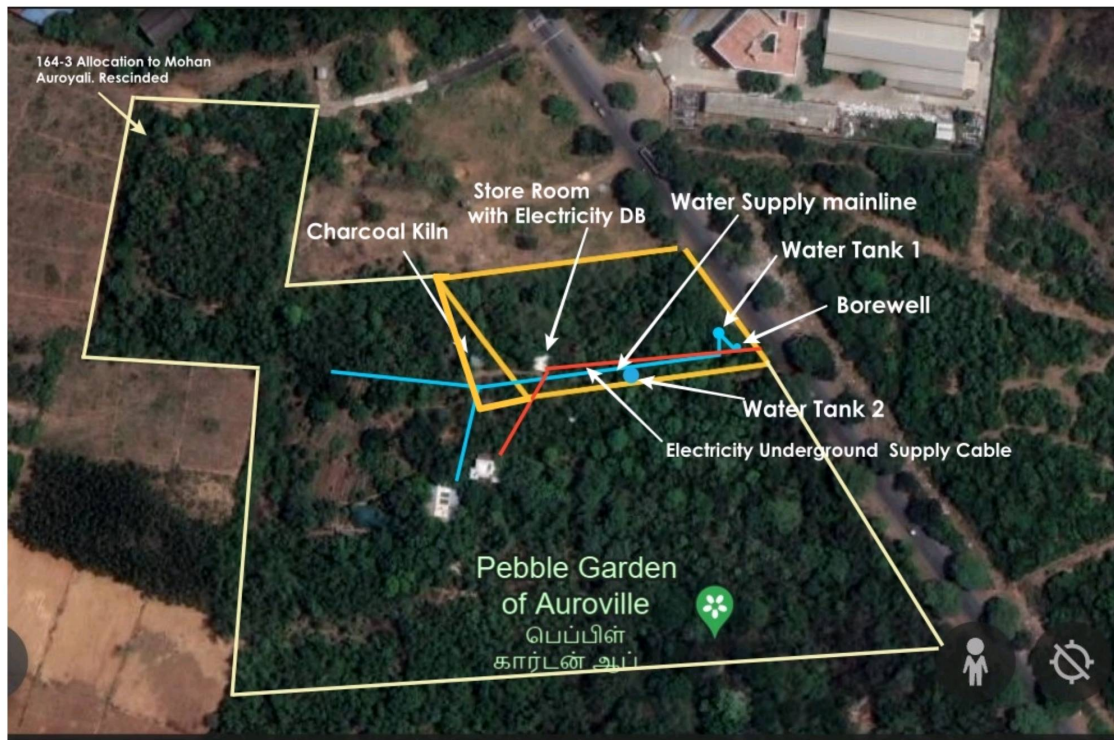


This is to inform you all about yet another emergency at Pebble Garden. The first was when Plot 164-3 was allocated by ATDC/Avenir to Mohan of Auroyali, which was thankfully rescinded after feedback.

On Friday 22-12-2023 at 9 am we saw 2 workers who identified themselves as Av Land Board workers, clearing a strip around a part of the front area of Pebble Garden, near the gate. On questioning them they said they were brought by Krishnamurthy of Av Land Board the previous day on 21-12-2023 and were instructed to clear a strip around a plot of 50m x 90m inside the Pebble Garden fenced area - to enable tape measurement. This is in the north-eastern corner of Aurobrindavan (Survey No 175-2), with the roadside on the east and the poramboke on the north. After insisting, we got to know from them that this plot of 50mx90m was being considered for land exchange by the land officers of the Av Foundation and the Av Land Board.

We did not receive any prior information about this. When we spoke to the workers and asked them why they did not inform us when they first came on 21-12-2023, they said that they had been explicitly told by their superiors in the Land Board not to.



In Yellow – plot marked for exchange

If this exchange takes place, all the indispensable assets, marked on the map, that we painstakingly built up over decades will be gone (list below).

We will be in an impossible situation and it will be a struggle to continue our work at Pebble Garden – a work that is cherished by many in India as a place from where the organic and seed revival movement originated.

Assets that will be lost if this exchange takes place:

- 1) Borewell - the only source of water
- 2) Pump and Pump house
- 3) Water Tank 1
- 4) Water Tank 2
- 5) Water supply main pipeline – 100 metres
- 6) Electricity underground cable – 100 metres
- 7) Pucca Store Room with Electricity Distribution Box
- 8) Underground Electricity supply cable from Store Room to house – 50 metres
- 9) Shed with Charcoal Kiln – ongoing research
- 10) 7 of 11 water harvesting ponds which charge the shallow borewell and provide silt for the garden.

Apart from the infrastructure, if this land is exchanged, losing 7 of our 11 ponds will remove one of the pillars of our regeneration work. These ponds with the silt they accumulate are indispensable to build up soil for the seed conservation garden and the forest. Without demonstrating water conservation as essential to regenerative land use, our work hangs meaninglessly in the air. Whatever we train and teach is a lived and grounded reality. The loss of this piece of land will destroy the integrity of work at Pebble Garden.

Please stand by us, we will need your help and support in the coming days. Write to us if you have any ideas, suggestions or information that could help us in these difficult times.

Warmly

Bernard & Deepika

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[pebblegardenforest@gmail.com](mailto:pebblegardenforest@gmail.com)

PS. A note with details about Pebble Garden attached

## PEBBLE GARDEN, AUROVILLE

### An Brief Introduction

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#### LOCATION & BACKGROUND

Pebble Garden located in the northern part of Aurobrindavan, Auroville, is an eco-restoration project - the lifetime effort of Bernard and Deepika who have worked there since 1994. This is a highly eroded land, classified as 'unfit for biotic production' because of extreme topsoil loss, caused by massive deforestation since the 1700s due to colonial expansion and exploitation.

#### SOIL DEGRADATION & DESERTIFICATION – A GLOBAL & NATIONAL CRISIS

The work at Pebble Garden is one of Auroville's demonstrated solutions to India's national crisis of soil loss and degradation. Of India's land mass of 329mha, 147mHa are degraded. Of this, 93mHa are deformed by water erosion, and devoid of soil, of which Pebble Garden, is representative. India is signatory to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) 2022 and is committed to achieve Land Degradation Neutral status by 2030. The Government of India has launched several missions to combat land degradation, loss of soil fertility and desertification.

#### An ETHICAL SOLUTION

Pebble Garden is standing testimony that a highly eroded land can successfully be regenerated in a relatively short span of 30 years. With 2 Working Principles:

- NO EXTERNAL inputs of Soil or Organic Matter (to avoid creating a desert elsewhere)
- NO HIRED LABOUR (2 people, few volunteers & only occasional casual workers)

Bernard and Deepika have worked hands-on for 30 years and shown what two pairs hands and minimum financial investment can achieve to rebuild and protect our country's soil and participate in a national cause, while being personally committed to the cause of Auroville. Sri Aurobindo in 1908 emphasized that Soil is the basis of National Permanence. The Mother said manual work is indispensable for the inner discovery and for directing consciousness into matter.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS/ WORK ON GROUND

- A Forest of 200+ Indigenous species – 5.00 acres
- 11 water harvesting ponds – 0.75 acre
- Endangered Tree Groves 0.5 acre
- 75 + Bird Species & small wildlife
- Seed Conservation Garden 0.5 acre – 134 varieties
- Charcoal Production for soil fertility preservation

#### RESEARCH & EDUCATION

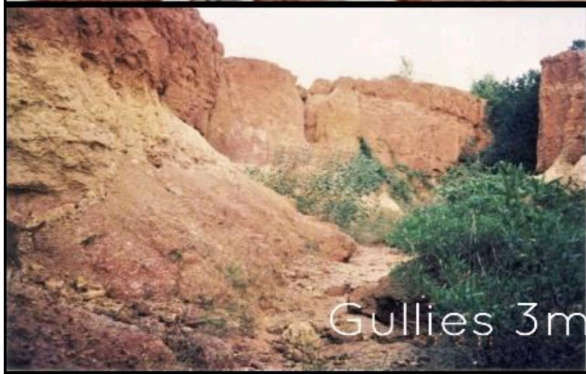
- Land based research on methods to regenerate eroded lands and revive Biodiversity
- Research on seed saving practices in the Indian context – exsitu and insitu
- Research on Terra Preta and use of Charcoal in Agriculture
- Research on Ecological History, Indigenous approach to Forests and Traditional Agriculture systems.
- Training, Workshops, Lectures on Seed & Soil Conservation (on request) – At least 400 since 1994
- Seed Distribution at National and Regional Seed Festivals – more than 1 lakh seed packets distributed
- Visits of adult and youth groups from T.N and other states (on request) – on regular basis.
- Every Saturday 10:30am visitors open day.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS OUTREACH

- Bernard founded ARISE – India's first network for Organic Farming 1994 – evolved into OFAI
- Guided Nammalvar, leader of Organic Farming Movement in Tamil nadu and influenced his vision of Agriculture
- Deepika Co-Founded BBSM – Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch – India Seed Sovereignty Alliance in 2012
- Publications by both on Organic Farming, Seed Saving, Land Regeneration.
- UN SAARD Prize for ARISE Network started by Bernard in 1995 – the roots of the organic farming movement in India
- National Award 2018 – Deepika received the Nari Shakti Puraskar, India's highest civilian honour for women – from Honorable President of India Sri Ram Nath Kovind, for her work on Seed & Biodiversity Conservation at Pebble Garden.



Pebble Garden Area 1984



Gullies 3m deep & NO Soil

GARDEN AREA – Soil Built up with NO External Inputs of Soil or Organic Matter



FOREST AREA at Pebble Garden

1994



2011

2013

2015



Regenerated Forest & Garden Areas

Seed Conservation at Pebble Garden & Training for Farmers



Seed Conservation Training for Farmers

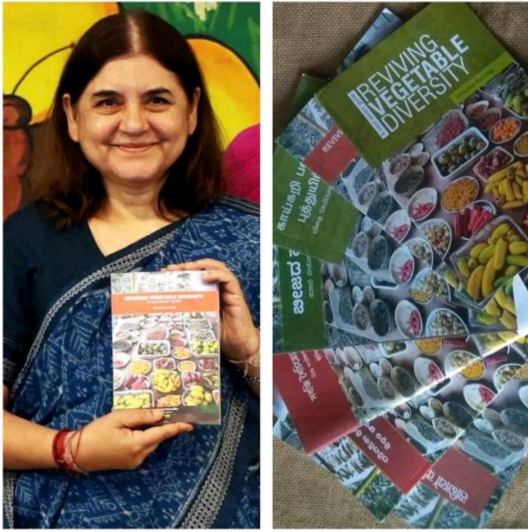


Bernard and Nammalvar at Pebble Garden

Near the biggest pond endangered by the land exchange →



Seed Saving Book Release by Smt Maneka Gandhi



Receiving the Nari Shakti Puraskar Mar 2018 from Hon'ble President Sir Ram Nath Kovind



Chief Guest at Seed Festival organized by Tamil Nadu Seed Savers Network March 2023

