you to Auroville in the first place, and what keeps you here?*

My connection to Auroville was something that I always felt at a deeper level. From the very beginning, I knew that this was where I needed to be. But it was never about the physical place or the particular social-environmental conditions. For me, Auroville is primarily a state of consciousness, a certain way of being which is only relatively dependent on the location. I felt a simple inner calling to stay here, and if I’m ever guided to leave, I will. But until then, this is where I feel called to be.

*You mentioned earlier that Auroville is not just a place but a state of consciousness. How does that philosophy influence your daily life here?*

For me, touching a deeper state of consciousness is not an optional extra – it’s a basic need. If I don’t connect even just a little with that inner depth, my day feels incomplete, almost like I’m living in an unreal dream. I make sure to touch that space every single morning, even if it’s just for a few minutes. I need to feel something real within myself before I engage with the world outside. This has become a daily practice that grounds me. And because I spend so much time working with

children or leading workshops, it’s essential for me to remain centred. I need to tune my entire being to be as fully present with others as possible, especially when guiding them through ATB.

*You’ve also been involved in projects outside of Auroville. Could you tell me more about that?*

I’ve been working on spreading ATB beyond Auroville. I go to Italy twice a year to lead workshops, and I also travel to South America, particularly to support the work my colleague Rosa is doing there. At the moment she’s based in South America and conducts workshops throughout the year, while I join her for some of the bigger ones. The idea is to train enough people so that the work there can become self-sustaining in the coming years. With my partner Vega, we also conduct seminars for Korean groups who come to Auroville and we’re planning to go to Korea in the future. It is rewarding to see how ATB can take root in different cultures and how each of them is responsive to some particular aspects of it.

*Do you conduct these workshops in English, Italian and Spanish?*

Yes. I actually learned Spanish here in Auroville, which was quite an experience. Being able to conduct workshops in both languages has opened up many doors. It’s also allowed me to connect with people in a much deeper way because language is such a powerful bridge. While working with Koreans, I rely on the connection with Vega, who translates and guides along with me.

*You’ve co-authored a book recently. What is it about?*

The book is a collaboration with a friend and colleague from Italy. It’s called *Come rinnovare la tua Ruota*, which translates roughly to *How to renew your Wheel*. The metaphor behind the title is about updating our inner tools, much like updating the software on a device. The book is a practical guide for educators and parents who want to educate themselves in order to better assist others. The idea is that personal growth and self-awareness are essential before we can truly guide or teach someone else.

The book is divided into four main sections. The first is on personal work, which focuses on self-awareness, attitude, progress and habits



ATB in Transition school with Francesco

formation. The second is about daily life, which includes tools from Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and other approaches to enhance how we relate to ourselves and others. The third section explores an approach to education which integrates both traditional methods and alternative practices, while the fourth is about defining one’s ideal, setting goals and translating them into actionable steps, whether on a personal level, in a group setting, or even in a school environment.

*And you are also starting a podcast related to the book?*

Yes, that’s another exciting project! We’ve recently recorded the first few episodes here in Auroville. The podcast is an extension of the book’s concepts, and it’s aimed at reaching a wider audience. The idea is to create more conversations around these topics and inspire more people to embark on their own journeys of self-education.

*You’ve clearly been very busy with all these projects. How do you manage to balance everything?*

It’s definitely a juggling act. My work with ATB takes up a lot of time, especially since many mornings and afternoons are dedicated to sessions or workshops. But I make sure to integrate physical activities into my day that also involve conscious presence, like hatha yoga, Somatics or other psychophysical exercises. At the end of these sessions, I take the opportunity to connect once again with that deeper part of myself. Taking those few precious moments gives me a sense of coming back home within, after a whole day spent somehow outside myself.

*With everything you’ve learned and experienced, and with the changes going on in Auroville, how do you see your connection to Auroville evolving?*

My relationship with Auroville has always been mainly internal. As I mentioned before, Auroville, to me, is more of a state of consciousness than a physical place. This very morning at the swimming pool someone asked me if I was happy in Auroville, and I replied, “I am happy, that’s it. If my happiness would need to depend on Auroville or anything else, I’d often be in trouble.” My main sense of peace and fulfillment comes primarily from the inner connection to that infinite consciousness that permeates everything. So whether I stay here or move elsewhere, I make sure that the focus remains on that inner connection, regardless of the particular setting or circumstance. On the other hand, I’m fully aware that we are living in an interwoven experience, where we all play our part and have our share of influence and responsibility.

The cooperative games we use in ATB are perhaps a suitable simile to illustrate how I perceive what’s going on in Auroville and the world. In the game as well as in real life, there are groupings of people, with goals to achieve, problems to solve and limited resources at their disposal. At first, everyone is usually trying to push their way through, but slowly they realise they have to collaborate to succeed. These games naturally bring out people’s tendencies – their habits, attitudes, and relational dynamics. Here’s where the great opportunity lies: because of the game itself we have the chance to become aware of our dysfunctional patterns and start to intentionally change them. It is exactly because of the difficulties created by the challenge that frictions become more evident. Once conscious, these dynamics can be deliberately worked upon, towards something more harmonious, functional and complete.

In a way, life in Auroville – or anywhere – is like a cooperative game. It’s like a microcosm of the larger world. We’re all here with certain tasks, limited resources and specific challenges. Just like in cooperative games, we need to work together to achieve something greater. During our workshops or classes we often see participants go through the same relational dynamics they face in everyday life. But when they reach moments of genuine cooperation, where everyone is fully present and united, it’s truly magical. That’s when one gets a glimpse of what Auroville – and life – can really be about.

*In conversation with Chandra*

For more information visit: <https://www.innervita.it/podcast>.



# The Auroville population conundrum

**There are important questions to be asked regarding the population of Auroville. Firstly, who decided that the intended population of the township would be 50,000, and is this figure immutable, fixed, or can it be adjusted? Also, who qualifies to be called an 'Aurovilian'?**

The figure of 50,000 is an issue for those who doubt that Auroville could comfortably sustain such a number, and/or are concerned about the present attempt to use it as a lever to accelerate an increase in Auroville's population, which is perhaps motivated by a statement in the *Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspective 2025)* that the population of Auroville would be 50,000 by the year 2025. (However, that same *Master Plan* observes that "the normal process of demographic growth does not apply to Auroville" as only those who aspire to be willing servitors of the Divine consciousness are supposed to be admitted.)

Interestingly, in September 1965, on Roger Anger's first visit after Mother had offered him the opportunity to build the new city, he wrote in his first report on the new town,

*We shouldn't underestimate the impacts all sorts of things will have on the creation of a new town, which, estimated at 10,000 inhabitants at its beginning, which before thirty years may reach 100,000 – and in the future surely more.*

As, till then, there was no record of Mother mentioning the size of Auroville's future population, he must have noticed that on her 1965 sketch of the future town its diameter was more than 10 kilometres. (Note that when later he reduced the diameter of the Galaxy model from previous models to prevent the township fully overlapping two villages, he enormously increased the density of the township.)

But soon, as he later confirmed, Mother said that he should plan a city for only 50,000. In a 1996 interview, he mentioned that he had been prepared to plan a city for any number that she specified, *but I think it (50,000) was for her the required number for the experiment to have a total reality*. It also appealed to him as someone who was setting out to plan a city (and to do better than Le Corbusier had done in his design for Chandigarh, which Roger disliked). *It was a number which was far from being uninteresting in terms of environment, in terms of densification of cities. Because beyond that one loses the feeling of a small town and one enters into that of a mega-city. At 50,000 one still has contact with people and in visual terms one is still able to associate urbanisation to something one is used to.*

Later, Roger was to identify this 50,000 as one of his 'non-negotiables' (along with the four zones, the Lines of Force and the Crown etc.) when it came to defining the key characteristics of the township.

However, during the last three years of her life, Mother became a lot keener on the quality of the Aurovilians than on their number. For example, in 1971 Shyamsunder noted how Mother said that *In Auroville she did not want number but quality. Twelve good people would be better than hundreds of stupid persons*, and the next year she insisted, *In Auroville I do not want many people. I want some people, but true people. If you want many people, I can give you a hundred thousand in a moment from South Africa* (probably because at that time South Africa had just stopped people from the Commonwealth, including many Indians, from taking South African nationality after a certain arrival date).

So perhaps the figure of 50,000 is not quite so immutable, so fixed, as some people would suppose. For Mother was very flexible, willing to change how things should be in Auroville because she wanted the township to develop spontaneously, "with the full play of the unexpected". It is why she was so concerned that her words

should not be fossilised into dogma. *You will say one day, 'Mother has said this, Mother has said that'... and that is how dogmas, alas, are made.*

## Who is an Aurovilian?

Who, then, qualifies to be termed an 'Aurovilian'? If one interprets 'Aurovilian' in a very broad way, and ignores Mother's definition of the 'true Aurovilian' – who is probably, as yet, a member of a very rare species – then the obvious answer is either those who, in the early years, Mother allowed to live in Auroville or, later, successfully underwent the stipulated entry process.

However, some people suggest that the villagers who inhabit the Master Plan area should also be considered Aurovilians. This would mean that we are already well on the way to reaching a population of 50,000 (there has been no recent survey of the population of these villages, but the total is currently estimated at between 20,000–25,000).

Those who argue that the villagers living in the Master Plan area should be counted as Aurovilians often base it upon an early document, approved by Mother, which stated that "*The first citizens of Auroville are those Tamil people who live on the soil of Auroville.*"



An early Aurovilian enjoying hospitality in Kuilapalayam during Pongal, 1972

Here some context is required. This document was written by Varadharajan who, in 1970, and with Mother's blessing, had volunteered to live in Kuilapalayam to build a bridge between Auroville and the villagers. Mother was particularly concerned about keeping a good relationship with the local villagers, writing to someone who had recently arrived that he should be very careful not to offend the people from the Tamil village. *It has been very difficult for us to win their confidence, and nothing should be done that should make them lose this new-born confidence which is of capital importance.... They are your brothers in spirit. This should never be forgotten.*

However, in 1970 that confidence had been severely shaken because the villagers of Kuilapalayam had heard that there were plans to compulsorily purchase 52 acres of their land for building Auromodèle. They were not a big village and felt threatened by the

people with whom they felt no connection and whose motives they did not understand. Some feared a new form of colonialism. They were also concerned that they would be relocated somewhere else, as had happened in the case of big government projects like the Neyveli township. This suspicion sometimes degenerated into violence: some of the early white Aurovilians had stones thrown at them by the villagers.

To address their concerns, Varadharajan wrote a note in Tamil which he sent to Mother through her son, André: *She gave our note and our work a big Blessings, a special Blessings*, says Varadharajan. The note assured the villagers that Auroville wanted to show a new way of life which would provide them with better employment opportunities, improve their standard of living, and provide new health and educational facilities. It also assured them that Auroville would not evict anybody from their homes because the Tamil people living on the soil of Auroville are "*the first citizens of Auroville*".

But what did this mean?

Varadharajan later explained, *I think you should distinguish between two kinds of Aurovilians. There is the geographical Aurovilian, who is here because he is born here, and has a birthright to Aurovilian citizenship. And there is the other Aurovilian who has come here following the call of Mother... Each one has to become a true Aurovilian.*

It is true that, at one point, members of the Comité Administratif d'Auroville (CAA), the first administrative body of Auroville which was set up by The Mother, thought of integrating the entire village of Kuilapalayam into Auroville, "*if they spontaneously ask for it*". But then, Varadharajan recalls, one of the Mother's secretaries asked, "*But are they ready?*" and this made them pause. In any event, finally only six families from the village applied to be integrated – only six because it was rumoured in the village that anybody joining Auroville would have to convert to Christianity or Islam! Two families subsequently dropped out, so the process began with only four families, comprising 17 people.

But there was no question of them being admitted automatically simply because they lived in the Auroville area. Varadharajan had to send their photos to Mother (later he took them to meet her) before she approved them, which was the same process for anyone wishing to join Auroville in those days.

It is worth noting that, while Mother was averse to creating rules for entry into Auroville emphasising, *Living in Auroville is a choice: you can choose a certain life. But once you choose one thing, some others become incompatible... At any rate, living in Auroville is an ACTION, a decision you make, an action.* What she expected of all applicants changed over the years. In November, 1966, she said simply *the goodwill to make a collective experiment for the progress of humanity is sufficient to gain admittance.*

But three months later she told Satprem, *All those who wish to live and work at Auroville must have an integral goodwill; a constant aspiration to know the Truth and to submit to it; enough plasticity to confront the exigencies of work and an endless will to progress so as to move forward towards the ultimate Truth.*

*continued on page 7*

## EXHIBITIONS

# Art and Spirituality at the Centre d'Art: Two exhibitions, one journey

From November 15th to December 4th, the Centre d'Art brought together two contemplative exhibitions: Pujasree Burman's "Sacred Echoes" and Vasandan Virappan's "The Symbol of Meditation". Although distinct in style and execution, both bodies of work shared a unifying thread – an exploration of the profound relationship between art, nature, and spirituality. Together, they formed a meditative journey, offering viewers an opportunity to reconnect with themselves and through that, to the world around them.

In "Sacred Echoes," Pujasree draws from her transformative experiences in Peru, where she immersed herself in the natural beauty and spiritual practices of the Shipibo tribe. Her works, rendered in watercolour, ink and colour pencils, weave vibrant, dreamlike narratives infused with animals, forests and other natural motifs. One piece, *Taruca*, portrays the Peruvian Andean deer, a symbol of grace, strength, and renewal. The painting's soft hues of pink and blue create a calming presence, while its intricate details – such as antlers that blossom into flowers – speak to themes of personal growth and the interconnectedness of life.

Pujasree's use of vibrant colours, inspired by the emotional resonance of colour theory, amplifies the energy and vitality of her work. Her fluid, organic forms suggest an ongoing process of



A painting by Pujasree Burman from the exhibition "Sacred Echoes"

transformation, as she translates her inner journey of healing and rediscovery into visual form. Her art celebrates the beauty of nature as a guide and reflects a reverence for life's cyclical rhythms.

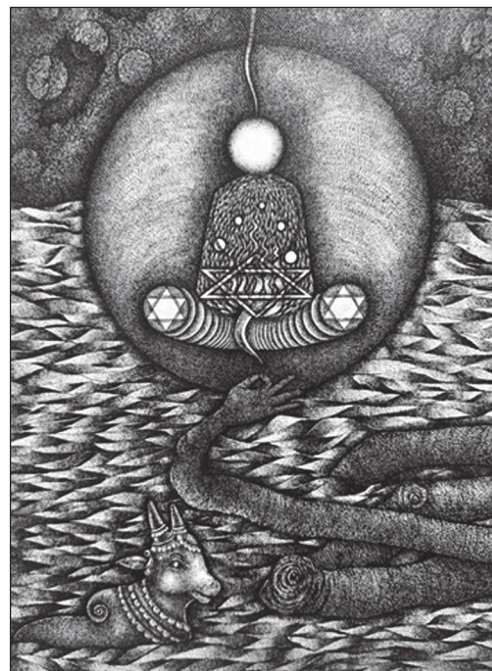
Complementing Pujasree's vibrant approach, Vasandan's "The Symbol of Meditation" offered a quieter exploration of spirituality. His pen-and-ink works, executed with a painstaking stippling technique, are monochromatic compositions of black, white, and brown. These highly detailed pieces reflect the artist's focus on balance, harmony, and the spiritual alignment of human life with the elements of nature.

One of Vasandan's pieces featured a figure in Padmasana (lotus pose), enclosed within a glowing orb. The surrounding environment, composed of flowing roots, textured landscapes, and surreal patterns, merges the human form with the elements of Pancha Bhoota (earth, water, fire, air, and space). The work's intricate textures and organic forms suggest the symbiotic relationship between humanity and the cosmos. Vasandan's use of stippling, with its meticulous attention to light, shadow, and detail, gives his pieces a meditative quality that mirrors the practice of mindfulness itself.

Both exhibitions served as visual meditations, inviting viewers to slow down and engage deeply with the themes presented. Pujasree's vivid colours and fluid forms inspired a sense of emotional renewal and transformation, while Vasandan's restrained palette and intricate details encouraged quiet reflection on the unity of existence.

Together, they offered a compelling dialogue about the role of art as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual.

*Chandra*



A painting by Vasandan Virappan from the exhibition "The Symbol of Meditation"



# Auroville's population declines

For years, our annual population review was a prosaic, statistically-detailed piece, with musings on which nationals were moving to Auroville in increasing or decreasing numbers. Yet in the last years the annual reflection has become an unexpected window into our community affairs.

### Closure of Entry Service

Our crisis has had a direct impact on our demographics. An example of this was the closing of the Entry Service, having the locks to their office changed overnight in the second week of January. Some final interviews took place till March and a few Aurovilians were recently announced, but all told only twenty Aurovilians (of which two were returning and one a youth) and eight Newcomers joined in 2024. With entry policy part of our legal battles, the population figures this year are consequently even more unusual than ever.

Bear in mind too as a larger context that not reaching 50,000 people was being quoted as a sign by the present administration of why Auroville was ‘failing’, making the metric of population an indicator of our communal success.

### Decline in number of Aurovilians

With that as background, this year has some unusual changes, the most notable being that the Auroville population declined by 68 people from 3368 in 2023 to 3300 in 2024.

### Reduction of foreign national populations

Concurrently with this reduction in overall size, the other notable change has been the decline in the foreign national populations. The French, for instance, whilst still the second largest population after the Indians, are down thirty-six people to 403, Germany, in third place, reduced its number by twelve to 227, Italians six down to 165, Americans seven less to an exact 100. Our Dutch colleagues lost two to 96 and Russians four to 72. It's only the Brits who stoically remain unchanged at 65. Other notable decreases were the Israeli population reducing by four to 44, the Swiss losing three to 35 and the South Koreans five to 46. Of the smaller in population size nations, Brazil lost three to have only seven

## HISTORY

### The Auroville population conundrum

*continued from page 6*

In 1969, in answer to a question about what it means to live in Auroville, she replied *Striving towards the supreme perfection*. Finally, in 1972, she stated *I would like people to feel that coming to Auroville does not mean coming to an easy life – it means coming to a gigantic effort for progress. And those who don't want to keep up with it should leave. That's how things stand. I wish it were so strong – the need for progress, for the divinisation of the being, so intense – that those who are unable (unable or unwilling) to adjust to it would leave by themselves: "Oh, this is not what I expected."* She also mentioned during an ‘Aspiration talk’ that *it would be preferable if individuals had made the ‘inner discovery’ before coming*.

Roger reported that Mother said that no conditions for the integration of the four families were to be laid down, except that those who owned land would have to sell it to Auroville, or rent it to Auroville on a long lease. Mother also told André that *There should be no compulsion to work, on the type of work, etc. If they are lazy, they can be so until they become fed up of being lazy*.

She specified that the integration of these families should begin on 7th August, 1970. But what exactly did ‘integration’ mean?

Mother confirmed that after she had accepted them, they became full Aurovilians, and they should be provided with all the facilities they needed *according to the possibilities of the development of the Township*. She was also not averse to them being provided with ‘guiding principles’ concerning how to integrate into Auroville: *Certainly it would be good if somebody was intelligent enough to do it and do it well*.

However, Varajadhan and others were concerned that some villagers would want to join Auroville only for economic reasons. How to communicate to them what Auroville was really about, the need for individuals to transform their consciousness?

Mother told him that the best way was education, but to educate them not by words and speeches but by example. *If you can get them to mix with your life and work, and they get the influence of your way of being, your way of understanding, then, little by little, they will change*. Varadharajan had been sitting at her feet when she said this, and he recalled that when she said, *little by little*,

*She bent down almost to my ear – as if to emphasise that the process of becoming a true Aurovilian would be a long and gradual one. Then She straightened up in Her chair and said, ‘And when they become curious and*

folk living here, and Hungary went down from eight to four. The only country outside of India to gain was South Africa, no stranger to conflict, gaining one extra citizen to become eleven strong. The international character of Auroville has been heralded as another metric of our communal story, so this decline is noteworthy.

### Growth in the Indian population

In opposition to the decline of the foreign population, the other continuing trend is the growth of the Indian residents. For the first time ever in Auroville’s history, they cross the halfway mark to become 51.5% of Auroville’s total population, a jump of 2%. They number a neat 1700, an increase of thirty-two from last year. As noticed in last year’s article, this breaks five decades of the Indian population remaining within the 42-48% band.

### Deaths increasing

A continuing trend from last year was the increase of deaths in Auroville. At the time of writing (late November 2024) 25 Auroville residents had passed away in this calendar year, along with 13 friends, associates, volunteers, in-living parents, longtime workers, etc., a grand total of 38 deaths. Last year at an equivalent time, the totals were slightly less, 36 passings, of which 23 were Aurovilians. At the time, that was the highest ever total.

With entry paused, only 20 Newcomers and 25 deaths of Aurovilians, we can presume that the reduction of sixty-three people reflects those who have officially declared to be leaving Auroville. Anecdotally, people have commented on Auroville feeling less full than before, but it's only in these figures that we get some formal indication of this. With Entry closed, it's hard to be clear if we are still as attractive a spiritual destination as we were before our recent challenges began.

In summary, in 2024 Auroville continues to be in flux, with a decline in population, foreigners becoming a minority and the Indian population continuing on an upward trend and also becoming a slim majority of the total residents. Time will tell if this is the new trend or a blip. We await next year’s statistics with uncommon interest.

*Peter*

*ask questions, then it will be time to answer and to tell them what you know’.*

At the same time, Mother warned Western and non-Tamil Aurovilians against adopting a position of *ridiculous superiority*. *Those who are in contact with the villagers should not forget that these people are worth as much as you are, that they know as much, that they think and feel as well as they do. They should therefore never have an attitude of ridiculous superiority. They are at home and you are the visitors*.

Whatever one feels about the distinction between ‘geographical’ Aurovilians and those who have come here from elsewhere, it is clear that there is a deep inter-relationship between those who have been accepted as Aurovilians and others who live in the geographical area of Auroville. For while we cannot know the occult influence upon those living in the proximity of this spiritual experiment, among other things we share the same land and face common ecological challenges.

In the early days, Aurovilians learned a great deal about farming from local farmers, and some of the early huts were inspired by the indigenous architecture of the villages. Aurovilians from elsewhere also came to respect and learn from certain aspects of Tamil culture. Auroville also had a profound influence upon the villagers, who encountered different ways of living and relating and new opportunities for employment, as well as the ability to learn new skills and set up their own businesses.

Overall, Auroville’s influence has been for the better, but it can be argued that more could be done to aid the development of the local villages through, for example, helping the villagers improve the existing infrastructure and providing models for sustainable growth.

This is not a new idea. At one point, the CAA considered taking up a project to make the whole of Kulapalayam a ‘model village’, but the approach seemed somewhat patronising, as it was not at all clear if the villagers would have had an important say in how their village was to be developed.

Today, such top-down development of the local villages it out of the question: the villagers must make their own decisions about how they wish to develop. But Auroville can be a valuable partner in this. Above all we should not see this as being an ‘add-on’, of minor importance compared to environmental regeneration or the building of the town.

For Auroville can hardly claim to be the ‘City the Earth Needs’ if it doesn’t also support the sustainable development of all who share this land.

*Alan*

		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1	India	1,415	1,475	1,504	1,583	1,668	1,700
2	France	449	456	459	438	439	403
3	Germany	259	259	260	249	239	227
4	Italy	170	172	176	172	171	165
5	USA	105	112	114	117	107	100
6	Netherlands	105	105	106	102	98	96
7	Russia	74	77	81	71	76	72
8	UK	67	68	67	63	65	65
9	Spain	60	62	64	62	62	60
10	South Korea	55	57	52	55	51	46
11	Israel	52	52	50	49	48	44
12	Belgium	45	46	43	44	43	41
13	Switzerland	44	41	41	39	38	35
14	Canada	27	29	26	26	27	27
15	Sweden	29	28	24	24	23	22
16	Ukraine	22	22	22	21	20	19
17	Australia	19	19	19	17	18	17
18	China	16	16	16	15	15	12
19	Austria	13	12	12	13	13	11
20	Japan	14	14	13	14	12	11
21	South Africa	11	13	13	9	10	11
22	Iran	7	9	9	9	9	9
23	Argentina	8	9	9	9	8	8
24	Brazil	11	11	12	10	10	7
25	Mexico	6	6	6	6	6	7
26	Columbia	4	5	5	5	6	6
27	Denmark	7	7	4	5	5	6
28	Nepal	8	7	6	6	6	5
29	Slovenia	6	6	6	6	5	5
30	Chile	2	2	2	5	5	5
31	Hungary	9	9	8	8	8	4
32	Latvia	4	4	4	4	4	4
33	North Macedonia	4	4	4	4	4	4
34	Portugal	2	2	2	3	4	3
35	Belarus	4	4	4	3	3	3
36	Ethiopia	3	3	3	3	3	3
37	Sri Lanka	3	3	3	3	3	3
38	Ireland	2	2	2	2	3	3
39	Tibet	3	3	3	3	2	2
40	Bulgaria	2	2	2	2	2	2
41	Finland	2	2	2	2	2	2
42	Lithuania	2	2	2	2	2	2
43	Philippines	2	2	2	2	2	2
44	Rwanda	2	2	2	2	2	2
45	Cambodia	0	2	2	2	2	2
46	Turkey	0	0	0	0	0	2
47	Kazakhstan	4	4	4	4	3	1
48	Norway	2	2	2	2	2	1
49	Taiwan	2	2	2	2	1	1
50	Ecuador	2	1	1	1	1	1
51	Algeria	1	1	1	1	1	1
52	Czechia	1	1	1	1	1	1
53	Egypt	1	1	1	1	1	1
54	Indonesia	1	1	1	1	1	1
55	Luxembourg	1	1	1	1	1	1
56	Moldova	1	1	1	1	1	1
57	Poland	1	1	1	1	1	1
58	Romania	1	1	1	1	1	1
59	Croatia	0	1	1	1	1	1
60	Seychelles	0	0	0	0	1	1
61	Mauritius	0	0	0	0	1	1
62	Andorra	0	0	0	0	1	0
63	Sudan	0	0	1	1	0	0
64	Iceland	1	1	1	0	0	0
Total		3,173	3,261	3,286	3,308	3,368	3,300

Adults	2,658	2,711	2,664
Male	1,320	1,348	1,311
Female	1,338	1,363	1,353
Children	650	657	636
Male	327	331	322
Female	323	326	314
2024 - 61 nationalities - 3,300 residents	3,308	3,368	3,300



Cyclone Fengal causes havoc



On November 30th and December 1st, cyclone Fengal made landfall close to the city of Puducherry and the northern part of Tamil Nadu. In Auroville, hundreds of trees were uprooted, roads were blocked, power lines came down. Also, part of the “Lego Block” wall between the first and second section of the Matrimandir Lake, which had recently been raised to its full height, shifted and partially collapsed, leading to water from the first section spilling into the second section which has not yet been lined with HDPE. More in the next issue.

Land exchanges questioned

On November 11th, an article in the *Times of India* mentioned that the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (All India Anna Dravidian Progressive Federation - AIADMK), currently the main opposition party in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, which has great influence in the state of Tamil Nadu and the union territory of Puducherry, demanded a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India's primary domestic crime-investigating agency, into the alleged irregularities in land exchanges at Auroville. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, responding to the representation of AIADMK's former law minister C. Ve. Shanmugan, said the issue had been forwarded to the “department concerned” for action. An estimate of the cumulative financial loss to Auroville of the recent land exchanges is approximately 250 crore rupees (almost 30 million US dollars). The recent exchanges of Auroville lands have been severely questioned by the RA Working Committee appointed by the Residents' Assembly (RA-WCom) as well as by members of the Auroville International Advisory Council (IAC). The latter had recently written to the Governing Board (GB) conveying

disappointment in the lack of transparency as regards land exchanges, resulting in a breach of trust between the GB and the Auroville residents, and urging the GB to halt any further land exchanges. The land exchanges are now also being questioned by Aurovilians who were previously supportive of the Auroville Foundation. In recent posts on Auronet, Auroville's internal internet forum, the Working Committee approved by the Governing Board (GB-WCom) stated that they had not been consulted for a proposed new land exchange and that they were against the exchange. According to their calculations, this exchange alone represented a financial loss to Auroville of approximately 5 crores, as the seller would receive high value Auroville land located on the Tindivanam Highway in exchange for 3 small pieces of “not important” greenbelt land. They also pointed out that the GB had only given permission for outlying lands to be exchanged for Master Plan lands in the city area. They also re-shared a report to the GB that had been previously deleted. According to the GB-WCom's calculations, the financial loss to Auroville due to the recent exchanges of AuroOrchard, Djaima and Felicity would be around 100 crore rupees. The GB-WCom stated “[these] Land exchanges ... were executed in total contradiction of the Governing Board decision in its 61st meeting... “In the history of Auroville, we have never suffered such a level of mismanagement ... We came to know in a conversation with Mrs. M. [the AVFO Land Officer] that she continues to meet the landowners for future land exchanges. And we also discovered that a land exchange has been approved again by the Governing Board and AVF, without any consultation with the GB-WCom.”

Evergreen land dispute

The appeal lodged by Mr PK Subramaniam (PKS) against the previous judgment on Evergreen land, which had found the contested Evergreen land to be rightfully Auroville land, was heard on the 25th October 2024 at the Tindivanam court, and a new judgement was issued. The Additional District Judge ruled in favour of PKS, meaning that Auroville now faces the potential loss of around one acre of forested land, as well as losing the access to Evergreen community. The area is prime land that lies by the Auroville main road from Kuilapalayam.

The verdict was a surprise because the land had been uncontested since 1992, (when it was purchased) and has been in the peaceful possession of Auroville for over 30 years with Auroville paying the land tax for it during this entire duration.

According to a mass bulletin issued by the RA WCom, certain moves by the AVFO ‘Land Service’ may have contributed to the verdict. The contested property had been included in a list of land that Auroville needed to acquire, which was shown in court to strengthen PKS's ownership claim. Additionally, despite several requests, the AVFO and their ‘Land Service’ made no effort to take ownership of the land after the previous favourable verdict. In contrast, PKS moved quickly after this judgement and a JCB and a team of workers came to clear the area of trees from 2nd November onwards. RA WCom members and residents attempted to stop the work, requesting that a government survey be carried out beforehand. No members of the AVFO or their ‘working groups’ came to the site. The RA-WCom, in a letter to the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council, stated that, due to the fact that no new Secretary had yet been appointed, no appeal had yet been filed. The RA-WCom urged the GB to immediately lodge an appeal, as well as to convey to the relevant ministries the urgency of appointing a new resident Secretary who would take strong and quick action to protect Auroville's lands. “Neglecting this is causing great damage and loss to Auroville's assets and the risk of encouraging violent land speculators to take advantage of the lack of authoritative action, and possibly resulting in law and order situations,” wrote the RA-WCom.

Secretary's departure leads to confusion

The Government of India has still not appointed a new Secretary nor a new Acting Secretary to replace former Secretary Dr Jayanti Ravi, whose term of office ended in July 2024. Confusion is caused as Dr Ravi continues to regularly visit Auroville and is still being named as the Secretary in the press. A report of a meeting with the Chairman of the Governing Board, which was circulated by some of the Aurovilians present, stated that the Chairman had insisted on several occasions that Dr Ravi was no longer Secretary. The same had been mentioned by the hon'ble Union Home Minister in a meeting with a group of Aurovilians on September 24th.

New civil works started

The contractors hired by the AVFO and its Auroville Town Development Council began two new major road works immediately before the monsoon, leading again to difficult and potentially dangerous conditions for road users, in

particular cyclists. In the Residential Zone, work began on the well-used and fully-functional Vikas Radial with the removal of half of the paving stones across the width of part of the road. Access to Humanscapes, Vibrance and Invocation as well as communities further along this road is affected by these actions. Work in both areas was then suddenly stopped without a known reason. It is unclear where the residents of the communities that are affected by the Vikas radial roadworks are expected to park, as their main entrances and access to secure parking is now blocked. Other recent development work includes the clearing work for the AVFO staff quarters, a project first mentioned in the 59th GB meeting minutes. Three new buildings are planned. These quarters will be located at different points within Auroville: one near Realization community, another between Sailam and Vikas communities, and the third next to Luminosity community. In the interim, non-Aurovillian AVFO staff have been given Auroville housing in several communities without consultation with the other residents, even though there are many Aurovilians and newcomers still awaiting housing allocation.

Sri Ma beach returns



After months of erosion [see *AVToday* # 422, September 2024], Sri Ma beach sands are returning. From now until March, the sand will accumulate because the current is coming from north to south.

Plans to divert rain water to the Matrimandir lake

According to meeting minutes of the Auroville Town Development Council appointed by the Governing Board, two rainwater “collection ponds” have been designed to “collect the water from the stretch of the Crown which will go from Solar Kitchen to Savitri Bhavan” and divert it to the Matrimandir Lake. One of these ponds is already a natural water collection area and the other would be an artificial collection area where the water would be filtered before being pumped into the Lake. There is no mention in the minutes of the potential impact to the local bioregion and the watershed. As this rainwater usually feeds the Irumbai pond it might lead to a negative effect upon surrounding villages' water collection.

RA News & Notes restructured

After a year and a half of publishing, the editors of the RA edition of the *News and Notes* have decided to limit the edition to content that strengthens community-building in Auroville, more specifically on working group announcements and reports, residents' voices and personal sharings, some cultural events, and information from essential services. It will also contain a link to contents from the Foundation Office groups, in a spirit of inclusivity and giving space to all perspectives. Materials which were previously included under the sections “Activities & Events”; “Food, Goods & Services”; and “Classes, Workshops and Healing Arts” will no longer be published.

One of the reasons for this decision is that many residents continue publishing these events in both the Foundation Office's *News and Notes* as well as the RA *News and Notes*, even though this legitimises the censorship applied by the Foundation Office's *News and Notes*. The editors stated that the duplication of these events made no more sense, and that the new RA edition will only include event content if it is only submitted to the RA *News and Notes*, and not to the other one.

Auroville dog shelter update

The Auroville dog shelter has been receiving an increasing number of desperate calls to save abandoned new-born puppies. However, as the dog shelter is at maximum capacity and is regularly flooded by heavy monsoon rains, help cannot be provided. A petition has been submitted to the Auroville Foundation Office, supported by over 800 people, asking for Rs 3 lakhs in basic monthly funding to cover operational expenses. A reply is still awaited. For more information visit [www.aurovilledogshelter.com](http://www.aurovilledogshelter.com).

PASSING

Jean-Luc Buro

Jean-Luc Buro passed away on 13th November, while in Dharamsala for a film festival, reportedly due to heart failure. He was 70 years old.

Originally from France, Jean-Luc lately lived in Surrender and was a cherished and active member of the community. He came to live in Auroville in 2019 after visiting Auroville regularly for many years and helping with the Auroville Film Festivals. Recently he had also been working with Aurofilm. Previously, he spent years in Revelation and held a deep love for the sanctuary there.

A renowned photographer, his work captured the Spirit of Auroville and beyond.

His cremation took place in Dharamsala on November 15th. In Auroville, a farewell ceremony was held.

Aurofilm offered also an homage to Jean-Luc Buro. For more information visit <https://filmfestival.auroville.org/meet-the-judges-for-2017/>, <https://jeanlucburo.com/>, and the Auroville YouTube channel.



About Auroville Today

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