

To: The Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, Honourable Governor of Tamil Nadu
Shri R. N. Ravi
From : Rod Hemsell

Regarding your invitation to the Auroville community to respond to your presentation of Nov. 7, 2022, this is my response, including a few suggestions.

The purpose of Auroville is the evolution of a new collective consciousness to which thousands of people have dedicated their lives for the past five decades. By fixating on the plan to build a city for 50,000 inhabitants, you seem to have ignored the level of human commitment that such an outer manifestation requires, and also the substantial progress that it has already achieved, although you have made passing references to these things.

You have heard or read ideas about Auroville's collective purpose expressed by those who were closest to the Mother at Auroville's commencement, such as Roger Anger and Kireet Joshi. Many of us have also heard these ideas from them, as well as from the Mother herself. The message we have received through working with them is that the inner development of the human being through dedication to the Divine is the essence and truth of Auroville, necessary in order to realize its destined outer development, and the ideal of human unity.

By assuming that building a concrete city is the first priority of Auroville, you have authorized actions that are contrary to the truth of Auroville and detrimental to its progress and the realization of its aims. Because of this, court cases have been undertaken against the AVFO, and members of the community have repeatedly voted in large numbers against such detrimental actions. You say that you find it difficult to understand this opposition. I would like to address your difficulty, and to offer some suggestions for moving forward.

We implore you to reverse the approach that you have taken to the reorganization of Auroville based on erroneous assumptions, and to adopt a wiser approach that restores harmony and order to the collective process of Auroville's development.

You unfortunately do not seem inclined to follow such a course of action. It is unfortunate, too, that you consider your opinions and judgments about Auroville's stewardship and *sadhana* to be more correct than and superior to those of the residents of Auroville. It is disconcerting that you say Auroville's development should be the responsibility of Aurovilians and yet you persistently demean their commitment and achievement. You seem to consider the commitment of their lives, sometimes for family generations, as a violation of principle and a sign of ownership and entitlement to be shunned, broken, churned and disrupted, so that your mission can be achieved.

In order for you to see yourselves as the saviors of Auroville it seems necessary for you to see Auroville as a place of deviation from its ideals, and a habitat for people who have lost their way. It seems easy for you because you are not an Aurovillian and you do not share the commitment and experience of Aurovilians; you consequently do not perceive and understand the level of devotion to its ideals that their lives represent.

You are experiencing difficulty with these things because your judgments are based on preconceptions, and you are motivated by an attitude of self-importance and superiority, to which you are accustomed as an official of the government. Your statements have made your position abundantly clear. Unfortunately the point of view that you express regarding the nature of Auroville, the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the Charter, and the role of the Governing Board in relation to these things is distorted and misguided by a certain attitude of self-righteousness and authority that prevents you from seeing the truth of these things. The difficulties that you have and the distortions that you perceive are a reflection of your own misconceptions.

Auroville is not the place that you have described in your presentation. It is not a place without norms where the ideals on which it is based have been compromised. It is not a place where service to the community and its surrounding populations have been neglected, or where a sense of collective purpose and well-being has been lost. These thoughts and impressions are a projection of some confusion about many unrelated ideas, concerns, and experiences of life that occupy your own mind. The distorted view of Auroville that you have expressed is a false view. And such a distorted view cannot possibly be the basis of any form of resolution of the difficulties of Auroville at present, most of which have arisen primarily due to your erroneous assumptions and misguided interventions.

Let me, therefore, suggest a few simple corrections to this view and course of action that might be made so that we can find a path forward together that could be more fruitful. The separation that you have made between the Auroville Charter and the laws of India, on the one hand, and the management structure defined by the Auroville Act, on the other hand, asserting that the former are of primary importance and the latter do not matter, is erroneous and must be rethought by you. These things are in fact a unity. The Auroville Act is a law. The governance structure is an instrument of the Charter and, as such, it matters a great deal.

The Master Plan was never set in stone; it was the product of immediate, practical circumstances. It is unfortunate that the government did not see fit to step in and fund it at the time, but that would probably not have been appropriate. However, you must understand that "revision" is an inherent part of the Master Plan, by definition. To revise it after 10 years is the normal course of such an instrument, and not a deviation. Similarly, the norms of life in Auroville were defined by the Mother and are embodied in a living way by the lives of the residents in an evolving way, in accordance with the Mother's guidelines. It is an inherent necessity and responsibility of Aurovilians to adhere to them, and their lives are a constant endeavor to do so. But such norms, with their developing interpretations and applications, cannot be dictated by an external authority; they are a product and expression of the *swabhava* of Auroville. To attempt to alter them, improve them, determine them from outside the life of Auroville would be a violation of the norms themselves, and the attempt to do so will naturally be rejected like a disease from the body and mind of an organism. It is you who are violating the norms of Auroville, not the Aurovilians.

The answer to your question, Why is there such opposition and resistance to our intervention?, is that the authoritarian, destructive, disruptive nature of your approach is the wrong approach to solving any of Auroville's problems. It is contrary to the spirit and truth of Auroville. It is not Auroville and Aurovilians that need to be corrected; it is your approach and the intention of your intervention that were wrong from the beginning.

If you have truly studied the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, you will know of the central importance to *sadhana*, and to the processes of the world in general, of the factor of Time. One of your fundamental errors has been the leap you make in your conception of Auroville's development between 2010 and 2020, and your attempt to connect a past with a present, excluding the significant movement that has taken place in between. The past decade has borne the fruition of the previous decade and forms the basis of the next decade. There is an inevitable continuity that you have failed to consider. My sincere request is that you make an effort to understand this reality of the movement of Time, which is an expression of the Divine Will. If you can attune yourself to that reality, it will be easier for you to rectify the disjointed and erroneous nature of your conceptions. The future can only be built on the reality of the past; to ignore this reality of Time can only be the cause of disharmony and destruction. You have asked for suggestions and advice, and I am responding to your request as sincerely and frankly as I can.

My comments are not made from a vacuum, nor are they random reactions to an unpleasant disruption of the status quo. I have been present at the foundation of Auroville, at the first government intervention, at the formulation of the Master Plan, and throughout the productive period of interaction between the Residents' Assembly, the IAC, and the GB between 2005 and 2015. I have participated actively in Auroville's educational

development, taught courses and published books on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, and graduated many students from village families with hardly even a secondary education, who have gone on to earn Bachelor's and Master's degrees. In the 70s I was associated with AVARD and published articles in their journal, at a time when your party was on the verge of its first brief assumption of power. I have taught Indian political science and I know something about the subject; I have lectured at MS University in Varodra.

I speak from the experience of Auroville, and I say to you that your attempt to deny and disrupt the integrity of the Residents' Assembly and its legitimate role in the development of Auroville is contrary to the purpose of the Auroville Act and contrary to the Charter of Auroville. I sincerely implore you, as I stated in the beginning of this letter to you, to take my observations into serious consideration, reverse your course, and restore integrity, harmony, and order to the collective process of Auroville's development.

You have made harsh but revealing judgments regarding the soul of Auroville and the Bhakti of Auroville, about which you know nothing. You claim to know the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo based on what you have read and the conceptions you have formed, but these have not enabled you to grasp the soul, the *sadhana*, and the *swabhava* of Auroville. You have condemned Auroville's commercial activity without understanding that it was emphasized by the Mother, along with the creation of an industrial zone, because it is essential to the growth of Auroville. You have not grasped the fact that Auroville is a township devoted to the Divine and not an ashram. You have failed to make these fundamental distinctions because you are not one of those who have dedicated their lives to Auroville and for whom its truth is a reality. When you say, "The core has to be respected, the core has to be restored," let this aspiration be directed to your own soul, and let your mind grasp the truth of Auroville on a higher, wider, more holistic, more inspired plane of consciousness. Then let us realize that unity and universality about which you have spoken.

Rod Hemsell
Nov 9, 2022