

THE GOVERNMENT TAKEOVER OF AUROVILLE 2022 by Rod Hemsell

This is a collection of 8 articles written during the past six months, describing the events as they unfold, revealing the gradual imposition of authority and takeover of the institutions of Auroville by the recently appointed Governing Board and Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. It is a combination of historical documentation, analysis, and personal reflection, in response to a variety of public media reports, video recorded meetings, and first hand observations of friends in Auroville that reached me soon after their occurrence. I could relate to them immediately because I have previously lived there for 27 years and know the community intimately. I was there at the foundation in 1968, experienced the first major struggle for Auroville's autonomy against the Sri Aurobindo Society of Pondicherry in the 1970s and 80s, and have recently spent more than a decade involved in projects, during a period of tremendous productivity and progress. I am therefore familiar with the context of these events and the people involved, while at the same time being able to reflect from a distance, without having to share the burden of events that those who are present have to endure. These 8 articles are compiled from publications between Dec. 2021 and May 2022, and are listed below in reverse chronological order.

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DOUBLING AUROVILLE (May 28, 2022)

A few weeks ago in an article titled Truth or the Abyss I emphasized this disjunctive proposition, stated by the Mother around 1968, as a paradigm for putting in perspective many situations and choices that confronted humanity in the world in general at the time, but also specifically those that confront us today in Auroville. At this point I would like to present some of the recent events that make the choice for us even more immediate and imperative: Truth or the Abyss.

There are at this moment two Aurovilles, with two "Working Committees" (WC #1, - the group that was recently elected to officially represent the Resident's Assembly in administrative matters, and #2, - a group consisting of 4 members from the previous WC plus three others, who have been recognized by the Secretary, in opposition to the RA). And there are two legally authorized governing bodies: the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, and the Residents' Assembly of the Auroville Foundation, which are actively opposing each other. There are also two significant segments of the Auroville community, divided roughly according to their understanding of Auroville's essential meaning and purpose, and consequently divided in their allegiances to the two opposed governing bodies and WCs. I hope to demonstrate this division, and its seriousness, with evidence from four sources: the Secretary's public statement of May 26, the GB's April Meeting Minutes released on May 25, a message from the WC (Secretary's Office/AVFO) on May 25, and a message from the WC (RA) on May 27.

The Secretary of the Governing Board (GB), Dr. Jayanti Ravi, released a video-recorded message to the Auroville Community on May 26, 2022, in which she said: "We are being guided by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through a decisive point in time." Her 20 minute talk was packed with rhetorical implications and almost no facts, with the exception of the number of visas recommended by her office so far: 560 for the length of time requested, 37 for one year, and 5 for three months (total 602) but no "rejections". Then she said that she had studied all the GB minutes since 1988 and found two "recurring refrains": 1) an aspiration to see the city manifested, bring in better governance, etc, and 2) a few who have always tried from the beginning to bring in obstacles to realizing the dream of the city. In this context she stressed that those who want to collaborate in building the city have nothing to fear, but if there are illegal activities against the constitution or the Charter there will be "no option but to resort to taking this action." She didn't say exactly what she meant by "illegal activities" or "taking this action" although the restriction and rejection of visas had just been mentioned. She also mentioned here that updating the Register of Residents was necessary before an election by the RA could be considered valid, and that this was a requirement of "government" - which seemed to imply that we are acting illegally by accepting the WC (RA) which was elected on May 10 by a vote of 800 to 80. This act of opposition to the GB and the Secretary's control of Auroville is clearly not the "bringing of an obstacle to building the city by a small clique" but something much larger: it is a democratic action by a large majority against an authoritarian take-over of Auroville. She implied that it is the government

that is making this phony requirement concerning the Register of Residents, and that resisting it is therefore illegal. Both implications are false, but the message is clear.

Important facts not mentioned by the Secretary include 1) that her office made a complaint to the police against the WC(RA) for occupying its legitimate office space, and 2) they also made a police complaint that using the internal media to make their official announcements was a cyber crime. As the WC(RA) wrote in its recent report to the community: "Since the latest decision of the Residents' Assembly on May 10th, and the appointment of our interim members on May 14th, we have been dealing with a number of urgent and sensitive issues which have unfortunately not left much space for communication. These include attempts to take over our office space in Town Hall, FIRs (First Investigation Reports) filed against six Aurovilians including members of the Working Committee, Visa-related issues...; 2) The update of the Register of Residents does not affect the validity of any RA- ratified decision-making process, including the most recent **RAD** or the selection process being initiated. Residents' Assembly Decisions are taken based on the Master List, which is regularly updated by the Residents' Service...; 3) The admin rights of Auronet have been handed over to the Secretary's Office and our access for posting information and updates to the community on behalf of the Working Committee, which used to be one of the major tools of our communication (referred to in the police complaint as "cybercrimes"), has been removed" (May 27). I should add that during this same short period of time many residents of Auroville have also lost their access to the community's internal communication network, which has been taken over by the Secretary's Office, just as the community's Outreach Media was taken over by them several weeks ago.

And from the other WC(AVFO) we read, on May 25, "...the Governing Board directs the Residents Assembly to pause any decisions taken by the Resident Assembly before the updation of the Register of Residents; all current ongoing activities such as with the **RAD** (Residents Assembly's decision-making processes) are to be stopped with immediate effect until the Register of Residents (RoR) has been fully updated on an urgent basis. Any such decision taken before updating the Register of Residents will be invalid, null and void. Then, in a subsequent communication, they attempt to clarify the overarching premise of "government" or GB/AVFO authority: "It (AVF) is autonomous, not a govt department. But as per the Act, GB has final executive powers. IAC / RA are advisory and work with GB" (May 25). They are pretending to have the authority of government, and to be the sole governing authority of Auroville, but both pretenses are false.

Other important facts that I think most people would consider to be of general interest but were not revealed by the Secretary, are to be found in the minutes of the April meeting of the GB, released only on May 25, which few people would ever see of course. In this document we read, for example, that 1) The Board noted and approved that an MOU with CPWD has been entered into for the execution of various township development projects. (CPWD – Central Public Works Department, the construction management department of government responsible for architecture, engineering, project management across the country...); 2) The Board approved to appoint a retired security officer in the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police for security related issues; 3) The Board approved the formation of a legal cell in the office of the Secretary, AVF to look into all legal matters related to AVF including land purchase, land disputes, other litigations...; 4) The Board requested the Organisation and Governance Committee to review the present functioning of various working groups and come up with proposals that will improve overall governance towards the realization of the aims and objectives of Auroville."

Although the Secretary did not mention these matters of the Board and her office, she said that the present situation was "a reaction to the disruption of the status quo that has continued for decades" and she referred several times to "a small group of people who are trying to do their best to see that it doesn't change". She referred to this "change" as the basis for a cleaner, clearer governance system to ensure our safety and security, greater transparency, better economy, and the development of facilities for more and more people who want to serve the divine. She said "The cycle of resisting this change is something we must absolutely denounce." She did not mention consulting with the RA in order to achieve these things. She did not say that she and the GB were here to help us achieve the goals to which our community is committed. She did not mention that those who were legitimately elected to represent the RA were being charged with committing anti-government activities and cyber crimes. Instead, she frequently praised this "beautiful, magnificent, exquisite experiment", while implying that the newly appointed GB, through her office, plans to do everything possible to completely take it over and control it. She also said, in more ways than one, that they expect us to collaborate with their efforts to put the new governance system in place, and not to resist it in any way.

I infer from the thrust of these statements that those who resist "in any way" and regardless of the numbers and the precedents, will be considered part of that small "clique" of obstructionists. They will become scapegoats and will be persecuted as an example of what "absolutely must be denounced". They will be those who best resist the pull of the Abyss and adhere most firmly to the Truth.

THE CONFLICT IN AUROVILLE (May 20, 2022)

As reported today in The Hindu newspaper, Thursday, May 19, 2022:

Auroville Foundation condemns 'unauthorised take-over of the Working Committee office'

A section of Aurovilians gathered in front of the Town Hall on Thursday in a show of support to the self-governance mandate of the Residents' Assembly, one of the key decision-making bodies in the international township of Auroville.

The police was called into Auroville (on Wednesday) after the Foundation reported a break-in into the Working Committee (WC) office and an "illegal take-over of its records and communication systems".

Meanwhile, the Auroville Foundation condemned the "unauthorised take-over of the Working Committee office by persons chosen through irregular votes... Based on the result of this illegal vote, unauthorised residents changed the lock of two Working Committee offices overnight and also seized the mailboxes of the WC and began to circulate messages to the community and outside authorities," it said.

"The legitimate (previous) Working Committee made a complaint, based on which a police complaint was filed against the unauthorised residents who had indulged in criminal trespass and cybercrimes. The police are investigating the issues and the extent of the cybercrimes and further action is awaited", the Foundation said.

TO SET STRAIGHT THE RECORD AS REPORTED IN THE NEWSPAPER ARTICLE QUOTED ABOVE:

The complaint against a so-called takeover mentioned in the Foundation's statement was made against the actually legitimate members of the Working Committee who were elected just a little over a week ago, and who were occupying the offices that are rightfully theirs. These allegations are part of an ongoing attempt by the "Foundation" to invalidate the authorized decision making process of the Residents' Assembly. In addition, it has concocted such fabulous allegations of "cybercrimes" and "anti-government" activity to justify its takeover of the Auroville community's internal and external communication services.

BACKGROUND:

The Auroville Foundation was established by an Act of Parliament in 1988 to secure the continuous development of Auroville according to its Charter. This Act created two primary structures for implementing the project: a Governing Board (GB) and its Secretary, which are appointed by the Government of India, and the Residents' Assembly (RA) made up of all those who become community members. What is being referred to above as the "Foundation" is only one branch of the Auroville Foundation. Each branch was assigned specific roles under the Act. For the past 40 years the two branches have worked cooperatively together, creating the remarkable township of Auroville which now exists.

However, since an entirely new GB and Secretary were appointed in 2021, a conflict has slowly developed between the two branches over who is actually in charge of Auroville's development, and what the goal and means of achieving it should be. The first instance of disagreement arose when the new GB presented an erroneous interpretation of the Master Plan which had been developed by the Residents' Assembly in 1999, and which was subsequently approved by the Government of India in 2010. The new GB decided that the plan, which had not been implemented for a variety of reasons, must now be rapidly executed with total disregard for the actual conditions of development that have occurred on the land during the past twenty years. This was immediately seen to be disastrous as trees and structures began to be indiscriminately torn down. The Residents' Assembly passed a resolution to halt such development, by a very large majority vote, and obtained a stay order from the National Green Tribunal – a court and legal system established for protection of the environment in India in 2010 – forcing development to stop, pending the approval of actual development plans and environmental impact assessments. These steps were already required by the original Master Plan but like the plan in general had never been carried out. This situation was interpreted by the new GB and Secretary as "blockage" by environmentalists, and any further delay was now being considered "opposition" to the "Foundation's" presumed authority.

The "Foundation," as it refers to itself, has launched a campaign not only to undermine the validity of the decision making powers of the Residents' Assembly, but to promote an image of community members as being "anti-city" and "anti-progress" culminating even in allegations that the community is made up of "anti-government" and "anti-national" extremists. This is considered by both Indian and foreign residents to be grossly insulting not only to their lifelong commitment to Auroville but to the very principles on which Auroville is based.

By making such outrageous claims in public, as seen above – first that the Residents' Assembly decisions are invalid, and then that the duly elected WC members are “breaking into their offices” and committing “cybercrimes” when they make official announcements – the Foundation is itself violating the Auroville Foundation Act, which authorizes the RA to do exactly these things.

Similarly, and even more extreme, are the Foundation's seizure of the community's internal internet service, as well as its outreach media, on the basis of its ridiculous and false allegations. These acts constitute violations of the basic civil rights of the Auroville residents and cause the severe disruption of their lives. Such actions demonstrate beyond any possibility of doubt, that the intention of this Governing Board and its Secretary is to undermine the harmonious and efficient functioning of Auroville. By creating division and the impression of disorder, they want this distorted image of Auroville to represent a community in need of authoritarian intervention in order to stop its “illegal activities”, and thereby to justify its attempt to gain control over Auroville's organization for its own purposes. These actions are obviously contrary to the ideals of Auroville, as well as being a violation of the Auroville Foundation Act and the rights of its citizens. It should be clear now to everyone that the situation will inevitably require the intervention of a court order to stop this abuse of authority, before any further destruction of the fabric of Auroville occurs, and before any steps toward a more harmonious collaboration will become possible.

“Reflections on Auroville” (May 5, 2022)

In this article I would like to respond to Chandresh's post titled “Reflections on Auroville” (Auronet, May 4, 2022) because he has not offered the option to respond directly, and because his statements are a perfect invitation to analyze more deeply the erroneous nature of his view. Let me summarize his view like this: In order to refer to what he perceives as Auroville's lack, he has used the phrases “sincerity to serve the need of the work, in light of the vision” along with Auroville's collective incapacity to “do the necessary work with Discipline and Perseverance.” Then he associates his idea of “the necessary work” and “the light of vision,” which he says Auroville lacks the sincerity and perseverance to serve, with what he calls “the Establishment.” And he thinks it has been the characteristic narrative of “Aurovilians” to oppose the work and vision of “the Establishment.”

Considering the historical developments over the recent months in Auroville, and Chandresh's expressed association with the take-over of Outreach Media by the Auroville Foundation Office, and his support of the Secretary's idea of the Sri Aurobindo International Multiversity, there can be no doubt about what he means by “the Establishment.” The erroneous nature of his statement becomes immediately apparent if we reflect on the generally cooperative and productive relationship that has prevailed for decades between Aurovilians and various Governing Boards, Secretaries, and government agencies. Aurovilians have not been in frequent conflict with these “establishments” or any others except for the famous SAS. As for “the work” and “the vision” in his statement, it is also quite likely that he refers to the new Secretary's conflation of the Mother's Dream, the Charter of Auroville, the Galaxy Model, the Master Plan, and probably also Integral Education and Integral Yoga, into one amalgamated and singular work and vision: to build a model city along the lines of the Galaxy Model and populate it with thousands of people as soon as possible. Many Aurovilians would agree that this “Establishment” - which fortunately has yet to establish itself – along with its “work and vision,” must indeed be opposed. If for no other reason, the authoritarian tactics that it has begun to implement have caused more division and destruction in a short period of time than would have previously been thought possible, and which cannot be allowed to continue. The relatively harmonious, sophisticated, and viable systems that have been created by Aurovilians, through their persistence and dedication for decades, which is to say, by their work and vision, must not be undermined by this so-called “Establishment” which apparently has little understanding of and even less sensitivity toward either the real work and vision of Auroville or the integrity of community processes. It would rather invalidate the community's achievements than utilize its strengths. In fact its idea of “the vision” and “the work” seem quite false in relation to what actually exists and can be done. And yet, Chandresh's statement that “learning to cooperate” (not collaborate, let us note) is “the only way forward,” must be taken seriously. If for no other reason than that a living embodiment of human unity is the real purpose of Auroville.

For the sake of moving a few steps further toward a better understanding, I would like to suggest that there are other important reasons why the unpleasant situations that have occurred recently have developed in the way they have. The first and probably the most difficult reason to grasp, because of our tendency to be overcome by the immediate impact of unexpected events, is what might be termed the geopolitical environment. Today there is a widely recognized and legitimately promoted strategy in world politics known as “Soft Power” - the head of UNESCO strongly encouraged it, and Korea is an example of growing dominance in the area of pop music, with government support. Cultural artifacts such as music, food, sports and tourism are promoted by governments to attract popular interest and respect, thus enhancing their

nation's status in the world. PM Modi would obviously like to assert India's "image" for this purpose as well as for profit, as can be seen in many recent videos posted from his travels in Europe. Secondly there is Religion. This government wants to combine soft power and religion, which makes Auroville a natural target for exploitation. If we are interested in finding a motive for the GOI's sudden interest in Auroville, we should probably look in this direction. To the extent that this has been a dominant motive, it would make sense that the outer manifestation of Auroville would be more important than its inner truth, and the truth of Auroville would not necessarily be understood at all. As the Mother once explained in a conversation she had with Satprem in the 60s, people with relatively developed intellects might be attracted to Sri Aurobindo's teachings without having the slightest capacity for Yoga. And she also did not say that the capacity for Yoga was a necessary requirement for living in Auroville. It is clearly the vision and work of the outer manifestation of Auroville, as they see it, which occupies the attention of this new "Establishment" and they may be understandably quite unaware of its truth.

Another reason for the present conflict that I think should be understood, is provided by the extensive research recently conducted and documented in the fields of neuroscience and psychology.* These studies show that there has been a pattern of left-brain dominance in the recent centuries of human development, which tends to focus consciousness mainly on the plan of action it conceives and the means to achieve its goals, a linear, object oriented focus, disregarding the right-brain tendency to embrace the whole and see the relationships between different aspects and levels of reality. Many people in the world, including in Auroville, have been conditioned, both genetically and culturally, to function in this left-brain mode. The idea of the Supramental Yoga is, in fact, to give precedence to the right-brain which is responsible for a more peripheral, intuitive, and creative mode of awareness and functioning. The result of this imbalance in human brains and their socio-economic products today can be observed in the dominance of materialistic values, systems, and processes. From the evolutionary point of view, we can observe a kind of strife underway in human nature and society globally, in order to restore the balance and enhance the more holistic functioning of the right-brain. We can of course see signs of this subtle and elusive conflict in action here in Auroville as well. The Dreamweaving process is a good example of the effort to actually confront and transform the narrower, more linear pattern. As I have pointed out before, the Secretary is a trained advocate of the scientific-technological perspective and is able to attract collaborators such as Chandresh, who share this trait, quite easily. And this type of functioning is much more useful in achieving the aims of governments today, just as it has been for the past few centuries. But we also know that it has become increasingly destructive, and it is necessary for humanity to make adjustments in its values and its techniques, if it is to continue to survive and progress. However much a turn toward "soft power" may be a promising sign, the tendencies toward destruction, as in the cutting of forests and burning of fossil fuels, in order to achieve "progress" are still overwhelmingly dominant in the world.

We must not forget that Sri Aurobindo emphasized the evolutionary aspect of the Supramental descent and transformation. And our situation also makes it easier to appreciate the effort of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to distance themselves from Religion and Reason and to emphasize Yoga and Intuition. It requires a deliberate effort on the part of human beings to shift their consciousness toward a more intuitive discernment of the truth of things. And this takes time. Auroville has been designated by the Mother as a laboratory for such an evolutionary development. But it is part of this creative process that it has to learn through conflict with that which has to be transformed. When these tendencies come into the open in a dramatic way, we have to recognize them for what they are and not blame the individuals, who often have little control over the tendencies that they exhibit. Considerable restraint has to be shown by all in order to avoid the disastrous outcomes that still characterize much that happens in the world, between peoples, societies, communities, families. It is necessary for everyone to reflect on his or her role in the present conflict and to recognize the nature of the tendencies their thoughts and actions represent. It is necessary for everyone to make sacrifices, or let us say adjustments, to overcome their limitations. It is also necessary, in such a relatively sophisticated and diverse society as Auroville, to utilize the best systems of communication and regulation that have been developed by societies everywhere to ensure, as far as possible, safe and respectful methods for achieving that "cooperative way forward." Open discussion and debate, participatory governance, a minimum of rules and regulations based on mutuality and respect are essential to a cooperative effort. It seems to me that in fact most Aurovilians are sincerely interested in pursuing this kind of vision and work, as they always have been.

*A neuroscientist working in this field, Alex Gomez-Marin, who has visited Auroville several times, is currently engaged in a series of discussions with the foremost authority in the field, Iain McGilchrist. Anyone interested in these illuminating discussions may find them at < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbIRVOYzgL>>

"Truth or the Abyss" (April 22, 2022)

These words of the Mother, given by her as a public message at about the same time as the foundation of Auroville, were probably interpreted by most people at the time as a generalization referring to the crises dominant in the politics of the world at the time, such as the "cold war," the Vietnam War, and the escalation of nuclear weapons. She even mentioned that

an occult purpose for Auroville was to prevent nuclear war by bringing together Russians and Americans, along with all the peoples and cultures of the world. This perspective is important historically for understanding the last line of the Charter of Auroville: "Auroville will be the site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity." The emphasis at the time, especially evident at the foundation ceremony with participants representing all the member states of UNESCO, focused on the global situation of humanity. No one would have imagined that in just six years the SAS would claim ownership of Auroville and try to evict its residents for trespassing, necessitating the intervention of the Government of India, and eventually the Auroville Act, in order to secure progress according to the Charter. Equally unimaginable and unlikely, during the ensuing four decades, would have been the current interventions by appointees of the GOI that have caused the current disruptions and divisions within Auroville.

Without reiterating the details, I would like to focus on the aspect of "division" that has become so poignantly apparent in the differences expressed by members of the apex committee, known as the Working Committee (WC), and the Residents' Assembly (RA), which is the collective body that the WC should be representing. These differences are clearly stated in published letters by the respective bodies and will therefore presumably be well-known to Aurovilians. My views on these communications are meant to emphasize the seriousness of the issues at hand as well as to analyze them, to some extent, with respect to my own experience and to the words of the Mother quoted in my title. For example, we read in a letter by some members of the WC a statement regarding the history of Auroville in which they allege that there "has been a strong resistance against the city... since the beginning, causing different stages of rupture" and "... after months of sustained discussions, and the never ending dissatisfaction from [a] section of foresters, youth and architects, Auroville's Town Development Council (ATDC) finally issued a work order to commence clearing...Unfortunately, the anti-city and environmental hardliners gathered on Dec 4th morning to aggressively stop the work by putting small children in front of JCBs (bulldozers) and other abusive behaviour."

The events of December are well-known by all and have been amply reported from the different and conflicting points of view in various local, national, and international media during the past four months. I am highlighting these statements to illustrate a certain narrative that wants to depict Aurovilians, and in particular those who actively associate with the RA, as "anti-city" and as "oppositional" and "disrespectful" toward the new Secretary and Governing Board (GB) of the Auroville Foundation (AF). As I have pointed out elsewhere, many of the public statements made by the new Secretary since December have entailed elaborate justifications for various destructive and invasive actions that have been taken under her authority, on the grounds that it is her mission to remove obstacles to progress and rectify what she refers to as a lack of commitment of Aurovilians to the ideals of Auroville.

The Residents' Assembly (RA) has responded to the Working Committee members' rhetoric in a letter which states: "THERE IS NO RESISTANCE TO A CITY, we all want Auroville to grow.

This lack of resistance to a city is in fact clearly evidenced by the enthusiastic and wide community support for the Dreamweaving project (a recently conducted seminar on planning attended by most architects, planners, and concerned individuals during several weeks) ... On the other hand recent representation at community meetings...has indicated large vocal support for an harmonious and peaceful way forward."

The RA letter also refers to the proposal currently moving through the community's decision making process to remove the members of the WC that are not accurately representing its position. The polarization between the GB, its Secretary, and her collaborators on the one hand, and the RA, which is actually the decision making body of Auroville, on the other hand, could not be any clearer. The stark reality is also that the former is the aggressor and the latter is forced to take a defensive position in response to the series of offenses that it has endured with considerable integrity and fortitude. And yet I am reminded of a situation that I have observed repeatedly in my career as an educator working with adolescents. The victims are always blamed by the perpetrator of the crime. And as a teacher of political science, I know of countless instances of authoritarian regimes and value systems that have used the alleged perversions and crimes committed against them by those who oppose them as justifications to insult, condemn and subjugate such "others," subversives, heretics, and minorities, even to the point of genocides. These are the realities of human nature on the level of ethical and social development during the period of human evolution that it is our privilege to be a part of. We have seen the worst examples played out among the most developed nations in history during just the past hundred years.

This type of socio-political polarization is still being played out in communities, states, and nations everywhere in the world today, and it brings to the forefront of people's lives in the starkest possible terms the choices that must be made if the future of humanity is to be different and we are to truly leap beyond the past that drags at our feet. This is what Auroville is really about, and it is why the Mother, in her calm but prescient wisdom, offered us the choice, "Truth or the Abyss". I too have written reports on Auroville's development periodically through the years, often with respect to its measurable progress. The population has doubled three times since Auroville became self-governing under the Auroville Act, and the economy,

doubling four or five times, has grown by a factor of at least 30, bringing with it schools, businesses, services, arts, and an indomitable spirit. It knew that forests were essential in order make the environment livable. It knew that beauty and harmony should shine in its structures. It created a nurturing society in which the youth of the future could learn and grow and become the leaders of their generation. It will now resist the forces of disharmony and division, leap the chasm, and build the beautiful city the Earth needs. At least this is how it looks according to my notes.

CHALLENGES TO THE AUROVILLE FOUNDATION ACT OF 1988 (Feb. 11, 2022)

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Actions and events that have transpired in Auroville since December 2021 and are ongoing as of mid-February 2022, which have been instigated by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, have disrupted the lives of Aurovilians and appear to be in violation of the Charter of Auroville. This situation also calls into question many aspects of the Auroville Act. I will briefly review some of the actions and events here in order to point out specific aspects of the Auroville Act which, in my view, need to be challenged, clarified, and possibly amended. For this purpose, I have included below a central portion of the Act – Articles 10, 11, 15-19 from its total of 34 articles, which occur on pages 6-7-8 of the Act and include definitions of the Governing Board, the Secretary, and the Residents' Assembly. These are the provisions that may lead to the greatest confusion and are therefore in need of the closest scrutiny. Other provisions may need to be considered but for the purposes of our immediate concerns these are the ones that will almost inevitably need to be challenged in court to prevent further conflict and address the violations that have already occurred.

For example, to begin with the most recent violations, this event was reported recently by Outreach Media:

On January 20th 2022 OutreachMedia received an email from the Undersecretary asking for the hand over of all movable and immovable, tangible and intangible assets.

In response, Outreach Media wrote:

I would like to know: 1. On what grounds was this decision made? 2. Have the 3 bodies that together constitute the Auroville Foundation been consulted and agreed to this decision? 3. Has the FAMC, as the mandated body responsible for managing assets of Auroville, been consulted and agreed to this decision? I would like to put on record my objection to your request and will continue to fulfil the OutreachMedia mandate with all means allocated to this purpose until the above points have been satisfactorily clarified. On Feb. 7, an action by the Secretary's office might be considered its direct counter response – a sign was placed by several of its personnel on the door of the Outreach Media's office stating in large letters: NOTICE This Property Belongs To Auroville Foundation Unauthorized Entry Is Prohibited. And a padlock was placed on the door. The office has since been occupied by some of the Secretary's collaborators in Auroville.

A similar intrusion into the management structure of Auroville was received in the form of an email from the Secretary's office stating:

As per the definitions in the Auroville Foundation Rules 1997, FAMC is of the Governing Board. Secretary, Auroville Foundation is the Principal Executive Officer of the Auroville Foundation and also the convener of the FAMC vide the same Rules. The meetings of the FAMC will be convened henceforth by the Secretary or her nominee.

To this, the FAMC (Funds and Assets Management Committee) responded on Feb. 8:

Please find attached the views of the FAMC on the FAMC, vis-a-vis the Auroville Foundation Rules 1997. Extracted from the document is our conclusion: "From the above it follows that the definition of the FAMC in sections 2 and 5.1.b. of the Rules of the Auroville Foundation is mistaken. The FAMC is to be seen as a committee constituted by the Residents' Assembly under section 19.3 of the Auroville Foundation Act and section 5.3 of the Auroville Foundation Rules." It is also to be noted that all of our members have been accordingly selected by the Residents' Assembly and are serving according to a mandate received and approved by the Residents' Assembly. As such, we will continue our way of working as before and you are welcome to attend our meetings as usual. As this inconsistency is a serious matter and not solely the problem of the FAMC to solve, we will be informing the Residents' Assembly and the Working Committee of this matter for further follow-up.

Without going into lengthy details, it should be apparent that institutions which have functioned successfully for decades in Auroville, in accordance with the functions assigned to the Residents' Assembly by the Act, are being put under increasing pressure to give up their autonomy, and perhaps their existence, as the Secretary of the Foundation imposes her authority in ways that this office has never before done, ways which are a direct contradiction of her role and that of the Governing Board as they have been interpreted since the Act was passed 34 years ago. And it is plain to see that this new interpretation is already putting in question specific articles of the Act as well as threatening the integrity of Auroville. Moreover, to claim proprietorship over Auroville and its assets is exactly what the SAS was doing in the 70s which led to the promulgation of the Act. Its purpose was to protect Auroville from a repeat of precisely this type of institutional behavior.

We have received a notice today in Auroville indicating a reversion to another form of pressure used at that time by the SAS – the entry visas which have to be approved by the Foundation so that Aurovilians of foreign nationalities, the large majority of us, can live productively in Auroville as many have done for most of our lives: NO MORE 5 YEAR VISAS WILL BE ISSUED...The Residents Service has received news from the Foundation that since yesterday, 8th February, only one-year visa applications will be signed by the Secretary.

It has been a little over two months since the first dramatic intervention by this new administration into the life of Auroville, which resulted in the destruction of a swath of forest and a few temporary buildings, thereby not only violating and traumatizing life but signaling the urgent need for a unified defensive response. A case was filed on behalf of Auroville before the National Green Tribunal which issued an interim stay order to protect the forest and prevent further destruction while the case is being heard. Numerous affidavits have been presented to that court during the past two months and the judgment is still pending. Meanwhile the community has conducted a month-long decision making process concluding with an almost unanimous vote to suspend all development under the Master Plan until appropriate studies can be made and agreements reached. A positive collaborative process of consultations among architects and interested parties has gotten underway.

As is generally well-known by now, this dispute is centered around the Master Plan for Auroville's township development approved by the Residents' Assembly in 1999 and formally accepted by the Government of India in 2010. As I have argued, along with many others, this Master Plan follows a methodology which requires five-year development plans with annual updating based on actual progress, a methodology that has never been implemented, and which was originally executed primarily to have the township area protected from encroachments at the time. The new Governing Board is fraudulently claiming that the Auroville residents have deliberately blocked and stalled its implementation during the intervening years, and that it must now be implemented by force – the force of government authority, money, and bulldozers, regardless of community opinion and the relevancy of the twenty-year old plan.

The crucial point to be made here is that the current limited court action to halt development temporarily and avoid further destruction is likely to be the first phase of a protracted legal battle for the Soul of Auroville between the Auroville residents and the Governing Board/Secretary of the Auroville Foundation – a government-appointed body which clearly has an agenda that is contrary to the interpretation of the Auroville Act, and the ideals of Auroville as stated by the Mother, with which we are all familiar, and to which most Auroville residents and supporters are committed. At this point, however, one might contend, as some surely do, that the conflicts of interpretation of the Act and the values represented by the opposing forces in Auroville today are not a matter of the Soul or Spirit but only of the “Letter” of the law. An outstanding example would be the difference, pointed out above in the statement of the FAMC regarding its interpretation of the “Rules and Regulations of the Auroville Foundation” promulgated in 1997. The FAMC sees itself as a committee of the Residents' Assembly in accordance with its habitual function, as authorized in section 19. (3) of the original Act of 1988. The new Governing Board/Secretary bases its interpretation on the rules of 1997 which establish the FAMC as a committee of the Governing Board with the Secretary as its convener. But this interpretation has not been commonly applied by previous Governing Boards, and especially not in a draconian manner. The differing interpretations are more importantly differences in values: one is more attuned to the Soul and Life of Auroville and the other to its own authoritarian agenda. These two opposing approaches to the day-to-day management of Auroville and the realization of its long-term goals will need to be brought into alignment by a common recognition of the Soul which these outer structures are meant to serve. This will necessarily entail a reinterpretation of the Auroville Foundation Act based on its original intention.

2

Before looking more carefully at the articles of the Auroville Act selected below, I would like to mention the substance of a few other articles that provide necessary background for understanding the status of the Governing Board. The Auroville Foundation Act of 1988 was preceded by the “Auroville Emergency Provisions Act, 1980” which was necessary because of “serious difficulties which had arisen with regard to the management of Auroville” such as attempts by the SAS to have residents of Auroville deported for trespassing on its land. The purpose of the AFA of 1988 was therefore to “provide for the acquisition and transfer of the undertakings of Auroville and to vest such undertakings in a foundation established for the purpose” while recognizing that “Auroville had been able to develop during the last eight years along several important lines and the residents of Auroville have also carried on activities for the development of Auroville which need further encouragement and consolidation.” Add to those years the next 34 years and we cover the complete story of Auroville's development under government administration, which has enabled and assisted the complex and varied progress of Auroville in all domains of life, as anyone can see and appreciate today. Contrary to the claims of the new Governing Board/Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, this has not been the story of a community with “a lack of focus, lack of social fabric, absence of work plans, governance, and organization” with “a need to promote a culture of engagement, transparency, commitment, accountability and integrity.”

As I have tried to explain in other articles, this is a kind of negative rhetoric that is being used to undermine and demean the Auroville community. It first defines the kinds of defects that its interventions are supposed to correct. Then it imposes its falsely derived solutions to its falsely proposed problems. For example, it says the Auroville residents have failed to build the Crown Road infrastructure or have blocked its development by planting trees, and now the new administration will correct those defects by cutting down trees and building roads through the forests. This proposed action is further falsely proposed to be necessary in order to construct a township for 50,000 people. Never mind that those people don't exist, or that planting trees is an appropriate and necessary interim phase of development, or that a governance system has been evolved by this very diverse, idealistic and committed community that is effective and fair even if it is cumbersome and slow. This process has in fact produced the Master Plan itself, and it is capable of properly implementing it if it has the necessary support. The test of its resilience, and the solidarity it has endeavored to foster over many years with extraordinary perseverance is now being forced upon us. The destructive interventions, false pretexts, and abuses of power perpetrated by this new administration must be resisted, exposed, and reversed.

Turning then to the Act, we can see from the first words that the GB/Secretary are violating the principles which they exist to protect. For example, as stated in section 17. (a), their function is:

“to promote the ideals of Auroville and to coordinate activities and services of Auroville in consultation with the Residents' Assembly for the purposes of cohesion and integration of Auroville.” It has been pointed out repeatedly in meetings and reports of witnesses that there was no such consultation before sending bulldozers in the night to cut down trees, much less to clarify that such actions would be in accordance with the Master Plan and the agreement of the community “for the purposes of cohesion and integration.” It goes without saying that this is also true of the recent attempts to silence the official information media of Auroville, to assume control of its financial organization, and to reduce the terms of visas, creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, all in violation of the law as set forth in the Act and of the integrity of Auroville.

It is doubtful that the members of the new Governing Board meet any of the qualifications outlined in section 11. (a), (b), (c) of the Act. It is reasonable to speculate that the new Secretary (a she and not a he as specified), by asserting her authority in such a violent and divisive manner shows that she has no intention of recognizing any limits stated or implied by the Act. There we can read in section 10. (3) that it is a threefold structure of authority with appropriate functions assigned to each branch. She is the secretary to the Governing Board and, as such, she is only authorized by section 17. (c) “to accord approval to the programmes of Auroville drawn up by the Residents' Assembly.” By overstepping this authority and attempting to take charge of Auroville she is violating the Auroville Foundation Act. If she continues to insist that her mission is that of a plumber who unblocks the pipes of progress, while at the same time conflating the Master Plan with the Charter of Auroville and the Mother's “Dream,” she is violating both the meaning and purpose of Auroville, as well as the meaning and purpose of the Act. It will therefore be necessary not only to resist such authoritarian violence and falsehood but to restore and uphold, by whatever means necessary, the original meaning and purpose of the Auroville Act. It is in fact not uncommon in a democratic society governed by law that a process of judicial review may be necessary from time to time to ensure that laws are correctly interpreted and applied, in order to protect citizens from the possible abuses of power.

As it states in section 19. (2) (c) the Residents' Assembly must make necessary recommendations to the Governing Board/Secretary regarding recognition of organizations – such as the FAMC, Outreach Media, ATDC, RAS, etc. – which are actually its representative bodies established over time in order to carry out its functions. And it must formulate the Master Plan, as it has done, in accordance with the real conditions and goals of Auroville. It is also the only authority that can successfully implement the plan. This is its responsibility and its authorized function under the Act as commonly interpreted, and it is the function of the Governing Board/Secretary to act in accordance with its advice. If these essential functions and responsibilities are not carried out in a harmonious and unified manner it will be impossible to create the structures – physical, vital, mental, and spiritual – necessary for the realization of the ideals formulated by the Mother in the Charter of Auroville. If the Auroville Foundation Act has not made these essential functions and responsibilities clear enough, then it must be revised and restated in accordance with its original intention. The sooner this process gets formally and legally under way the better the chances for Auroville's survival and continuous progress. But there can be little doubt that these things are now in jeopardy. It is important to be clear about the meaning of the Act, to understand the strengths and weaknesses of its present formulation, the purposes of its authors, the significance of its enactment, and to take a strong and determined stand for its right implementation. The most relevant sections of the document are presented here.

Chapter III – The Auroville Foundation....

10. Establishment and incorporation of the Foundation.—(1) With effect from such date as the Central Government may, by notification, appoint in this behalf, there shall be established for the purpose of this Act, a Foundation, to be called the Auroville Foundation.

(2) The Foundation shall be a body corporate by the name aforesaid, having perpetual succession and

a common seal with power to acquire, hold and dispose of property, both movable and immovable, and to contract and shall by the said name sue and be sued.

(3) The Foundation shall consist of the following authorities, namely:— (a) the Governing Board; (b) the Residents' Assembly; (c) the Auroville International Advisory Council

11. Governing Board.—(1) The Governing Board shall consist of the following members, namely:—

(i) not more than seven members to be nominated by the Central Government from amongst persons, who have

(a) rendered valuable service to Auroville;

(b) dedicated themselves to the ideals of life-long education, synthesis of material and spiritual researches or human unity;

(c) contributed significantly in activities that are being pursued or are envisaged to be promoted in Auroville, including activities relating to environment, afforestation, arts and crafts, industry, agriculture, humanities, sciences and integral yoga;

(ii) two representatives of the Central Government to be nominated by it.

15. Secretary and other officers of the Foundation.—(1) The Central Government shall appoint a Secretary to the Foundation to exercise such powers and perform such duties under the Chairman of the Governing Board as may be prescribed or as may be delegated to him by the Chairman. (2) The Secretary shall be entitled to such salary and allowances and such conditions of service in respect of leave, pension, provident fund and other matters as may, from time to time, be fixed by the Central Government.

(3) The term of office of a member nominated to fill a casual vacancy in the Governing Board shall continue for the remainder of the term of the member in whose place he is nominated.

(4) A member may resign his office by writing under his hand addressed to the Central Government but he shall continue in office until his resignation is accepted by that Government.

16. Committees of the Governing Board.—(1) The Governing Board may appoint such committees as may be necessary for the efficient discharge of its duties and performance of its functions under this Act. (2) The Governing Board shall have the power to co-opt as members of any committee appointed under sub-section (1), such number of persons who are not members of the Governing Board as it may think fit, and the persons so co-opted shall have the right to attend the meetings of the committee, and take part in the proceedings of the committee, but shall not have the right to vote.

17. Powers and functions of the Governing Board.—The powers and functions of the Governing Board shall be—(a) to promote the ideals of Auroville and to coordinate activities and services of Auroville in consultation with the Residents' Assembly for the purposes of cohesion and integration of Auroville;

(b) to review the basic policies and the programmes of Auroville and give necessary directions for the future development of Auroville;

(c) to accord approval to the programmes of Auroville drawn up by the Residents' Assembly;

(d) to monitor and review the activities of Auroville and to secure proper management of the properties vested in the Foundation under section 6 and other properties relatable to Auroville;

(e) to prepare a master-plan of Auroville in consultation with the Residents' Assembly and to ensure development of Auroville as so planned;

(f) to authorise and coordinate fund-raising for Auroville and to secure proper arrangements for receipts and disbursement of funds for Auroville.

18. Residents' Assembly.—(1) The Residents' Assembly shall consist of all the residents of Auroville who are for the time being entered in the register of residents maintained under this section.

(2) The Secretary to the Governing Board shall maintain the register of residents in such manner as may be prescribed and all the persons who are residents of Auroville and who are of the age of eighteen years and above are entitled to have their names entered in the register on an application made to the Secretary in such form as may be prescribed.

(3) All the names of residents, which have been included in the register maintained by the Administrator appointed under section 5 of the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1980 (59 of 1980) immediately before the appointed day, shall be deemed to have been included in the register maintained under this section.

19. Functions of Residents' Assembly.—(1) The Residents' Assembly shall perform such functions as are required by this Act and shall advise the Governing Board in respect of all activities relating to the residents of Auroville.

(2) In particular, and without prejudice to the foregoing powers, the Residents' Assembly may—

(a) allow the admission or cause the termination of persons in the register of residents in accordance with the regulations made under section 32;

(b) organise various activities relating to Auroville;

(c) formulate the master plan of Auroville and make necessary recommendations for the recognition of organisations engaged in activities relatable to Auroville for the approval of the Governing Board;

(d) recommend proposals for raising funds for Auroville for the approval of the Governing Board.

(3) For the purpose of carrying of its functions, the Residents' Assembly may establish such committees as it may consider necessary which shall represent it in relation to the functions to be performed by the Governing Board.

20. *Working Committee of Residents' Assembly.*—(1) *There shall be a Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly which shall assist the Residents' Assembly or, as the case may be, the Governing Board, in discharging its duties under this Act.*

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

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

(4) *The Working Committee may, with the approval of the Governing Board, create or constitute other organisations, trusts, societies or associations relatable to Auroville if the Working Committee is satisfied that such organisations, trusts, societies or associations have—*

(a) their headquarters at Auroville; (b) declared that in all matters relating to Auroville they shall act in conformity with the decisions of the Governing Board and that their main object is to promote the ideals laid down in the Charter of Auroville proclaimed by "the Mother" on the 28th day of February, 1968.

HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND AUROVILLE TODAY (Jan. 17, 2022)

To what extent is it necessary to have an understanding of and realization of the Overmind, or the Higher Mind, or Intuitive Mind, in order to understand the aims set forth in the Charter of Auroville? To start with, we must first understand something about our normal rational mind and how it differs from those higher functions of consciousness, and how each of these "minds" might be useful, or not, in understanding Auroville. Of course we know these things already, but as they say in politics these days, "Let us be clear." I will try to be clear and relevant to the situation, although necessarily somewhat offensive to some, boring to others, and maybe a bit incendiary for some. Ah, let us light the sacrificial flame and burn the incense to Agni, Indra, and Saraswati!

The rational nature of mind, or what we know as our normal intelligence, thinks and organizes life according to principles such as cause and effect, means to ends, reasons and justifications for our attitudes, goals, actions based on experience and what we think might work to achieve our aims. It is a pragmatic intelligence that generally pursues aims that it considers to be in our best interests, worthwhile, and important. And the means we choose for their realization are thought to be "necessary" and "economical" in the sense that they are expected to be efficient and appropriate enough to be likely to succeed, with minimal negative impact on our lives, under the prevailing conditions. The conditions we refer to are usually determined by environment, available energy, capacity, resistance, obstacles to overcome, mostly physical but often also psychological. Our aims are usually what we consider to be practically possible and desirable. This intelligence is logical, objective, and linear in its conception of the goals it wants to achieve.

Regarding human habitation, for example, this pragmatic, linear intelligence has built cubicle structures all over the earth, where human families dwell within solid walls with roofs and foundations, made from available materials, which are expected to provide shelter and safety under the prevailing environmental conditions and to endure for the time required for families and societies to thrive. The thinking, planning, action required to achieve these goals are logical, pragmatic, and linear with respect to what is necessary, according to the principles of 'progress from the possible to the actual,' in order to make the best of things for the individuals and societies concerned. It is all well-known.

According to the neuroscientist and author, Iain McGilchrist, who has recently developed a very elaborate theory of mind based on brain science, such accomplishments of human rationality are possible because of the interaction of right and left brain functions that have evolved in animal life over millennia under natural conditions. Briefly stated, the right hemisphere functions in a relatively holistic, peripheral and intuitive way, while the left hemisphere functions in a more focused, goal oriented, and analytical way. The former knows what needs to be done in a comprehensive intuitive way, and the latter knows how to do it in a detailed, practical, power oriented way. Describing the nature of these fundamental brain functions in terms of their essential difference and possible opposition in determining animal behavior, he says of the left that it is characterized by "an essentially divisive drive to acquisition, power and manipulation, based on competition which sets individual against individual," while the right brain function is characterized by "an essentially cohesive drive towards co-operation, synergy, and mutual benefit, based on collaboration, in the service of the survival of the group" (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 128).

We can imagine how both of these functions have worked both creatively and destructively throughout history to ensure the survival of individuals and groups under an infinite variety of conditions, even up to our present highly sophisticated stage of mental evolution. The purpose of introducing this theory in the context of our questions, is to give us some tools for thinking about how our minds function and for understanding how we might think about Auroville, similarly or differently,

under the prevailing conditions. The crux of McGilchrist's theory, as we might also easily imagine, is a critical evaluation of society based on his perception that the characteristic traits which the left brain brings to human consciousness have been dominant for several centuries, under the influence of scientific, materialistic rationalism, with the consequent suppression of the right brain function that is so necessary as a guide. This imbalance, as he sees it, has resulted in a humanity that values the control and manipulation of objects and the calculation of material and economic results, more highly than care for the well-being of the whole, an intuitive grasp of the unity and purpose of life, and a more harmonious general progress.

We are of course familiar with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of evolution, based on a similar critique of human consciousness and social development, written more than a hundred years ago from the spiritual perspective. And we know that the aim of his teaching was to show a way for humanity to rise above the rational mind, through Yoga, into a higher intuitive consciousness which would have the will and power to address the imbalance of which the neuroscientist speaks today. The Mother created Auroville to be a laboratory of such an evolutionary Yoga, and we would be justified in inferring that this imbalance is exactly what she had in mind by writing the phrase in The Charter of Auroville which states that "Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future." In fact, when we read the Charter, we see several indications of that intuitive and holistic function which is attributed to the right hemisphere of the brain. For example: "Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole" ... "Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations." ... "Auroville will be...a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity."

Moreover, in speaking about the organization of Auroville just a few months after announcing the Charter, she was explicit about the necessity of a more holistic and intuitive consciousness in order to understand Auroville and guide its organization. She said, "Money belongs to no one; money is a collective possession which should be used only by those who have an integral, comprehensive, and universal vision. And I would add something to that: not only integral and comprehensive, but also essentially TRUE, that is, a vision which can distinguish between a use which is in accord with the universal progress and a use that could be termed fanciful. ...The first thing that should be accepted and recognised by everyone is that the invisible and higher power (that is, the power which belongs to a plane of consciousness which is veiled for the most part but which can be attained, a consciousness which can be called by any name, it doesn't matter, but which is integral and pure in the sense that it is not false: in the Truth), that this power is capable of ordering material things in a MUCH TRUER, happier and better way for everyone than any material power" (Mother's Agenda, 1968, p. 83).

The behavior of those in Auroville today who say that the purpose of Auroville is to build a city, and who also insist that the process of realizing that goal should follow a document titled the Master Plan just as it was formulated twenty years ago, clearly demonstrates those traits so clearly identified by the neuroscientist as characterizing the function of the left brain when it is not listening to the guidance of the right brain. And the fact that this point of view is being projected in an authoritarian manner by agents of the government is a prime example of the pattern of disregard for the well-being of the whole, while acting for the sake of calculated material gains, that has been the source of so much suffering and destruction in recent centuries. Because we do not find a single indication that the purpose of Auroville is to build a city in any of the documents that do state its true purpose, we may find ourselves closer to understanding the truth because it is revealed by such a blatant falsehood. But we may also be enabled by this disturbing experience to make an intuitive leap toward an even truer and more comprehensive understanding of Auroville and its aims than would have been possible under the day to day influence of the left brain's habitual achievements and satisfactions. Our rational minds, like those of human beings everywhere, are so dependent on the repetitive, predictable habits enacted by the left hemisphere. But we may take this rather imposing opportunity to re-attune ourselves on a deeper level to what the Mother meant, and realize what she intended for us to understand about the true purpose of Auroville, when she said:

"No rules or laws are being framed. Things will get formulated as the underlying truth of the township emerges and takes shape progressively. We do not anticipate. ...What I mean to say is that usually, always until now and more and more, men establish mental rules according to their conceptions and ideals, and then apply them, and that is absolutely false, it is arbitrary, unreal, and the result is that things revolt or wither and disappear. ...It is the experience of Life Itself that should slowly work out rules that are as Supple and Wide as possible, in such a way as to be always progressive. Nothing should be fixed. That is the great error of governments: they make a framework and say "There you are, we have set this up and now we must live under it," and so of course they crush the life in it and stop it from progressing. It must be Life itself developing more and more in a progression towards the Light, the Knowledge, the Power that should, little by little, establish rules, as general as possible so that they are extremely flexible and amenable to change, to change with the need as quickly as needs and habits change. The problem finally reduces itself to this: to replace the mental government of intelligence with the government of a spiritualised consciousness" (Mother's Agenda, 1967, p.53-59).

And perhaps we should add that the suppleness and wideness of the intuitive consciousness knows by virtue of its universal connectedness what is true and right, and what is false and wrong. On the basis of that vision it must empower its left brain emissary with the wisdom and skill to overcome the adversary.

The Auroville Foundation, Dr. Jayanti Ravi, and the Governing Board (Dec. 29, 2021)

1. On Jayanti S. Ravi's Background and Attitude to Governance and Administration

From the little that we know about Ravi's background there are certain characteristic patterns that we can discern which are relevant to the prospects of her role in Auroville as Secretary of the Auroville Foundation.

The bio that is presented in the magazine VIKALPA • VOLUME 37 • NO 3 • JULY - SEPTEMBER 2012 tells us that she holds a Ph.D in Technology Enhanced Education from MS University, and a Masters degree in Public Administration from Harvard. At the time of writing the article on 'Making the Multiversity: An Open Higher Education Model' (2012) she was the Commissioner for Higher Education in Gujerat. Her paper is a detailed proposal to create a technology based system of higher education for India to enhance and fundamentally replace the current system of higher education. It is an ambitious plan. And it informs us of Ravi's fundamental interest in prefabricated universalized computer-based teaching, about which she informs us she also authored a book in 2012 titled A multiversity model for transforming higher education, Lap Lambert Publisher.

For example, she writes:

“Information and Communications Technology (ICT) comes through as a possible silver bullet offering a lot of promise and prospects.

The world over, experiments on open education resources (OER) have demonstrated the dramatic effect of technology-enhanced education (Iiyoshi and Kumar, 2008). These include the Open Course Ware (OCW) initiative of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the Open Learning Initiative (OLI) of Carnegie Mellon University (CMU).

The ‘Multiversity’ as developed in this paper is a conceptual model that leverages ICT to address the human resources development problems that plague the country.” Ravi then provides an elaboration of the “problems” that she alleges plague the country and that her computer based educational model is proposed to solve: “The current scenario of higher education is marked by various problems of access, equity, and quality. The ills that afflict higher education in the country relate to outdated and rigid curricula, large number of vacant faculty positions, poor faculty quality in terms of both commitment and competence, poor systemic enablers for student mobility, absence of research, minimal and poor extension work, low levels of skill development, low employability, flawed and rigid system of examination, poor methods of teaching and learning, presence of strong vested interests, poor management and educational services, and problems of governance in the ecosystem of higher education.”

If we are familiar with research being conducted on a national level into the status of higher education in India at the time, we may have some grounds for accepting these allegations which are made without any specific proof of their accuracy or validity. The assertion that her model will address these ills is, however, pure speculation. But the interesting aspect of her argument, which we will see recurring in the context of Auroville, is her rhetorical style of argumentation which seems to assume that because other systems are wrought with error and failure, therefore her proposed system will succeed. We are simply meant to accept these premises and conclusions on the basis of her presumed authority.

As for the educational system she proposes, there are two fundamental structural components. One is a very elaborate top-down administrative structure for the production and dissemination on a large scale of prefabricated learning materials, with government appointed experts at the top. And the other is the establishment of brick and mortar installations throughout the country to provide hands-on implementation and supervision of the program, with an added element of what she refers to as “integral education” as understood from her mentor Kireet Joshi, formerly head of the Mother's International Centre of Education in Pondicherry. First, on the educational technology aspect she writes: “The model has five main components: e-Gyan portal, National Knowledge Network (NKN), National Pro- grammes (NP), Member Higher Education Institutions (MHEI), and Halls of Culture and Training (HCT). The e-Gyan portal is the heart of the model. The gateway or portal would, in turn, collate and make available open education resources and services (OERS) from various ‘constituent’ MHEIs. The ‘e-Gyan portal’, a virtual entity, would have a full-fledged presence on the web with an effective back office to carry out all the work that is required to realize the OERS offerings. The possibility of including the set of courses that are offered by not just one university but a number of universities and institutions can really multiply the choices available to our population. The current existing National Programme of Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL)³ can be extended to

include courses of technical, science, and humanities disciplines. It encompasses content creation ranging from course objectives, learning outcomes, course out-line, lesson plans to unit-wise lectures, class-wise, or week-wise lectures totalling to about forty hours of lectures, presentations, films, videos, text books, notes, projects, assignments, tests and practice questions, animations, films, simulated laboratory facilities, internet-based access of real laboratories, question banks, periodicity for syllabus updation, and provision of reference material in the form of a bibliography and 'web'liography."

Next, she describes the local hubs that should be spread around the country in accessible population centres funded and administered by State governments: "At the ground level, it is proposed to set up centres which are labelled as Halls of Culture and Training at district and ward locations." The word culture in the context of the Hall of Culture and Training is used to connote the context of 'immersion' that is needed for sustainable and fruitful learning. This helps create a social and sustainable culture of learning as against fragile, dysfunctional processes of 'learning'. Thus, an HCT would be the place 'at the proverbial last mile', where the model touches the ground and provides actual access to students and learners from across the country. It is proposed to start with about 1,000 HCTs initially..."

In a footnote on p. 12 this concept has been attributed to Kireet Joshi: "The concept of Halls of Culture and Training has been articulated in great detail by Prof. Kireet Joshi in his book 'Education for tomorrow'. Most of the concepts of HCT presented in this paper are based on his inputs and discussions with him."

Here we need only think of CIRHU in the architectural plans of Auroville yet to be implemented:

"Each Hall of Culture has a central quadrangle for formal assembly, informal learning, and group interactions in an open environment and a library of books, films, and e-material or resources to supplement the OER. This is flanked by two lecture rooms, one of which functions also as the Satcom reception room or Integrated e-Class room (IeCR). ...The HCT includes another Lecture Room for seminars by visiting scholars and a Creativity Room for nurtur- ing the various dimensions of one's personality related to music, dance, fine arts, craft, poetry, dramatics, etc. A sound-proofed Silence Room is planned with a glass brick opening at the top to allow some sunlight to enter the room."

Here "integral education" of the Kireet Joshi variety is also mentioned, although it is the floor plan of the installation and its function that is emphasized: "Provision of Integral Education - Intrinsic values such as truth, hard work, sincerity, intelligence, and character can be developed through some of the methods outlined below.

- Stories related to intrinsic values One such action could relate to the narration or provision of stories of truth, beauty, and goodness. A repository of about a hundred stories from various cultures could be built and further expanded.
- Education related to the physical dimension The jogging track and the basic gymnasium in HCT would facilitate physical education. In addition to actual physical exercise, sports and games, rich multi- media presentations on concepts related to the Beauty and Excellence of Human Body (Joshi, 2003) could be included.
- Education related to the inner self HCTs should also provide for a silent room for students to study, reflect or meditate in the course of their learning. The curricula proposed for the Multiversity should provide silent spaces for Buddha like qualities to be cultivated.

We might highlight the statement about "culture" that occurred earlier in order to raise the question that will recur in the context of Auroville as to what this term might mean to others, especially members of the Auroville community, and many other communities, which might be served by an educational system like this, but whose idea of "culture" and "education" might be quite different. "The word culture in the context of the Hall of Culture and Training is used to connote the context of 'immersion' that is needed for sustainable and fruitful learning. This helps create a social and sustainable culture of learning as against fragile, dysfunctional processes of 'learning'." She is referring to the culture of internet learning here, and to a methodology referred to ten years later by her in her proposal for Auroville as a 'multiversity' hub, where she refers to "Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's philosophy of integral education" but about which she says nothing specific.

Looking over the GB Minutes and listening to Ravi's early references to the 'Multiversity' in her various presentations it is apparent that this notion was brought forward, probably long before the GB Meeting, as part of her resume of interests and qualifications that she would bring to the job of administering Auroville. Since neither she nor the GB seem to have known anything about Auroville other than what they read in the minutes of previous meetings, they could easily have assumed that using phrases like "Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education" and "the Mothers philosophy of integral education" would be a useful background to rouse the faithful to loyal adherence to her leadership, as if they were articles of doctrine that everyone would know and believe. This is also the way her words and phrases appear to have been used in her proposal to the Government of Gujarat in 2012, where her assumptions might have worked better. And yet her proposals didn't materialize there, although they were a fair blend of her technological rhetoric with Kireet Joshi's educational rhetoric.

2. On the GB Minutes and Ravi's interventions in Auroville

One gathers from these minutes of the Governing Board on Nov. 2, 2021, that Ravi dominated the meeting from the start by making a detailed presentation, on the basis of which the GB, which seems to be made up of persons not known to Auroville and who may have never been to Auroville, and therefore were entirely dependent on Ravi's opinions, proceeded to "take decisions". The first of these minutes indicates the assumption by the GB of the belief that Auroville governance and organization are in need of their intervention. To quote just a few articles of the action section for example: "The Board is of the view that the following action needs to be taken in relation to Auroville governance and organization: 1.1. Decision-taking in Auroville needs to be driven by the ideals given by the Mother. 1.2. There is a need for the preparation of work plans for each work area of Auroville by the respective working groups. These work plans must relate to the realization of the ideals of Auroville including township development, governance, economy, education and research. 2.4. There is a lack of focus on the development of the township amongst the various working groups and Auroville residents."

This statement clearly implies that the Board believes that Auroville's organization is not currently driven by the ideals of Auroville, especially in those crucial areas which now require "workplans" to ensure that its economy, education, research, etc. are so driven. Their approach from the beginning was to assume that their intervention was necessary to correct the deficiencies rather than to build on the strengths of Auroville's development.

One wonders whether the members of this Board have any idea of what and how the development of Auroville has actually proceeded over the past 50 years, and the things it has achieved. The impression that they have been given by Ravi has, in any case, apparently disposed them to believe that the development has been incompetent and flawed, as indicated by their comments, as we have seen, in the first and in later sections of the minutes. For example, from the first opinion section: "The Board noted the following in relation to the present status of governance and organisation in Auroville: 1.1. There is a proliferation of groups and discussion forums. 1.2. There seems to be decision paralysis or the inability to put decisions into practice. 1.3. The Residents Assembly is seen by many as a decision-making body for even operational issues that are under the responsibility of working groups. 1.4. The absence of work plans or governance and organisation that ensures implementation of work plans."

There follows a series of "decisions" taken by the Board to intervene in Auroville's development in two specific areas, both of which have caused division in the community and in one case actual harm, and both interventions have been rejected by the community. The former was the arbitrary destruction of forests and community structures, at Ravi's behest, and the latter was the idea of creating the "Multiversity" as a model of education reform centered in Auroville. This, as we have seen, is an idea that she formulated in 2012 in a different context and is not at all related to Auroville's actual educational initiatives. Both interventions derive from Board "decisions" apparently in response to Ravi's directions to the Board and not as the result of any actual developments or initiatives of the residents of Auroville. It seems clear that such considerations are unimportant and inferior to her notions of what should be happening. As stated in the minutes, concerning township development:

"1) 2.8. All Master Plan deviations on the land earmarked for the Crown have to be cleared so that the circular Crown Road and related infrastructure can be built without further delay. A similar exercise shall be implemented for the twelve radials and the outer ring road, where land ownership permits.

2) 5.2. Auroville to become a hub for integral education and research. 5.3. The Board noted that the establishment of the Sri Aurobindo International Multiversity as an affiliating network for integral education, research, teaching, training and extension is a good and appropriate initiative to be launched during the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo."

The first of these "decisions" of the Board which Ravi has tried forcefully to implement, against the wishes of the community and with disastrous results, is now well known. The second came to an apparently early demise after a detailed proposal was created by her with a group of educational institutions, several from outside Auroville, which proved to be untenable in the context of Auroville's legal status. It also generated an immediate general skepticism toward its relevance in Auroville and its early rejection by the community. It is nonetheless being implemented by her without community support.

It is this example which leads us to emphasize the self-centered and authoritarian approach that Ravi has taken towards Auroville from the beginning. Her influence on the Board, as well as her interventions in Auroville, both indicate that her intention is to use the position of "Secretary of the Auroville Foundation" to take charge of Auroville's development and impose her views and judgments about Auroville, education, and who knows what else, as though she were its appointed savior and guide, with little regard for what others might think or know to be the truth. This was also her attitude toward higher education in India in 2012, which she proposed should be replaced with her idea of the Multiversity.

It is important to examine closely the style and method of argumentation that Ravi uses to persuade her target audience. These will be apparent from reading the documents referred to here, which are attached below. To further illustrate their nature, however, I would like to suggest a fictitious set of analogous premises, from which certain erroneous conclusions may be drawn.

Ravi's claims:

- P. 1 Building the city according to the Master Plan is necessary for the realization of the Mother's Dream. Justifies implementing the MP immediately.
- P. 2 Cutting trees is necessary for implementing the Master Plan. Justifies cutting trees immediately.
- P. 3 The RA approved the MP in 2010. Justifies its forceful implementation as is.
- P. 4 The Avlns aren't committed to the Mother's Dream. Absurd.
- P. 5 The Avlns are preserving forests to delay implementation of the Master Plan. Absurd.
- P. 6 The Avlns are not loyal to the decisions of the RA. Absurd.

The inference can be made that the three initial propositions are true based on the absurdity of the three counter propositions. But obviously the first three propositions are not true, they are only made to appear to be true, or to be valid, by the negation of the second three. Of course the Avlns are committed to the Mother's Dream. Therefore implementing the MP is necessary. Of course the Avlns are not preserving forests to block the MP, but to restore the environment, as the whole world knows. Of course the Avlns are loyal to the RA because they are the RA. Therefore trees they have planted can be cut down immediately, and the outdated MP should be implemented without adaptive changes.

This is a rather devious form of argumentation, similar to her constantly repeated phrase "Remember the Dream" and then asserting that the "Dream of the Mother" and "building the City" are synonymous, when in fact there is no direct relationship between the two phrases. "There should be a place on earth which..." says nothing whatsoever about either building a city or the approval and implementation of a Master Plan. For one thing, the publication of the Mother's Dream occurred decades ago, in 1955, and is a revered statement of the Mother's social and cultural idealism. The Master Plan was approved in 1999 and 2010 by the RA as a guide for building the township which has been subjected to many forms of delay. To insist that the two are the same, and that the delays justify arbitrary interventions on the part of an authoritarian administration that is out of touch with the actual development of Auroville, is the real absurdity.

CRITICAL POINTS – AUROVILLE IN CRISIS (Dec. 17, 2021)

Summary of the dilemmas that arise at this point – Dec/Jan 2021 – in relation to the Master Plan of Dec. 2001, referred to as Perspective 2025, in relation to the Auroville Foundation Act of 1988, and in relation to the current development disputes and violations.

According to Toine's statements about these things in a presentation on Dec. 9, the Master Plan of Dec. 2001, which was made in association with the TCPO and approved by the MHRD, is the same as the MP approved and gazetted ten years later in 2010, with the exception of architectural drawings that were added to the latter.

It is stipulated in that document that four Five Year Development Plans and Annual Plans along the way would be submitted to and approved by the Governing Board to ensure regulated and coherent progress. It is predicted in that document that this procedure would lead to a resident population of 15,000 by 2010. This program has obviously not been followed, with the resident population standing today at 3000 after 20 years. Whereas Auroville's development has proceeded under various social, economic, and environmental conditions during the intervening period and has achieved considerable success in these and other areas, it is very far from having achieved the continuous methodical development of buildings and infrastructure conceived by that Master Plan, for which many practical material reasons can be cited. In today's actual context it must be pointed out, therefore, that the point of view and priorities expressed in the recent GB Minutes, and the distressful and precipitate recent actions of the Secretary, appear to disregard and contradict the reality of Auroville. Instead, while attempting to act in Auroville's interests, and to open a pathway for a new and constructive relationship with the Government of India, they have fostered division and distress. It appears that this may have been inevitable on the basis of the assumptions made from the start. For example, the GB Minutes of Nov. 2nd, start like this: 1.6 The Working Committee must assist the Governing Board with the implementation of decisions taken by the Board...

This statement seems to assume a breadth of authority and power by the GB beyond what is stated and intended in the Auroville Foundation Act, which states for example in Article 17: Powers and functions of the Governing Board.—The powers and functions of the Governing Board shall be—(e) to prepare a master-plan of Auroville in consultation with the Residents' Assembly and to ensure development of Auroville as so planned. The GB has not ensured such a development, nor could it have realistically done so under the existing conditions of the past 20 years, anymore than it can do so today.

The Secretary referred to this item in her recent presentation on Dec. 12, and emphasized her own role in carrying out this plan of the GB as she sees it. However, the next Article of the Act states: 19. Functions of Residents' Assembly.—(1) The Residents' Assembly shall perform such functions as are required by this Act and shall advise the Governing Board in respect of all activities relating to the residents of Auroville, among which is mentioned: (c) formulate the master plan of Auroville and make necessary recommendations for the recognition of organisations engaged in activities relatable to Auroville for the approval of the Governing Board.

The fact is that the creation and implementation of the Master Plan, the development of Auroville, the realization of the ideals expressed in the Auroville Charter, all depend entirely on the residents of Auroville who comprise the Residents' Assembly. None of these things can be achieved by the Governing Board and its decisions, whatever they may be. This is most evident with respect to the history of the Master Plan itself.

Considering that the procedures for implementing the MP have not been consistently followed over the past 20 years, and the current activities to clear land for the Crown road do not follow an Annual Plan or a Five Year Development Plan as should have been the case, the Resident's Assembly is entirely justified in declaring such activities to be arbitrary and intrusive under the current circumstances, not to mention destructive of actual developments on the land and in the "social fabric of the community" which have actually developed during these 'unplanned' decades by the efforts of the residents. The GB Minutes are here treating the implementation of the Master Plan as if it were the primary purpose of Auroville, and disregarding its larger purpose, spirit, and actual needs, priorities, and values.

Concerning the current status of Auroville development, the GB Minutes point out such things as:

- 2.2 ...lack of cohesive social fabric
- 2.3 Master Plan right-of-ways (the Crown, radials, outer ring and international zone loop, etc.) have not been cleared,
- 2.4 ...lack of focus on the development of the township
- 2.5 low population dispersed over a vast land area

Each of these points is merely the opinion of external observers who could easily and understandably be ignoring altogether the actual conditions of life in Auroville, its actual social fabric, its actual focus on both the higher aims and purposes and the day to day realities of the Auroville experiment. The actual conditions that have impeded the development of a larger population, and an urban infrastructure, especially the economic conditions, are more a result of the socio-political-economic development of India than of the actions of Aurovilians.

Concerning actions that need to be taken to accelerate development, the GB Minutes list:

- 3.5 (incorrectly numbered in the minutes) The ATDC needs to complete the work of preparation of Detailed Development Plans (DDPs) based on the Auroville Master Plan.
- 3.8 All Master Plan deviations on the land earmarked for the Crown have to be cleared so that the circular Crown Road and related infrastructure can be built without further delay.

The preparation of five year Development Plans and annual Progress Plans, according to the purpose and methodology of the Master Plan technology, is to provide continuity and realistic development, and thereby actually avoid arbitrary, destructive, and unrealistic interventions. But these necessary precedents for such development do not exist, hence item 3.5. These two items in the GB Minutes in fact disregard the purpose of the Master Plan, as well as the purpose of Auroville, the social fabric of the community, and the requirement to make and implement decisions in consultation with the Residents' Assembly. To assume that an effort made to adopt the Master Plan methodology 20 years ago can stand today, just as it was under the exigencies of that long past period in the history of Auroville's development, is an absurdity, as well as being a contradiction of the meaning and purpose of the Master Plan methodology.

The Master Plan provides general guidelines. It is not a blueprint and so cannot be implemented "as is". Even though the Secretary has said that that is what is being done by her. She has said that, once the MP was approved, Aurovilians no longer have a role to play in the physical manifestation of Auroville.

The 5-year development plans provide the detailed means for near-term development and, as an ongoing updating of the Master Plan, ensure that the MP continues to be progressive. As stated in the MP: "It will neither be traditional, nor static, nor rigid." It is a statutory requirement that these development plans are reviewed and approved by both the RA and the GB with "the same process as followed in the preparation of the Perspective Plan."

Acceleration of the progress of Auroville depends more on the recognition of the actual conditions of Auroville and of the world, and on the cultivation of meaningful, caring, and creative relationships among all the parties involved in this difficult human experiment. It cannot be achieved by heavy handed, authoritarian methods, nor by unrealistic social, economic, and organizational models that are carried over from the past and carelessly imposed.

Postscript: In support of the credibility of my judgments here, let me add that I have lived in Auroville for 27 years, the first 15 and recently for 12, when I served as the founder and principal of the first CBSE school in Auroville from 2007 to 2013. During the recent period I presented a paper on NCF and Integral Education at a WIPRO Educational Conference in Bangalore which has since been read online by more than 20,000 educators in India. I do know something about this subject. I have also published several books on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy which lead me to assert that Dr. Ravi's rationalistic mode of thinking is antithetical to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo which advocate an intuitive mode of consciousness to be developed through Yoga. And her advocacy of a prepackaged educational content with predetermined standardized outcomes is antithetical to the aims of an integral education which consults students in the manner and aims of their individual learning processes, based on the actual strengths and interests of each individual learner, and on the potentials of the 'whole child'. I would conclude therefore that Ravi's educational technology background, her authoritarian administrative style, and her rationalistic mode of thinking and values are highly inappropriate in the context of Auroville.

Furthermore, when reflecting on what her motivations might be for adopting such an authoritarian approach to her mission, while at the same time referring frequently to the Mother's aims and ideals in creating Auroville, I can only surmise that they are political. If she had adopted a softer and more sympathetic approach and offered to assist Auroville's development in a cooperative way, things could have developed quite differently. Looking back at her close association with the BJP and PM Modi's administration in Gujarat, where she served in the Ministry, and at the Auroville Foundation Governing Board that she now serves, which is made-up of high level BJP operatives, there can be little doubt that she shares their objectives. As mentioned above, it is overwhelmingly apparent that the Modi government is interested in promoting the Hindu religion on the one-hand and cultural tourism on the other, which makes Auroville's futuristic designs and the reputation of Sri Aurobindo as a renowned philosopher of Hinduism ideal targets for the kind of brutish takeover that the events conveyed in these articles represent. The news media in India has recently also been filled with what it calls JCB-Nationalism because of the widespread use of bulldozers by the BJP against factions that it considers to be oppositional. This is certainly not the approach that one would have expected from anyone aligned with the ideals of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, or even of a nationalist political party that idolizes Sri Aurobindo. But the past association of the Sri Aurobindo Society with the BJP, and recent public gatherings under its sponsorship featuring high ranking officials of the BJP are strong indications that political motivation is the most likely cause of the takeover now underway in Auroville.

June 2, 2022