

Landmarks

Auroville exists in more than one dimension – there is the occult as well as the material dimension – which makes it difficult to assess what really is most important or influential in terms of the community’s development. With that proviso in mind, we decided to celebrate the 37th birthday of Auroville Today by attempting to define the most significant landmarks – spiritual, social, political and legal – which we have covered in our past 435 issues between 1988 – 2025.

Passing of the AV Foundation Act (November 1988, No 1)

The Auroville Foundation Act was passed in both Houses of Parliament in September 1988. Shiv Shanker, the Minister for Human Resources, in introducing it said “Auroville is to be looked upon as a vision which has a great potentiality, and this can be of tremendous service to our country and to the world.” Alain Bernard, who witnessed the passing of the Act, remarked, “What is always moving when you see it happening, and it happened very powerfully this time, is when you see the Force operating.” Later, Kireet Joshi, who drafted the Act, explained, “I think this Act has some very unique features, which you will not find in any Act in the country. If you read between the lines, you will find that the whole Act is so formulated that it would facilitate what Mother has called ‘divine anarchy’.”

The Auroville economy: a small step forward (May 1989, No 6)

A proposal from the Economy Study group was accepted by the community for an experimental six months. Yearly budgets will be drawn up for all collective responsibilities for which money is needed; all Aurovilians and Auroville units will be asked to contribute to a Central Fund which will distribute to these budgets; the individuals will have the right to determine to which budget their contribution will go and the units will determine how much and to which budget they will contribute each month; and an Auroville Economy Group will be formed, consisting of representatives of all sectors of the Auroville economy, to take responsibility for the execution of this first step.

The Matrimandir Chamber opens (October 1991, No 33)

“What happens to a person when he steps into a huge 12-sided room of white marble with 12 columns disappearing into the roof, and a ray of light shining down into the centre? What happened to me at first was an unexpected sense of all the people who had in some way contributed to Matrimandir by wanting it to be. Everything that had said, ‘Yes, it must be’, everyone who did it was there making it real now. ... (A week later the crystal was put in place.) Again, another order of magnitude is the energy field, a centre reflecting only light. Whatever or however one may reflect on the symbolism, the effect on the body is profound. The feeling is one of clarification, even of purification that happens directly ... August 1991 is over, but what happened seems to be the beginning of another time. The room is open.”

The city’s inner dimension (June-July 2001, No 149-150)

(From a speech given by Dr Kireet Joshi introducing the seminar ‘City in the making’)

“Auroville is the most precious gift that the earth possesses. It has momentous potentialities and each of us who live here have to bear a new kind of torch that is still in the making. ... By living together, Sri Aurobindo wrote, such a collectivity will increase the force of the truth, but at the same time each individual will contribute his or her incapacities, and therefore the force of the incapacities will also be concentrated. In the past this concentration of incapacities has exceeded the concentration of the truth force, and as a result such group attempts have been a failure. This can only be prevented, Sri Aurobindo says, if the Divine will has taken a decision to protect it and develop the experiment. This has happened in the Ashram and in Auroville ... I think Mother felt the need to create a body, a collectivity, which would serve the purpose of receiving the light of the divine body, and would organise itself into higher and higher modes of living so that the work of the supramental manifestation could move faster and faster. In other



Matrimandir completed (February 2008, No 227)



The Prime Minister hails Auroville (March 2018, No 344)



H.H. The Dalai Lama inaugurates Pavilion of Tibetan Culture (February 2009, No 240)

words, the most important foundation of Auroville is the supramental consciousness.”

A step towards Auroville unity? (October 2003, No 177)

The first building in the city’s administrative sector becomes operational.

The Auroville Centre for Urban Research, alias the Town Hall, has been functioning for some months now. Although the formal inauguration awaits the relocation of Auroville Fund and the Financial Service from their offices in Pour Tous, other major groups like Auroville’s Future, the Land Service, the Housing group, Development Council, the FAMC and the Working Committee and Council have taken up residence. ... Roger gave Anupama (the architect) some guidelines for the overall design of this sector. “This is the only part of the city which must have a direct visual contact with the Matrimandir, he explained, as it is important that the decision-makers should have the Matrimandir – the force of cohesion and the essence of Auroville – always before them.”

President Abdul Kalam visits (November 2004, No 190)

On 1 November the President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, paid a visit to Auroville. The President said, “I have come here as a pilgrim, for you have a large mission, a mission which came from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. When I heard your presentations how the barren land was transformed into a beautiful place I was moved and also by your concern for the water and the seawater ingress. Somebody once said that everything starts from the inner side, and if the inner side is OK, everything is OK. For what do you want to be? My answer to this question from a child was ‘to be a better human being’. And Auroville probably is the place which creates better human beings.” In the Matrimandir visitors’ book, he wrote, “Matrimandir is a beautiful divine creation. When I spent a few minutes in the concentration chamber, I felt time is infinite”.

The Auroville tsunami rehabilitation effort (January 2005, No 192)

The first wave of the tsunami hit the Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu coast at 8 am on 26 December 2004. Seven thousand people died on the spot. By 9:30 a team from Auroville swung into action. A first emergency meeting was called in the house of two Aurovilians and it was immediately decided to set up a camp for people affected by the tidal waves ... The camp was manned by more than 60 Tamil youth from the villages within Auroville, as well as many Aurovilians. By 2 pm 750 people were fed and 350 food packages distributed ... All through the afternoon refugees kept streaming in and another 1200 people were fed in the evening. ... By the fourth day it became clear to Aurovilians that they had to shift from immediate relief measures to long-term solutions for the affected villages. The Auroville Tsunami Relief Committee was established with Aurovilians Hemant and Joss as main coordinators. ... It was found that [in the immediate region] approximately 500 houses had been destroyed and 62 deaths registered. ... A member of the coordination team emphasises, “This is a catastrophe of unparalleled dimensions ... If we receive sufficient funds, we will not only look after the rebuilding of the 12 coastal villages we have taken charge of, but we will include all those reaching up to Marakkanam.”

Youth for Unity (April 2005, No 195)

Exploring new values through inter-cultural and inter-religious exchange.

The international conference ‘Youth for Human Unity’ was a collaboration between CIRHU and UNESCO and was part of UNESCO’s worldwide inter-religious dialogue programme. The main aim of the event was to create dialogue between the major religions and young people of the SAARC region. The official delegates came from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bhutan, Nepal, Singapore and Australia and spent five days discussing issues like spirituality and religion, education, art and culture and integral development. ... The feedback regarding the

<ul style="list-style-type: none">● We need a real Residents’ Assembly: an interview with Lakshay Dharan● Isai Ragam: Changing village lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Notes on growth, geography and change, by Daniel Helman Lee● AuroMag: The Auroville Hungary Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● New book: The mountain glowed like fire● ‘The Thinking Hand’ exhibition● Reflection: The death of Public discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● News in brief● Residents risk expulsion● Governing Board completes four-year term● Passing Anne Goldsmith
pages 4–5	pages 6–7	page 7	page 8

organisation and impact of the conference and Auroville was overwhelmingly positive. All the delegates felt more open to the others and better equipped and more willing to bring change to their communities. They also had a deeper understanding not only of the obstacles to human unity – “war, cynicism, emphasis only on external growth, not being unified within” enumerated one delegate – but of the means to achieving it. “We need to work on two levels; on the material level there should be education for all. On the spiritual level, we should work on the evolution of consciousness. That’s the key. Once that’s achieved, unity will come automatically.”

Matrimandir completed (February 2008, No 227)

This month Auroville is 40 years old. This birthday coincides with the completion of the Matrimandir, which had been under construction for almost as long. *Auroville Today* celebrated by publishing for the first time an issue in colour so that it could show both the soaring lines and the beauty in detail of the Matrimandir. “The Matrimandir,” wrote the Mother, “will be the soul of Auroville. The sooner it is there, the better it will be for everybody and especially for the Aurovilians.”

Dalai Lama inaugurates Pavilion of Tibetan Culture (February 2009, No 240)

Speaking to a crowd of more than 3 000 people, the Dalai Lama expressed his happiness that he was once again back in Auroville, this time to inaugurate the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. “I feel it is a great honour. Every visit I come here I see more development, more progress. Sri Aurobindo’s and The Mother’s vision are being executed whole-heartedly, and that is very good. I want to express my deep appreciation and thank all of you who carry Their vision.

“I also want to thank you for the development of the Tibetan Pavilion ... Tibetan culture, the culture of compassion and nonviolence, will be shown here and preserved. ... although material development with the help of technology and science is rapidly increasing, it is by itself insufficient and no guarantee for a peaceful human existence. We need some special effort to bring inner peace and a spirit of dialogue. For that reason, Tibetan culture, a more compassionate culture, is something useful to preserve.”

The Auroville Retreat (April 2015, No 309)

The Auroville Retreat brought together members of the International Advisory Council, the Governing Board and around 160 Aurovilians to examine the present state of Auroville and to draft an action plan for the near future. It was the culmination of two months of intense work, involving around 300 Aurovilians and 35 thematic work sessions. The original idea was to focus simply on governance. ... This was expanded to include five key areas of Auroville’s life: governance, land and planning, growth, education and the economy. However, when it was noticed that youth and the bioregion were under-represented in the preparation groups, these two areas were also added. ... On the second day, steps were taken towards the concrete implementations of milestones. (On the final day) each area group presented their chosen milestone with its terms of reference to the plenary. The day ended with Dr Karan Singh giving an uplifting speech. Noting that Auroville is at a crossroads and needs a major change – “it either breaks through or breaks down” – he observed he had never seen Aurovilians in a better mood and felt there was a new energy to move forward. And he promised that once the Governing Board received the concrete proposals drafted in the Retreat, “we will do whatever it takes to see that the breakthrough occurs.”

The Prime Minister hails Auroville (March 2018, No 344)

On 25 February, the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, paid a visit to Pondicherry and to Auroville to participate in Auroville’s golden jubilee celebrations.

In a speech in Bharat Nivas he said, “I am happy to be here today on the occasion of the golden jubilee week of Auroville. Sri Aurobindo’s vision of India’s spiritual leadership continues to inspire us, even today. Indeed, Auroville is a manifestation of that vision. Over the last five decades, it has emerged as a hub of social, cultural, educational, economic and spiritual innovation ...

“The very fact that Auroville has brought together such huge diversity of people and ideas makes dialogue and debate natural ... India has always allowed mutual respect and co-existence of different religions and cultures. India is home to the age-old tradition of Gurukul, where learning is not confined to classrooms; where life is a living laboratory. Auroville too has developed as a place of unending and life-long education ...

“Be it unending education, environment regeneration, renewable energy, organic agriculture, appropriate building technologies, water management, or waste management, Auroville has been a pioneer. May Auroville continue to come up with ideas to empower the ordinary citizens of this country.

“May people from far and wide bring with them new ideas. May Auroville become the centre where these ideas are synthesized. May Auroville serve as a beacon to the world. May it be the guardian which calls for breaking down narrow walls of the mind. May it continue to invite everyone to celebrate the

possibilities of humanity’s oneness.

“May the spirit of Maharishi Aurobindo and the Divine Mother

continue to guide Auroville to the eventual fulfillment of its lofty founding vision.”

COVID-19: a wake-up call (June-July 2020, No 371-372)

How has Auroville dealt with this unique stress test?

On the whole, it has done very well: typically, we seem to derive strength from adversity. Those strengths include the extraordinary dedication and spirit of service displayed by those in our essential services (food, energy, economy, waste disposal, etc.) to keep the community functioning efficiently; the long hours spent by Security, Health, the COVID Task Force and the Working Committee in dealing with the authorities and ensuring that the tough lockdown conditions were adhered to; a huge upsurge in volunteerism from people of all ages; and, in spite of the rigours of the lockdown, a pervasive good humour and willingness to observe the unfamiliar practices of social distancing, mask-wearing and sanitising by the residents. Support was provided for the older and more vulnerable members of our population through a new food delivery service and psychological counselling, while Auroville Village Action Group provided emergency aid to the most vulnerable in the nearby villages.

However, the stress test also revealed weaknesses.

Perhaps the most obvious consequence of the lockdown ... was its disastrous effect upon our economy. The lockdown has jolted us out of our habitual grooves, and now we have the opportunity to experience Auroville anew and to examine the economy, governance system, institutions, etc., we have created, as well as the lifestyles we have grown accustomed to.

... unless there is a change in our consciousness, meaning the beginning of a realisation of our essential oneness, we are liable to look back on it, just as we did on Cyclone Thane and The Retreat, as yet another opportunity missed.

New Secretary’s address to the community (August 2021, No 385)

Dr Jayanti S. Ravi assumed office as Secretary of the Auroville Foundation in July 2021. In her first address to the community she said, “... the skill that I, in my career spanning 30 years, have been able to perform or deliver is the ability to straddle different points of view, different stakeholders, and actually facilitate the process of making things happen.

“I do look forward to this as an exciting possibility where, with all of you together, I would be very happy to offer my services, to work in a very sincere manner towards seeing all your aspirations, dreams, come true. ... We are all trying to manifest what (the Mother) dreamt of, a unique experimental city where you synthesise matter and spirit, and work through and towards human unity, where we are all trying to synthesise the diversity that we have.

“I look at myself as a master plumber who can help you remove some of the obstacles, the things that possibly clog our aspiration to make things happen.

“I want to appeal to all of us to re-dedicate ourselves to really make the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, and the vision, the dream, of Mother manifest itself as beautifully, as quickly, and as firmly as possible here in Auroville to serve as a beacon for the entire world and mankind.”

The new Governing Board meets (December 2021, No 389)

On 2 November, the new Governing Board met for the first time in Auroville. It was subsequently reported in the Indian press that the Governing Board wanted a time-bound implementation of the Master Plan, and they discussed ways to carry forward goals in sectors ranging across housing, infrastructure and greening initiatives in Auroville.

In the late afternoon, four members of the Board – Shri Ravindra Narayana Ravi (Hon’ble Governor of Tamil Nadu), Shri Aravindan Neelakandan, Professor Goutam Ghosal, and Professor Sarraju, accompanied by Dr J. Ravi, Secretary of the Auroville Foundation – attended an open meeting with the community.

The Governing Board was asked how they planned to work with the new International Advisory Council. The Chairman replied that ... “within the ambit of the Act, we will definitely take all their views into account and your views, and will move forward with them.” However, he emphasised that it is the Governing Board that has the overall responsibility for the management of Auroville.

He felt that people outside are losing faith in Auroville. “The dream of The Mother is being questioned; the experiment that she started is a failed experiment as it appears today.” He feels that Auroville must become a “strong magnet” to attract people from all over the world. “That magnet we have to create and we will do that with the help of you all. Not that we are here to create, you will create. We are here as a catalyst, that is what our role is. We will give the resources and we will be a catalyst.”

Youth Centre buildings destroyed (January 2022, No 390)

The last weeks saw bulldozers removing trees planted by Auroville foresters and Auroville habitations in the Youth Centre to clear a path for the Right of Way of the Crown, which is intended to connect the four zones of the city. This action was opposed and decried by some who saw it as an assault, not only on the environment, but also on the fabric of our unity. One Aurovillian wrote, “Although I am very sad about the destruction of our trees and our Youth Centre, and am heartbroken to see the clearcutting of forest, I am most sad about the destruction of our Auroville values. Values such as caring for our neighbours, integrity, compassion and goodwill. To see actions such as violence, verbal and physical abuse, the use of the police and hired locals to enforce our decisions, all condoned in the name of



The Auroville tsunami rehabilitation effort (January 2005, No 192)



The Auroville Retreat (April 2015, No 309)



COVID-19: a wake-up call (June-July 2020, No 371-372)



Youth Centre buildings destroyed (January 2022, No 390)

progress, is a clear indication for me that our dearest values have been abandoned.”

Others however, while not necessarily applauding the methods, were happy to feel that, after 53 years, an important step was being taken towards the materialisation of the city.

The Dreamweaving concludes (May 2022, No 394)

The ‘Dreamweaving the Crown’ is part of a process which attempts to bring down to the ground the Galaxy and the Master Plan in the form of a Detailed Development Plan (DDP).

Recently, the Dreamweaving the Crown exercise finished. Approximately 70 people – Dreamweaving architects, their peers, multidisciplinary experts, focus groups and randomly selected members of the Residents’ Assembly – took part at various stages of the exercise, which began with a Crown walk at the end of December and concluded with an exhibition and presentation to the larger community in early April ... As mentioned in the brief, the report – representing the diverse voices of Auroville – will also be sent to Vastu Shilpa Consultants to support, inform, and inspire their detailed development work on the city.

Eleven Dreamweaving teams participated. Although their backgrounds and orientations differed, and they focused on different aspects of the Crown, certain commonalities began to emerge during the process. One common theme was integration and synthesis – particularly of the Galaxy vision with the ground and bioclimatic realities. Another common theme was the need for diversity, for the Crown to provide a variety of different experiences as it passes through different zones and environments. Finally, there was a shared emphasis upon the need for the Crown to be human-centred: for pedestrians and cyclists to be prioritised, for the provision of plazas and safe, communal spaces, and for shading/weather protection at all times of the year.

The Chairman addresses the residents (December 2022, No 401)

In December, the Chairman of the Governing Board Shri R.N.Ravi addressed the residents in a community meeting. Among other things, he said, “The first thing that Mother’s Charter makes very clear, that to be in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness. And in plain and simple language, it means one has to be a *bhakti*, with total surrender to the Divine Consciousness, one must be a *bhakta*, a devotee, that is a *sadhak*, who comes over here with a desire for further evolution to the higher level of consciousness. And that it’s a place of constant education and progress.

“Now, it pains me, when I moved around, the *sad-hana* element of it, we find it is GROSSLY deficient, grossly deficient. You may find my statement very provocative, but I want to provoke because after all, we are here not for the brand Auroville but for the soul of Auroville. If the soul is not there, brand has no matter ...

“I would suggest now that Auroville has to have a set of guidelines, agreed norms how to conduct its affairs, in terms of who should be allowed to come, who should be in Auroville, what are some common minimum activities which are consistent or necessary for being a *sadhak* in this process of our forward journey. Those norms ... MUST be there.

“Because it is now not acceptable ... to let the status quo continue. ... Auroville has to be spiritually strengthened, and of course materially reinforced as well ... Auroville needs a shock, an external shock to bring it to its sense, bring it to its trail.”

Leave India Notice (March 2023, No 404)

The community was deeply shocked to learn that a young Aurovilian and member of the Residents’ Assembly Working Committee had been served with a Leave India Notice on 15 February. No official explanation has been given. ... The Auroville International (AVI) Board sent a letter to the Governing Board ... noting that the Notice raises “suspicion ... that this serious measure is a retaliation for [this individual’s] commitment to the governance of the Auroville community.” The RA Working Committee reports that they are actively looking into the situation and are hopeful that compassion and reason will prevail, for “We have faith in the goodwill of Mother India.”

Auroville’s population declines (December 2024, No 425)

Our crisis has had a direct impact on our demographics. This year has some unusual changes, the most notable being that the Auroville population declined by 68 people from 3 368 in 2023 to 3 300 in 2024. 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. The international character of Auroville has been heralded as another metric of our communal story, so this decline is noteworthy.

In opposition to the decline of the foreign population, the other continuing trend is the growth of the Indian residents. For the first



The Dreamweaving concludes (May 2022, No 394)



The Chairman addresses the residents (December 2022, No 401)



Auroville’s beach erosion (September 2024, No. 422)



Cyclone Fengal hits Auroville (January 2025, No 426)

time ever in Auroville’s history, they crossed the halfway mark to become 51.5% of Auroville’s total population, a jump of 2%.

Auroville Foundation issues residence criteria standing order (January 2025, No 426)

On 25 November 2024, the AVFO Officer on Special Duty, Dr G. Seetharaman, issued a new Standing Order detailing residence criteria and a code of conduct for all Residents, Newcomers, volunteers and permanent guests in Auroville, which came into effect immediately.

The Standing Order outlines “General principles of life in Auroville” and contains a detailed code of conduct, as mandatory requirements rather than guidelines, with the stated threat of “termination of status” if the ‘rules’ are breached. The rules include all those residing in Auroville must attend the Auroville Spiritual and Material Refresher programme organised by the Human Resources Service; residents are expected to participate in the building of the city and shall in no way obstruct or hinder the manifestation of the township of Auroville, being built in accordance with the Master Plan; all inhabitants shall act in strict compliance of the decisions of the statutory working groups, approved by the Governing Board; residents shall be engaged in work for the collective, through an Auroville unit or service, at least 6 hours per day, 6 days per week, or, 5 hours per day, 7 days per week or as may be decided from time to time by the Funds and Assets Management Committee, in accordance with the Mother’s teachings and guidelines; residents shall live full time in Auroville. For any absence, information must be given to the Human Resources Service upon departure and upon return. In case of leaving Auroville for longer than two weeks, long-term or frequent absence, such as for family, medical or educational reasons, this must be applied for and approved by the Human Resources Service.

Two judgments of the Supreme Court of India (April 2025, No 429)

The Supreme Court issued, on 17 March, two judgments on appeals made by the Secretary, Auroville Foundation – one against the NGT ruling of 28 April 2022 regarding environmental clearances, and another against the Madras High Court order of 15 March 2024 on the Town Development Council matter.

The Supreme Court has accepted the Auroville Foundation’s appeals in both cases. Regarding environmental clearance and the Auroville Master Plan, it stated, according to a notice from the Auroville Foundation, that “the Auroville Master Plan ... has statutory force and does not require Environmental Clearance” and the Supreme Court has “set aside the National Green Tribunals directions that had stalled the construction of the Crown Road and other essential projects aligned with the Auroville Master Plan”. In a separate case, the Supreme Court “reaffirmed that the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation has full authority under the Auroville Foundation Act to constitute and reconstitute committees, including the ATDC, for the efficient implementation of the Master Plan”, and “clarified that the Residents’ Assembly’s role is advisory in nature and does not extend to the right to nominate members to committees formed by the Governing Board”.

However, the statutory rights and responsibilities of the Residents’ Assembly as outlined in the Auroville Foundation Act and its rules remain intact.

Auroville’s beach erosion (September 2024, No. 422)

Once upon a time, Auroville had ten beach communities. Now there are only eight left. The most southern ones, about six kilometres north of Pondicherry, are Quiet (home to the Quiet Healing Center), Samarpan, Samutra and Gokulam. These communities suffered badly from beach erosion, losing at least 50 metres of their beachfront land, with the beaches completely disappearing or being vastly reduced in size. Efforts to protect these communities from further sea erosion have largely failed. In 2019, with the help of a 13 lakhs private donation, Quiet built a wall of sand bags to protect its land and buildings, but this gradually disappeared in the following two years. Yet, these communities continue to exist, thanks to a seawall and a groyne.

On 19 August 2024 Auroville learned that Dr Ramana Murthy, the Director of the National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR), and his team visited Sri Ma and inspected the land loss and the severely eroded beach. They concluded that to stop any further loss of land, a stone wall needs to be immediately constructed along the eroded stretch of the shoreline, for which NCCR will send the design.

Later on, this stretch can be integrated with the Shoreline Management Plan made by the NCCR for the entire Tamil Nadu coast.

Cyclone Fengal hits Auroville (January 2025, No 426)

On 29 November 2024, Cyclone Fengal developed and intensified into a cyclonic storm about 270 km east-southeast of Puducherry. It made landfall over Puducherry on the night of 30 November, bringing torrential rains, strong winds, and gusts of 3-minute sustained winds of 85 km/h. The cyclone wrought havoc in Auroville, where a weather logger reported that 54 cm of rain had fallen in 24 hours, an all-time record for the community. Hundreds of trees were uprooted, roads were blocked, and the ground floors of Bharat Nivas and of some apartments were flooded. At some time during the night, the Lego block wall that separates section 1 of the Matrimandir Lake from the as yet unfinished and unlined Lake section 2 broke in the middle and at both banks, and water stored in section 1 cascaded into the 10 m deep excavation of section 2. The situation was exacerbated when the water in the open water channel around the Matrimandir area also drained into section 2. The Matrimandir executives said that a different type of foundation, which would prevent a shifting of the Lego block walls, would be designed, although there is no plan to rebuild the broken one in situ.

Message to our readers

This is the last issue of Auroville Today.

While this issue was in the press, the editorial team learned that a new media policy for Auroville is about to be implemented. We do not feel we can continue to function under this policy, so regrettably, because we are very aware of our responsibility to you, our readers, we have decided to stop publication. This additional page features a few articles that we had planned to publish in our December issue. Now we offer them to you as a final goodbye and thanks for your support.

The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, in its 68th meeting held on 5 December 2024, had approved a new media policy. However the policy was only made public on 7 November 2025, one month after this Governing Board’s term of office had ended.

On 10 November 2025, the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) appointed by the Governing Board called a meeting of all Aurovilians involved in media. We were informed that the FAMC plans to bring all Auroville media activities together under a single, large media department. The main aim is to unify how Auroville represents itself to the world and to foster a ‘positive image’. To ensure compliance with this objective, all media material will require approval by an overview group before it can be published.

On the face of it, this is not unreasonable. Clearly it is important that there is unity in how Auroville’s purpose and ideals are presented to the world. The issue, however, concerns how to document the way in which a community of seekers is trying to realise these ideals. Auroville, as Mother emphasised more than once, is about experimentation, and experiments – particularly a unique spiritual experiment like this one which lacks any precedent – can be messy, chaotic, unpredictable.

If one adopts the communication strategy of the corporate world, the ‘messiness’ involved in designing a product must never be mentioned: the only image to be propagated is a positive one. But Auroville is not a product to be sold on the open market. It is a working experiment, an attempt to realise a new way of being.

At *Auroville Today* magazine, we have always felt it is important to document this process as honestly as possible, celebrating the successes but also reflecting on the failures. We have done this

not only because we feel that such a unique experiment needs honest documentation but, above all, because we have an abiding faith that Mother is continuing to guide this project; and that every detail, every struggle, may have its importance in the larger scheme of Auroville’s evolution, even if we do not immediately grasp its significance or, indeed, how apparent oppositions can be reconciled at a higher level of consciousness.

The new media policy will not allow us to do this, as the focus will have to be upon ‘positive’ news only, and we will have to conform to a particular narrative regarding what we publish about Auroville. In addition, we were informed that new executives may be appointed to hold office along with or to replace the existing executives, presumably to ensure compliance with the new media policy.

At the same time, while we have complied with all requested procedures, a substantial donation made to Auroville for *Auroville Today* has not been released to the magazine.

Given these developments, we have come to the difficult decision that this issue, which coincidentally is published on *Auroville Today*’s 37th birthday, will be our last.

We are immensely grateful for the support we have received from you, our readers, over the past 37 years.

Editors

Subscription refunds

Though *Auroville Today* is in financial difficulty because we have not been allowed to access our donation funds, we request current subscribers to let us know if they wish to receive a partial refund for the months remaining in their subscription. Please email avtoday@auroville.org.in mentioning your bank details. We will try our utmost to pay all requested refunds.

REFLECTION

Auroville and accelerated evolution

Mother once described Auroville as a “centre of accelerated evolution”. (“*Auroville is the place where this new way of living is being worked out; it is a centre of accelerated evolution where man must begin to change his world through the power of the inner spirit.*”) Left to the tardy pace of nature, consciousness evolution takes millennia. And it is far from being a linear process, for there are many setbacks and deviations. But if Auroville is intended to be a place of accelerated evolution, clearly something must be happening here to speed up the process. Most powerfully, no doubt, it is Mother’s Force for progress which is exerted upon all Aurovilians.

But external circumstances can also be a spur. As Sri Aurobindo put it in relationship to India and the modern invasion of Western ideas: “*Throughout the East, the subjective Asiatic mind is being driven to adapt itself to the need for changed values of life and thought. It has been forced to turn upon itself both by the pressure of Western knowledge and by the compulsion of a quite changed life-need and life-environment. What it did not do from within, has come on it as a necessity from without and this externality has carried with it an immense advantage as well as great dangers.*”

In this sense, while there have been real achievements in Auroville over the past 55 or so years, I wonder if it isn’t our failures which can provide the impetus for accelerating the evolution of our consciousness, for, unlike our successes, they have the potential to bring us face to face with the shortcomings of the present way in which we perceive and organise our world.

Take, for example, our repeated failure to reconcile seemingly contradictory approaches to the development of the city. On the

one hand, there is the view that Auroville must grow organically, according to the developing consciousness of the residents. On the other hand, there is the belief that the plans for the city have already been provided, and that all we need is to follow these, and that the process of materialising them will of itself serve to develop our consciousness.

These alternative paths were first delineated by Roger Anger at the first meeting of the Auroville Planning Group in October 1971. Interestingly, at that time Roger favoured the ‘organic’ approach, explaining (according to Ruud Lohman’s notes) that we need to “Just let it happen, give it a chance and all the time it needs, and we’ll see what comes out of it. For, after all, it is a spiritual and evolutionary experiment in which unknown forces play a role and it will happen anyhow, with us or without us.”

The dichotomy surfaced again as one of the ‘elephants in the room’ during the 2015 Auroville Retreat, where the following resolution was suggested:

“Auroville will be built with plans that allow for flexibility and organic growth within a planned framework”.

However, this very rational synthesis has not put the discussion to bed, perhaps because its resolution required something more than merely the intelligent exercise of reason; namely, the capacity to experience the different ways of perceiving which underlie these different ways of looking at development.

The potential for doing this is already here. The ‘ecological perspective’ which favours organic development is most strongly developed in those Aurovilians who worked the land in the early years. For many of those pioneers, the slow, quiet work on the land led to a deep identification with the earth and caused them to develop an outlook upon life which was more aligned with nature;

with the seasonal shifts and the slow growth of vegetation. But others were drawn to Auroville by something else: by the call of a vision which promised a new beginning, a new world, which, for many of them, was represented by the Galaxy plan. This was as profound an experience for them as the healing touch of the earth was for those pioneer ecologists.

The problem is that neither has been able to fully experience the other way of seeing. On the contrary, each has tended at times to downgrade or dismiss those who think differently. And so they are locked in a continual battle to demonstrate that their perspective is the ‘true’ one.

But perhaps it is precisely this impasse which offers the spur to the next stage in the evolution of our individual and collective consciousness in Auroville. For it requires us to develop our intuitive faculties; to develop the capacity to experience rather than merely verbalise modes of understanding different from our own, and to actually experience where they are no longer opposites but indispensable aspects of a larger whole. For, as Sri Aurobindo put it, “*As you go higher up, a wider movement develops which reconciles all contraries*”.

Perhaps it is the growth of this capacity, this enlargement of consciousness, which holds the key to the solution of many of our current problems, including the intractable challenge of how to organise this complex community. For as Raag Yadava put it in his monumental study, *Governance in Auroville*, “it is not an abandonment of the rational faculty, but its progressive illumination that is the defining movement for Auroville to develop its regulatory and governance architecture”.

Alan

PASSING

Roy, who passed away in Auroville on 6 November 2025 at the age of 76, came to Auroville from the USA in 1971. Roy had learned about Auroville when seeing an image of the Galaxy in a bookshop in New York. He was in search of a spiritual community after experiencing a higher, non-mental state. He found a yoga teacher who knew about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. In the Lama Foundation community in New Mexico he also met someone who had been to Pondicherry and visited the Ashram.

Roy would have liked to stay in the Ashram, where he had met the Mother, but being advised to go to Auroville, he arrived in the Silence community, where he met Constance, Iris, Jocelyn, Daniel, Jaap, Diane and others who were creating a community near Kottakarai village.

Together with Constance, Roy started Auroville’s first pottery there. They wanted to hire a village potter and teach him glazing as they were concerned that village potters would

disappear unless they made more durable products. This attempt did not succeed, but the pottery did manifest in the end; and when Patrick and Angad, both experienced potters, arrived, the pottery took off.

Roy soon started working at the Matrimandir construction site and stayed in the Matrimandir Workers Camp. From there he moved to Aurodam, where he stayed for many years with his partner Gillian. He was involved with the H.E.R.S. store in Kottakarai and took over as editor of the *News & Notes* in July 2021, until recently when he withdrew for health reasons.

Roy recalled having a vivid dream in 1972 of Mother’s passing. “In this dream I approached the Ashram, the main gate was closed but a seldom used side door was open. There was a long line of disciples winding its way slowly inside and there on the Samadhi lay the Mother’s body. I approached and kissed her feet, they were blue in color, but a force surged through them and I knew she was not dead but in a deep state.”



Roy was not outgoing, more of a quiet presence. He once described himself modestly as “a short, a bit overweight, Jewish guy from New Jersey who plays guitar and builds tube amplifiers”.

Roy was a good writer, with sharp insights into Auroville affairs. In one post on Auronet, he observed, “Getting Aurovilians to agree on any subject let alone a detailed description longer than a paragraph remains a kind of insolvable enigma and may be so for some time to come. Perhaps we may have to wait till the details of our policies are tackled by those Gnostic Beings.” And he quoted Sri Aurobindo:

“*In the Gnostic consciousness difference would not lead to discord but to a spontaneous natural adaptation, a sense of complementary plenitude, a rich many-sided execution of the thing to be collectively known, done, worked out in life.*”

At Roy’s funeral, on 9 November at the Auroville Cremation Ground, one of his friends recalled having asked Roy recently about his psychic being. Roy’s answer: “For the last 60 years or so, my life has been Sri Aurobindo. Now I hope to be near him.”

Annemarie

“The Inner found its way out”

Nishtha (Siegfried) Mueller is a long-term Aurovilian, Sanskrit teacher, Veda researcher, and passionate life-long learner. For more than forty years he has devoted himself to Sri Aurobindo’s *The Secret of the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, to the study and restoration of some of the ancient hymns and to sharing a living approach to Sanskrit with spiritual seekers.

Auroville Today: Could you start by telling us a bit about your early years and what led you to India?

Nishtha: I grew up in a small farming village in Southern Germany, where from a young age I often felt closer to nature than to the general setup of human society. Then came the early seventies, the time of the hippie movement, of idealism, of people speaking about peace and inner freedom. I felt drawn to that search for a deeper, truer life. Finally, when I was around twenty, I went through a deep crisis of meaning, and feeling a deep question rise within me: “Is this all there is?” I couldn’t identify with the world I saw around me.

One day, a friend showed me a magazine that had an article on Auroville. This was early 1976. I remember being captivated by the idea that there was a place on earth dedicated to living in harmony, where work was not just about earning but about self-expression and service to a greater ideal. The article mentioned that a new German book on Auroville had just come out. I ordered it, not knowing what awaited me. When it arrived, my life was changed forever. I was deeply impressed by the biographies of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and was especially struck by the idea that the Divine is not something remote, not something to be found only after death or in heaven, but something we can experience here, in life. That realisation was transformative, it felt like a new birth. Within weeks, I knew I had to go to India.

That must have been quite a radical step to take at the time.

Absolutely. First of all my family was in deep shock and travelling to India in the seventies was not what it is today. But when I finally came to India, the experience was overwhelming. We landed in Chennai, then Madras, and everything was different: the smells, the heat, the sounds. Finally, after a five hour adventurous bus trip I reached Pondicherry there was a palpable change in the atmosphere. And this deepened as I was travelling in a cycle rickshaw through the old French township towards the Ashram main building. I will never forget these magic moments. The next day I hired a bicycle and searched for the guest house in Auroville, where I had booked a room months ago by postal contact. After travelling on a gravel road through open fields with no big trees, from where I could see the four pillars of the Matrimandir rising out of the ground, I reached the guesthouse, which was very basic. In the thatched roof ‘capsule’ where I stayed there were rats, even snakes, and I fell ill almost immediately and lost much weight.

You eventually settled in Auroville in 1981. What did those first years look like?

They were very formative years. From 1977 onwards I immersed myself in the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Life Divine*, *Essays on the Gita*, and especially *Savitri* and *Prayers and Meditations* became my daily companions. The poetry of *Savitri* touched something profound in me. Then in 1978 I discovered *The Secret of the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. These texts spoke to me in a way that was not only intellectually inspiring but deeply spiritual.

And is that how your journey with Sanskrit began?

Yes. But even though the wish to read the Nagari text above Sri Aurobindo’s English renderings was there early on, it began almost by accident. During one of my stays at the Ashram at the end of 1980, I attended lessons on *Essays on the Gita* conducted by Dr Aravinda Basu. One day at my request, he wrote down and recited for me the shloka ‘sarva dharmān parityajya, mām ekaṁ śaranam vraja...’ which by then I had understood to be “The supreme secret of the Gita”. It was a short moment, but it felt like a revelation. When in March 1981 I permanently settled in Auroville, I was determined to learn more. I bought cassettes and transliterated texts of the Gita and the *Devimahatmya*, and began to practice Sanskrit pronunciation by myself. Later, my interest turned more and more toward the Veda. I

would cycle to Pondicherry, go to the Ashram Library, and hand-copy hymns from an old *Rig Veda* book. I had no electricity then, so I worked by kerosene lamp. Those were quiet nights of deep joy in Agni Community, for which I myself had chosen the name and planted many shrubs and trees there, based on Mother’s flower book, which for me, due to its profound spiritual psychology, was a veritable Veda of flowers by itself.

Did learning Sanskrit change your way of seeing the world?

Definitely. First of all I must say that from the beginning I felt some familiarity with Sanskrit, which was not the case when I looked at some texts in Latin or later on in ancient Greek. I never had the sense that this is an old or archaic language. I rather felt it represents an omnipresent eternal reality and noticed that when I tried to chant the verses metrically, something began to move in me and I could feel a natural rising and falling of waves of sound. The poetry would flow naturally only if I respected the original rhythm, sometimes even undoing the euphonic word combinations called *sandhi*. That’s when I began to realize that the *Rig Veda*’s language is even more rich and profound than the later classical Sanskrit. In comparison the classical form feels simplified, almost domesticated, since it observes grammar rules that developed only when ‘writing’ was established. The Vedic Sanskrit, on the other hand, is alive with more light, fire, colour and power. This is not to say that the Gita and the metrical Upanishads do not have their own speciality and grandness. In fact, many of those Upanishads still echo something of the Vedic Sanskrit and style of poetry, due to which in recent years I also study them more and more in the original and make my own translations.

You were also drawn to music during this time and have taught the recorder for years.

Yes, music was always part of me. I had wanted to play an instrument since childhood, but my family couldn’t afford one. Only at the age of eighteen during my apprenticeship as industrial merchant, I took some basic guitar lessons. But it was not until the early 1990s that I began earnestly studying by myself the alto recorder. And after some years of rigorous practice I played duets, trios and quartets with friends in Auroville and in the Ashram, and music became a means of meditation and of experiencing a higher harmony collectively. I realised that music, like Sanskrit, demands one’s full dedication. It’s not only about talent but about surrender and practice. Then music can truly become alive in you. It was during that period that I taught the soprano and alto recorder at Deepanam for seven years.

How did your work as a teacher and researcher develop from there?

Around the early 2000s, I joined advanced Sanskrit studies with Vladimir Iatsenko. After its completion three years later, I began teaching the same at Savitri Bhavan. Later, I co-led study sessions in Pondicherry where we would begin with the recitation of Vedic hymns before discussing Sri Aurobindo’s translations. It was during these sessions that I realised even more the importance of restoring the original Vedic metre. The flow of the verse reveals its inner

“... the Vedic symbolism as worked out in the hymns is too complex in its details, too numerous in its standpoints, presents too many obscurities and difficulties to the interpreter in its shades and side allusions and above all has been too much obscured by ages of oblivion and misunderstanding to be adequately dealt with in a single work. We can only at present seek out the leading clues and lay as securely as may be the right foundations.”

Sri Aurobindo
(The Secret of the Veda, CWSA vol 15, page 246-247)



Nishtha

music. If the rhythm is broken, the true expression is lost. Even though there existed already the entire *Rig Veda* in a metrically restored version online by the Western academic scholarship, I found out that it is even possible to do the restoration spontaneously while reading the traditionally written *Samhita* text. The result was astonishing, the verses came alive with new resonance. Sri Aurobindo had hinted at this in his writings as well.

“... the whole problem of the interpretation of Veda still remains an open field ...”

Sri Aurobindo
(The Secret of the Veda, CWSA Vol 15, page 30-31)

Your research into Vedic metres and pronunciation became quite groundbreaking.

Perhaps from a certain point of view one could say so, since I began to see connections others had possibly missed or did not find them important. To say it in a very inadequate nutshell, I found out that the Vedic pronunciation of words like *Sūrya*, spoken tri-syllabic as *Sūriya*, seems to be still preserved in the Tamil language, eg *Sathiya*. For the *Rig Veda* there already exists a metrically restored online version, but I am not aware of any such version for the *Yajur Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. Therefore I started myself to systematically restore the meter of any given hymn.

In 2008 you were formally recognised as a full-time Veda researcher in Auroville. What did that mean for your work?

It allowed me to dedicate myself fully. Under SAIHER, I worked on translating and commenting on all the major hymns to *Brihaspati* and *Sarasvati* in the *Rig Veda*, and on the 18-verse hymn with the *Gayatri Mantra* of the seer Vishvamitra. These were deep, luminous years. Later, I began leading weekly sessions called “*Meditations with Hymns to the Mystic Fire*.” We would chant together, explore Sri Aurobindo’s translations, and discuss the symbolism. It wasn’t academic, it was more experiential, and some people felt the living vibration of the ancient words. During those years I was able to touch with these sessions dozens of visitors from all over India and some from abroad.

And that eventually led to the founding of ‘Agni Veda Research’?

Yes, in 2018. The interest in my work was growing, and I wanted to create a space dedicated to Vedic research and teaching at my Veda *sthana* home in Agni. I also began to develop my own Sanskrit learning method for spiritual seekers. Most modern primers are too academic, they ignore the heart of the language. My approach early on brings together *Vedic*, *Upanishadic*, and Classical Sanskrit, along with

song texts from the Carnatic music tradition.

I have developed around forty lessons and built my own Sanskrit-English dictionary, over 550 pages now, that integrates Sri Aurobindo’s interpretations. It’s both a tool and a meditation. The intention is to make Sanskrit alive, to teach it through poetry and meaning rather than only through dry grammar. In fact it is hoped that those who usually shy away from grammar get an incentive through the rich samples.

Alongside this work I made several discoveries during my daily research, which I intend to publish in the near future and for which I have skimmed so far through 890 of the 1028 hymns of the *Rig Veda* and several dozens of the *Atharva Veda*, for each of which I created a separate research document, and hundreds of files on particular topics therein.

You have said before that Sri Aurobindo’s own Vedic work was left incomplete. Could you elaborate?

He never allowed *The Secret of the Veda* to be published as a book during his lifetime, because he considered it unfinished. Even in the 1940s, he was working on around 150 hymns to Agni, either newly translating or revising, but finally published only 35. The same applies to his Upanishadic work, only the *Isha Upanishad* was approved for publication. To me, that is deeply meaningful. It means the field is open. We are invited to continue the work, to listen, to rediscover, to contribute. The Veda and the Upanishads are not closed books, and still wait to be interpreted in a more integral approach.

How would you describe what Sanskrit and the Veda have given you, after all these decades?

They have given me everything. A sense of belonging to something vast, luminous, eternal. When I chant, I don’t feel that I am repeating ancient words. The Veda is not in the past, it’s in the present moment, in the light that burns in our being. In addition, one has the impression that to study the Veda is to gradually build in oneself a ladder that connects the ascending scale of mind-hierarchies. This might as well be the deeper meaning when some Upanishad teachers ask the student “Did you study the Veda?”

Let me end with a line from the *Rig* and a verse from the *Atharva Veda*:

viśvāyur agne, guhā gūhaṁ gāḥ

Sri Aurobindo: O Fire, thou art universal life, enter into the secrecy of the secret Cave.

Rig Veda [I.67.6]

bālād ekaṁ aṇīyaskām, utāikaṁ néva drśyate |

tātaḥ páriṣvajīyasī, devātā sā máma priyā

Sri Aurobindo: One (presence) is smaller than a child, and one is not even seen. More embracingly close than that is the deity. She is my beloved.

Atharva Veda [X.8.25]

In conversation with Chandra

Today, Nishtha continues his work through Agni Veda Research in Auroville. His mission is to keep the ancient fire burning, to make the luminous speech of the Veda alive again for seekers of today, to connect the past dawns with the future dawns, to help India, his chosen country, to reignite its ancient glory.

He is happy to welcome new students who feel drawn to explore the living spirit of Sanskrit and the Veda. Nishtha can be contacted at nishtha@auroville.org.in

“We need a real Residents Assembly”

Lakshay Dharan shifted to Auroville in 2015 and became an Auroville resident in Feb 2018. Since then, he has been active in art, communication, strategy, and organisational work. A brand strategist by profession and an artist by temperament, he has contributed to several working groups and collective dialogues in Auroville. He works in a service unit called Aware. Recently he published on Auronet a 12-point peace plan for Auroville (see box). This is the latest in a series of suggestions made by residents and friends of a possible way forward out of the present turmoil.

Auroville Today: Why have you published this now?

Lakshay: Why not now? It’s already too late. I started writing on this topic four years ago, when there was a Residents’ Assembly Decision to remove four people from the Working Committee (WC). I wrote then that every action like this would generate a reaction, and that would take us down a rabbit hole. And that is what has been happening for the last four years. But I feel that the recent Supreme Court judgement is a pivotal point. Whether we like it or not, forthcoming Governing Boards (GBs) will quote it and use it. So, what do we want to do now?

The question is, are we happy as a collective with the way things have turned out in the last four years? Clearly, many of us are not. So, is the solution more resistance? I’ve long felt that this would likely harden the Governing Board’s stance. They are tasked with ‘governing’ Auroville, yet it seems challenging for them to do so without the collectivity of the residents, which ought to be the Residents’ Assembly (RA) ‘functioning’. I don’t think the Governing Board is entirely satisfied with the present state either, as they are limited in what they can achieve, with just a handful of people working with them.

So what do you suggest we do as residents?

We need to come together as a real Residents’ Assembly. Unfortunately, at the moment, it can’t be called that because the term has been utilised by a large group which is resisting the changes. When RA meetings are called by this particular group – perhaps, a reminiscence of ‘the collective’ of the 70s/80s – only those who agree with them come to hear the things they want to hear. It’s an echo chamber, a happy marriage between 500 or so people. I don’t call this a real collective; it’s a faction.

But these are open meetings. Anybody can attend, including those who want to register their disagreement.

True, but I think there is an aversion in our community to talking about difficult subjects, so we always tend to take the easy path – to be with those who think like us. Also, those who are perceived to hold a different perspective and who’ve tried to attend these meetings will tell you that it is not a welcoming atmosphere. We do need to figure out a new way to organise ourselves because our old organisational structure cannot continue. It is very clear now that democracy is not the way forward. In fact, it was never intended for Auroville, but somehow we arrived at this point – maybe because we thought it was the best available model.

What is the alternative?

I think the only way forward is to resurrect the Residents’ Assembly as a genuine collective. The whole point is to interact, to work with others as aspiring Aurovilians, not as factions. It won’t be easy. As long as we remain under the influence of our egos and our preconditioned emotions, we will continue to wrestle in the quagmire now. At the moment, it seems everybody thinks they are right. Yet, there’s nobody that I know of, who is willingly doing anything to intentionally harm Auroville – and I include here all the people who have filed court cases – but people are not engaging with each other. And, that’s hurting our purpose.

A functioning RA would manage agenda topics, organise meetings, record minutes, and ensure reports are created, and we could very well use the Secretariat to submit these to the GB/IAC/Ministry. The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation is to act as a liaison between the RA, GB, IAC, and other bodies. The RA if it were to work not in opposition to either of the other bodies, may then begin again to establish committees or task forces of residents and experts in the relevant fields to collect data, study issues, and propose solutions in key areas such as policy and organisation, urban development, environment and sustainability, economy and abundance, art and culture, and resource allocation. The outcomes of such study groups could then be presented to an inclusive functioning RA for discussion and refined into actionable policies or advisories to be submitted to the GB, which, of course by definition, would have the final say.

Residents can nominate themselves for these groups.



PHOTO COURTESY LAKSHAY

Lakshay

So these groups would be self-appointed?

The choice of who could be in a group should definitely not be made by voting, because then people will pander to a certain group or interest. Those who have nominated themselves, proposed a clear plan forward, been vetted by a trustworthy body, could then be chosen by lottery, or even by a child picking out their names.

But shouldn’t there be a precondition for somebody who wishes to offer themselves as a candidate for one of these groups?

I agree. It’s important that every member of such a group does not claim something as ‘their’ idea and is not attached to the outcome. And if the Assembly or the chosen trustworthy body feels that somebody who has nominated themselves is representing something totally wrong for Auroville, the latter could be excluded from the selection process. Also, if someone who has not been picked in the lottery has a good idea, he or she could be used as a resource person, or their ideas taken forward.

When I think of how the RA could function on a regular basis, I imagine something like the Retreat, which brought diverse people together in 2015 to discuss the way forward. It could happen every month on a fixed day, when we would pause regular work in Auroville to come together for this.

I’m sure that initially – and perhaps always – it is going to be tough. It is going to be noisy, messy, but we need to try to keep our egos and personal perceptions at home and tell ourselves we are coming for the sake of Auroville. That’s the kind of surrender which is necessary. That’s the kind of Residents’ Assembly I’m talking about.

The important thing is that we get our act together before we present anything to the Governing Board.

But let me take a hypothetical scenario. If one day we have a Governing Board which does not have Auroville’s best interests at heart, what should be the responsibility of the residents? Does legal authority trump Auroville’s spiritual ideal?

Very good question. I would not approach this from a standpoint of fear. If anyone wants to spoil things, they could attempt to do so. Say, 40 years from now, we have no way of knowing who will be in power. Also, it is true that the past four years have amplified these concerns to an extent, but it is important to understand what may have actually happened. Could it be possible that actions which were detrimental to Auroville – such as media maligning, boycotting, and filing court cases – provoked the Governing Board to respond the way they did? Moreover, these actions were not undertaken with the full involvement of the residents; there was no broader debate. Nor does it seem that the group making these decisions fully anticipated the repercussions.

So, to answer your question, of course, the vision is higher than any court judgment. If a Governing Board does not uphold that ‘Vision’, the community should oppose it – but as a full collective, not as a clique. I believe the last Governing Board, which has just completed its tenure, was

more supportive of the Vision than some Aurovilians I know.

The question is, did they spoil things on their own, or did we, as a collective, undermine their chances? I think we created a situation where the Governing Board was forced to act as it did because, collectively, we boycotted them, embarrassed them, and inundated them with so many court cases that they were unable to function effectively. In response, they created more posts for Officers on Special Duty and relied on the few people who did not refuse to work with them.

But it didn’t have to be like this. I remember when the Secretary first came – we were very enthusiastic about her. She came with a certain energy, but we didn’t know how to receive a Secretary who wanted to work and who was very hard-working. I was in the ATDC at that time, and she kept wanting action, results. We reacted in our typical way, not expecting anything would happen to the Youth Centre, but when she finally lost patience – and she was very patient for someone so action-oriented – she sent in the JCBs.

We forced the hand of somebody who wanted to help us.

I think she believed in the RA; otherwise, she wouldn’t have volunteered to come to that 15 Dec 2021 meeting, where she was publicly insulted. We may say we didn’t invite her, but from her perspective, I think the way she was treated was an inflection point. She is a high-ranking government official and a human being and a woman.

The trouble is, the more arrogant in our resistance we are, the more reasons the Governing Board has to harden its position. And perhaps, this resistance is based on some people seeking to keep power and retain the status quo.

I think almost everybody accepts that change has to happen. But my perception is that the resistance is largely due to the manner in which the change is being effected at present. Many have lost their jobs, their maintenances, from one day to the next, without any explanation being given, without any conversation or appreciation being expressed by the people in authority for the work they had been doing. It feels inhumane, as if people are not considered as individuals with real needs, but rather

as puppets that can be set aside if they are not serving a particular agenda.

I hear you, and I can see how it must have felt, how it must feel. Yet it is what it is. I think the people driving the resistance had not anticipated the consequences, many were very emotional in their response and didn’t take everybody on board, but almost everyone is suffering as collateral damage.

So you see this 12-point peace plan as a possible way forward?

Yes. But I want to emphasise that I don’t want it to be seen as ‘my’ plan – others may change them or come up with further points. However, I think it does provide a basis on which the RA and GB can work together again. I have listened to Kireet’s talk on the Foundation Act many times, and he stresses the importance of ‘mutuality’ in the relationship between the three authorities of the Foundation. I think this is a kind of mutuality which does not demand one’s ‘rights’; it begins with offering oneself. Almost as a responsibility.

But why should we invest our energy in discussing this peace plan if the Secretary and the Governing Board may ignore whatever we come up with?

When I was writing it, I asked myself the same question. But what other options do we have? In four years, we have filed and lost the court cases, we have ended up making the Master Plan more rigid, and we have saturated the media with news that negatively impacts Auroville. Of course, we could continue to ostracise or ridicule the Governing Board and those working for them, but is that really a solution?

However, if we manage to agree on something together, why would they want to veto it? If we advise the next Governing Board that, as residents, we want to beautify the Crown with a zero-budget request, because we can do it ourselves, wouldn’t that be music to their ears? Common sense shows it, and perhaps, the GB members know it well, that government officers and employees cannot replace committed Aurovilians in building Auroville.

continued on page 5

12-Point Peace Plan for Auroville

1. Acknowledge the Governing Board’s legal authority under the Auroville Foundation Act while reaffirming the spiritual and deeper Dream that unites us.
Law and Vision must walk together.

2. Communication Ethics – End Hostile Propaganda
Stop character assassinations, leaks, and spin-doctoring. Replace media theatrics with transparent, public dialogue founded in sincerity.

3. Organisational Reform – Resurrect the Residents’ Assembly
Reform the RA as a body of deliberation, not manipulation. No mobs, no secret decisions, no majoritarianism. Only dedication, surrender, and commitment to Her Ideal.

4. Conflict De-escalation – Withdraw the Court Cases
Where possible, replace litigation with mediation and dialogue. Courtroom battles drain resources and deepen divides; internal resolution heals. Neutral facilitators can lead this process.

5. Trust Repair – Establish Auroville Alignment Forums
Create safe spaces for grievances to be aired, documented, and resolved without retaliation. Aligning consciously with Auroville’s founding ideals is the only condition.

6. Justice and Due Process – No Retaliatory Expulsions or Secret Admissions
Admissions, terminations, and notices must be handled openly, with fairness and transparency. No more backroom whispers or retaliatory actions.

7. Constructive Redirection – Focus Energy on Manifesting Auroville in All Its Dimensions

Channel collective effort into agreed infrastructure, mobility, and ecological projects – visible progress that restores hope, faith, and pride in Auroville’s future.

8. Ecological Grounding – Safeguard Land and Water
Afforestation, water security, and soil restoration are non-negotiable. Ecology must stand above factional interests as a common sacred responsibility.

9. Social Equity – Build Fair and Inclusive Structures
Ensure transparent, unbiased systems for guests, volunteers, newcomers, and residents. Remove discrimination based on race, social status, or ideology.

10. Community Wellbeing – Strengthen Collective Care
Prioritise wellbeing, education, and dignity for women, children, elders, and the vulnerable – so no one is left behind in the struggle.

11. Ethical Framework – Adopt a Shared Code of Conduct
Commit publicly to honesty, non-violence in word and deed, transparency in decisions, and accountability in leadership.

12. Global Offering – Take Auroville to the World
Carry Auroville’s experiment beyond its borders, together. The world needs its example of human unity, peace, and conscious living more than ever. Let us anchor our work in Sri Aurobindo’s Five Dreams – India’s awakening, Asia’s unity, a new world order, the uplift of the spirit, and a step towards the supramental future. Auroville was never meant for itself alone; it is a gift to humanity.

Isai Ragam: changing village lives

Aurovilians Ivar Jenten and Brigitte Vink, both originally from the Netherlands, have been working with village children for many years. In June 2021 they founded Isai Ragam under Auroville's Auromitra Trust. The specific beneficiaries are very poor children from villages and Dalit settlements around Auroville. Brigitte tells more about the project.

Auroville Today: Did you already have a background in village development before you came to Auroville?

Brigitte: No. My parents had four children and the last one was born with a disability. Maybe this was a factor because in 2002 I began working for an NGO in the Netherlands that provided care for people with disabilities. It was in the Netherlands that I first met Ivar Jenten, an Aurovilian who had been working for many years with children in the villages neighbouring Auroville. He founded Isai Ambalam school and, with the help of other Aurovilians, he set up night schools in the villages. He also founded Isai Maiyam Trust which, along with an art school and boys' and girls' home, includes a school in Pondicherry offering music, dance and computer lessons for differently-abled children. Like him, I also had a music background so we had common interests. He invited me to visit, but India sounded way too scary to me!

So what changed your mind about coming here?

I had some friends who visited, and they all came back alive! So in 2005 I brought some people from the Netherlands to do a music programme in a village near Auroville. After that, I came back every year until 2010 when I decided to stay because I had set up a music band in 2009 and a dance group in one of the villages, and I wanted this to continue.

So you didn't come primarily for Auroville?

No, it happened gradually. I had begun teaching music in Isai Ambalam school, but when Ivar started reading Sri Aurobindo to me I began to be drawn in.

At the age of 14, I became very interested in spiritual things and was reading many books on the topic, but I had never come across Sri Aurobindo before.

In 2013 I finally became an Aurovilian: I had to do my Newcomer period twice because the

Entry Group people didn't like the fact that in addition to my Auroville work, I was also involved in an outside project in Pondicherry. Later, in addition to my work in the villages, I taught English to older students at an after-school in Kuilapalayam through Auromitra Trust. I was briefly involved in the Martuvam project in 2009 and 2010 and I worked two afternoons a week at Matrimandir after 2013.

At the time of Covid, Ivar and I realised that many village kids were missing out on their education as the schools had closed. So we started providing them with informal English and Maths classes in their homes. In 2021 we decided to formalise the activities by establishing a new unit under Auromitra Trust: it is called 'Isai Ragam' meaning 'melody of music'.

Today, Isai Ragam reaches around 120 children and youth, aged six to twenty-three, from villages and Dalit settlements in the region. We meet in the houses of people who know Ivar well – some had been his students in the past – and now we have seven locations in the surrounding villages, six of which are in Dalit colonies. We meet every evening from 6 to 8 pm on weekdays and have full day programmes on weekends. We also organise occasional tours.

We welcome all kids, but many of them are under-privileged, from homes affected by poverty, fractured families, or alcohol abuse, where educational and emotional support is scarce. So, in addition to the educational activities, we provide them with a sense of belonging and safety: some don't want to leave at the end of the evening session! For many of these children, Isai Ragam is the first place they have felt truly supported.

What kind of activities do you provide?



Village children practising the guitar

In every house we provide tutoring in conversational English and Maths, help with their school homework and games. We also like to provide a holistic programme which includes sports, computer studies, instrumental training (keyboard, violin, guitar), Bharatanatyam and folk dance for girls, and street dance for boys. During the summer holidays we give handicraft training, and in one centre in Kottakarai colony, the children have received meditation classes from an Aurovilian.

However, what is provided in each house varies according to the specialty of the teacher and the location. The teachers are all people we have known for some time who have a higher educational qualification: one is a graduate in computer studies, another has a master's degree in Maths, another a master's in English, so their programmes tend to emphasise these specialties. Also, some houses don't have a sports field nearby so the kids there can't do sports, while others may not be able to provide music and dance lessons. Whatever is possible in that area we do. At the moment we are teaching Bharatanatyam dance and folk dance at three locations and violin, keyboard and melodica and guitar at another three.

Have you seen big changes in the children since they began attending these centres?

Yes. Many of these children are very clever – no different from children anywhere else – but very often they don't get a chance to develop their abilities. For example, quite often talented girls are forced into early marriage which deprives them of the chance to do higher studies. When they get that chance, the results are sometimes extraordinary. One of our ex-students who came from a very poor family where her mother couldn't even tell the time, is doing a PhD in Maths, while another is studying piano and violin at a very high level: she astonished us because without formal training she could play

complex pieces by Bach and Beethoven entirely by ear. Others are following professional courses in Bharatanatyam, nursing and business studies. We help each child discover and nurture their talents.

But surely pursuing these higher studies is expensive, and presumably many of the parents cannot afford the cost.

True. We try to financially support a few to pursue higher studies but our funds are limited.

So how is Isai Ragam funded?

We are almost entirely dependent on Ivar's pension to keep running: 90% of the funds come from him. We also get small amounts from supporters in Holland, and AVI USA has provided us with funding in their once a year 'double up' funding initiative. However, like many other units in Auroville we are finding it difficult to access donations once they arrive in Auroville.

Your financial base is fragile. Are you optimistic that the programme will continue in the future?

If we are not getting Ivar's pension any more, then we may have to stop, but I'm not going to worry about that because it's no use. I think only of how we can improve what we are providing now. For example, we would like to create more playgrounds for the kids (we have created two so far with help from donors and AVI Netherlands and AVI USA) and to buy more second-hand laptops so as to enable computer classes in all locations. In order to teach music to larger groups of children we also need more musical instruments, like guitars, bongos, drums and melodicas.

Meanwhile I love what I am doing. It is so varied that there's never a dull moment!

From an interview by Alan

For more information, contact isairagam.org



Guitar teachers Sagadevan and Brigitte

"We need a real Residents' Assembly"

continued from page 4

For example, what if we as a collective decide to activate the International Zone? Suppose we appoint two of our best minds for each continent, and their job is to connect with people there, reach out to their cultural ministries, organise student exchanges, etc., as part of Auroville's larger outreach. Wouldn't a GB want to support this? I believe that if we can create initiatives like these, the GB would actually look forward to coming here; they would love to meet an RA of a thousand people where such initiatives are presented.

Then there is the question of the messenger, some people may reject this peace plan because of the person who is proposing it. Many people consider you to be a polarising figure because of your postings on Auronet. In fact, many of your postings seem to contradict what you propose in point 11, that there should be non-violence in word and deed. So why should anybody believe

you are serious in making this proposal?

I absolutely agree. I get it. I do not particularly enjoy the role I've been playing, but sometimes it is necessary to confront the deviations we see. Over the last four years, I have tried to exhaust certain issues by bringing them to light, by aggravating, exaggerating, or ridiculing them, to show that some kinds of behaviour are dead ends. Do I want to continue doing this? No – it is not necessary at all, which is why I put it as a second point. It is understandable that the focus has fallen on me. It would be better for Auroville if all of us stopped engaging in spin-doctoring and planting stories, particularly in the Tamil media, which alienate our neighbourhood.

So can we, as a collective, stop this? Absolutely. Would I agree to stop doing this? One hundred percent, yes – if it is a collective decision.

But, crucially, on what basis do you think we can come together to discuss such a plan after what

has happened in the past four years?

Mother has given it. Becoming a 'true Aurovilian' is the goal, but even for that, we need an instrument – something we can work on together and grow through, progress with. It has to be something larger than us, and what else is there apart from the City? What united Aurovilians in the past was the construction of the Matrimandir, because when you are passing chetties of cement from hand to hand, you are not judging another. I think that today the city can perform the same role.

In other words, can we agree to disagree, and yet work together for the greater possibility of Auroville?

Some people did not want the Crown to be circular. But now that it is, can we come together to plant trees and clean the area, which is now littered? This is why we have to activate a whole-some RA, so we can take up functions like this.

We need to stop the old habit of endless dis-

cussion and draw up action points instead. I think that is the only way to go forward.

The first step is to come to terms with the present reality – there is no point in crying about it – and start from there. We need to come together to ensure these things do not happen again and to repair our relationship with the GB. Then we need to reorganise the RA. And then there is the question of alignment. Do we know how many of us truly understand the purpose of Auroville? We need to take responsibility when we see that somebody – a friend or someone who trusts us – is not aligned with the deeper purpose. This is where the older generation can become really active, because there are so many newcomers who need guidance. Can we learn to be true Aurovilians together?

There is no guarantee of success, of course, but by working together on these points we can perhaps attempt to pave a new path.

From an interview by Alan

Notes on growth, geography, and grace

Daniel Helman Lee grew up in Auroville, graduated from Future School in 2019 and studied in Maastricht, The Netherlands, before moving to Israel, where she is now enrolled in a Master of Fine Arts creative writing programme in Tel Aviv. Here she reflects on her journey.

Maastricht

Maastricht is a beautiful city in Limburg, in the south of The Netherlands. It prides itself as being an international student city, with an impressive array of university faculties spanning both sides of the Maas river, and – important for students keen on realising a romanticized Pinterest-aesthetic uni-life – with study cafes sprinkled around every other cobble-stoned corner, where one can drink a daily espresso or latte or matcha, served with the always present complimentary cookie (“*het koekje*”).

What is it that attracts many Auroville students to Maastricht? No, not the coffee shops as they are currently defined in The Netherlands. Rather, it is The Netherlands’ reputability of its high-quality, world-ranked English-led university programmes, as well as their notable ranking in global happiness and quality-of-life indexes – after all, students need some sort of insurance to counter the stress and sufferance that are a promised package (or)deal to the ultimate student experience one pays thousands of euros to undergo.

It is well-known in Auroville that Dutch universities, especially University College Maastricht (UCM) known as a top Liberal Arts and Sciences Honours College, is a popular location for Future School alumni – particularly for those who have European passports. However, as a non-European citizen who would have to pay preposterous fees, I applied to several scholarships from different Liberal Arts and Science programmes (suitable for those who want to study but don’t know what to study). Yes, I chose the university, but the university-scholarship also chose me.

From UCM, I received a full-ride need-and-merit-based scholarship (discontinued the year after my year graduated). The scholarship covered tuition, visa, healthcare, and provided housing and a monthly stipend of 500 euros. It was awarded only to five non-EU students a year, and I was one of them! Oh the glee, the immense gratitude to luck, and a sense of validation that I was perhaps, in some ways, extraordinary.

What was the secret to receiving the scholarship? On top of excellent grades, my motivation letter glamorised my unique childhood. Beyond my multicultural background (Korean mother, Israeli father, born in India, raised in the international, experimental township of Auroville), I emphasised the various disciplines I pursued: choir, piano, guitar, Odissi, tango, fire-spinning, gymnastics, swimming, horse-riding, and whatever else I had dabbled in for at least a significant number of years. I cherry-picked and framed a very particular image: a diverse, talented, over-achieving, autonomous individual, cultivating qualities of leadership, team-work, discipline, and creativity, thriving and productive in a variety of settings, eager to soak up and create knowledge and output.

Following my receipt of the scholarship were the glory months wherein I basked between the best of both worlds – Auroville’s stability, freedom, and safety of family and friends, the familiar environment where I had some forms of spotlights (teacher’s pet in high school, performer in fire spinning and Odissi, etc.), and the euphoric expectations and imaginations of a life beyond my mould in Auroville – the nerdy, introverted, shy, not particularly popular or exciting girl. Oh, how I would re-invent myself in Maastricht with a mass of friends and a romanticised envied life!

There is a psychological theory that the relative difference between expectations and reality, rather than one’s absolute reality, has a far more significant effect on one’s happiness and well-being. I lived first-hand through the confirmation of this hypothesis. From being one of the best of my class doing average study work, I was average in my class doing my best. I was a soloist in Auroville’s choir, but my voice cracked on every note in the audition in Maastricht – and in the re-audition I pleaded they grant me. From a built-in network of childhood friends and family, to a devastating loneliness with an unknown expiry date and a threat that it could stretch forever if I didn’t actively make an effort. And boy, was I making an effort, but attempting small talk to fill in silences is a circular form of purgatory as one performs the same conversation with a rotating cast of people with no real interest in how many siblings they have, and whether they lived in France or Belgium or Germany (“Frankfurt? How fascinating! Tell me more!”) was just a dull, shallow soup of information.

It would have been easier if at least one thing had been going well – academically, socially, emotionally, physically – something. But no, studying was not linear (i.e. the amount of time one studies and puts in work did not produce a proportional response in output and grades) and it was overbearing (one had several hundred academic pages to read a week for courses, plus assignments/essays/exams every 3-4 weeks); I was socially and emotionally lonely with no real skill or experience in making new friends and an insecurity that my introverted personality and undramatic life made me a boring person; and all the stress and sudden adjustment to this new, intimidating environment and Europe’s looming winter caused me to be frequently ill, which only further reinforced the debilitation of my academic, social, and emotional life.

Could I give up Maastricht and return to Auroville? It crossed my mind a number of times. There was just one caveat: it wouldn’t solve my problems.

I craved a life in Auroville that belonged firmly to the past: I could not return to high school after I had graduated; most of my friends were dispersed across the country or the globe; I had a reputation for discipline, perseverance, success – how could I return a ‘failure’, giving up my lottery-like scholarship, because I was too weak to handle life abroad? If/when I return to Auroville, it is because I make a willing choice to, not because there is no other choice. I am not someone who will return to Auroville simply because it is the easy thing to do, because it is home, because it is a safety net. I have no interest in being an Aurovilian until I am ready to realise that title.

Thus, I was stuck in Maastricht because there was no alternative.

Thank the universe there was no alternative. I pushed through endless days of mental breakdowns and phone calls home, glued myself to potential friendships on a day-to-day basis fighting against them petering out; I familiarised myself with and normalised the academic workload, rubrics and expectations; I got accepted in the choir in the second semester. Once I survived the base levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Maastricht edition, I could promote myself to enjoying the city as it should be enjoyed.

Maastricht is a fairytale charmed to life with pristine, postcard-perfect streets, five beautiful bridges, burbling rivers, and lush parks – verdant, floral, autumn palette or skeletal depending on the season. It is especially lovely that Maastricht is a pedestrian city; you haven’t lived there long enough if your bicycle hasn’t been stolen at least once.

I admit, Dutch winters are dark and chilling, (forcing yourself out of your duvet at 7.30 am for a morning lecture/tutorial is a daily form of torture during the colder months) – but the strings of light bannered streets, the Christmas baubles floating in trees, windows lit up with buttery light, the Vrijthof Christmas market circulated with the scent of deep-fried Oliebollen – are a fair compensation.

So what next? Was life all rose-gold? Here are a few of my favourite challenges I encountered: I was under risk of being kicked out of university when a close friend plagiarised my paper and the university authorities didn’t know who had copied who; I got my phone stolen (twice) and my laptop, keys, ID, and wallet (once); thesis was a nightmare amount of stress; and let’s not forget when our overstaying guest, Corona, paid us all a visit in her world trip. I think we are universally familiar with those years.

I’ll close Maastricht with a final memory of climbing Mount Saint Peter, known by the Dutch as Sint-Pietersberg – the only ‘mountain’ in The Netherlands with a height of 171 meters – to watch the rose-gold sunset spill on the skyline, invoking every last bit of Maastricht’s peace and beauty.

Israel

After 3 years of an intense bachelor’s degree focused on economics, math, and sustainability, and a gap year (also in Maastricht), I wanted to continue studying, but a subject for my soul. Bar Ilan University offered an English MFA programme in creative writing, and by making Aaliyah to Israel (immigration of a new or returning citizen), my tuition fee would be covered (my luck with scholarships had dried up for UK and American programmes). It was also a



PHOTO COURTESY DANIEL

chance to connect with family I’d only visited in summer vacations, regasp the language, and immerse myself in the culture that makes up half my genetics.

The summer before my university started, I visited Auroville for a month and South Korea for two weeks. My flight was from Seoul to Tel Aviv, with a transit in Warsaw on 8 October, 2023. On 7 October, my father called me from Ashkelon, Israel.

“No one knows the full details yet, but there was a terrible massacre like never before. You can’t come to Israel.”

He was staying in Ashkelon, Israel, in his mother’s house with his sister and nieces. He sent me a picture from the balcony: a landed missile 500 m away, blazing flames gorging on cars, a thick trunk of solid black fumes rising up to penetrate the sky.

And it wasn’t over. Hamas were roaming the streets and every citizen of Israel was told to be on house lockdown until further notice. I imagined the missile landing on my grandmother’s house; I imagined Hamas infiltrating her apartment; I imagined if someone I knew had been killed or kidnapped, and I texted the Israeli Aurovilians I knew were in the country, all the while thinking, “it could have been you. It could have been someone you know. The danger isn’t over”.

There is an immense amount of sadness, and a twisted sense of gratitude that it wasn’t someone I knew who was murdered or kidnapped; that it wasn’t my grandmother’s house – housing most of my family – that had been bombed. The immeasurable amount of anxiety and worry I spent on my family would be unbearable if it solidified to grief. I inundated my father with texts, and if he didn’t answer within 5 minutes, my imagination overreacted.

“Daniel, I can’t be on my phone when I’m sleeping. Let me text you if there are any changes.”

He told me to first focus on my immediate reality. Like, where do I go? I was very fortunate to have family and friends in Europe. From Warsaw, I booked a ticket to Madrid where my stepmother graciously and generously hosted me, before I spent a month in Maastricht. The next question was: what do I do now that my Israel plans are disrupted?

It is difficult to translate the emotions and thoughts I lived through at the time. There are myriad layers of reality to peel through. With regards to the immediate future, I thought about myself. What do I do about university? Is Israel still an option? Why is the rent for my 1-year contract dorm being sucked out of my bank account every month whilst there is a war? What do I do with my life? Am I wasting it every day that I don’t make a concrete decision and plan? If I apply to a university in Belgium (which I started doing as a backup plan) that would still only start next year. What do I do this year? I was hanging around as a visitor in Europe – it wasn’t my life. Truly, I felt a deep restlessness and earnest craving to stabilise and anchor my life, working at personal progress and development; I felt like a ghost lingering in Europe, unable to host any corporeal form, and thus unable to do anything meaningful.

On the other hand: none of that matters. If you are physically healthy and safe, your worries are first-world problems. It is easier to remember that when disaster and danger is at your doorstep, or your family’s doorstep. It is easy when one recalls the ongoing trauma of Israelis of 7 October and its consequences, and the daily trauma

of Gazan civilians facing famine, destruction, and traumatic grief that no civilian should go through.

Time-skip to December and the university informs me that the first semester begins at the end of the month. Now I really needed to make a decision: study in Israel amidst a war and an atmosphere of suffering, or linger aimlessly through life for a year?

There was a lot of indecision and hesitation. I talked to many people in Israel to gauge how life was there. I don’t know that I have rational answers to the decision I made – there are some choices in life that cannot be logically explained through words and arguments; you let your intuition and instinct guide you. I can say that I do not regret my choice to move to Israel to study.

Of course, there are an incredible number of challenges, and one can compress them into the question: how can one live in a place where so many contradictions are realized?

The news is constantly on the war, social media on the daily horrors lived by Gazan civilians, the streets are pasted with the faces of the kidnapped, and the sirens have become a too-familiar sound. At the same time, I am able to make new friends, go out for lovely dinners, buy lattes and attend my lectures. As an English major in university, I may also enroll for free in the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certificate programme to be an English teacher. My teacher teaches us how to teach English as a second language. She also asks about us and our life, and she tells me I am welcome to talk to her about anything – it must be hard to adjust to this new country; I am always welcome at hers for Shabbat dinners whenever I feel like. I don’t even really know her, but that is the hospitality of Israelis.

Sometimes during her lessons, she mentions the time and place of the next protest for the hostages to demand of the government a ceasefire deal and an end to the war, or asks us to take a minute of silence for them. She always has a yellow ribbon pinned to her clothing, the symbol to call for the release of the hostages, even as she teaches us the difference between the first and second conditional; even as she humorously role-plays a student with an attitude whilst one of us role-plays the teacher and diffuses the classroom situation.

“But you know her daughter’s fiancé was murdered on October 7th, bullets riddled through his body with his last moments clutching his mother. You know her best friend’s cousin was kidnapped and is currently in Gaza,” says my classmate a few months later.

No, I didn’t know. Because how can that be a reality for my teacher and she still has the strength to come to class and teach us trivial things like gamifying the present simple into ‘Guess Who’? But I realized – my teacher isn’t special. Everyone knows someone who knows someone who lost a family member or friends – not only in Israel, but also in Gaza. It’s a hierarchy of hell; are we all suffering being in a country where we need to run to bomb shelters every other day? Not as much as those who need to endure their own losses, and those they are grieving for.

I feel a certain net of safety with the shelters and the Iron Dome; the same cannot be said for those living in Gaza. With every bomb that rains down landing, it is impossible to fathom the lived experience for whom this is a first-hand reality, prolonged for years.

A harrowing truth of the world is that trauma and atrocities, in Israel or Gaza or elsewhere, will test humans to draw on a certain inner strength, and remind humanity that humanity still exists. My English teacher is the only person I’ve met first-hand who has touched my heart. I also know there are countless people, in Israel and Gaza, who must do the same. These figures of hope, who could so easily cave to the outside world forcing zero-sum game polarisation, hatred, and selective sympathy – because that’s the easy thing to do – instead turn to empathy and peace for all as driving solutions, and continue to do their bit in making the world a better, more compassionate place.

It is these people who inspire me to draw on my own inner strength and empathy, to not be swept up in the extremist polarisations taking over the world, and to recognize humanity in humanity behind social, moral, cultural, and racial appearances.

Daniel

AuroMag (Auroville Hungary Association)

I met Dr Boglarka Nagy (Bogi), a warm, smiley woman, at the Global Ecovillage Network Europe gathering in Hungary in August 2025. Hers was one of the best workshops I attended at the gathering. What initially intrigued me was the title of her workshop: 'Restorative Circles, the Auroville experience'. A quick chat revealed that Bogi had in fact spent 15 years in Auroville, and that she was now in the process of building a community near Budapest, called AuroMag.

When Bogi promptly invited me to visit AuroMag, I thought it was an opportunity that I could not miss. On the last day of the gathering, we drove twenty minutes north of Budapest on a country dirt road to an as-of-yet uninhabited settlement surrounded by agricultural fields. What stood there reminded me instantly of the photos I had seen of Auroville's early days. There were six buildings, some slightly more modern than others, but all clearly built by hand. Grass was growing all around, with some small trees and vegetable gardens.

The project started five years ago when Bogi and her family returned to Hungary temporarily for her doctoral studies. Due to the COVID public health emergency, the family could not immediately return to Auroville and felt the need to initiate something akin to Auroville near Budapest. Together with others, they pooled money and resources and started to purchase land, amounting to around 8 hectares as of today. AuroMag currently has 40 members including children; some intend to move in while others just want to support the experiment of manifesting the Auroville Dream in Hungary. My imagination ran free through the empty plots, picturing what AuroMag could be one day.



AuroMag community members

The project has both potential and ongoing challenges, some not very different from what Auroville is passing through. The primary challenge faced by AuroMag is the gigantic Samsung factory that has come up just a few kilometers away. Apart from possible contamination of water and soil, there has been pressure from the government for residents in the area to give up land for the factory's expansion. Still, AuroMag continues to buy plots of land in patches according to availability and affordability. The land also lacks groundwater; hence the community relies largely on water harvesting techniques.

I became curious about the name AuroMag and discovered that it

carries a double meaning. In Hungarian, *mag* means 'seed', symbolising growth and potential; and *magyar* means 'Hungarian'. So AuroMag is an apt name for Auroville's representation in Hungary.



An AuroMag tiny home

Bogi and other members of AuroMag founded the Auroville Hungary Association (AHA), part of the Auroville International (AVI) network, in 2012. AHA has invited several Auroville educators to Hungary and organised Hungarian film screenings, as well as culinary and cultural programs in Auroville. They also sought to build a Hungarian Pavilion in the International Zone, the first element of which, the Hungarian Caravan, currently stands in the garden of the European House. In their imagination, the bridge connecting Auroville and Hungary has two physical pillars: the Hungarian Pavilion in Auroville and AuroMag in Hungary.

Over the course of the day, it became very clear to me that Bogi has been deeply moved by Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Even while she focuses on completing her doctorate in Hungary, she has found her own path to continuing the work and experiment that is Auroville. Divine Anarchy seems to be the guiding principle in her life, as well as in AuroMag's development.

As Bogi and I parted ways, I was reminded that Auroville is an experiment, a dream and possibly a glimpse of a world-future where our best methods and ideas have spread globally.

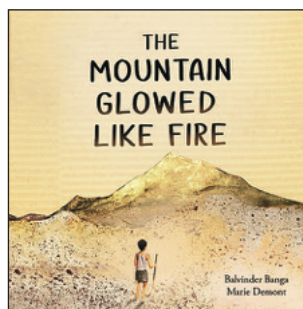
Namu

NEW BOOKS

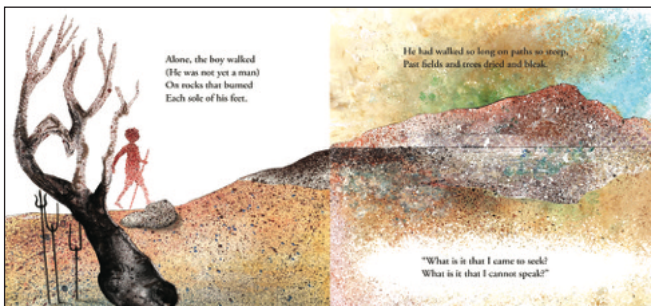
The mountain glowed like fire

This is the charming illustrated story of a young boy who seeks, in the midst of an arid landscape, for a way to restore the monsoon, and who finds the clue while asleep "on the mountain where all journeys end". The rains come "like tears from a god" and for the boy, "nothing could ever be as before, not now that he had touched the sky."

The text is by Balvinder Banga and the lovely illustrations are by Marie Demont. The book was launched on 1 November and the accompanying exhibition ran at Pitanga until 15 November.



The mountain glowed like fire: a fable of Arunachala with portraits of its timeless form. Published by Auroville Press 2025. Available from various Auroville outlets, including Visitors Centre, Taboo, It Matters, and the Auroville Online Store. Price 750 rupees.



REFLECTION

The death of public discourse

One of the many things which have changed in Auroville over the past four years is the contraction and virtual disappearance of public discourse, meaning the free exchange of ideas and perspectives between Aurovilians in a public forum. Auronet has shrunk to a place where a few voices tend to express the same line and where rare challenges to this perspective are often attacked or ridiculed. Community meetings are banned unless called by officially recognised groups, while officially-sanctioned meetings tend to be attended mainly by those who support the regime and dissent or alternative views are rarely, if ever, expressed. And even though a plethora of alternative information and discussion channels have opened up on the Internet, these are not open to all and tend to be populated by those who share the same perspective.

And it's not just the lack of discussion platforms supporting a diversity of perspectives which is the problem. Self-censorship is also widespread. Aurovilians today fear voicing their opinions and thoughts publicly if these challenge the official narrative as the consequences may range from public ridicule and boycotting to the possible cancellation of visas and/or residence in Auroville.

It is understandable, then, why people keep quiet or share their thoughts only with those who they know think like them. But there is a price to pay. For the fear of saying the wrong thing or speaking to the 'wrong' person is corrosive: the loss of the ability to freely express oneself leads to contraction, to a loss of the fullness of being, while the community as a whole is impoverished when public expressions of diversity are lacking.

When we inhabit silos of thinking, echo chambers in which we only hear our own views repeated back to us by others, we lose the capacity to expand our understanding by encountering different views, and assertiveness, dogmatism, replaces the healthy uncertainty which can lead to new discoveries. John Stuart Mill, who wrote the classic text on the importance of free speech, argued that truth is only discoverable through debate, through the free exchange of ideas. While, from a spiritual perspective, we may question this assertion – Mother made it clear that the discovery of Truth does not depend upon debate or mental reasoning – it remains true that if many of our assumptions are not challenged we lose the chance to change or refine them: few of us have the ability to vigorously question our own beliefs.

Above all, to open a reasoned discussion with someone is an expression of solidarity: it demonstrates that I think you are worthy of being listened to and responded to. In this sense, dialogue, discourse, is one of the most important of the invisible glues which hold communities together. This glue is weakening today. It is weakening because, while there are exceptions, more and more of us seem to be refusing to enter into dialogue with those who hold different views, not only because we think that only we hold the 'truth', or, more reasonably, because we think this is the time for action, not words, but also because we consider that those who don't think like us are not worth engaging with. We have decided they are not 'good' Aurovilians and therefore don't deserve to be listened to or even, perhaps, to be here.

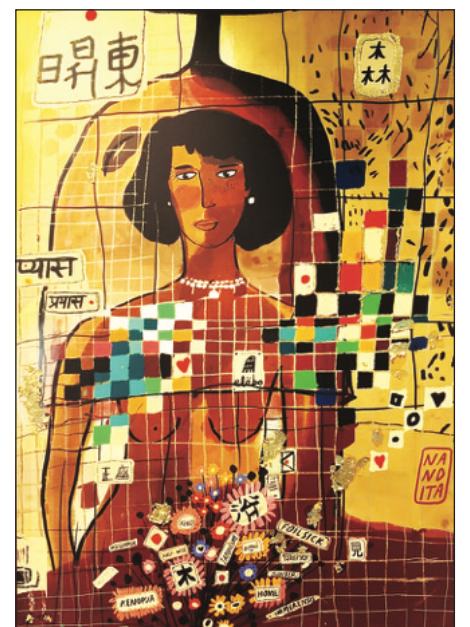
And once we begin taking this road, there is no easy way back....

Alan

EXHIBITION

The thinking hand

In October, the Centre d'Art hosted an exhibition by artist in residence Nandita Sharma. Titled "The thinking hand", she explained that her work moves between words and images. "Fragments attract me: the intensity of a moment, a glimpse of the ordinary rather than the whole story ... For me, there is no single reading of a place, a person, a city." To this end, she supplies the viewer with alternative ways of interpreting each work, one which takes 10 seconds, another more than 40. For example, a tapestry-like collection of cows is explained, in 10 seconds, as "What you see here is a co(w) congregation ... If you stumble upon a congregation of cows amid the clamour of cyclists, bikers, pedestrians and other sentient beings, you've arrived in Auroville". And, in more than 40 seconds, "co(w) congregations can often be mistaken for a



group of enlightened lamas seated around one another in companionable silence".

What is striking about the exhibition, apart from the technical virtuosity and its sense of fun, is the extraordinary diversity of styles. It is as each painting, each poem, represents a new departure, a new moment of discovery for the artist as much as the viewer. And here the key concept for Nandita is *zuihitsu*, a Japanese term that implies 'following the brush', allowing it to lead rather than dictating its direction. The sense of spontaneity, of joy in creation, which invests almost everything in the exhibition is a reminder that so much of what gives life its flavour is that which is uncontrolled, unexpected.

Alan



Long-term residents face risk of expulsion

In early September 2025, a number of long-standing residents and duly-appointed community representatives received emails from the AVFO’s ‘Admissions and Termination Scrutinizing Committee’ and ‘Admissions and Terminations Registry’. They were told they had 14 days to respond to a variety of accusations or risk being removed from the Register of Residents. Of the 35 residents who received these letters, most have lived in Auroville for more than 20 years, some of whom were among Auroville’s early pioneers. The RA Working Committee commented that “These letters are filled with baseless accusations, written in a tone that is hostile, intimidating, and devoid of humanity. The language and the attitude is aggressive, accusatory, and completely against the spirit of Auroville’s Charter and our aim of human unity.” The International Advisory Council stated, “We cannot resist the conclusion that the show-cause notices list convoluted accusations couched in dramatic language so as to build a case for termination against those residents whom the current administration, for whatever reasons, happens to be unhappy with.” In response, residents initiated a petition denouncing the committee’s baseless allegations and asking for an immediate withdrawal of these notices. The petition concludes, “Constructive engagement – not punitive exclusion – is the only path forward for a collective experiment such as Auroville.”

The continued pressure from the AVFO on visa-dependent Aurovilians since 2021 has significantly affected international interest in joining Auroville. In the past three months, only 23% of those entering through the Entry Board process and only 30% of those entering through the AVFO ‘ATR’ process are of non-Indian origin. Also, over the past 3.5 years, a significant number of Aurovilians from the international community have left due to mounting challenges related to visas, work projects, and means of sustaining their livelihoods.

Constitution of the Appellate Committee

The Governing Board, in its 69th meeting held on 8 July 2025, has constituted the Appellate Committee to hear appeals arising from rejection of applications for admission as a Volunteer, Newcomer or Aurovilian, or removal/termination of individuals from the Volunteer List, Newcomer List, and Aurovilian List/Register of Residents (RoR). The members are Shri Aravindan Neelakandan, Professor Goutam Ghosal and Professor Sarraju. Invitee: Dr Nirima Oza. A mass mail explained that all appeals shall be submitted in writing to the Admissions and Terminations Registry, duly signed by the appellant. The appeal shall be decided by the Appellate Committee within a period of thirty days of receipt of the appeal, and the decision of the Appellate Committee to confirm or revoke the decision appealed against, shall be final and binding.

Afsanah Guest House

On 16 October, a group of 15 people came to Afsanah Guest House, including executives of the Auroville Security Services appointed by the AVFO and broke open the doors of the office, the dining room and Room 7. Computers and documents were removed. The guest house team members were prevented from collecting their personal belongings, which were not returned to them. The team thanked those who had supported them during the past two years of, as they put it, repeated attempts to forcefully takeover the Guest House “without following due process or principles of natural justice”. However, a member of the FO FAMC stated this was a “lawful repossession of Neeraja Guest House, formally known as Afsanah Guest House, by Auroville Foundation Auroville”. And that despite repeated directives and formal notices, two individuals had refused to hand over the keys of the Afsanah Guest House and had continued to occupy and operate the premises without authorisation. He also alleged that over the past years the guest house has been “grossly mismanaged”, an allegation the

replaced team said is “simply untrue”, listing all the improvements they had made over the previous three years.

Auroville Dog Shelter

The Auroville Dog Shelter (ADS) team was replaced without explanation via an Office Order issued on 30 August 2025. The GB and AVFO plan to build a VIP road directly through the shelter and through three established Auroville farms. The now-replaced ADS team were promised a new portion of land and some financial support to relocate the shelter, which it seems they never received. The team had proposed to relocate the shelter to a neighbouring plot.

Annapurna farm support

Since the news that the AVFO has signed an MoU with IIT Madras, agreeing to hand over 100 acres of Auroville’s certified organic farmland in order to build a ‘sustainability campus’, support for Annapurna Farm has poured in from many different quarters. The number of signatures on the petition currently stands at more than 16,000 and is growing daily. Several letters have been sent to the Governing Board questioning the plan, including letters from Auroville International and the International Advisory Council. Ramsubramanian, a senior consultant at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, also shared supportive posts on his social media.

New oversight donation committee

A new oversight committee (the ‘DCC’) for the AVFO ‘Donation Channeling Group’ (‘DCG’) has been announced via an Office Order. Since the ‘DCG’ was put in place by the AVFO, the number of administrative tasks that have to be fulfilled in order for units and trusts to receive their donations have greatly increased. Additionally, several units and services have reported that their donations, particularly foreign donations, have been held up or blocked entirely, meaning that they are unable to receive them and therefore to function normally. This is despite the donations being given from entirely legitimate sources. It seems that the AVFO FAMC and their auditors have also banned crowdfunding platforms, cutting off another vital source of income.

Establishment of paramilitary forces in Auroville

The Governing Board recently approved the stationing of 15 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) members in Auroville for five years “to safeguard Auroville’s development zones and uphold law and order”, as well as the development of a new security complex with a “master control room”. The CRPF is India’s largest paramilitary force, used for internal security and counter-insurgency operations. This decision marks a sharp digression from the Mother’s vision of Auroville as a place without army or police.

Paramilitary academy inaugurated by the AVFO

On 28 August 2025, the Gujarat-based Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU) and the AVFO inaugurated the “RRU-Auroville Security Training Academy (RASTA)” at Bharat Nivas. According to media reports, the academy aims to provide “security education” combining “technical mastery with Auroville’s spiritual wisdom” and will offer certification courses in fire-fighting, cyber security, drone operations, and basic military training. The Secretary described the academy as embodying “youth empowerment, community safety, and national resilience”. The media report claimed that the academy will run programmes for “600+ students across Auroville schools”. On 1 September, the RA WC sent a letter to the GB expressing “deep concern” about the initiative, stating it was launched “without consultation with, or consent from, Auroville’s Residents’ Assembly”. Some of their main concerns were that associating Auroville with military-style training contradicts the Charter as Auroville’s ethos is “non-political, non-sectarian, and non-

militaristic”; that the 15-day timeline left no room for mandated consultation with the Residents’ Assembly; and that framing the academy as a vehicle to “fuel the local economy” reduces Auroville to a commercial enterprise.

Auroville Governing Board completes four-year term

The newspaper *The Hindu* reported that the Auroville Foundation Governing Board held its 70th meeting on 1 October 2025, to mark the conclusion of its four-year term. According to a press release, at the meeting chaired by Governor Ravi, the Board took stock of the governance and development of Auroville in the last four years, and several important matters were deliberated upon and decisions taken to bring about further clarity of the administration of Auroville.

Trees cut along State highway

According to a report in the *Times of India*, on 22 October residents of Kuilapalayam and Edayanchavadi villages objected to the Foundation’s decision to cut large trees along the highway connecting the two villages. On learning that the trees were being cut, they gathered and protested, forcing work to stop. Police arrived and held peace talks with the villagers. In a release, the Auroville Foundation clarified that six trees along the highway were being removed to lay the Outer Ring Road, and that “The Foundation strictly followed all legal procedures.”

Proposed tram and toy train network

A press release stated that the Auroville Foundation has proposed to launch a tram and toy train network in collaboration with the Indian Railways to improve internal transportation in Auroville. The tram will serve as a low-speed electric commuter mechanism around the Crown, helping the town transition away from fossil fuel vehicles to collective electric mobility. Phase 1 of the project encompasses a 2.355km segment, and is ready for detailed engineering and execution. The toy train network will serve the kindergarten belt of the town. It will span a 595-metre route through the Kindergarten Zone, featuring 12 carriages, with each coach embodying qualities such as aspiration, joy, and harmony. The goal is to stimulate children’s sense of wonder, spatial awareness, and independence while providing a safe, low-speed mobility mode.

A new service from the EcoService

The EcoService has announced a much-needed extension of their regular waste pick up from residential, commercial and institutional establishments. Recently, there has been a growing amount of litter dumped along the roads, pathways and in the bushes within the city and in certain open spaces. By the beginning of November, the EcoService will have a dedicated service to clear this litter and waste from areas that are hard to reach by their larger vans. This service will initially concentrate on clearing waste from within the designated City Area (and not along the tar road) and will gradually extend to the greenbelt.

Evergreen forest site for new EcoService facility

In August 2025, the AVFO ATDC announced their intention to allocate almost five acres of Evergreen land in an effort to expand the EcoService operations. EcoService, which currently functions out of a 0.75-acre plot and sorts Auroville’s waste in an effort to reduce landfill, is seeking a larger plot of land for, as they describe it, “sorting, baling, shredding and storage, plus 1 acre for a sanitary-waste incinerator. Modern conveyor lines, balers, and a heated press will turn hard plastics into tiles and panels, while a 500 kg/hour incinerator handles unavoidable sanitary scraps. The larger site allows safer traffic flows, volunteer housing, training rooms, and fire-safety systems, positioning Auroville to cut landfill reliance below 5 percent.” While the efforts to extend the EcoService’s capacities are largely welcomed, they come at

the cost of denuding another 4.75 acres of carefully planted Auroville forest.

Coffee Ideas wins awards

Coffee Ideas, a unit that was established in 2008 with the vision to spread knowledge and foster a community around Indian specialty coffee, won a number of awards at the 2025 Global Coffee Awards Origin Competition held in Houston, Texas in October. Judges awarded a gold in the flat white dairy category (Single Origin Traditional Processing Method), silver in espresso blend, as well as awards in other categories.

Monthly meetings to improve communication

Expressing that “one of the essential values of Auroville is collaboration – a spirit of shared responsibility and transparent communication”, the FO Working Committee has introduced a new initiative aimed at improving dialogue between Auroville residents and working groups. From now on the FO WC will host a Residents’ Meeting once every month, open to all community members. These meetings will offer a space to share updates from working groups, discuss current challenges or proposals, collect feedback from residents, and, “most importantly, listen to what matters to you”. They invite anybody with a topic which needs attention, a question they would like answered, or a group they would like to hear from to contact them. For, as they put it, “Our goal is to foster a culture of inclusivity, openness, and responsiveness, where every resident feels informed and engaged in Auroville’s evolving process.”

Auroville Alignment Programme

The Human Resources Service has announced the Auroville Alignment Programme which “is a collective effort to help each one of us – whether arriving, aspiring, or already rooted – live the ideals and purpose of Auroville in a more conscious, practical way”. Different programmes are planned for volunteers, Newcomers and Aurovilians. The latter programme, which will happen quarterly, is termed ‘consecration’ and will involve concentration, plenary and keynote sessions, breakout discussions and readings from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

YouthLink moves


YouthLink is moving its office space from Virundhu Canteen (Town Hall) to the Kailash building. As they put it, “the move comes as part of our ongoing efforts to strengthen youth engagement and collaboration in Auroville”. Some of their plans for the new space include vocational training and skill building; a youth residency programme which will provide transitional housing and mentorship to young Aurovilians, volunteers and newcomers; community activities like hosting workshops and cultural evenings; and offering guidance for youth navigating their role in Auroville and beyond.

Farewell team Open House

On Sunday 12 October the Farewell team hosted an Open House to update everyone on their work and its role and function in the community. They explained that “This is an impersonal work which demands sensitivity, equality, good practical sense, readiness to serve, emotional stability, acceptance of any bodily condition, receptivity to the inner reality, attention and plasticity and goodwill towards all. We share a sense of dedication to Mother and Sri Aurobindo, seeking to express it in the Spirit of Auroville so that our understanding and experience of physical death in our individual and collective adventure may grow ever more conscious and free.” And they emphasised that “we are keen to remain free from all opinions and alignments that, in our collective life, may still interfere with our harmonious progress. This service is for all in Auroville”.

Passing Anne Goldsmith

Anne Goldsmith, previously of Surrender Community, passed away peacefully on 23 October, shortly after her 87th birthday in Clitheroe, England. She was an active member of the community for many years until her return to England in 2008 to care for her elderly parents.

About Auroville Today	Subscription information	How to subscribe:	Editorial team:
Auroville Today is an activity of the Kattidakalai Trust of the Auroville Foundation. The GST number is 33AAATA0037BXZV	Subscription rates for 12 issues: India print Rs. 850 India digital Rs. 1,000	1. Through our website: Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through https://auroville.today	Auroville Today, Surrender community, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.
Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India, Phone: +91.413.2622572. Email: aurovilletodayweb@gmail.com and avtoday@auroville.org.in .	Other countries: Print Rs. 4,000 Digital Rs 3,500	2. By cheque: Cheques must be payable to <i>Auroville Maintenance</i> , reference <i>Contribution Auroville Today</i> , and need to be sent to	3. By bank transfer. Bank transfers are to be made to account # 163101000118 of Auroville Maintenance at ICICI Bank, Auroville Branch, IFSC Code ICIC0001631, Swift Code ICICINBBCTS, reference: Contribution Auroville Today.
			Alan, Carel, Chandra, Gita. Proofreading: Alan, Gita, Kristen. DTP: Carel. Print editing: Jean-Denis. Digital editing: Krishna V.
		<i>Auroville Today</i> does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.	Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.