

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXI

No. 2

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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# *AUROVILLE*

**The Flowering**

*Auroville...*

*a name, a place, a dream, an experiment, an adventure...*

*On the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation, we present a compilation of poems, extracts from books, journals, speeches, conversations...*

*A number of pieces have been taken from The Auroville Adventure (1998) and The Auroville Experience (2006), published by Auroville Today.*

*We will have more articles in our subsequent issues.*

*Yet words can't fully capture what Auroville is...*

*For it is a city with a soul,  
a conscious endeavour in collective living,  
it is an experience,  
an aspiration,  
a future in the making...*

(Message for the Inauguration of Auroville)

28. 2. 68.

Greetings from Auroville  
to all men of good will

Are invited to Auroville all  
those who thirst for progress  
and aspire to a higher  
and truer life.



Greetings from Auroville to all men of good will.

Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life.

28 February 1968

28. 2. 68

## Charte d'Auroville

- 1) Auroville n'appartient à personne en particulier. Auroville appartient à toute l'humanité dans son ensemble.

Mais pour séjourner à Auroville, il faut être le serviteur volontaire de la Conscience Divine

\*

- 2) Auroville sera le lieu de l'éducation perpétuelle, de



progrès constant et d'une  
 jeunesse qui ne vieillit point.

\*

3) Auroville veut être le pont  
 entre le passé et l'avenir.

Profitant de toutes les découvertes  
 extérieures et intérieures,  
 elle veut hardiment s'élancer  
 vers les réalisations futures.

\*

4) Auroville sera le lieu des  
 recherches matérielles et spirituelles  
 pour donner un corps vivant  
 à une unité humaine concrète.



### **Auroville Charter**

1) Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.

But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

2) Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

3) Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

4) Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

*28 February 1968*

## THE SUPREME FESTIVAL OF THE LIGHT

*(Description of the ceremony by Mme. Yvonne Robert Gaebelé.  
Translated from French.)*

On the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1968 the Bay of Bengal woke up powdered with gold.

The gold was colouring the roofs of the houses of Pondicherry and as the splendid orb mounted up in the sky the whole countryside around appeared to be bathing in the royal light.

It was indeed the supreme festival of the light which awaited us at the place, chosen out of all others, for the construction of Auroville.

Imagine, not far from Pondicherry, a sort of immense arena with slopes around rising in grades, the whole wondrously arranged to receive thousands of spectators of whom several had come from great distances to participate in the ceremony of the day.

In the centre of the arena was an elevation of earth, where one could reach by a circular way to an urn with a lid styled as a lotus bud. This urn was to contain the earth from 124 countries, brought from all parts, on which the future city would be built. After the loudspeakers had called for silence, first arose the voice of the Mother who spoke from a distance from her room in the Ashram.

What was the Mother saying?... She was reading the Charter of Auroville and in the solemn silence first fell the sublime words, "Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness." This relinquishment, absolute and deliberate, contrasted so strongly, from the first, with the spirit of the century that one could not but admire and bow down before a realisation of such an amplitude and serenity. Then the procession commenced.

The first pair had the flag of the Mother, the golden wheel on the sky-blue base, symbol of the Mother's occult and transcendental powers. The two young ones appeared from the horizon; with slow steps they followed the triumphal path lined by volunteers and began to climb the symbolic cone. Soon the flag fluttered there, caressed by the wind while the young ones carefully placed the earth of the Ashram and the Charter of Auroville in the depth of the urn.

Then other pairs followed, with very slow steps, as if cadenced by a low-toned music, while the Charter was being read in the principal languages of the world. All were arriving, pair after pair, surging from the horizon, the young girl carrying the name of the country they represented, the young boy with the soil of the country in a vessel. When they arrived at the top, near the urn, with a pious gesture the soil was poured over the other soil already sunk there, and then they came down the opposite side. Some pairs wore the costume of the country to which they belonged. Thus one could admire the colours of the rich costumes of Africa. Immense Russia was

represented by two quite small infants, blond and charming. Then each state of India had its turn. No country of the world was forgotten—from the icy lands of the Pole up to those of the tiny states of the Equator. The last pair carried the orange-coloured flag of Auroville evolving with a symbolic lotus at its centre.

The silence became, if that was possible, yet profounder when was seen moving forth the noble disciple of the Ashram, Nolini, the earliest and one of the oldest, the disciple from the first days of the beloved Master, Sri Aurobindo. Accompanied by his son he came to seal the urn. When he climbed the cone and stood at the top, dressed in immaculate clothes, with his face of handsomely grave features, one could say some Vedic priest of the ancient ages was officiating at the altar, lighting there the fire of the sacrifice.

Is Auroville not the altar on which must burn away forever all the evil passions so that the world, grown pure, may teach the new Evangel to the earth of man?

\* \* \*

## FEBRUARY 28, 1968

*(On this day, Auroville's inauguration ceremony took place on a barren plateau in Tamil Nadu. What exactly happened? Gleaned from preparatory Ashram documents, participants' memories and newspaper reports, this résumé is perhaps the closest we'll get to the definitive story.)*

The ceremony, which would take 75 minutes, began at 10.24 with the white-clad announcer briefly explaining the order of events to come to the 5,000 or so people assembled in the amphitheatre. At 10.30 there was the sound of a gong, there were a few bars of Mother's music, then came Mother's voice, relayed from her room in the Ashram:

*Salut d'Auroville à tous les hommes de bonne volonté. Sont conviés à Auroville tous ceux qui ont soif de progrès et aspirant à une vie plus haute et plus vraie.*

[Translation: Greetings from Auroville to all men of good will. Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life.]

A few more bars of music followed, then Mother read the Charter of Auroville in French.

The announcer then stated, "Now the earth from the Ashram will be put in the urn." Kiran and Vijay Poddar approached the urn. Kiran carried Mother's flag and Vijay carried earth from the Samadhi and a stainless steel container and inside it the scroll with the Charter of Auroville in Mother's handwriting. As they reached the urn Sunil's 1968 New Year music began to be played, along with Mother's New Year message: "Remain young. Never stop striving towards Perfection."

The stainless steel container was lowered deep into the urn by ribbons, along with the earth.

The announcer then introduced the formula which would be followed for the rest of the ceremony. The Charter would be read successively in 16 languages by nationals (usually Ashramites) of those countries or cultures (the languages in order were Tamil, Sanskrit, English, Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Tibetan). Before each reading the announcer would introduce the translation—"Now the Charter in Tamil will be read..."—and specify which States of India or countries would approach the urn during that reading (the states first, countries afterwards, all in alphabetical order). In all, two young delegates from each of the 23 States or Union Territories of India and representatives from 124 countries (63 persons were delegated by embassies, the rest were students from the Ashram school) walked up to the urn. In each pair one would carry a placard with the name of their State or country, the other would carry earth (or a substitute) from that State or country in a small bowl. After the earth was tipped into the urn, the representatives walked down the ramp from the urn. Their placard was taken and placed in a pre-assigned socket, they signed a scroll with their names and the name of their State or country, and then they walked up a ramp out of the central arena.

Finally came the announcement, "Now the earth of Auroville will be put in the urn. Then the urn will be sealed." Michel (Kalya) and Fabienne, Mother's great-grandchildren, approached the urn. Michel carried Auroville earth while Fabienne carried the Auroville flag (the symbol was an open lotus with another lotus in its centre against a background of 'dawn gold'). Then Nolini and his son walked to the urn. He placed the lid over the top and removed the screwed handle. The urn was sealed, the inauguration of Auroville complete.

*(The Auroville Experience, pp. 2-3)*

\* \* \*

## 28<sup>TH</sup> OF FEBRUARY

*(A representative remembers)*

28<sup>th</sup> of February 2008...

Forty years ago—I remember...

28<sup>th</sup> of February 1968,

The day of the Foundation Ceremony of Auroville.

10.30 a.m.  
All was still.  
And in that stillness,  
Came Her voice,  
Loud and clear,  
Full of Love,  
Full of Force,  
A call to humanity  
To take a step towards Light and Truth.

And to make this possible,  
Auroville was born.

The whole world  
Participated in this birth,  
This symbolic ceremony.  
Many countries  
Sent their delegates,  
A boy and a girl,  
Or a handful of soil—  
All were represented.

The Charter was read  
In many languages—  
Of India and the world.

The young representatives  
Poured their country's soil  
In the lotus-bud shaped urn.

The soil of all the countries  
Mingled.

The Mother's Flag came first.  
The Samadhi sand  
Given by the Mother Herself  
That morning  
Was poured in the urn.  
And the Charter  
In Her own Hand  
Was placed in the urn—

The Divine Grace and Action  
Behind this Creation.

How we hoped,  
How we wished  
The Mother would come  
For the Birth  
Of this grand project of Hers

And She *was* there!

\* \* \*

## PREPARATIONS FOR THE CEREMONY

*(Three passages from Mona Sarkar's notes of his conversations with the Mother about the inauguration ceremony. He was in charge of the volunteers and the 'security arrangement'.)*

*[The ceremony was to be an open-air affair, and there would not be enough place for all in the temporary shade that had been put up.]*

...You could speak to them personally, that they should bring their umbrellas, not to remain in the sun the whole time.

*Yes, Mother, but the best thing would be if the sky remained cloudy.*

Yes, that would be the best thing, but it should not rain, the rain would spoil everything.

*Yes, Mother, that is why we pray to you so that the sky remains cloudy.*

I don't see how one could do that.

*If you want it, it will be done. This is our prayer to you.*

Let us see. The ideal would be if the sky were cloudy.

*Yes, Mother, you must do this.*

We will see.

\*

There are always people of goodwill, who, moreover, are very few, but when they watch the ceremony, they will always see the good side of what is happening. They see only the best that emerges. Their attention will be turned to beauty and

harmony. And they will say how beautiful it all was. Because they have a heart that responds to what is beautiful. They do not at all see if there was a bad side to it all. And these are the people of goodwill.

And then there are others who, from the beginning, will see only the bad side of things. They come with the idea that nothing happens as it should. And they will see the disharmony and the uselessness of things. They will always look with an eye to find faults, to give a bad twist, to look askance even when one does the best possible. For them it will always be something commonplace or mundane. They will never be able to appreciate something well done, because they always have a bad attitude. That is why they see only the bad.

And then, there are others who will be indifferent, and these persons will not say anything, because whatever happens, it is all the same for them.

That is why I give no importance to what people say. The opinions of people have no value, because one will always find these three categories in a crowd like that.

\*

What is important is the inner attitude...

To purify, to become conscious of what is happening, to open to the force that is at work, to aspire to be ready, to be sincere, to act in the right manner,... to be conscious of this (*the heart*), always,... to do things in such a manner that it helps...to be more conscious,... to feel and prepare for this great occasion and to try as best as possible to participate in what is being done in Auroville, to open the consciousness and to widen it in order to receive...

The proper attitude,—to call the consciousness, to purify the thought, and to become ready to give oneself entirely. It is this that is important for me.

To think of the creative Force of the Supreme which is at work in Auroville, to be ready to receive what is happening in Auroville, to be conscious of what I have been entrusted to do, and to remember that it is I who would have done all this and not the children.

It is because I do not go out, that is why the children will replace me. To feel that it is I who am putting the sand [*from the Samadhi*] instead of them. It is this that has importance.

\* \* \*



## AN ELECTRIC SHOCK

*(On the evening of 28th February, Hema noted this in her diary:)*

Douce Mère,

The inauguration ceremony of Auroville this morning was an unforgettable experience. Out of chaos and disorder everything worked towards harmony and beauty.

I had been selected to represent Iraq during the inauguration ceremony but people from that country arrived so I was shifted to represent Yugoslavia. Unluckily for me people from that country also reached Auroville at the last moment. Then I was made a Turk but to my utter dismay people from Turkey also panted in at the last second. Finally I was given the banner of China and that too communist China. You can very well imagine my feelings at that moment! Well, I can at least boast of being the only person to have changed her nationality four times in a single hour.

Douce Mère, as the ceremony started all the muddle and confusion were forgotten. I could feel your presence among us so powerfully, so very concretely that nothing else mattered. An ardent aspiration mounted upwards for the realisation of this beautiful dream of yours; of Auroville—city of Harmony. It was a moment when “earth grew unexpectedly divine”.

It was no longer of any importance which country I represented or which countries others stood for, what counted most at that time was that we were present at this very solemn and historic hour in our march towards perfection.

As I walked into the arena with China’s flag in my hands an electric shock seemed to have passed through my being emptying it of all thoughts and feelings and “touching the moment with eternity”.

Nearly everyone present must have felt something, for there was a trance-like quality in their gait when they entered the arena.

Douce Mère, today was really a very beautiful and memorable day.

Thank you and good-night.

*(Auroville Today, February 2003)*

\* \* \*

## THE DAY THE BALLOON WENT UP

*(It was like this, wasn't it? A long-time Aurovilian tries to remember the inauguration of Auroville.)*

One of my earliest memories as a child was being held out the window of a railway carriage as the train wound its way along the side of a valley, revealing first one end of the train and then the other, my grandfather twisting me first one way, then the other as he sang out, "There's where we come from; there's where we go."

Forty years later, I had a similar experience as I came onto Auroville land for the first time for the inaugural ceremony. The bus in which we travelled had turned the corner near Hope and suddenly people were standing up, pointing. There were no trees then, remember, and the views were long. Some people pointed way across the barren fields to an orange meteorological balloon tethered near a distant banyan tree; some pointed behind to all the buses that followed us, while others were pointing ahead to all the buses going around the next bend. Everyone started to laugh...

We had arrived at the Ashram four months earlier. The first we heard of Auroville was when Mother told us we were to work for it. And although in the meantime we had been given work in Ashram departments we had started to involve ourselves in the preparation for the opening ceremony.

Over the years I've been trying to recall it as a glorious time when we all worked harmoniously together under the directions of the Mother. But it wasn't like that. It was a mess.

For four months everyone disagreed, argued, contradicted each other, worked at cross-purposes, fought for their own version of things. In mid-February, for example, we were still undecided how even to identify the country whose representatives were going to walk up the spiral pathway with their samples of earth to put in the urn. The man who wanted flags, knowing that we now lacked time to get them, stormed out of one meeting in search of an Ashram artist who would agree to silkscreen 124 different flags. "Have you seen some of those flags?" someone shouted after him. Before the reverberations of the slammed door had faded away someone else came up with another idea: how about making a gigantic jigsaw puzzle of a world map, so that everyone coming up to the urn could be able to fit his country's shape into the general picture? I got up and quit, right then and there, but I realised before I had even got out of the door that no one had invited me to be a part of that committee in the first place.

On the 27th February I went to bed convinced that the next day would bring about the biggest shambles the world had ever seen.

I awoke at first light to a fantastic day. Crows in the palm trees, kites in the sky, a faint shushing of small waves breaking on the shore. We left the house early, clad in white; everyone that day seemed to be wearing white. The buses were lined up in the streets between the Ashram and the sea-front. I rather think each one had a number

for I remember looking for a particular bus, suddenly filled with a keen apprehension that if I wasn't careful I might miss out on something fundamentally important. Looking back I always fancied I wore some kind of badge identifying me as something or other, although that strikes me now as unlikely. On reflection I think it must have been some symbolic tribal feeling I was experiencing, the badge perhaps a declaration of some inner commitment.

I suppose it was catching, this apprehension, for it resulted in a bit of scurrying to and fro with calling out to children and wayward aunties and old grannies. But finally everyone was on board and the buses, in convoy, moved off. Still it wasn't until we'd turned onto the dirt road that we realised how many of us there were. I'm tempted to say that there were a hundred buses but that couldn't be, could it? All I know is that it seemed that every available vehicle of every conceivable description had been put into use that day. And if it hadn't been for the fact that the road had been watered before we got there we'd have raised a cloud of dust to rival the one caused by the eruption of the Krakatoa.

The road sort-of ended near the present-day Matrimandir parking lot. How could they all fit in there? You're forgetting that there were no trees, none at all, except a scraggly grove of palmyras and a young banyan giving shape to a wide open space.

We all descended and began to shuffle our way through the sand across perfectly flat ground to what looked like some raised earthworks topped by a temporary structure of casuarinas and cloth. Blue, I think, the cloth. Closer we could see it was the lip of a circular depression in the earth, the covered shelter circling the rim. Down in the depression, off-centre, clearly significant, was the stylised lotus bud, the only thing with any look of permanence to it. Settling without speech some sat in chairs, some on mats in the shade, some out in the sun. A section had been reserved for the people from the nearby villages, and although it was a large enclosure already you could see it was going to be inadequate. You could see people coming from every direction across the fields.

Red earth, green from the tree, people in white, orange balloon against the blue sky, the billowing blue cloth giving an occasional explosive clap above us....

You know I could be making all this up. For really I don't know; I'll never be sure. It could all be merely a striving to put myself back into a place the significance of which I shall, I suppose, never be able, fully, to comprehend. I'm tempted to put down the names of people I know were present in the belief that there is safety in numbers. But I don't actually remember who I sat next to. I don't know to whom I spoke. I don't know who I met. Sometimes I wonder what part of me was present....

It was all so simple, really, so splendid.

As 10:30 approached silence fell. There was, I think, the sound of a gong. And then the Mother's voice. It was transmitted live, directly from her upstairs room in the Ashram, a fact which seemed to add immediacy to the message.

Have I given the impression, earlier, that laughter, that day, came easy? Well

I'll tell you, the day had changed. What was going on now was no laughing matter. If there was a suggestion behind the words it was this: Listen to me. Listen. And listen we did... as if our lives depended upon it.

The newspaper said the ceremony lasted 75 minutes. I'll accept that. After all it's their business to measure things. Certainly a lot seemed to have happened by the time it was over. I do remember Mother's flag with its golden wheel resplendent on a blue field being carried up by Kiran in the beginning just when they started the reading of the translations of the Charter into the different languages. And near the end I remember Fabienne and Kalya with the Auroville flag—it was the first time we'd seen it; we didn't even know it existed. In between I remember something of the procession of young people, some of them in their national dress, the boys with their packets of earth, the girls with the signs, beribboned in their national colours, which announced their country. I particularly remember the Russian participants for they were little children, which somehow seemed most aptly to embody the spirit of the occasion.

When the last young couple had come back from the urn, Nolini-da went up to seal the lotus. He seemed to be up there an awful long time. I got the feeling that Mother was supervising his masonry work. At last, I thought, she's finally got someone who will do what he's told.

When he came down I suppose we all came down. Sunil's music ended. The crowds dispersed. We wandered off to the exhibition around the banyan tree. We got fed, every single one of us. We looked up at the balloon, and around at the bleak landscape, and then we got back on the bus. (Isn't it amazing how it always takes more buses to get people home after an event than it does to get them out in the first place?) And so we went back to Pondy, not to come back, any of us, for six months.

So that's the way it was, was it? Well I wouldn't actually swear to it. After all it's a long time ago. And I've got a terrible memory. And I have this habit of what I don't remember I make up. But only in the details, I think. But surely you can tell it was something, can't you? You can feel it was something real, momentous?

You must also have realised, as we did ourselves much later, that while we were squabbling away the Mother was getting things done. Would it have been better, do you think, an even more glorious day, if we had stayed out of her way altogether? Perhaps. And perhaps not. I suppose she knew what she was doing when, in her infinite wisdom, she did something foolish... and let us participate.

*(Auroville Today, February 2003)*

\* \* \*

## THE DAY WE BAPTISED YOU

*(Maggi writes of what that day, that hour meant)*

The hour before the dawn beheld us,  
A motley stream oncoming through the desert plain  
Towards the promised land.  
In omnibuses, cars and carts  
On bicycle and foot;  
A caravan of hope and faith.

For She had called you down from fields of Light,  
The City of the Dawn,  
And sent us forth, Her emissaries,  
To welcome you.

She'd said that you would be,  
In 20 years or 50 years or more,  
It mattered not. It was decreed.  
You *would be*. There was finality in Her voice.

Now She was with us,  
Leading and hovering on hidden wings,  
To guard against all incident,  
For this tremendous day of birth.

Our eyes stretched wide when we alighted:

In the desert an oasis,  
Its great tree garlanded  
The roots bending from heaven  
Over Vedic offerings of fruit and flowers.

Brightness was in the air  
That danced with golden particles.

As in a dream of gladness we walked amidst you  
O City that wanted to take birth.

Your amphitheatre awaited.  
 Then music poured like an oblation—  
 We listened deeply  
 When She spoke of all the things you wanted:

Auroville wants to be...  
 You called our souls forth  
 And even as She proclaimed You  
 You took birth.

We baptised you with tears.

\* \* \*

## THE GRANDEST DAY OF MY LIFE

*(Tapas reminisces)*

My memories of Auroville go back to the years 1965 or 1966. I was a pupil in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in the Ashram. In those years Roger Anger used to visit the Mother to talk about Auroville. Afterwards he would sometimes come to our class and give us big sheets and colour pencils, and ask us to make a drawing of how we imagined the ideal city. That play of my imagination was my first contact with Auroville. I must have been 14 at the time. The stories of Mother's ideal city filled us children with incredible enthusiasm.

Late 1967, beginning of 1968, many Ashramites joined forces to build the first roads in Auroville. We went by bus, and sweated it out to make the road from Kuilapalayam to the amphitheatre. One night in Pondicherry I dreamt of that landscape of red earth, yellow sun and blue sky, where I was all alone in silence. Somehow, it was an initiation into Auroville.

From February 21st to late in the night of 27th the grounds around the urn and the Banyan tree were prepared. Buses took us every day early morning and we would return late evening. My job was to decorate with *kolams* the bottom of a big pond, a job that was done together with some village women and Roger Anger. Once the paint had dried, water was put into the pond.

When I came home on the 27th, very tired and covered with red earth, my father told me that Tanmaya, a teacher from the school, had left a message that the next day I was going to participate in the ceremony, representing Syria.

February 28th. We left at 5 a.m. There was a fleet of more than 50 buses waiting for all the delegates and us children near the Ganesh temple in Pondicherry. We

boarded, and then started what is probably the grandest day of my life. The buses went to Jipmer hospital, from there passing Auro-Orchard and Hope to Edayanchavadi and then to the amphitheatre. Right from Jipmer, through the Edayanchavadi village all up to the urn, crowds were cheering on both sides of the road. When we arrived, we were seated under the canopies set up all around the amphitheatre.

Pathways were planned out, and then a boy and a girl representing each country would walk up the pathway to the urn, carrying a placard with the name of that country, and deposit the earth of the country into the urn, while the Charter was read out in that country's language. If there was no earth available, we put salt. Mother had selected Ashram children to represent those countries from which there were no official representatives. There was a very powerful atmosphere, especially when we heard the direct broadcast of Mother reading her message from her room in the Ashram. The entire amphitheatre, full of people, fell silent. There was the red earth, the hot sun, the blue sky, and the buses and people were like little ants in a new cosmos. It was a surrealistic image with a very special atmosphere: a joining of a strong human aspiration that Auroville is going to be a grand dream to work for. And there was an incredible feeling of togetherness—people from all different parts of the world joining in that aspiration.

When we had done our bit, there was a big exhibition around the Banyan tree. There were big blocks of circular concrete for sitting, and everybody was having a good time. Photos were taken and then somebody discovered an image of the Mother in the Banyan tree. While she was reading her message from her room in the Ashram, she was also present at Auroville.

Then we went back by bus to Pondicherry. There was a big function in the garden of the office of the Sri Aurobindo Society. There was a question and answer session with all the delegates, a lively interaction, which kept us together for a day or two longer.

That ceremony had changed something in me. In the months and years that followed, I kept coming to Auroville, by bus or cycle, for doing some digging or some other work. I wouldn't lose a single opportunity to come. My classmates were equally enthusiastic. For us it was a sense of picnic. Between 1968 and 1977, when I finally moved here, we would often come on Saturdays, doing night duty at the Matrimandir.

*(Auroville Today, February 2003)*

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## LIKE A WELL-OILED MACHINE

*(Udar recounts an interesting detail.)*

For the actual ceremony,... there had to be a master of ceremonies. They proposed an American actor with a good voice. The Mother said, "I don't know who this American is. I want Udar there."

Thus I was pitchforked into something I did not want. I had to go and be the master of ceremonies. The whole ceremony was very, very beautiful and it went perfectly, smoothly, without the smallest hitch, without even the smallest hesitation, so much so that the American Consul-General came to me afterwards and asked, "How many times have you rehearsed this ceremony?" I replied, "We have never rehearsed it." He exclaimed, "No?" "No," I emphasised. He commented, "I have seen so many ceremonies but I have never seen anything go so perfectly, without the slightest hitch or hesitation. Absolutely perfect, like a well-oiled machine."

This is how the Mother works and can work if the instruments do not put their own ideas in between.

(Shyam Kumari, *More Vignettes*, pp. 195-96)

\* \* \*

## IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

*(Else Jacobs was fortunate to be part of that significant event.)*

After reading and hearing about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, I was interested in visiting their Ashram. Which I did from January to May, 1968.

Right away, I wanted to see the Mother. But when I was told that the Mother only saw people on their birthdays, I requested to see Her on my half-birthday (since I would not be there on my birthday, July 30). And She agreed.

Through my eyes, the Mother looked into my soul for a long time. She then asked me what I wanted to do while I was in the Ashram. "I like to learn and I like to teach," I told Her. So I taught pre-school children in the morning (I have a degree in education), and, in the afternoon, I learned batik and marbling.

I also got involved with the Auroville Inauguration Planning Committee. They asked me to have my parents send some soil from our home in Norway, which, during the inauguration, was placed in the Urn at the centre of Auroville.

As the only Norwegian in the Ashram, I was asked by Udar to translate Auroville's Charter, written by the Mother in English. She gave it Her Blessing, and wrote my name on it. During the Auroville inauguration ceremony, the Charter was read in 18 languages. It was broadcast over All-India Radio, and seen by a large



audience. Representing Norway, and reading the Auroville Charter in Norwegian, I believe, was a special honour given to me by the Mother.

To tell the truth, there was so much last-minute scrambling around (chaos!) that no one on the Planning Committee expected the ceremony to go smoothly. But the Mother's Guiding Hand was tangibly felt the whole time. And that day, for anyone who was fortunate to be there, will never be forgotten.

I was truly blessed by the Mother to be in the right place at the right time. Including my half-birthday darshan, I saw Her 7 times during my stay in the Ashram: the first time was the spur-of-the-minute balcony darshan She gave to a group of Jains who were pilgrimaging through South India; the second was in the same place the next day, when the Mother yielded to the many Ashramites who complained about missing Her impromptu darshan with the Jains; then I also saw the Mother on February 21<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> and April 24<sup>th</sup>.

The last darshan with the Mother was the day before I left the Ashram. She gave me an autographed copy of *The Mother* and said: "Will I see you again?" However, it didn't sound like a question. It was much more like, "I will see you again!" A promise She has clearly kept.

\* \* \*

## WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

The simple ceremony represented history in the making.

...To bewildered men everywhere the first step of realising a mighty dream—the laying of the foundation-stone of Auroville—will come as a ray of bright hope amid the encircling gloom.

- *The Times of India*

The ceremony was at once imaginative and moving... It is the chance of a lifetime to be present at the birth of a city, and of a city, too, that will be in tune with the noblest ideals of India and the world.

- *The Indian Express*

Modern Shangri-la in the offing... The township, if it materialises along the lines now envisaged, may well be the dream city of the world.

- *The Statesman*

May it serve as a beacon light of hope and promise of the One World to be.

- *The Sunday Standard*

(*Auroville Today*, February 2003)

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## THERE WAS A KIND OF MAGIC...

*(Bob and Deborah Lawlor are remembered as the first settlers in the area known as Forecomers. They left in the early seventies. Deborah told us about how it all began.)*

Shortly after the inauguration ceremony we asked Mother if we could settle in Auroville. She sent someone with a jeep to show us all the plots that had been purchased. The one we felt most attracted to was the most dramatically beautiful, though by far the worst farmland, the area around the canyon that Mother then named Forecomers. That name was not only given to the area. She also referred to us as ‘the forecomers’.

We fell so much in love with that land—Bob was an artist and I was a theatre person and a dancer trained in arts. We used to make long walks to gaze at the land from different sides, sometimes calling each other to “Come over here and look at the contour of the canyon from this angle!!” The palmyra trees, the vast plains, the deep canyons, there were so many aspects of nature to be worshipped and honoured.

So “Adam and Eve” went around admiring the landscape. There was a little mango grove there—it is still there—and between that and the canyon we built a storeroom which also served as our ‘house’. We slept under a keet overhang in the open, and felt very isolated. I think we were the first people this side of Promesse who settled in Auroville. Later, others settled in the Certitude area and after some months the ‘caravan’ arrived from Europe to settle in the place later known as Aspiration which was then known as ‘Advance colony’.

We had the fortune of finding a man from Edaiyanchavadi named Sellakannan who became our watchman, accompanied by his little boy Dhandapani. The boy must have been 9 or 10 years old then [Dhandapani later became one of the trustees of Aurelec, eds.]. We were of course objects of great curiosity, being the first non-Indians many villagers had seen. Before Auroville came into existence, these villages had been very isolated. Though Sellakannan and Dhandapani worked wonders for our acceptance, we were still stared at constantly. For me as a woman it was particularly uncomfortable, but I learned to deal with it. As a theatre person I was used to an audience. But here there was an audience for everything: If my bike had a flat tyre I could be sure I would be surrounded by a crowd of onlookers watching how this ‘different’ person was solving the problem. We cycled a lot. All our food came from Pondicherry, so I would cycle from Forecomers through the gully to Kottakuppam—where children would tease me by throwing stones and calling ‘vellakari’, meaning white woman—and then to Pondicherry and back with the big shopping bags dangling from the cycle, then pushing the cycle and bags through the hot sand of the gully back up to Forecomers. That was quite rigorous. Also, in the beginning we had no water and once every couple of days a jeep would come from Promesse with a big milk

container full of water. One of the first things I learned in Auroville was to take a bath with a quarter bucket of water. But if uncomfortable, it was also part of an exciting adventure. I was 28, Bob was 29. And if sometimes you got more than you'd bargained for it was still...it was still so wonderful that those first three years we never ever thought of leaving for a holiday. There was something in the air...perhaps it was due to the fact that we were learning that the state of one's consciousness was influencing one's work. There was a kind of magic in that. Everything felt more intense than ordinary life. There was that conscious attempt to do everything with reference to the Mother.

We brought Mother a map of the land and asked her to put her finger where we should dig a well. She did that and we dug the well and then there was no water. Also one of the workers lost a tool down the well and it was a mess. So we figured Mother did not want it to be easy. Some time later we consulted a local diviner and made another well and that one was successful. When we finally got a well and had a bit of a garden, we offered the first fruits of the harvest to Mother and brought them to her room. Her smile was radiant. She was just wonderful, and said, "*Continuez!*" Those meetings with Mother, on my birthday and in the context of Auroville, are amongst my most profound and cherished memories.

And then there was reforestation. Shyama and Frederick had started planting trees even before moving to Auroville. We planted as many as we could and when Francis joined us we began the Success nursery and were able to plant trees on a larger scale. This was not only a question of digging a hole and filling it with good earth, compost and the tree sapling, but also of watering the tree during its first years and guarding it against goats and other livestock. It is staggering to realise that now two million trees have been established in that way.

*(The Auroville Experience, pp. 8-9)*

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## LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

*(Snapshots of Auroville's first years in talks with early Aurovilians.)*

**Auroville Today:** *Why not start from the beginning? Maybe we can try to remember what Auroville was like then, back in 1968, and how things unfolded and in what direction.*

**Frederick:** I would say the first phase of Auroville was from 1968 to 1973, when the Mother left. I think each one has his own individual, very personal, very

intimate recollections, that is, his individual aspiration. But then there was also a collective aspiration which was not in antagonism to the individual but simply different. I'm sure the foundation of Auroville was something where everyone was caught suddenly in a common cry for the future. The project was very young, very fresh, very Utopian and very hopeful. But speak to people who were in France, in Europe, in Berkeley, in Berlin of '68, '69, '70. It was the same vibration. It was not unique to Auroville. There was an overall terrestrial evolution. I'm amazed sometimes how naive, how young I sounded in my letters to the Mother, my conversations or in my diaries, how hopeful and believing I was.

*You once mentioned that the Foundation ceremony was almost like a meteorite hitting the earth.*

**Frederick:** It felt like that. It felt like something from a different plane. Like that one triangle of Sri Aurobindo's symbol which stands on its head really hitting the ground. And that impact was too much in fact. The next day there was nobody there. It was empty, it was wind-blown, there wasn't a tree, there was nothing. There was the grandstand there, there was a lot of litter, and it took days before people started crawling out of their niches to look at what actually had happened.

*Who were the first people to come out here? There was the Foundation ceremony and then an empty desert. The first six months, how did Auroville actually physically start manifesting?*

**Francis:** I came in October 1968; that was the first time I came out here. I actually came to stay here on the land. Other people staying on the land were Arindam, Gene Maslow, Janet Fearn, Bob and Deborah Lawlor and Gary Miller. And they were the only ones here at that time. Except for Bob and Deborah, who had come in July and started Forecomers, everybody was staying around the Centre area.

*When was it that Mother pinpointed the location of Auroville on the map?*

**Frederick:** It was prior to the Foundation ceremony. Roger Anger, Gilbert G. etc. were doing the preparations and they asked, "Mother, where exactly is the Centre?" She said, "Let me see a map." She looked at a map, she closed her eyes and she took some sharp instrument and she put it down. Everybody stared and waited and then they measured it, and that was where the Banyan tree was. And she said she knew it was. And they said, "We have to cut." And she said "No".

**Savitra:** There was at the time of the Foundation ceremony a brick barrier built around it, which the Mother instructed the Aurovilians to take down, because it was

constricting the tree. She said she had received the feeling from the tree that this was to be taken away.

**Jan:** The presence of the Mother in the physical was...I don't know how to describe it... She was looking after everything. It made things easier, no worries!

**Frederick:** I think her presence helped us not to have to question and not to have to employ your mind and ask for the rights and wrongs. She said it, and you did it.

**Savitra:** I remember we were asking our kids—the ones who could remember—this question. I asked Renu and I remember her saying, “Well, it was like everything was right in the world, because the Mother was in that room. We went to the bazaar, we went shopping and we knew everything was OK—She was sitting there, you rode your bicycle down the road, and no matter where you were going, you knew it was OK because she was there.” And I know, that the kids that grew up with Mother felt in some way perhaps more orphaned than we did, because it was built in for them—they were born and grew up with her and those kids maybe had a more difficult time than we had. She was their Mother.

**Frederick:** I think—I don't know if this is true for the world, but it is for us here—that on the 17th of November, 1973, when the Mother left her body, something happened which was like a watershed. Individually and also collectively, it created something that we haven't overcome yet. I don't believe in whitewashing the fact that something happened on that day and we are all victims of Her leaving in a certain way. Even now, when Savitra was talking—I'm almost fifty years old—I'm close to tears. I miss her, no? I think she has created an expectancy in me and she suddenly left, and that vacuum has never been filled.

*Savitra, when did you come to Auroville?*

**Savitra:** In 1969. When we started digging the foundations (late 1970) for Matrimandir, I was living at Aspiration. We were brought out in a car every morning. We were digging and it was a kind of absurd exercise watching maybe 14 people maximum coming out in the morning. I don't remember if there were people working full time then. Maybe some of the people at the Centre. We used to come from Aspiration before breakfast, so we would get in about 2 hours of digging. It went on like this for a couple of weeks. Then somebody came out from Pondy and said, “You guys are digging in the wrong place.” Do you remember?

**Francis:** Yes.

**Savitra:** Our centre was off! We had to have the centre readjusted.

**Francis:** It took a few days for everyone to really absorb the shock! (*laughter*) We were under the impression at the time that all the labour was lost, but in reality it wasn't. It was just shifting the centre and starting from that point. But it made us see very early in the game that we were not going to complete the digging! And that if we would, we would all be grandfathers by that time! Hence three villages came in.

*From where?*

**Francis:** I really don't know where they came from, but they hired themselves out as a full village to dig. They weren't local labour. They were from three different areas in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, they were brought in and they had to work separately, otherwise they would all get into fights which actually did take place. It was amazing to watch because it was just like ants on the move. You couldn't believe that these little *ammās* (village ladies) carrying that little bit of soil... But it was continuous and down went the hole... It was great to watch. Once or twice there were heavy conflicts among the three teams. Then Aurovilians who stepped in to try and separate them got battered. (*laughter*)

*We're talking about '70 now, but, between '68 and '70, were there any special moments? Maybe the whole period was special, but when did things start consolidating? When did you feel that something had really started?*

**Francis:** We were all under the impression that it had started when we were here. We just miscalculated the amount of time it would take! The feeling of euphoria that it was about to happen, and pop up in front of us, was present in all of us. We were out there working—and it wasn't working half a day; it was working all the time from the moment you woke up till when you went to sleep. Just getting your drinking water, cooking your food, buying your groceries, fixing pumps, planting anything, to see if anything would grow. Because there was nothing here. There was a great bond among everybody who was out here and Mother was present, so any disagreements went straightaway to her, and most of the time she laughed! (*laughter*)

*Let's talk about the first years in Forecomers, one of the most colourful and interesting communities of the time. Could you describe how it was then?*

**Francis:** It was a moonscape. Nothing was growing.

**Savitra:** I remember the Forecomers toilet. It used to be one of the more bizarre visions of Auroville because it had a swinging door and there was nothing behind it!

**Francis:** That's my creation!

**Savitra:** You would open this door, which you thought was a door to a bathroom... and there was nothing behind it! (*laughter*)

**Francis:** It was painted all these colours—yellow, white, black... it was a beautiful door.

**Savitra:** It was actually the perfect image of Auroville of those days! There was this facade, and you opened it up and there was nothing behind! (*laughter*)

*How did things change after 1973?*

**Savitra:** Since Mother's passing, it's almost as if Auroville had to mesh gears with the rest of the world. You could say that, at the moment of Her passing, we went into our own shadow. But now, if you look all around the world, you see that people are able to acknowledge the relevance, the reality of Auroville, and can actually translate that into their own lives. I feel that the promise that was planted in the beginning of Auroville is coming back now on a much larger scale than any of us imagined at that time. It doesn't belong to us any more.

*Coming to terms with one's shadow. How did that difficult experience unfold in Auroville? And have we come to terms with our shadow?*

**Savitra:** I think we're just beginning to have the honesty to confront our shadow as a shadow. You could say the struggle with the Sri Aurobindo Society was an 'outer' conflict, which became an external symbol—and there was a legitimacy in Auroville's struggle at that time. There really was an actual threat. There were persons who—I felt—carried the force of the world that wanted to swallow this place up in one way or another. But then suddenly it wasn't any more a struggle with something 'out there'. It became a dogmatic struggle and they were the enemy, and every problem was because of them. For maybe 5 or 10 years we were operating on this principle: eliminating the negative rather than building the positive. And we lost our balance. When Mother's physical presence was there, she reminded us what we were going toward. "Don't worry about the other person's problem, worry about your own, create an atmosphere of collaboration—that is what I ask of you." This was the overwhelming vibration which she kept pumping into the atmosphere, and in her absence we began to indulge in looking at what was wrong with... I think now, at least I can say for myself, that we are leaving that dungeon.

*Does it mean that our outlook is changing, a new outlook is emerging?*



**Francis:** We don't hold the Truth; we are aspiring for it and Auroville has never been meant as a small private club. And just now it's going to open its doors and everyone, individuals, countries, everyone is about to participate, in one way or another.

*(The Auroville Experience, pp. 10-12)*

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## IN THE MID-SIXTIES

*(Dayanand recollects the practical difficulties of the early years.)*

The main activity in Auroville in the mid-sixties was only a hectic and endless identification of land needed by poring over maps, locating the owner of the land, entering into long and endless discussions with them to part with the land. Getting the FMBs (Field Measurement Books) was another Herculean task, locating the land on the ground was another. After finalisation of the land deal, registration of documents was one more tedious process, and finally, the payment. Since most of the villagers were illiterate and did not have bank accounts or had even heard of banks, they wanted all the money in cash. To count and re-count and finally obtain a receipt was another task. Most difficult was taking possession of the land purchased. It had to be surveyed, boundaries identified, and stones laid to demarcate the property. There were long disputes with the neighbours to settle this. Like this, there were over 1116 documents registered and 2400 acres of land taken possession of and taken care of.

Then started the numbering of thousands of trees. Several thousand palm trees (*nungu*), thousands of cashew trees, mango, jackfruit, guava, *nelli*, *sitaphal* etc. These had to be guarded round the clock, fruit collected, and since there were few Aurovilians, the produce was brought to the Ashram Dining Room or the Corner House.

The land area had been used until then by the farmers for dry cultivation, that is raising short-term crops with the help of the North-East monsoon. Between July and March, three such crops could be raised by inter-cultivation. As far as I remember, no one from the villages even touched our trees or tried to cut them. They were permitted to collect dry and dead wood free.

We also started a massive Farmers' Education and Training Programme to modernise and update the farmers on advanced techniques and use of high-yielding varieties. This covered all the villages in Auroville and beyond in Vanur taluk. Over a period of 6 to 7 years, we had trained over 15,000 small farmers, farm women and labourers in the area. We took many of them on tours to modern farms and universities and gave radio sets to each group of men and women so that they could listen to the Farmers' Programme in the evening.



Cultivation of cash crops on the seashore in Kalapet was undertaken in a 20 acre plot (Ganapathy Chettikulam). Seawater of different concentrations was used for germination, and the seedlings were planted in several replications of fertilisers. The results of the research were submitted to ICAR (Indian Council of Agricultural Research), the funding agency. How to collect water from the sea and take it to the research plot was the main problem, not the raising of plants. The motor for drawing water from the sea was the only ridiculous way and we found the motor always missing due to the action of the tides or unworkable due to corrosion. All these were interesting challenges and we met them.

At that time, there were controversial opinions on the use of organic fertilisers. The basically organic Indian farmer had by now been converted to a businessman and he wanted maximum returns in the shortest time. So the use of fertilisers began. Raul Mercier, working in Auro-Orchard, was a saintly organic farmer opposed to fertiliser usage. So the matter was referred to the Mother. She vehemently opposed the use of fertilisers. “No, No, No,” she said to fertilisers.

In those days, I used to go alone, by jeep, from my residence in Pondy to Auroville via Bommaipalayam, the best road, I thought, driving carefully between the cart ruts. Once, near Two Banyans, the jeep got stuck in the so-called wilderness and there was no one in sight to call for help. I was looking around and pondering on the next step when suddenly three boys stepped out of the cashew grove and voluntarily dug up the ridge and lifted the jeep out of the rut. A godsend, I felt. Helping hands there were from nowhere.

It was the early days of Auroville’s administration getting organised and there were many criss-cross decisions of the administration. The Mother had placed me in charge of all purchases and payments with the definitive order of 12.9.67. Regarding a purchase that was made, she sent me a note in this context as follows:

Dayanand,

A week ago I have said that all purchases and payments should be made by and through you.

I have even written a paper to that effect.

I hope this purchase has not been made afterwards.

It was in those early days that the Mother decided to form the first and only Auroville Administrative Committee, perhaps in 1967. It used to meet every Sunday in the then Auroville office adjacent to the Ashram Centre of Education. The committee consisted of Navajata, Laljibhai Hindocha, Suresh Hindocha, Roger Anger, André Morisset, Anjani and Dayanand, with Wil as secretary. Navajata conducted the meetings; the minutes were recorded and shown to the Mother who was the chairperson of the Committee. She corrected and approved the minutes of each meeting. Perhaps the record of all the proceedings must be available with the Auroville Archives.

The Committee was dissolved after it functioned for about four years.

The first colony to be constructed was 'Aspiration' at Kuilapalayam village which was a large grove of big tamarind trees. Along with the colony, came up Vincenzo's workshop, adjacent to the handmade paper manufacturing unit. One day there was a fire in the workshop which practically destroyed it. When the matter was referred to the Mother, she said it was essentially due to disharmony in the atmosphere that the accident occurred.

There were interesting exchanges between the Mother and me on various aspects. Some of them were:

- Regarding the procedure to organise the collection of cashew seeds efficiently, whether the work may be leased out to an outsider, the Mother replied, "It would be better to find among the people of Auroville, some who will be happy to do this work."

- I wrote to the Mother, "How does one take decisions based on Truth in action? I intensely aspire for this in my dealings, specially with the people who live in Auroville. How to know what is the Truth in each case? For example, one villager had agreed to collect and give us 13 bags of cashew nuts during this season (69-70). Now due to drought, he says he can give only 5 bags. It is true there has been drought in the area. Mental and visual assessments are not infallible. How to assess correctly?" The Mother replied, "The thing is false from the beginning. How can the man promise to give a fixed number of bags when he does not know how many he shall get?"

- It was proposed to start a transport unit. I prayed to the Mother to give a name. This is what she wrote: "Aurotransport".

But the laying of the Foundation stone on 28 February 1968 was the most transfiguring moment, when I look back. A mighty crowd of thousands had gathered for a very solemn ceremony of placing in the urn earth from each country. There seemed to fall a hush and peace on the whole area and the Mother's voice was heard loud and clear.

An eternal moment in history, indeed.

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## LIMITED VISION

*(The images we hold of Sri Aurobindo and Mother tend to be sanctified and one-dimensional. What are the consequences of viewing them in this way? Alan reflects.)*

I can't help feeling that Sri Aurobindo and Mother have had a bad press...and mainly from their followers. For when I read what Sri Aurobindo and Mother have said or written, and when I talk to those who had met them, I get a very different picture from that which emerges from the books about them. Sri Aurobindo and Mother—to put it palely—eluded categorisation. Not only were they barrier-breakers who constantly challenged stereotypes and convention, but, on a more intimate scale, they also related to each sadhak in a different way. Yet the images which emerge from many of the biographies and reminiscences about them tend to be one-dimensional and sanitised, the typical products of hagiography.

Why is this? In Sri Aurobindo's case the answer comes pat: "My life has not been lived on the surface for men to see", he wrote. Yet there is more than enough evidence in his writings and in his letters of his playfulness, irony, unstuffiness and willingness to make *risqué* statements, qualities which tend to be downplayed in biographies in favour of an image of Olympian detachment. In Mother's case, the documentation is far more complete, yet even here one sees her biographers picking and choosing the aspects which they want to emphasise, and ironing out the apparent contradictions. An avatar who wears lipstick? No way!

Avatarhood, or, rather, their followers' assumptions about how an avatar should behave, is surely another reason why there is a certain unwillingness to portray their more 'human' qualities. To take but one example: there was (and still is) a widespread belief among their followers that Sri Aurobindo and Mother could never make a mistake. If they misspelled a word, well, it wasn't a mistake, there was a higher reason for it. Similarly if Mother translated or read a line of *Savitri* which later turned out to contain a mistaken transcription, under no circumstances could the line be changed because Mother, through reading it, had given it her spiritual imprimatur.

Sri Aurobindo himself pointed out that this common view of the avatar's infallibility regarding material details was quite beside the mark:

Men's way of doing things well is through a clear mental connection; they see things and do things with the mind and what they want is a mental and human perfection. When they think of a manifestation of Divinity, they think it must be an extraordinary perfection in doing ordinary human things—...an accurate memory, not making mistakes, not undergoing any defeat or failure.... All that has nothing to do with manifesting the Divine....

*(Letters on Yoga, pp. 410-11)*

The assumption of avataric infallibility also leads Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's biographers to portray their yogic path as a linear one, a straight line of constant progress culminating in triumphant achievement. Yet the reality—as evidenced by Sri Aurobindo's frequent revisions of his major works and by Mother's comments in the Agenda—is quite different. Both Sri Aurobindo and Mother were feeling their way—and sometimes they had to backtrack or modify previous statements in the light of new discoveries. Sri Aurobindo, for example, doubted that the physical mind could be an instrument of transformation, whereas Mother was later to discover that it could be a very powerful lever.

Another example of the way in which biographers practise selective vision is in the way they ignore certain aspects of Mother as revealed through the Agenda conversations. In these conversations Mother is often moving from 'poise' to 'poise', from one level of consciousness to another. She was not always speaking as the supreme Mother: at times she could be an irascible old lady growling out her disapproval of sadhaks' behaviour, or someone who was misled by the intrigues of some of her disciples. This 'other' Mother is not mentioned by the biographers presumably because they assume, once again, that avatarhood and human fallibility cannot coexist in the same person. Sri Aurobindo's response remains clear, "...not making mistakes, not undergoing any defeat or failure.... All that has nothing to do with manifesting the Divine...."

But one of the main reasons, I would suggest, why Sri Aurobindo and Mother are often portrayed as remotely perfect figures who have achieved all is that this relieves us of the responsibility of making our own spiritual discoveries. This is a tricky one. Sri Aurobindo and Mother explained time and again that if the sadhak made a true surrender to them, they would take full responsibility for that sadhak's yoga: this is the powerful path of surrender, of bhakti. However bhakti can shade into passivity, and neither Sri Aurobindo nor Mother wanted doormats for followers. They wanted a self-giving which was a product of free will, and they certainly didn't preclude people questioning them or even challenging them as a means to arriving at this end.

Mother once described Sri Aurobindo as 'a direct action from the Supreme'. This in itself should be a sufficient warning against attempting to define him, to frame him in terms however grandiose, for the Supreme is not constrained by our conceptions of how It should act. It is more akin to a force, to a free and agile movement which takes up and uses everything in order to hasten transformation. Identifying Sri Aurobindo and Mother too closely with their historical manifestations, or with images we have superimposed upon them, may cause us to miss the unfolding, the flow of the Becoming which, moment by moment, births a totally new set of conditions and possibilities.

Paradoxically, we may need to abandon the Sri Aurobindo and Mother whom we think we know in order to contact, to live, what they truly represent.

*(The Auroville Experience, pp. 20-21)*

## COLLECTIVE YOGA

The Mother created a new concept which she called Collective Yoga. It refers to a spiritual discipline that has not been attempted before and, for Auroville, it is important to understand what it is and in what way it differs from other Yogas. One thing is evident. Collective Yoga does not refer to an assembly of people—groups, Ashrams, monasteries—who pursue an individual yogic path together. This distinction is crucial, for it is here that many misunderstandings of Auroville’s ideal and purpose originate.

Perhaps the most telling clue comes from experiences of the Mother which are excitingly confirmed in certain experiments in the New Physics. It was found that there are no independent entities or parts of whatever type anywhere in the universe; every single thing forms part of a greater whole and as such carries in it the imprint of the whole. The Mother expressed this in Her own inimitable way.

It is the unity of all in the solidarity of a common manifestation that will allow the creation of the new and divine world upon the Earth. Each will bring his part, but no part will be complete except as a power in the solidarity of the whole.

We have to accept the fact, and learn to live by it, that there is a total interdependence and even an inescapable oneness linking individuals to a greater assemblage, as Sri Aurobindo likes to call it, in our present context, the individual to the collectivity of Auroville.

As the Mother observed, a truly collective life has to obey certain group laws that are different from those governing an individualistically-orientated life. For instance, we are told that these laws are likely to run counter to personal achievements, however exalted, because of the latter’s incompleteness. Thus an individual might have to relinquish certain realisations to allow the “imprint of the whole” to take root in him/her and change his/her outlook.

It appears that this is a necessary precondition for what the Mother calls collective realisation or awareness. Clearly this cannot develop in us by leading a mainly solitary life, it needs the experience and the interplay of a group of individuals willing to give themselves to this experiment.

A collective inner awareness also demands of us a shift in our attention. If it is, as is habitually the case, riveted to a dominantly self-centred attitude, then divisions and clashes of personalities within the group are inevitable. But if our attention in daily life can be directed, again habitually, towards the group as a whole, then identification of individual and group becomes a possibility and, maybe with it, we are afforded a first glimpse of what Mother meant when She speaks of the need for a new centre of action in us.

Is there a method or spiritual discipline indicated in the Integral Yoga to help such a radical change to occur?

More communal activities, greater openness within the group, greater tolerance

and give and take, all these are undoubtedly helpful and have all been tried before, but they are clearly not enough. Something else is called for. This something else appears to be enshrined in a concept especially dear to Sri Aurobindo. He speaks of “an observing Consciousness” that “frees us to rise to a spiritual level and thus to recreate our existence”. This observing consciousness in us, following other traditions, he calls variously the Witness Self, the Witness Soul or just the Witness. Sri Aurobindo gives us a clue of what is meant in his frequent admonitions “to stand back”. For this witnessing awareness stands back from the daily flux of happenings, observing, impartial and uninvolved. It is an attitude to life which, if taken up as a spiritual practice from moment to moment, tends to loosen our self-attention and, what is more, takes into its ambience the greater whole, the group, the collectivity.

*(The Auroville Experience, pp. 20-21)*

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## SPIRITUALITY IN AUROVILLE

The utter simplicity of the inner chamber of Matrimandir is Auroville’s statement of spirituality. Within that space, nothing is to interfere with or distract from the most direct contact with...something else.

This aspect of the question “Is there spirituality in Auroville?” is relatively easy to answer. The second aspect, however, is much more challenging. For it stems from an argument that runs something like this: “I understand that Auroville is not meant to be the seat of a new religion. Nevertheless, after 28 years there should be something to show that this place is different, some exterior manifestation of a new consciousness or, at least, of an attempt to reach that consciousness. Yet all I see around me here in Auroville are the forces of the old world—egotism, deceit, politics, money power, male chauvinism, colonialistic attitudes—running riot. It’s just like anywhere else, with an additional thin overlay of spiritual dogma.” This argument, I believe, is based both on a misunderstanding and on insight. The misunderstanding is the assumption that a spiritual community will not manifest, at least in its initial stages, the old knots and wrinkles which have tortured humanity for millennia. For it is not by avoiding but by confronting such forces that we gain the opportunity, the leverage, to transform them.

And yet... the accusation that Auroville is “unspiritual” at present, however much it is based upon a misunderstanding, may also touch upon a certain truth. Some Aurovilians have cast away certain norms of conduct—courtesy, refinement, gratitude—in the name of “Truth”, yet that “truth” seems often to be based more upon cultural predisposition and personal fears or ambitions than upon contact with a higher, spiritual force.

Is Auroville on course? Only a Sri Aurobindo or a Mother could answer this. If Auroville is, in some respects, representative of all the problems and possibilities of humanity, and if collective transformation can only be effected by a new consciousness permeating all these separate singularities, we might expect progress to be slow here. Yet what is “fast”, what “slow” in the context of changing the habits of millennia?

*(The Auroville Experience, pp. 21-22)*

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## **“THERE IS NO FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE”**

*(An introduction to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram-Auroville relationship)*

As Mother made clear, the Ashram and Auroville issued from the same high source of inspiration. However, she was often asked to clarify the relationship between the two. As early as her first detailed conversation about Auroville, in June 1965, she stated that neither she nor the Ashram would actually move to Auroville (although she might visit). Auroville, she explained, is “the contact with the outside world”. A few months after the inauguration of Auroville she further clarified, “The Ashram will keep its true role of pioneer, inspirer and guide. Auroville is the attempt towards collective realisation.” Thus Mother stressed from the very beginning two of the characteristics which distinguish Auroville from the Ashram—the fact that it is more ‘outward’, more involved with the texture and challenges of the ‘real’ world, and the emphasis upon collective action as opposed to the more individualistic yoga of the Ashram.

The first settlers in Auroville were predominantly Western, and many were strongly influenced by the anti-authoritarian attitudes of the 1960s. In appearance, attitude and behaviour they represented a totally different world from that of the highly-regulated, overwhelmingly Indian-populated Ashram in Pondicherry. Some Ashramites must have wondered who these strange people were, and why Mother was welcoming them without imposing on them the same admission conditions and discipline as prevailed in the Ashram. Was there, perhaps, a fundamental difference between the ideal of the Ashram and Auroville? Mother replied, “There is no fundamental difference in the attitude towards the future and towards the service of the Divine. But the people of the Ashram are considered to have consecrated their lives to yoga (except, of course, the students...). Whereas in Auroville, the simple goodwill to make a collective experiment for the progress of humanity is sufficient to gain admittance.”

In 1969, she wrote her fullest explication of the Ashram-Auroville relationship for a UNESCO committee:



The task of giving a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's vision was entrusted to the Mother. The creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. By the very nature of things, it is a collective ideal that calls for a collective effort so that it may be realised in the terms of an integral human perfection.

The Ashram founded and built by the Mother was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind.

And the next year she added, "The Ashram is the central consciousness, Auroville is one of the outward expressions. In both places equally the work is done for the Divine."

The latter sentence seemed particularly aimed at those who felt that the early Aurovilians were not at all the right material for hastening the advent of a new world. And this was not just the perception of certain Indian Ashramites. In a famous conversation of 10th January, 1970, Satprem reports an Italian disciple suggesting that the Ashramites should join Aurovilians in building the Matrimandir, "because without the inner force of the people of the Ashram mingling with the Aurovilians, the people from Auroville will remain what they are." The Aurovilians, he explained, are not "receptive enough to do the work", they are "full of arrogance, of incomprehension, they only see the outside of things". He concluded that the "breach" between Auroville and the Ashram could only be healed if the Ashramites and Aurovilians worked together. However, to Satprem's obvious astonishment, Mother replies, "As for myself, I don't find it (the breach) wide enough... It isn't at all the same plane." And she goes on to explain that she didn't want Ashramites to be infected by the bad habits of some Aurovilians. As if to reinforce this concern, her next message regarding the Ashram-Auroville relationship was precipitated by an Aurovilian misbehaving in the Ashram Playground, resulting in a call to ban entry to all Aurovilians.

"Being an Aurovilian is not at all the same thing as being a member of the Ashram and living the Ashram life," she wrote, and went on to say that only those Aurovilians who had been in the Ashram before the birth of Auroville had the right to attend Playground activities.

There followed what seemed to be a blizzard of messages from Mother to the Aurovilians on topics like the need to tell the truth, to avoid violence and to go beyond egotistical limitations. When, in March 1972, a fire completely destroyed Vincenzo's workshop Auropolyester in Aspiration, Satprem asked her if this was due to "a wrong attitude over there?" "Yes. Oh, they're all quarrelling among themselves! And some even disobey deliberately, they refuse to recognise any authority."



Interestingly, however, Mother stated, “I do not want to make rules for Auroville as I did for the Ashram.” And even if she was forced to make one exception (regarding drugs), she continued to be, from the point of view of some Ashramites, extremely lenient in her attitude to some Aurovilians, allowing some of them chance after chance to reform their behaviour. She wanted, it seems, the Aurovilians to progress not through obedience to imposed rules, as in the Ashram, but through the practical discovery that the old habits, “like smoking, drinking and, of course, drugs...all that, it is as if you were cutting pieces off your being.” In any case, she said, there would be a natural weeding-out. “The power of the realisation—of the sincerity of the realisation—is such that it’s unbearable to those who are insincere.”

In spite of Mother’s strictures and the increasing scepticism of a few Ashramites concerning the viability of the Auroville experiment, throughout these years many Ashramites and students from the Ashram School continued to come to Auroville. Some worked on the Matrimandir, others taught in Aspiration School or helped with physical education. After Mother’s passing, however, there was a progressive worsening of the relationship with the main office-holders of the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) who, it was felt, wanted to run Auroville as their personal project. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that, in 1980, the Government of India passed the Auroville (Emergency Provisions) Act, temporarily taking the management of the project out of the hands of the SAS.

The conflict was clearly with the SAS rather than with the Ashram, and throughout this difficult period many Aurovilians and Ashramites continued to visit each other just as before and maintained deep friendships. However, there were incidents which, for some individuals, weakened their links with the other community. For example, the Ashram teachers working at Aspiration School were very distressed when, in the mid 1970s, they were put before an ultimatum which required them to either join Auroville or stop teaching there. Even though the reason had more to do with radical educational theories than opposition to Ashramites, the decision of the Ashram teachers to stop coming reflected their feeling that they were no longer welcome: On the other hand, when the Ashram trustees refused to support the Aurovilians, choosing to remain aloof from the conflict, some Aurovilians felt betrayed. Similarly, those Aurovilians close to Satprem were dismayed by the way they believed the Ashram authorities had mistreated him in pursuit of the Agenda tapes. The publication of Mother’s Agenda, which contained strong comments on certain Ashramites and certain aspects of the Ashram, coupled with Satprem’s pronouncement that the Ashram was dead, further reinforced a feeling in some Aurovilians that Auroville need have nothing to do with that institution.

In recent years, however, there has been much more interchange between the two communities. This is due to a number of factors. The passing of the Auroville Foundation Act in 1988, which finally took away the right of the SAS to manage Auroville and gave Auroville its own legal status, gave Aurovilians a renewed

confidence in their independence and allowed many of the psychological battlements to be dismantled. Then the opening of the Chamber in August, 1991, resulted in a significant increase in the number of Ashramites visiting Matrimandir. A few years later, another bridge was put in place when Savitri Bhavan began inviting Ashramites to give talks to Aurovilians on different aspects of the yoga: these have proved very popular. Alongside this there has been an increasing cultural interchange, of which the recent joint art exhibition is only the latest manifestation. And, of course, new people have joined Auroville who have little knowledge of or interest in the old stories, while former antagonists have gained greater understanding of each other's perspectives over the years.

Obviously, Mother created a very different ethos, or 'work environment', for the Ashram and Auroville, and sometimes the differences have been misunderstood or over-amplified. Ashramites, for example, have been stereotyped as over-devotional, hidebound by tradition and unwilling to experiment, while Aurovilians have been seen as 'vital', undisciplined and more interested in outer manifestation than inner development. Partly, this reflects different cultural centres of gravity in the two communities, as well as the failure to offload 'baggage' some of us have been carrying for many years, if not many lifetimes. It's worth remembering, however, that when Mother talked of the need to be receptive to the new consciousness and to prepare the world for a new creation, she made absolutely no distinction between Auroville and the Ashram. For her, they are clearly one.

*(The Auroville Experience, pp. 23-25)*

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## MOTHER STEERS AUROVILLE

*(From Shyam Sundar's notes and recollections)*

From day one when Mother gave me the Auroville work it started in right earnest. The very next morning she asked me about what I had done the day before.

Precious are these memories of the days that followed up to the end.

The overall impression is indelible, though difficult to express.

From 23.2.72 I maintained daily notes of the work transacted with Mother. I had almost forgotten them till I discovered them lying safe with me. And a few notes for 1971 also came into my hands. That was the year for which daily notes, if kept, would have made a big bulk.

I now share some of these papers.

22.1.71

I wrote to Mother,

According to my understanding, Auroville residence is for those whom Mother has approved. There are certain persons who say that those who reside at Auroville should be hospitable to the whole world, and there are persons at Auroville whom Mother has not accepted.

Mother's answer:

I hope to guard for Auroville the character of aspiration for a truer future. But if the Aurovilians find this ideal too high for them, it will have to be renounced, at least for the moment.

Sometime during March 71:

A rich woman, residing at the Ashram and working for Auroville, wanted to know about bringing down her standard of living to the "present Auroville minimum".

Mother answered orally:

You should grow in consciousness.

You should feel that you are working for the Divine, living for the Divine.

You should want the Divine alone.

You should not be affected by the opinion of others. You should try to know and do only what the Lord wants you to do.

Don't think of pleasing others. If you try to please one, some others will be displeased. I also do not try to please.

You have made your life simpler. If you decide to make it still simpler, my help will be there.

All the circumstances are there as opportunities so that you can grow in consciousness, sincerity and consecration. You can always have my help for it.

This is the only solution.

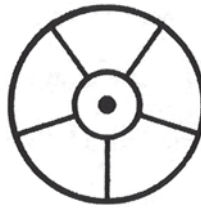
9.6.71

The question arose regarding the difficulty of the children's kitchen at Aspiration. Mother wanted the kitchen to be very clean and the food to be simple and healthy for the children to live and grow. She did not favour many kitchens. Regarding a separate kitchen for integrated families she said, "Why division, division?" They should be encouraged to feel that they are Aurovilians and not different, integrated etc.

Mother said that in Auroville she did not want number but quality. Twelve good men would be better than hundreds of stupid persons. Auroville is not for comfort but for the servants of the Divine. People in Auroville should not shirk hard work. They should not think of escaping from the outer control until the divine control is there.

August 71

(On August 16 I placed before Mother a request for a symbol for Auroville and its departments. She gave a design for tracing by Jayantilal. On the 24<sup>th</sup> I took the tracing to Mother. She liked it.)



She said that one of the lines should always appear perpendicular as shown in the above picture.

She explained the significance as follows:

The dot at the centre represents Unity, the Supreme;  
the inner circle represents the creation, the conception of the City;  
the petals represent the power of expression, realisation.

Next day I read it out to Mother and she confirmed it.

23.11.71

A letter from outside was read in which there was a mention of pulling the supramental Force.

Mother made it clear that pulling is not advisable. What is needed is aspiration; aspiration that is self-giving. (*Mother made a gesture with her hands of self-offering*) If one starts pulling, the ego and selfishness create trouble. In Auroville also people are pulling.

I asked about the pulling by people in Auroville. Is it by their vital or by their mind?

Mother replied that there are some who pull by the mind, and there are some who pull by the vital. One is as bad as the other.

8.2.72

Last evening Mother had received a report about the attitude of superiority of some non-Indians at the health Centre towards Indians. As soon as I entered, she asked me about it. I told her what I knew and also that I was waiting to talk to other persons concerned before speaking to her about it.

She said that people coming to Auroville from abroad should know that India is their host country and they are on the soil of India. India is the country of spirituality and even a peasant here is nearer to the Divine in his heart than the philosophers of Europe. People in Auroville must recognise this fact; those who do not, have no place in Auroville. The spiritual status of India is an absolute knowledge.

She added that she was categorical in what she had just stated, and wished that I had brought a recorder to tape it.

Then she wrote a message in French, dated it and advised its distribution:

*From the spiritual point of view, India is the foremost country in the world. Her mission is to set the example of spirituality. Sri Aurobindo came on earth to teach this to the world.*

*This fact is so obvious that a simple and ignorant peasant here is, in his heart, closer to the Divine than the intellectuals of Europe.*

*All those who want to become Aurovilians must know this and behave accordingly; otherwise they are unworthy of being Aurovilians.*

24.2.72

The notice for the 28<sup>th</sup> of February programme was read out:

The 28<sup>th</sup> of February is the anniversary of Auroville.

On that day—wherever we are—we shall meditate at the appointed hour 11.30 a.m. and resolve to work more and to work better than before and open ourselves ever more to the Divine Will.

Mother wrote “Blessings” and signed it.

4.4.72

Excerpts from the Mother’s conversation with Roger and myself, taped by Kumud.

I am not at all saying that difficulties should be accepted—don't invite them at all, at all, at all; life is difficult enough as it is! But when a difficulty comes you must take heart and face it courageously.

We must strive for Order, Harmony, Beauty and...collective aspiration—all the things which for the moment are not there. We must...you see, being the organisers, our task is to set the example of what we want others to do. We must rise above personal reactions, be exclusively attuned to the divine Will—we must be impersonal, without any personal reaction. We must 'be' in all sincerity. What the Divine wants—let it be. That's all. If we can be that, then we are as we ought to be, and that is what we must become. For the rest...for all the rest, we do the best we can.

I know it's not easy, but we are not here to do easy things; the whole world is there for those who like an easy life. I would like people to feel that coming to Auroville does not mean coming to an easy life—it means coming to a gigantic effort for progress. And those who don't want to keep up with it should leave. That's how things stand. I wish it was so strong—the need for progress, for the divinisation of the being, so intense—that those who are unable (unable or unwilling) to adjust to it would leave by themselves; "Oh, this is not what I expected." As it is now, all those who want an easy life and to do what they please as they please, say, "Let's go to Auroville!" It should be just the opposite.

It is the sincerity of our attitude and effort that makes the difference. People should feel that insincerity and falsehood have no place here—they just don't work, you can't fool people who have devoted their entire life to go beyond humanity.

There is only one way to be convincing—it is to be that.

Then we'll stand strong, we'll have all the divine force on our side.

We are here to prepare a superhumanity, not to fall back into desires and easy life—no.

People must feel it; it should be so strong that the sheer force of our sincerity would drive them out—that's what they have to feel. At that point, we will be what we should be. The power of the realisation—of the sincerity of the realisation—is such that it's unbearable to those who are insincere.

#### 4.3.73

There are people in Auroville who say it is against the spirit of Auroville when I ask people there to work or when I allot work to them. Mother wrote a message:

*Auroville is still in the state of elaboration and those who want to remain there have to collaborate to its erection according to the plans made and to be made approved by me and signed by Shyam Sundar.*

27.3.73

Mother wrote a message:

*Auroville is created to realise the ideal of Sri Aurobindo who taught us the Karma Yoga. Auroville is for those who want to do the Yoga of work.*

*To live in Auroville means to do the Yoga of work. So all Aurovilians must take up a work and do it as Yoga.*

My diary and notes end with my last visit to Mother. Years have gone by since.

I remember that era of my visits to Mahasaraswati.

Her love, her training, her urge for progress, her helping hand, her solicitude and toil for me, for Auroville, for all.

I remember her holding my hands in hers before I would leave. My hands would carry the smell of the perfume from hers, and something more would go within....

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## AUROVILLE

*(Loretta's poem captures the note of epic grandeur involved in the tremendous task of building Auroville.)*

Have you seen the giants walking  
On the wide red land?  
Seen them moving large and grand  
Against the sky?  
I have seen them coming,  
Tiny seedlings in their hands,  
Hands and feet as red  
As the earth they work each day,  
Carrying the future  
On their backs and in their dreams;  
Seen them growing tall and strong  
As they hammer out their way  
In a land of growing beauty  
Making progress from delay,  
Seen them growing wise and deep  
As they dig the hardened clay,

Worry water from the dry red earth,  
Bend their backs,  
Sweat out their sorrows,  
Wrest from yesterday  
Tomorrow's coming  
Of a new world's birth.

Have you seen the giants working  
In the quiet, secret spaces?  
In the kitchens, in the gardens,  
The world's forgotten places?  
I have seen them rise, emerging  
Out of ignorance and pain.  
Faith sustained, they give their labour  
To create a new domain.  
A thousand tiny troubles  
Tell the story of their struggle  
As they strive to bring alive  
A long forsaken dream.  
In their hearts an angel singing  
Being's beauty widely winging  
As they grow to know the truth  
Of creation's will to be  
A living harmony.  
Have you seen their victory?

Have you seen the giants building  
High atop construction beams,  
Suffering the toils  
Of their hardest dreams?  
I have seen them growing, changing,  
Working, working out the problems  
Of imperfect human nature  
Through necessity and failure  
With enduring dedication  
Consecrated to completion.  
Seen them struggle with the passing  
And the changing ways of time,  
Hoping deep enough to open,  
Feeling love enough to trust,  
Finding courage to create



A living wonder with their labour.  
 From the nameless, from the formless  
 You can see the promise rising  
 In the clearer, higher spaces  
 At the centre of the city;  
 Breathless peace, transcendent beauty.  
 While the glorious expansion  
 Of the limitless in man  
 Opens wide the striving hearts  
 To manifest the miracle  
 Decreed by destiny.

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## **SRI AUROBINDO, OTHER TEACHINGS, THE BUILDING OF AUROVILLE**

*(A letter from Amal Kiran—K. D. Sethna)*

Your circular is full of goodwill and a sincere desire to bring about harmony. You seem to have come across Aurobindonians who tend to be more religious than spiritual in their attitudes. It is the usual religious mind that sets up one alleged revelation in opposition to the approaches of other religions towards God. But one who claims to do an Integral Yoga cannot be exclusive in this fashion or come out with cudgels against people who are not yet aware of what Sri Aurobindo stands for. No true Aurobindonian tries to bully or browbeat anyone into becoming an Aurobindonian.

However one must realise what is meant by saying, as you do, that a newcomer from an old Teaching has to be brought to a point where Sri Aurobindo can take over and that the old Teaching should be given its due as the newcomer's starting-point. If the old Teaching is a "starting-point" and if Sri Aurobindo has to "take over", surely it is admitted that there is something in Sri Aurobindo which exceeds the old Teaching and effects a consummation not possible with the old Teaching. When this is admitted, one cannot just say: "It has all been said before two thousand years ago and in other ages too." One cannot remain simply a Christian, a Buddhist, a Judaeon, a Zoroastrian, a Mohammedan, a Bahai or even an adherent to the Vedantic Hinduism which served as the base and background to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga—one cannot just be any of these things and still be an Aurobindonian. One does not "exclude" the old Teachings, for exclusion would run counter to integrality, but one certainly cannot keep them as they were. You have yourself understood Sri Aurobindo to imply that his Yoga "goes beyond Buddha, Christ, Krishna and other Teachings". If Sri Aurobindo

“includes” all the Teachings of the past and yet goes beyond them, why does one have to keep them at all in their old recognisable forms instead of plunging wholeheartedly into Sri Aurobindo?

If we keep harking back to the great figures from whom the old Teachings emanated and to the terms in which they have chiefly gone home to humanity, we shall merely be using Sri Aurobindo to give a new look to the religious forces of the past. No doubt, we must not disdain these forces, but there must be what I may paradoxically call a sympathetic good-bye to them, a friendly break-away. Those forces have their own counterparts in Sri Aurobindo: so there will be no real loss, but they will now work in a wider context and be infused with new meanings. If that context and those meanings are to yield their full life-value and bring us a pull from the future in addition to a push from the past, the old associations need to disappear, however gently and gradually. Otherwise we shall never get the total benefit of the light which Sri Aurobindo embodied for us. I may specifically make it clear that I do not mean only an adapting of the old Teachings to changed modern conditions. I mean something more than old wine in new bottles or even new wine in old bottles. In a certain important sense there have to be both new wine and new bottles. Two basic instances in point are the Aurobindonian concepts of “Supermind” and “Transformation”.

Sri Aurobindo says that he brought the term “Supermind” into general use and now it is employed in various ways quite far from his intention. Similarly he remarks that people talk of “Transformation” in senses that are very different from what he wants. Sri Aurobindo’s “Supermind” makes a fundamental difference in our vision of God’s activity and purpose in the world, and Sri Aurobindo’s “Transformation” carries us far beyond all previous ideals of sagehood, seerhood, sainthood. Time and again he has explained the precise content of these two key-terms of his Integral Yoga and how they make this Yoga very new on the whole in spite of old aims, methods, disciplines and experiences forming part of it, especially in the early stages.

Now I come to what you write on love of one’s fellows as a builder of Auroville. There is a fundamental truth in what I may call the essence of your message. For, the love you speak of is a mighty idealism and a forgetfulness of oneself. Your vision answers in its own way to Sri Aurobindo’s in those glorious lines of *Savitri*:

Love must not cease to live upon the earth;  
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,  
Love is the far Transcendent’s angel here;  
Love is man’s lien on the Absolute.

But you will observe that Sri Aurobindo’s definition of love is openly charged with a sense of “heaven”, the “Transcendent”, the “Absolute”. Unless these high realities are made an active force in the lover’s consciousness, the unity towards which

love drives will never be set on its way to consummation. Unquestionably if one is not capable of loving the human, one will not have the capacity to love the Divine, just as one's love of the Divine will not be complete if cut off from love of the human. But the converse is even truer and more basic: one cannot fully and freely love the human without rooting oneself in love of the Divine.

What we name love of one another is as much coloured—whether grossly or subtly—by egoism as any other movement of our nature, however high-pitched it may be. The gospel of love of one's fellows has been preached repeatedly but it has never brought about the hoped-for results. As long as no attempt is made towards an inner wideness and tranquillity which would lead us to an already existent Universal Being, the single infinite Self in all—as long as no turn is there towards the deep hidden “psyche” in us to whom God the beatific Super-Person is ever real as its Lord and its Origin, as the Master and Source of the whole world—we shall always have in our love a seeking for the satisfaction of our desires, a feeling of disgruntlement at things not going as we might wish, and even a resentment if the sort of response we want is not forthcoming. Our fine dreams and grand hopes will invariably founder on the blind rock of our divided egos.

A conscious Yoga must accompany the movement of love for our fellows, an intense turn both to the Cosmic Presence and to the Personal Divinity beyond all beings as well as within them. Then alone will love bring heaven to earth. Then alone shall Auroville be the City of Dawn built from the Light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

\* \* \*

## AUROVILLE: A DREAM TAKES SHAPE

*(An introduction to the Auroville experiment—by Bindu)*

On 28 February 1968, youth representing 121 nations and all States of India placed a handful of earth in a lotus-shaped urn, symbolising the creation of Auroville—the city of human unity. Supported since its inception by UNESCO and the Government of India, Auroville at present comprises 1,600 people from India and thirty-four other countries. Located in Tamil Nadu, south India, thirteen villages in Auroville's immediate vicinity with a population of approximately 40,000 people directly or indirectly participate in the Auroville experiment.

Auroville has created a basic infrastructure with accommodation for its residents in about 100 settlements. Municipal services for food, renewable energy and appropriate building technology, ecological agriculture, alternative production, purchase and distribution, electricity and water supply, communication, waste management, education,

health care, financial transactions and town planning have been established. Auroville has also made commendable efforts towards promoting environmental regeneration, health care and educational research, handicrafts and small-scale industries and rural development. While visitors tend to make hasty judgments about Western Aurovilians, it is important to bear in mind that many of them, especially in their early years, have put in all their money into building and maintaining the collective resources in Auroville. What is both admirable and occasionally frustrating about Aurovilians is that most of them do not have any professional training for the work they are engaged in. They just take up any project that they personally desire to manifest, or any service that is needed in the community, and through their determination, bit by bit, they manifest the city.

Underlying this multi-faceted growth of Auroville is a spiritual aim, for Auroville draws its inspiration from the work of the visionary sage, Sri Aurobindo. As the Mother declared, “Auroville wants to be the first realisation of human unity based on the teaching of Sri Aurobindo, where men of all countries would be at home.”<sup>1</sup> While Auroville welcomes all people who are drawn to the ideal of human unity, the deeper spiritual significance of Auroville can only be understood in the context of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

## **Integral Yoga in Auroville**

*Auroville is intended to hasten the advent of the supramental reality upon earth.*

*The Mother*

In innumerable ways, perhaps even unknown to its residents, Auroville is an experimental field for Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's work towards a spiritual transformation of the world. Auroville, envisaged as a township for 50,000 people, can be seen as a step towards establishing a spiritualised society. While in some messages, especially the early ones, the Mother seems to indicate that having goodwill is a sufficient quality to become an Aurovilian, from many other recorded conversations, it is clear that she expected Aurovilians to “belong to the enlightened portion of humanity”<sup>2</sup> and be open to the “discovery and practice of the Divine Consciousness that is seeking to manifest.”<sup>3</sup> The Auroville Charter explicitly states, “to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.”<sup>4</sup> During her lifetime, through a selective process, the Mother hand-picked those she deemed worthy of becoming Aurovilians.

Whether the residents of Auroville consciously practise the Integral Yoga or not, it is believed that each individual has a role to play in the collective transformation of humanity. As Sri Aurobindo explains:

...for a spiritual and supramental yoga, humanity should be variously represented. For the problem of transformation has to deal with all sorts of elements favourable and unfavourable. The same man indeed carries in him a mixture of these two things. If only sattvic and cultured men come for yoga, men without very much of the vital difficulty in them, then, because the difficulty of the vital element in terrestrial nature has not been faced and overcome, it might well be that the endeavour would fail.<sup>5</sup>

As Integral Yoga allows for a free self-development of the individual and the progressive manifestation of his unique psychic being, Aurovilians are allowed utmost freedom in their spiritual practice and way of life. But freedom does not imply that people should give free rein to their desires. The Mother reminds Aurovilians that “The only true freedom is the one obtained by union with the Divine. One can unite with the Divine only by mastering one’s ego.”<sup>6</sup>

Termed by the Mother “the city the Earth needs”, Auroville is seen as a micro-cosmic representation of the world that would have a transformative effect on the larger macro-cosmos of the world. The Mother envisioned it as “a centre of transformation, a small nucleus of men who are transforming themselves and setting an example to the world.”<sup>7</sup> And, even though the Mother categorically states that “As long as egoism and bad will exist in the world, a general transformation is impossible”,<sup>8</sup> there are certain symbolisms inherent in its very conception that seem to indicate ways in which Auroville can have an effect on the larger world.

To begin with, a city—as opposed to a village or community—is perhaps the smallest collective unit that encompasses all the activities that human beings can engage in. If these activities are undertaken not from the basis of personal desire, but in the spirit of yoga, then it is feasible that a spiritual transformation of human life can take place. Yet another symbolism lies in the fact that the Mother purposely situated Auroville in India, for as she stated, “India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that the...cure will be found. And...that is why—THAT IS WHY (*emphasis in the original*) I was made to start Auroville.”<sup>9</sup> It is perhaps not a mere coincidence that Auroville was founded on an environmentally degraded wasteland in impoverished rural southern India. The land was so badly eroded that a District Forest Officer visiting the area in 1976 noted: “The entire area is exposed to wind and water erosion. If this is allowed to continue, then...the people will be forced to vacate the land in the not too distant future.”<sup>10</sup> It is to the credit of Aurovilians that through massive environmental regeneration efforts, this bleak situation has been successfully countered and today the rural bioregion of Auroville thrives economically as well.

The very layout of Auroville is symbolic. At the very centre of the city is Matrimandir, a sacred edifice which is considered the “soul of Auroville.”<sup>11</sup> It is seen as “the symbol of the Universal Mother according to Sri Aurobindo’s teaching.”<sup>12</sup>

For Sri Aurobindo, the Universal Mother represents the supramental consciousness, or the conscious evolutionary divine power that seeks to help humanity move beyond its present limitations into the next step of its evolutionary adventure. By its very form of a gold-plated sphere that seems to break out from earthly matter, the Matrimandir is “the symbol of the Divine’s answer to man’s aspiration for perfection.”<sup>13</sup> For most Aurovilians, the Matrimandir, as envisaged by the Mother, is “the central Force, the cohesive Force”<sup>14</sup> in the multi-faceted growth of Auroville.

Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual ideal of human unity is represented in Auroville not only by the diversity of its residents, who currently hail from thirty-five different countries, but also by its “International Zone”. In the town plan of Auroville, the Mother envisaged a sector of the city area to be the International Zone where all countries with a developed culture would be invited to establish a pavilion. Elaborating on the symbolism of the International Zone, the Mother said, “The most important idea is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither by uniformity nor by domination and subjection. Only a synthetic organisation of all nations, each one occupying its true place according to its own genius and the part it has to play in the whole, can bring about a comprehensive unification which has any chance of enduring.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, more than any other sector of Auroville, the International Zone represents a miniature world-union. In his political writings, Sri Aurobindo posits that, like the individual, each nation has a specific role to play in the world and a soul that it seeks to manifest. The proposed pavilions of the International Zone, by presenting the living and vibrant exhibits of their respective cultures, would be an embodiment of their respective nation-souls. The Mother wished for nations to actively participate in the building of the International Zone, stating that by such conscious collaboration, Auroville will act “against the catastrophic consequences of the error of armament.”<sup>16</sup>

## **Auroville as an experiment**

*Auroville is an experiment in collective realisation.*

*The Mother*

The Mother often refers to Auroville in transcendental terms, stating that the founding of this city was undertaken by a divine decree and that the city already exists on an occult plane. She speaks of the divine force specially aiding Auroville by exerting a continual pressure on its citizens and asserts that the ideal Auroville, even if it takes hundreds or even a thousand years, will one day be manifested on Earth. In one recorded conversation, she completely dismisses human agency saying, “The city will be built by what is invisible to you. The men who have to act as instruments will do so despite themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger forces. Nothing depends on human beings—neither the planning nor the

execution—nothing!”<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, however, she admits that “in the details of the execution the human consciousness intervenes.”<sup>18</sup> Perhaps above all, one has to bear in mind that, in numerous conversations documented in several volumes, the Mother speaks of Auroville as an experiment that may act as a catalyst to hasten the earthly evolution from mind to Supermind.

It is a matter of conjecture as to how much the present-day reality of Auroville embodies Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s far-reaching vision of human unity and world transformation. If we were to accept a transpersonal view of reality, it would be impossible for our limited rational minds to determine the veracity of Sri Aurobindo’s vision or to gauge how far Auroville manifests that vision.

One has to admit however that certain developments in present-day Auroville are in direct contradiction to Mother’s wishes as stated over thirty years ago. For instance, the presence of the Indian Government in Auroville, however much appreciated, and Auroville’s overwhelming dependence on a 5000-strong hired labour force are not in keeping with the Mother’s ideals. The city has also become a tourist destination. In the salubrious winter months, almost one-third of the residents of Auroville comprise visitors. Such developments are to be considered as adverse since the Mother explicitly warns against Auroville having too much contact with the outside world. She speaks of the immense need for a divine protection to prevent “infiltration or admixture” that could keep the “nucleus [of the city] from falling back into an inferior creation”.<sup>19</sup>

In this context, one should bear in mind that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother repeatedly said that the supramental force works out things in its own manner in ways that they could not entirely predict. Conditions on earth have definitely changed since the inception of Auroville. The last three decades have witnessed the collapse of communism almost throughout the world, the end of the Cold War, forces of globalisation and new information technologies reshaping the world, and an increasing interest in the West in Eastern spirituality. The spirit of Auroville now seems to be expressed in different forms and in different places all over the world.

While the vision of Auroville and its dynamic spirit continue to attract many, one may ask if the present-day reality of Auroville actually represents a unique evolutionary edge. Aurovilians are keenly aware of the hiatus between the vision and the reality. In an effort towards bridging this gap, they continuously experiment with different collective structures. Most of them simultaneously engage in an inner spiritual quest in the belief that the inner consciousness shapes the outer manifestation of the city. Perhaps this is where the challenge and the promise of Auroville lies: the city is built from within.

Given the Mother’s statement that it could take as long as a thousand years for the manifestation of the ideal Auroville, it is perhaps too early to gauge the success of Auroville in terms of its evolutionary impetus. Besides, Auroville’s development is interlinked with the evolutionary momentum of the planet. As Sri Aurobindo states:



With the present morality of the human race a sound and durable human unity is not yet possible; but there is no reason why a temporary approximation to it should not be the reward of strenuous aspiration and untiring effort. By constant approximations and by partial realisations and temporary successes Nature advances.<sup>20</sup>

These words encourage Aurovilians to persevere in this experiment in human unity, despite all inner and outer challenges that they face. For most Aurovilians, Sri Aurobindo's world-view gives meaning to their endeavour, casting personal and collective life in a new and purposeful perspective. And in turn, the living reality of Auroville as an embodiment of the universal vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother continues to inspire many individuals and groups all over the world.

## References

1. *Collected Works of the Mother (CWM)*, Vol. 13, p. 215.
2. *Ibid*, p. 210.
3. *Ibid*, p. 202.
4. *Ibid*, p. 193.
5. *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL)*, Vol. 23, p. 856.
6. *CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 215.
7. *Ibid*, p. 219.
8. *Ibid*.
9. The Mother's Conversation of 13 February, 1968.
10. *Auroville: A city that cares for its bioregion*, p. 3.
11. *CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 223.
12. *Ibid*.
13. *Ibid*.
14. *Ibid*, p. 342.
15. *CWM*, Vol. 12, p. 40.
16. The Mother's Conversation of 21 September, 1966.
17. *Mother on Auroville*, p. 13.
18. *CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 201.
19. The Mother's Conversation of 18 July, 1961.
20. *Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA)*, Vol. 12, p. 467.

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## AUROVILLE

*(Kittu Reddy finds in Sri Aurobindo's words, "If this is not the solution, then there is no solution" an explanation of the meaning of Auroville.)*

Since the dawn of history, man has been dreaming of an ideal and perfect society. These dreams have been bequeathed to us through legends and tradition. Thus there are traditions in many ancient cultures which speak of a golden age when man lived in harmony and peace. However, history and modern sociology basing themselves on the theory of evolution tell us that man has evolved from the barbaric state and that these traditions are mere figments of imagination with no basis in reality.

But man has persisted with this dream and innumerable attempts have been made in modern times to transform the dream into actuality. These have been made on the basis of the creation of a Government-less or anarchic society based on the full development of the intellect. Ideally, such a society will be one in which men will live in their highest nature, "associated by the inner law of love and light and right being, right thinking, right action and not coerced to unity by kings and parliaments, laws and policings and punishments with all that tyrant unease, petty or great oppression and repression and ugly train of selfishness and corruption which attend the forced government of man by man." (*The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 292)

As Sri Aurobindo writes:

Intellectual anarchism relies on two powers in the human being of which the first is the enlightenment of his reason; the mind of man, enlightened, will claim freedom for itself, but will equally recognise the same right in others. A just equation will of itself emerge on the ground of a true, self-found and unperverted human nature. This might conceivably be sufficient, although hardly without a considerable change and progress in man's mental powers, if the life of the individual could be lived in a predominant isolation with only a small number of points of necessary contact with the lives of others. Actually, our existence is closely knit with the existences around us and there is a common life, a common work, a common effort and aspiration without which humanity cannot grow to its full height and wideness. To ensure coordination and prevent clash and conflict in this constant contact another power is needed than the enlightened intellect. Anarchistic thought finds this power in a natural human sympathy which, if it is given free play under the right conditions, can be relied upon to ensure natural cooperation: the appeal is to what the American poet calls the love of comrades, to the principle of fraternity, the third and most neglected term of the famous revolutionary formula.

*(Ibid. pp. 217-18)*

But the question is whether such an intellectual anarchism can really create the ideal society. Will the development of the Reason and intellect be sufficient? Sri Aurobindo writes:

If Reason were the secret highest law of the universe or if man the mental being were limited by mentality, it might be possible for him by the power of the reason to evolve out of the dominance of infrarational Nature which he inherits from the animal. He could then live securely in his best human self as a perfected rational and sympathetic being, balanced and well-ordered in all parts, the sattwic man of Indian philosophy; that would be his summit of possibility, his consummation. But his nature is rather transitional; the rational being is only a middle term of Nature's evolution.

*(Ibid. p. 219)*

He further says:

The solution lies not in the reason, but in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual, an inner freedom that can alone create a perfect human order. It is a spiritual, a greater than the rational enlightenment that can alone illumine the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution, no other can replace it...

This is a solution to which it may be objected that it puts off the consummation of a better human society to a far-off date in the future evolution of the race. For it means that no machinery invented by the reason can perfect either the individual or the collective man; an inner change is needed in human nature, a change too difficult to be ever effected except by the few. This is not certain; but in any case, if this is not the solution, then there is no solution, if this is not the way, then there is no way for the human kind.

*(Ibid. p. 220)*

Auroville has been created with the sole purpose of creating this kind of Anarchistic society based on the spiritual being of man, on the soul and its spiritual tendencies. This was based on a dream of the Mother, a portion of which we reproduce below.

### **A Dream**

There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of good will, sincere in their

aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for material pleasures and enjoyment....

The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess the necessary knowledge to understand and accept it nor the indispensable conscious force to execute it. That is why I call it a dream....

An important step in this direction was taken on 28 February 1968 with the inauguration of Auroville. The charter of Auroville in the Mother's voice was heard by all who were present there.

### AUROVILLE CHARTER

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.  
But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future.  
Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.
4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

Auroville is well on the way to realisation, despite all the heavy odds which originate chiefly from the human instrument and being. It sometimes looks like a far-off dream. But it is a dream that is bound to be realised. In the words of the Mother:

You say that Auroville is a dream. Yes, it is a “dream” of the Lord and generally these “dreams” turn out to be *true*—much more true than the human so-called realities!

20 May 1966

(*Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 191)

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## RHYTHMS OF *THE HUMAN CYCLE* APPLIED TO AUROVILLE

*(Joseba Martinez looks for the underlying pattern.)*

The purpose of this work is to apply to Auroville the psychological methodology that Sri Aurobindo has described in his social philosophy for the investigation on the evolution of humankind, especially in his work titled *The Human Cycle*. This system of analysis is a good intellectual tool to discover and to try to understand what are the inner or psychological cycles that Nature follows in its process of development of human societies, what man has been in his physical and vital evolution, and what can be his mental and spiritual future destiny; what is his place and what is the meaning and purpose of the entire process. Although this analysis can be applied universally to any given society, the process of the evolution of each one of the cycles, the time of manifestation and flourishing, the process of assimilation of each one of them, will differ necessarily from one society to another. This aspect, the particularity of the process followed by every different society, can be of special relevance when we take into consideration the exceptional characteristics of the society of Auroville. The first of these characteristics is that here most of the people are volunteers who have joined consciously in order to participate in an experiment where the explicit aims and objectives are to accelerate the ordinary process of evolution through a concentrated effort made at individual and collective levels in a new process of psychological transformation that Sri Aurobindo called Integral Yoga. The ultimate goal is the achievement of a new kind of society, a society spiritually transformed or a Gnostic Society. Therefore, it can be expected that in this context these cycles will evolve and be expressed in a different manner and with a different swiftness than in any other society.

### **The Symbolic:**

*This is a foundational period, predominantly religious and spiritual. A strong intuitive mind is applied to institutions, customs, ideas and other forms of culture. The other elements, psychological, ethical, economic, are there but subordinated to the spiritual and religious idea.*

The predominant character of this period, its inspiration and guidelines were given to Auroville directly by the Mother. Unfortunately, this important period of her life for Auroville was extremely short. The Mother started the process of defining Auroville around 1965. Therefore, if we take this year as the starting point and until her passing away in 1973, there were practically only eight years for the establishment of this foundational base. It is necessary to consider that the age of the Mother was another factor: at that time she was 90 years old and in very delicate health that

prevented to a certain extent the intense external efforts necessary for this kind of period. Guidelines were given for the main aspects of the practical life and organisation, but in many cases these were ideals that belonged to the future and were very difficult to fulfil in the present state of consciousness of humankind. During this short period, whenever these guidelines met obstacles for their implementation, it was possible to get direct help and advice from the Mother to overcome these difficulties.

Another possibility for the establishment of a longer foundational period could have been to develop a closer relationship with the Ashram and to take advantage of its experience. Unfortunately, only one year after her passing away, that is in 1974, Auroville had to face a very difficult period. This was the moment of the conflict between the Sri Aurobindo Society, the Society that was acting as the project holder for the development of Auroville, and the majority of the residents of Auroville. When this period was over, one of the consequences was that the normal and fluent communication which had existed earlier between the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville had been seriously harmed.

Another important characteristic of this period was that at the moment of launching the project, the international media gave wide coverage to the event and this attracted a number of young people from different countries, many of them from France. It is important to note that these youth were coming strongly influenced by the ideas of that period, the sixties, particularly after the cultural revolution of May 1968 in France. Many of their main ideas: the spirit of social revolt, anti-hierarchical attitude, individual freedom, egalitarianism, etc., were going to play a crucial role in the resolution of many of the issues involved in the early years of the development of Auroville. At the same time, these seeds that were planted in the cultural ground of Auroville could be seen as a very significant factor and an important contribution to the future, in an attempt to find a cultural synthesis between East and West, and this is one of the most essential aspects of the ideals that Auroville needs to achieve.

### **The Typal or Conventional:**

*This typal stage creates the great social ideals which remain impressed upon the human mind even when the stage itself is passed. There is an increasing tendency to intellectualise life and this period culminates in the Conventional, in which the rigidity of social ideas, norms, and conventions is established. The chief characteristic of this age is formalisation in the name of stabilisation and preservation: systems of rigid grades and hierarchies are erected and life is more in its outer structure than in its inner Spirit.*

This period could be considered as extending from the passing of the Mother in 1973 until now. During this time Auroville has dedicated many of its efforts to its self-organisation as a collective body; there is an attempt to regulate the different aspects of its collective life and for each of the important areas, there is a group that

tries to take care of it, and normally has prepared a set of rules and policies that try to administer it in the best possible way. A kind of 'regular' process has been established, in which diverse proposals and groups created to implement them change very fast, every two or three years at most, and one has the impression of being immersed in a very fluid and flexible structure, in which nothing can become fossilised. But at times this is only a superficial impression, since looking at these processes from a longer perspective, it can be perceived that these changes affect only the surface, and it is often that one finds situations stagnating in spite of all these supposed changes.

The approval in 1988 of The Auroville Foundation Act by the Indian Parliament was the other important event during this period. The relevance of this Act can be seen at two levels: first, it can provide Auroville with the necessary official recognition and legal frame to interact with the Indian administration on all levels and channelise various initiatives; second, this Act has provided the Indian Government with the possibility to intervene directly in Auroville's affairs. This Act also introduces the possibility of establishing and formalising conventional processes at some levels: for instance, in my opinion, this is happening in the Governing Board, a body which is nominated by the Central Government and follows customary and common procedures. If one of the important aspects of the Auroville experiment is to research and to discover new and innovative forms of self-government, the present Auroville Foundation presents some aspects which may need to be amended in the future, in order to foster this research and discovery.

I would like to point out that the present organisational setup is quite unsuitable to realise the ultimate aims of becoming a spiritualised society. There is a contradiction between trying to live within, in contact with the inner Spirit, and from there to try to mould external structures, and a mental attempt to organise and regulate the outer world that is the predominant character of the present organisation. This contradiction can only be solved when some individuals or a group of individuals have reached a substantial inner development, and have been able to effectively transmit their knowledge to the collectivity. Meanwhile these kinds of temporary organisational arrangements can have their own utility in order to facilitate the necessary transitional period between the present level of human consciousness, and the future realisations that we as a collectivity try to manifest.

There are some inevitable dangers in this situation, one of which would be the growing importance of conventionalism in all these structures, the triumph of the external and practical form over the spirit, and the subsequent rigidity and stagnation of the entire organisation,—after all, this has been the normal process of evolution followed by ordinary societies. Auroville is aware of these dangers and hopefully will do what is necessary to prevent them.

These are some of the reasons that make me believe that this period in Auroville is probably going to be much shorter in its evolution; never will it have the unquestioned acceptance and general legitimacy that one can find in other experiences and it will

be marked by a general sense of temporality and distrust.

### **The Individualistic:**

*This is a very skeptical, critical and questioning age; it is an attempt to rediscover the truths of life and thought and action that have been distorted in the conventional period.*

Up to now, it is not possible to find any generalised expression of the characteristic attitudes of this period in the context of Auroville, probably the main reason for this is that the experiment is still in its initial phases of development, and not sufficient time has been given to any of its organisational forms to settle and become formalised.

But it is possible to find some specific forms that this individualistic behaviour has adopted; this can be seen more clearly in the interrelation between individuals and the different aspects of collective life. In the present organisation there are rules and regulations that reflect a certain degree of arbitrariness and inappropriateness with regard to the real needs of the collectivity, and the dissatisfaction caused by these deficiencies is being expressed in various attitudes.

One of them is the lack of participation in the collective process. Often, since the number of people involved in taking decisions is not substantial or sufficiently representative, the decisions do not have enough validity to be implemented.

Another expression, more common in the financial area, is that given the complexity and the number of difficulties experienced in the past to find an appropriate system for a collective economy, many people finally took recourse to finding their own individual solutions, which are less difficult and less demanding, and as a result the implementation of a true system is postponed, and to the unresolved problems is added the weight of inadequate solutions put in practice by individuals.

Another of these expressions, which takes more the form of a general trend of thinking, could be called pluralistic relativism which very much influences the present reality. Its main characteristic is the strong subjectivism that means that individual preferences or interpretations impose themselves over an objective truth: what is true for you is not necessarily a truth for me, everything is considered a matter of interpretation, and in that sense there are no truths that can bind the collectivity in a common exercise. The main problem with this attitude is its proportion, since beyond an acceptable point, this attitude can become a psychologically corrosive acid that could dissolve the accepted truths established in the Symbolic age and prevent collective action.

### **The Subjective:**

*The subjective stage of human development is the critical point at which, having moved forward from the conventional stage, the human being starts to see deeper, sees what is below the surface and tries to act from within. It is a step*



*towards self-knowledge and towards living from the self. Everything depends on how this self-research is taken, to what kind of subjectivity we arrive and how far we go in this self-knowledge; because here the errors can have big dangers while right seeking can yield fruitful results. There is a false as well as a true subjectivism.*

Individual seeking for the truth of one's being can be done safely if two great psychological truths are respected. The first is that the ego is not the real self and therefore the fulfilment of the individual does not mean the satisfaction of his egoistic intellect, vital and physical desires but the development of the divine individuality in him to his utmost capacities of wisdom, love and powers of realisation, something that the evolution has been secretly preparing for emergence one day in everyone. The second psychic truth is that the individual is not only himself, but he is in his life and being all others simultaneously, there is a secret solidarity between the individual and the collectivity and only by admitting and realising his unity with all the others can the individual entirely fulfil his true self-being. A psychic self-knowledge tells us that there are in our being many frontal, apparent or representative selves but only one which is entirely real, although secret in our deepest self. To mistake the apparent self for the real one is a very common error, the root of many others and the cause of many sufferings and blunders.

There is then a true and a false subjectivism, and this carries some important implications for the analysis of the individual and the life of societies and nations. In the context of Auroville, my assumption is that the majority of its members are living psychologically, in one way or another, in this age, although most are probably still in the phase of a "false subjectivism". This assumption is based on two things: first that even if it is possible to recognise in many of the Auroville residents an authentic attempt towards finding the truth of their beings, presently there is evidently the lack of a leading person or group with the required spiritual consciousness to guide the entire process. The rest of the residents probably are still in the individualistic age, looking for their "partial and external freedom", without recognising that first, this freedom and liberty are only the incomplete and external aspects of a much deeper and wider reality, and second, that this is an attitude that is going to reaffirm the false ego, instead of seeking for one that is oriented towards putting an end to it.

If this is the outline that can be depicted after thirty-seven years of experience, some observers could comment that from the spiritual point of view, apparently not much advance has been made in a project whose explicit aims are precisely those. To this it could be replied that it should not be forgotten that first, the project was started with people with no experience in Yoga or spiritual paths in most of the cases; second, that the help that maybe could have been received from the Ashram in this field was cut very soon; and third, that the process of learning normally takes a long time and always encounters many difficulties.



For these reasons, looking at all the circumstances involved in a process of this complexity, my opinion is that it is almost a miracle, or maybe I should say just a miracle, that a project of the magnitude and significance of Auroville has managed to survive through the large number of difficult challenges that had to be faced in a short time and is still alive and confident in the final achievement of the ideals for which it was created.

There are two other important questions that I would like to clarify: the first is the direction that Auroville needs to take at present if it still wants to fulfil its original aims, and the second is the next necessary steps to be taken to reach the objectives mentioned. The direction that Auroville must take in these circumstances is, in my opinion, to deepen and enhance the true subjective period that has already started, even if this is done only by a small minority of its members. All the present problems of Auroville, all the divisions, conflicts, weaknesses, have this at their base: the insufficient development of this Subjective Age. At the same time, all the unrealised potentialities are also contained at this point, latent and waiting for the hour when the external conditions and time becomes favourable for manifestation.

With relation to the second question, there is a very interesting section in the chapter 'Conditions for the Coming of a Spiritual Age'. One of its propositions is that if the spiritual change is to be effected, it must unite two conditions, there must be an individual or individuals who have embodied in themselves a higher spiritual consciousness, and there must be at the same time a mass, a society, the possibility of a group soul which is capable of receiving and assimilating this spiritual consciousness. Sri Aurobindo ends by saying that such a simultaneity has never happened in the past but must happen one day. I think that the entire endeavour of Auroville revolves around the fulfilment of these two conditions. But, what will be the strategy that the Spirit behind all the processes of Auroville is going to apply for its realisation? The first condition clearly has not been achieved if we look at the present situation, but perhaps the strategy followed all these years has been devoted to slowly collecting the different ingredients and the basic components that are necessary for the fulfilment of the second condition.

Meanwhile, what is needed at this precise moment is to face our insufficiencies as well as our highest hopes, to identify and know both of them in depth, to offer them for transformation to the Divine concealed in all of us while continuing our daily work with an indomitable spirit and an unshakeable faith in our destiny, knowing that the force of this faith and the power of our actions are the necessary conditions to create the most inviting environment to attract the forces of the future necessary for the realisation of the once unattainable ideal of Auroville. The essence of this spirit can be summarised in the following lines:

Cherish the might of the spirit  
The nobility of the ideal

The grandeur of the dream  
 The spirit will create the material it needs  
 The ideal will bring the real to its body and self-expression  
 The dream is the stuff out of which the waking world will be created

\* \* \*

### THREE POEMS FROM AUROVILLE

*(Lloyd's verses give a hint of what lies behind the apparent.)*

#### Fertile Breeze

A closing blue-black sky  
 smothers the sun  
 bleeding on the land.

Leaves blot final rays,  
 no stars yet, no answers  
 but for the breeze.

The moon a torch  
 gilding twilight clouds,  
 I gaze on travel at rest,  
 feet made bronze by dust  
 in the golden gleam  
 an early candle contributes.

Distant swallows  
 would soar in absent forms,  
 but for the breeze.

#### Workspace

Air is caught in trees  
 under low clouds  
 predicting storm.

At the far end of wind  
 and grass in a snake dance

the rattling gate  
heralds the eyelid  
of one more nightfall.

The grass-roof overhang  
dims light to a level  
that brass cares not  
to reflect it.

All of it adds to the darkness  
in which I rebuild my world  
by a candle or two.

### **Quiet**

Forgetful  
of my borrowed time  
and at rest  
with missing answers

nameless but  
true as the gift  
of a morning  
for a first day.

Still...

Where—maker  
of breezes that flow  
as breezes do—  
where to meet you?

\* \* \*

## MAJOR TRENDS IN THE GROWING CITY OF AUROVILLE

*(It is not often that we pause to look at the larger movements of which we are a part, so engrossed are we in our own activities. Subash tries to identify some of the significant lines of development in Auroville. Here is an abridged version of his essay.)*

### Introduction

I happened to see the book *Megatrends* by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene in 1993. I browsed through the book and found it very interesting, but could not read it completely. Recently I was lucky to get from Guy the authors' second book *Megatrends 2000* (Published by William Marrow and Company, New York, 1990).

The general outlook of the book was positive. The authors had gone through a tremendous amount of information about the happenings in the world in all fields, identified ten major trends and predicted certain outcomes that turned out to be correct. The book impressed me very much and I thought of adopting a similar approach to understand Auroville's growth. With that in mind, I started thinking about Auroville and several aspects of its development. I found a number of underlying trends which were interesting and which appeared important to me.

In this article I present the trends I have noticed in Auroville and their relevance to the further development of Auroville.

### The Relevance of Megatrends-like Enquiry to Auroville

In the early 1980's I was very eager to read articles that related world events to what Sri Aurobindo and Mother have said. Logically, when we take their teaching for granted, the countries of the world should be passing successively, in a slow or fast pace, through the physical, vital, mental and spiritual stages of their growth. In such a growth, progress, development and prosperity must be an inevitable outcome. When one looks at the events of the world, one can see how the tendency to move away from poverty towards prosperity is taking shape and at what speed it is occurring. We can obtain invaluable insights by a careful look at the way things are developing. But news headlines in the media—paper, radio, T.V. etc. tend to dramatise only the negative side, giving always a picture of the world in a poor and precarious shape.

In the same way, when I came back to Auroville in 1993, much of the news I heard was along negative lines.... The only achievement mentioned was that of transformation of the arid terrain of Auroville into a green, cool, fertile one. But during the last two years of my stay in Auroville I perceived some trends underlying the development of Auroville, which indicated that Auroville is indeed moving towards the realisation of its ideals, though—so it appeared—slowly.

### The Major Trends Observed in Auroville

The First Major Trend that is so striking is that *mental planning does not work for doing anything in Auroville*. Never does a thing materialise as planned. Always something or other occurs whereby one is at the ‘mercy’ of the moment. However seriously and skillfully one tries to ‘organise’ the work in the most ‘perfect’ way, it does not work: that ‘something’ is equally skillful in getting through that organisation and denting a hole in it! The result is that many in Auroville have lost their faith in mental planning and organisation, even though many do not want it to be like that. And those who are willing to dispense with it are not clear as to how it can be done in the context of their daily life.

The Second Major Trend is that *in some measure or other all here feel the Grace or Mother’s Force behind the activities of Auroville*, even though many do not like to call it so. It is perceived in various ways: unexpectedly I get the book I needed most; or get the answer to a pressing question; the material, the money, the right kind of people required suddenly turn up; the solution of a particularly urgent problem, whether individual or collective, emerges all of a sudden; there are innumerable other instances. It is quite common that when a person, under a spontaneous impulse, seeks for some knowledge about a thing with which he is concerned, he finds each event occurring in quick succession leading to a certain full acquirement of it.

Further, in all serious and sincere people, there is rooted deep the conviction and a perception that ‘somehow’ the work will get done if one decides to do a thing and sticks to it, even when all the needed things are not immediately available; and, in fact, all of them see that it does get done. The more one is in a position of responsibility, the more one feels the certitude of this ‘somehow’.

Another form in which this Grace is felt is the finding that each happening in Auroville is meaningful, however insignificant it may appear at that moment. This is particularly so for the first-time visitors and guests and for the newcomers. It is as if some Presence is looking after them and arranging everything for them. After sometime, when the original freshness with which one came tapers off, this feeling of meaningfulness in everything diminishes.

The Third Major Trend is that *many people in the Auroville area get opportunities for growth in their own line of development or even a new line*; they get in touch with higher things, higher than their present level. A villager at the survival level gets good food regularly even though his work in Auroville is a menial one and he gets accustomed to it; village students studying in Auroville schools partake of the freedom and joy there which they cannot have in their home and they spontaneously treasure it; a simple Aurovilian without much mental awakening is exposed to many things awakening his mental curiosity; people with a certain spiritual awakening see many instances of peace or freshness or causeless joy or similar things invading their being. It is as if they are put in contact with such things so that they can have a ‘taste’ of it first, and which, if they care for it, can be ‘acquired’ by them. And, indeed, it is so.

Innumerable occasions occur and opportunities arise bringing this 'taste'.

The Fourth Major Trend can be observed in the field of education. When Mother named the second school started in Auroville as 'Last School', it was felt that Mother did not want any school and desired the very life in Auroville to be a field of education for all living there. The next school was named by her 'After School' and the one after that was named 'No School'! None of the schools now in Auroville can be fitted into any sort of syllabus or curriculum applicable uniformly to all the students in that school, so diverse are the nature and the needs of the students. It has become imperative on the teacher to take note of the level of learning of each student and cater to his individual learning need. Naturally, this baffles the teachers at first.

Further, the teachers are all subjected to material, social and spiritual 'pressures'. That is, they are not able to define to themselves the goal of their teaching in clear practical terms: should their teaching help the future career of the student or his spiritual awakening. The parents expect the education to help the material future of the students and Aurovilians under whom the teachers serve stress the fulfilment of Mother's ideals on education. When the stress is on the former, all the routine functions associated with them follow. When the latter is emphasised, the teachers at first do not know what to do. And they are not able to integrate these two as they come from diverse backgrounds: those who are Aurovilians and those who come from outside to earn their living. Further most of these teachers are not qualified teachers and are, in fact, learning to 'teach'. The result is a sort of an uncertain balance between the two whose outcome cannot be foreseen by anyone and teaching happens to be governed by the needs and exigencies of the moment. But one thing is striking: *whatever is imparted to the student by way of education is done so without any coercion or compulsion; this is a very marked characteristic that can be noticed in all the schools.*

The Fifth Trend is a *certain tendency in the circumstances which tends to avert anything leading to disharmony*. The disharmony occurs only when that tendency is willfully brushed aside resulting in unpleasant or, at times, disastrous consequences. It should be noted that such a willful rejection is not a common practice, but only an occasional one.

The Sixth Trend is that *nobody could be pressured to do a work that he does not want*. One does not have to force even oneself to do a thing, whether it is to be done inwardly or outwardly. That is, if a necessity arises for one to change oneself and one also feels the need and is willing to change, one need not compel oneself to make an effort to change, working with great difficulty against the grain of one's nature. One just makes the effort and the change is made in a sort of willing and gradual manner, more or less in a short time, in fact, unknowingly!

The Seventh Trend pertains to food habits in Auroville. *All over Auroville attachment to any particular food is disappearing and it does not have as much hold as it had before*. However much one tries to arrange one's food according to old habits, the 'something' sees to it that one does not succeed; but when one tries to

arrange it so that the body's real needs are met that 'something' helps one. One's body is getting accustomed to this new situation.

### **The Relevance of These Trends to the Growth of Auroville**

These are the trends that I could perceive in the last few years, though I feel that there must be many more like the growing environmental awareness, the absence of social status considerations etc. For the moment I prefer to concentrate on some of the trends delineated above and see their relevance to the growth of Auroville.

Let us take the First Trend. It is in fact in accordance with the direction of evolution as delineated by Sri Aurobindo. The human being has to evolve into a supramental being resulting in a supramental race. In the course of this evolution human actions will have to be based more and more on the higher ranges of mind like Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition etc. till Supermind is reached. To function from any of these planes means actions based in silence and dispensing with those based on mental reasoning and intelligence. Since mental plans do not work in Auroville and one is invariably and always face to face with unexpected 'interferences' or unknown situations and made to act in a fresh manner, it is useless to stick to the mental way of working and get frustrated. To do so means one functions from the 'old consciousness'. One must reverse it and start functioning from the 'new consciousness'. That is, one has to deliberately choose to learn to shift his base of action from mental thinking to silence. A dread is felt at the very thought of it.

Sri Aurobindo describes this vividly in the chapter 'The Intuitive Mind' in his book *The Synthesis of Yoga*: "This sense mind, this intelligence, this reason, however inadequate, are the instruments in which he [man] has learned to put his trust and he has erected by their means certain foundations which he is not over-willing to disturb and has traced limits outside of which he feels all to be confusion, uncertainty and a perilous adventure. Moreover the transition to the higher principle means not only a difficult conversion of his whole mind and reason and intelligence, but in a certain sense a reversal of all their methods... If an animal mind were called upon to leave consciently the safe ground of sense impulse, sense understanding and instinct for the perilous adventure of a reasoning intelligence, it might well turn back alarmed and unwilling from the effort. The human mind would here be called upon to make a still greater change and, although self-conscious and adventurous in the circle of its possibility, might well hold this to be beyond the circle and reject the adventure." When Mother said, "I invite you to this great adventure the goal of which is a sure victory but the path to it is totally unknown and has to be traced step by step," it was for this adventure She invited—the adventure of rejecting the habit of relying on the usual mental functionings and shifting to a non-rational, or rather suprarational, functioning from levels above the mind. This is what She wants when She asks us to reject the 'old consciousness' and acquire the 'new consciousness'.

Sri Aurobindo says further in the above chapter, "In fact the change is only



possible if there is first a spiritual development on our present level of consciousness and it can only be undertaken securely when the mind has become aware of the greater self within, enamoured of the Infinite and confident of the presence and guidance of the Divine and his Shakti.” And hence one should learn to perceive the guiding light from within to replace the mental guidance, to act according to that light and learn gradually to make it a normal practice. It has to be done consciously and as a matter of fact till it becomes one’s normal functioning. Mental functionings should be resorted to till this status could be reached at will or become one’s natural poise, but without relying totally on them as one is accustomed to now.

The Second Trend helps immensely the shift mentioned above. When the feeling of Grace or Mother’s Force behind one’s activities in Auroville becomes conscious, the inner guidance is perceived more and more clearly and to act accordingly becomes easier and normal. Mother has made this Grace accessible to anyone with even a small effort and, we may say, at will one can get a touch of it. It is not as hard as it is supposed to be. A mere change in attitude can make one feel its touch.

For many people, we can even say for most people, it is a common occurrence to see the action of this Force when they reach a certain maximum in doing their work beyond which they do not know how to proceed, when their mental and other capacities and skills cease to be of use. They do not then give up, but persist quietly; they feel a silent perception that the work is still ‘on’ and they wait; invariably a breakthrough comes. Any effort made consciously to reach one’s maximum in that work and at that level will ‘automatically’ ‘call’ down the Force and enable it to act. Such a functioning should become a conscious and normal one.

If a detailed awareness of the working of the ‘old consciousness’ develops, then one will see that it is made up of habits in all the levels and domains of one’s being. If one makes a conscious effort to reject them in oneself, one will feel a constant action of the Force or Grace. One will be conscious of the Grace all the time.

The Third Trend testifies to the reality of Auroville being a place of “constant progress” and “unending education”. One can go on ‘acquiring’ the higher things if he knows how to do it. After one’s first ‘taste’ of the higher thing, whatever it is, he aspires to have it again, and he gets it. When the wish to ‘acquire’ it in a permanent manner arises in him and he makes an effort for it, he finds that he is not able to aspire constantly and that the aspiration becomes alive only when he is willing to rid himself of the habits of living at the present level. As Sri Aurobindo has expressed, a constant aspiration is possible only when constant rejection is practised. That is, when he reaches a higher level and he wants to function from it all the time, he cannot do it on the old basis or structure, he cannot do it with the ‘old consciousness’; he can do it only on a new basis or structure, he can do it only with the ‘new consciousness’. All in him that is willing to change to accommodate the new functioning can be kept and all that is unwilling must be rejected. The interesting thing is that when he is willing, when he makes a real decision to reject such a thing and needs for it a certain strength or



knowledge or humility or selflessness and other similar qualities, the 'Grace' readily gives it to him and he finds that he has just to acknowledge it for it to become operative. When he is able to give this consent continuously, his 'constant progress' occurs.

Hence the knowledge of this trend can be very useful for Aurovilians to initiate conscious efforts for progress. It can also be helpful in initiating village development works which are essential since Mother considered the villagers in the Auroville area as the first citizens of Auroville. They are no more at the survival level and are rising above it. Food, shelter and health needed by them at their present level are available to them. They have started feeling a need for a better living and education. If those needs are identified sufficiently in detail and they are enabled to put forth appropriate efforts to fulfil them, it alone will be an effective help to their development. By example, influence and any other means they can be taught the necessity, if they wish to rise above, to reach to the maximum of their achievement at the present level and then they can be enabled to reach it. When they reach their maximum at their level, in their own way, they will experience the Grace and Force acting and uplifting them to the higher level or status or thing for which they aspired. And to the extent they become more and more energetic and acquire more and more education, of whatever kind it may be, to that extent their development will become faster.

The Fourth Trend testifies once again that the present way of organising education, practised all over the world, cannot have any say on the education in Auroville. Again and again teachers are compelled to see that their effectivity as a teacher depends solely on their ability to awaken in the students the desire to learn, to instil in them a taste for learning and to help them learn. All the time they see that a fixed curriculum or syllabus has no meaning in the Auroville context. They see that in teaching students they have 'to go from the near to the far', they cannot compel anyone to learn, they can indeed teach 'nothing'. All the teaching workshops in Auroville in which they participate emphasise again and again this aspect and train them and help them to teach accordingly. They are trained to provide ingenuous learning contexts for the children in the classroom. To the extent they are able to provide them, to that extent they become effective teachers; to that extent the curiosity is kindled in the children making them seek more and more knowledge, and develop a taste and joy even while learning all the basic subjects like languages, maths, geography and science, to that extent their work becomes meaningful.

In such a situation it would be appropriate to mention the need to make the children perceive in some manner or other the inner guidance, feel the influence of the inner guide, the inner Presence. For instance, it may be felt, as Mother had observed, as a feeling of uneasiness before telling a lie or doing a wrong thing. There are many other ways in which it can be perceived by them: a joy, a freshness, a peace full of plenitude. This can be felt even in learning the basic subjects mentioned above. This perception combined with the self-learning through the learning contexts provided by the teachers will enable them to blossom spontaneously according to the truth of

their being utilising all the life situations. This process can be accelerated enormously and very effectively if the teachers themselves become capable of feeling it in them at will and invoking it in their 'classroom' context. As long as 'schools' and 'classrooms' exist in Auroville, this will become more and more necessary.

Sri Aurobindo mentions in the chapter 'The Four Aids' in *The Synthesis of Yoga* how this inner Guide, the Jagadguru within functions: "What is his method and his system? He has no method and every method. *His system is a natural organisation of the highest processes and movements of which the nature is capable....* (emphasis by author of this article) The full recognition of this inner Guide, Master of the Yoga, lord, light, enjoyer and goal of all sacrifice and effort, is of the utmost importance in the path of integral perfection." When the teachers enable the children to achieve this condition, the children will learn and function at their peak, become 'élites', in a natural and joyous manner. Regarding the role of the Ashram School as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo, Mother wrote in a message, "...the University Centre which for years he considered as one of the best means of preparing the future humanity to receive the supramental light that will transform the élite of today into a new race manifesting upon earth the new light and force and life." This role can be attributed to Auroville schools also.

### A Helpful Hint

How to feel the inner Guide? How to clearly perceive His guidance? How to keep the aspiration for the fulfilment of higher things—better life, better position, high ideals, spiritual realisation etc.—alive? Is there anything that can effectively help a person in this direction? Yes, there is. It is the practice of consecration followed by surrender.

The following words from one of the letters of Sri Aurobindo, referring to his own sadhana, testify to the effectivity of consecration: "There is also another way which was mine for a long time—a condition in which the work takes place automatically and without intervention of personal thought or mental action, while the consciousness remains silent in the Divine. The thing, however, does not come so much by trying as a very simple constant aspiration and will of consecration. Aspiration and will of consecration calling down a greater Force to do the work is a method which brings great results, even if in some it takes a long time about it. That is a great secret of sadhana, to know how to get things done by the power behind or above instead of doing all by the mental effort. I don't mean to say that the mind's effort is unnecessary or has no result—only if it tries to do everything by itself, that becomes a laborious effort for all except the spiritual athletes..."

"Strength is all right for the strong but aspiration and the Grace answering to it are not altogether myths; they are great realities of spiritual life."

In practice consecration is taken to mean remembering Mother before doing any activity and offering it to her. Even though it is much more, this simple meaning

is sufficient for our present purpose. When a right and steady effort to consecrate all the activities is put forth, it will lead to the perception of the inner guidance. First this will be generally in the form of getting ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the activity offered. In that process a quietude will gradually get established with occasional reaching of one’s depths. Then one gradually starts feeling Mother’s Presence in and around oneself that leads to the recognition of its guidance from within and to a subsequent development of the ability to follow it. When this is continued, gradually, the impulsion for doing the right action, the action that will further Mother’s work on earth or in Auroville, will be felt rising from within oneself. At a later stage consecration will start covering all action in detail, in great depths and heights, and the consummation can be as described by Sri Aurobindo in the chapter ‘Self-Consecration’ in *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

How can one offer any activity to her when he does not see her within? One can imagine that Mother or her light is within and start offering steadily and persistently to it. In fact, when one does so, he imagines a thing that is really there. As Mother is in the psychic being of everyone, the offering is really made to her, with the result that he sees her there all the time by constantly practising this consecration.

As Auroville is, from the perspective of realisation of its ideals, *Karmabhumi*, a land of Works, where Karmayoga, the Yoga of Works, is the way, the perception of this inner Guidance and following its lead are essential. This has become imperative as the mental basis of functioning no more helps or does not help one essentially. For this, consecration is a very effective means. When done rightly, it leads to feeling Mother within oneself, first feeling her Force influencing and acting on the work, then receiving the impulsion for action from herself and ultimately becoming conscious of herself doing all the action in and around oneself.

That the terms consecration, Mother, her Presence, her Grace appear religious and have so far been used religiously, does not abrogate their reality, their truth, their necessity for our work in Auroville. Sri Aurobindo and Mother themselves have said that the Divine alone can do the sadhana of Integral Yoga in the sadhaks. Sri Aurobindo says: “The whole principle of this yoga is to give oneself entirely to the Divine alone and to nobody and nothing else, and to bring down into ourselves by union with the Divine Mother-Power all the transcendent light, force, wideness, peace, purity, truth-consciousness and Ananda of the supramental Divine.” Only by becoming conscious of that action in oneself can one be of help to, can one really and effectively collaborate in the work done in Auroville. This can be achieved only by surrendering to the Mother-Force, to the Mother. For all this, consecration is an effective and essential practice. To feel love for Mother, to do the work because it is for her, to feel a privilege that one is able to participate in it, to be grateful that one is given such a privilege by her, all these will make the process joyous, rich, full of plenitude, sweet.

Work in Auroville cannot be done on the mental support only, that is, with the mind holding up the ideal all the time. Mind cannot do it; beyond a point, mental

effort to do so will result, at one time or another, in a dryness. Instead of abstractly conceiving Mother as an impersonal Force, if she can be conceived as a Person, related to as a loving and lovable one and then one wishes to be for her, to feel her Presence all the time, to be identified with her all the time and consequently to become her, the way to the realisation of Auroville ideals will become clear, rich, happy, without in any way abrogating the thrill and joy of the adventure and discovery.

The very fact that she has asked Aurovilians to build the Matrimandir and said that it will be the soul of Auroville emphasises the importance of Mother. Concentration in the Matrimandir Inner Chamber can be effective if one practises it to feel her inside, for the sake of her work in Auroville, for the love of her. Approaching the Inner Chamber thus, the path will not be long; the joy of the path and joy of discovery and joy of work, all of these will be in full measure. The practice of this concentration will be facilitated by the consecration. Sri Aurobindo has said after describing the necessity of all-inclusive concentration in *The Synthesis of Yoga*: “The effective fullness of our concentration on the one thing needful to the exclusion of all else will be the measure of our self-consecration to the One who alone is desirable”, who, in our Auroville context, is Mother. Hence it is evident that this consecration is an absolutely essential thing for the effective concentration inside the Inner Chamber.

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## MATRIMANDIR—UNIVERSITY OF UNITY

*(Doing simple tasks can be an occasion for great understanding, as Tim Wrey finds out.)*

Shortly after my second arrival in Auroville, in 1975, someone suggested that I should try working at the Matrimandir site. When I asked what the work entailed, I was told that there was nothing complex or requiring special skills, and I would easily be able to contribute via a range of straightforward tasks. That was encouraging, but I felt that if I was going to put my time and energy into something so massive and important, then it would be nice if I could contribute in a “significant” way.

The next morning I headed for the site, but on arrival could find no-one at ground level to direct me. Seeing that a lot of work was going on amid the scaffolding above me, I decided to climb up and find someone who could guide me as to what to do. However, on reaching the level of maximum activity I could see no-one in charge, in the sense that no-one was directing the work or was able to point out a job. Finally, a Frenchman suggested that I could rub down some plywood shuttering panels—used to contain the poured concrete until it had set—in preparation for the next concreting. I joined an American woman already working on the shuttering, and got some satisfaction in completing the work with her, though I felt it wasn’t the sort of

‘meaningful contribution’ I had in mind.

In fact, looking around I couldn’t see anything special happening anywhere on the site. Some people were dismantling the shuttering around a recent concreting, others were extracting and collecting nails from miscellaneous pieces of wood, or sorting nuts and bolts, or cleaning washers and scaffolding clamps, or simply sweeping down the wooden planks which formed the high level working platforms. Nowhere could I see anything of great importance happening. I finally descended feeling puzzled, but strangely contented with the little I had been able to do.

The next day there was a concreting in the afternoon. When I arrived I found an atmosphere of quietly dedicated activity in all directions. Men and women of all nations and ages were involved in shoveling sand or stone chips, hauling and emptying cement sacks, manning the concrete mixer, pushing trolleys of concrete mix and attaching them to hoists, then finally—above where I stood—pouring the trolley contents into shuttered spaces containing steel reinforcement frames, and vibrating the mix until all the air pockets were removed and it had fully settled into a solid mass.

They communicated in a variety of languages, or in silence, their smiles and integrated action often being all that was required to carry the work forward step by step. Everywhere there was a radiance and sense of common purpose. I worked until blisters made my unaccustomed hands too painful, then returned to the Centre Camp for a shower.

The third day found me again up amid the scaffolding, wire-brushing and oiling bolts. Around me another mix of Aurovilians was involved in the same range of simple tasks that I’d previously observed. I still couldn’t identify any major work happening, and began to wonder at the extraordinary simplicity of what everyone was doing. Nobody to my knowledge was doing anything specially skilled or exceptional, yet the Matrimandir was clearly progressing; a lot had been achieved in those two days, and the project was clearly that tiny bit nearer completion. I pondered; then suddenly I understood.

The truth burst on me in all its beauty and simplicity, as I realised that there could be no such thing as a ‘significant contribution’, except in the context of my own ego. Every single task, no matter how simple or menial, was as significant as the rest, because it was only by the execution of them all that the project was progressing. If you removed any one of them the whole work would be halted—until someone or a group of people took up that particular task and completed it. Only by everyone working together, and each contributing his or her humble part to the whole, and doing it to the best of their ability, could the Matrimandir be built. Its construction progressed through unity, and so to work on it was to receive a lesson in Unity.

My mind went back to the very first words I ever heard spoken about Auroville, when I first visited in 1973: “It’s not so much that we’re building Auroville, as Auroville is building us!” How true those words now seemed, as I realised inside myself what the Matrimandir had already taught me—via its scaffolding, wooden

planks and menial tasks needing to be done.

It was truly acting as a centre of higher education, a virtual University of Unity.

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## RELEVANCE OF MATRIMANDIR TO INDIA AND THE WORLD

*(The following short article by Aryadeep was written at the request of an editor of a quarterly magazine The Oriya Aurovilian published from Orissa, India.)*

Matrimandir is apparently a building, a very special architectural creation. It is the material realisation of a vision of the Mother, who also founded Auroville.

What is the significance of Matrimandir to India and the world? To understand this, it would be worthwhile to first understand Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's message of the new evolution and India's mission.

To put it very simply, the world is in a state of progression. It has evolved from utter inconscience and, in the process of evolution, it first reached a stage of Matter, then Life and then Mind. Mind, which is the chief distinguishing element of man from other species, is only a stage. The next stage or step in this evolution will bring in a new level which obviously will be greater than the mind and its capacities. In fact, it will have overcome the present limitations of the mind governed by imperfect and partial knowledge. The new level, by its nature, will be constituted of light and of whole-seeing, and the power of effectuating what it sees. It will be freed from the downward gravitation of the inconscience from which evolution is proceeding and make super-conscience or the spirit the base and the centre of life, and the play of life on earth. Thus, for man and humanity, to aspire to come in touch with this spirit or the super-conscience, which exists in the depths and heights of one's being, to be governed by it, to let it permeate mind, life, body, to let it transform mind, life, body is to participate, to cooperate, to lend a helping hand in the process of evolution.

The delight of the Spirit is ever new, the forms of beauty it takes innumerable, its godhead ever young and the taste of the delight, *rasa*, of the Infinite eternal and inexhaustible. The gnostic manifestation of life would be more full and fruitful and its interest more vivid than the creative interest of the Ignorance; it would be a greater and happier constant miracle.

Sri Aurobindo

*(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 1106)*

The individual and collective growth into the Light will pave the way of a new



creation upon earth in which each nation will bring the unique peculiarity of its soul. India's soul-peculiarity is what had interested her most since time immemorial, the discovery of a higher principle of life and the governance of life by that principle. Hence, in the new creation, India is expected to be "a leader in the ways of spirit", that is to say, set an inspiring example of a life governed by a truer consciousness, the psychic individuality which is the true centre of a human being.

In this evolutionary process, rather a journey, there are things that can help, be of inspiration. They can be levers, reminders, guides. They not only enrich the human civilisations but prepare the way for the new super-human or post-human civilisation. Sri Aurobindo's epic, *Savitri*, and his writings in the *Arya*, the works of the Mother, and in fact, all great music, poetry, prose, art and the buildings such as Matrimandir are to be understood in this context.

Evolution from inconscience to super-conscience is not a progress from nothing to nothing but from nothing to everything, including, as Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri*, "Matter shall reveal the spirit's face". In this sense, Matrimandir is an attempt to organise matter in such a way that it becomes the 'spirit's face'. It is a material vehicle to the spirit and it is also spirit's vehicle to reveal itself in matter.

All material objects—a watch, a tap, a computer—are essentially an organisation of matter. But once the matter is organised, once an object is formed, it assumes its individuality and purpose of existence. Numerous are the instances and words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to prove that to them material things and objects were not unconscious objects, they had their own consciousness and feelings. Now, Matrimandir is also materially an organisation of matter, of bricks and mortar and marble and gold and steel but once the matter is formed and once the building comes into existence, it assumes its own individuality; it becomes a living thing, a living object with its own life and mission. This is all the more true because basically Matrimandir is the material expression of what the Mother saw on the subtler planes of consciousness. We in our ordinary mentality may not be able to perceive or feel this but those who live in whole consciousness, in the Truth-consciousness or those who are open and receptive to the Truth of things cannot escape this inner or hidden reality. That explains why the Mother called Matrimandir the "Soul of Auroville". It is a building and a place and a consciousness, all in one, and meant for leading, helping, facilitating, inspiring Aurovilians and humanity for a progress towards spirit, towards one's true self, towards the future of evolution.

And this explains its relevance to India and the world.

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## THE MATRIMANDIR GARDENS

(*Narad explains the 'Significance of the order of the Matrimandir Gardens'.*)

I have occasionally been asked about the significance of the arrangement of the twelve Gardens of the Matrimandir. How do the gardens relate to each other in the order that has been given by Mother? This is what has come to me.

The first garden is the ***Garden of Existence***. All begins with existence, Sat, and I see this garden as representative of the initial manifestation with its stone, pools, primordial plants such as bamboo, ferns, etc. The hibiscus Mother chose to represent the Garden of Existence is *Psychic Power in Existence*. There are three forms, all single flowers and the basic colour is pink with a red centre.

Existence is an infinite and therefore indefinable and illimitable Reality which figures itself out in multiple values of life.

(*The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 63)

All existence,—as the mind and sense know existence,—is manifestation of an Eternal and Infinite which is to the mind and sense unknowable but not unknowable to its own self-awareness.

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 189)

All existence is a manifestation of God because He is the only existence...

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 13)

The second garden is the ***Garden of Consciousness***, the natural and divine progression after Existence, Chit. The representative hibiscus for the Garden of Consciousness is *Supramental Consciousness*. Again, there are three forms but all are medium to large double flowers ranging from yellow to golden yellow.

Consciousness is a fundamental thing, the fundamental thing in existence—it is the energy, the motion, the movement of consciousness that creates the universe and all that is in it—not only the macrocosm but the microcosm is nothing but consciousness arranging itself.

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 236)

To me, for instance, consciousness is the very stuff of existence and I can feel it everywhere enveloping and penetrating the stone as much as man or the animal. A movement, a flow of consciousness is not to me an image but a fact.

(*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 316)



The third garden is the *Garden of Bliss* with its representative flower, a hibiscus, as are the flowers of the first two gardens. In fact, the hibiscus carries such importance that it represents ten of the twelve Gardens of the Matrimandir. *Ananda* is the flower Mother selected to represent the Garden of Bliss. It is a small to medium size flower of a rich cream shade with a pure white centre. Another lovely form is *Ananda in the Physical*, the same cream petals but with a deep red centre.

For from the divine Bliss, the original Delight of existence, the Lord of Immortality comes pouring the wine of that Bliss, the mystic Soma, into these jars of mentalised living matter; eternal and beautiful, he enters into these sheaths of substance for the integral transformation of the being and nature.

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 275)

And this bliss is not a supreme pleasure of the heart and sensations with the experience of pain and sorrow as its background, but a delight also self-existent and independent of objects and particular experiences, a self-delight which is the very nature, the very stuff, as it were, of a transcendent and infinite existence.

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 16)

So, the first three gardens represent Satchidananda which leads us to the fourth garden. As Sri Aurobindo has given us a luminous understanding of Satchidananda, more need not be said.

Of course, it will not be required that one go through all the gardens in a consecutive manner, beginning with the *Garden of Existence*. For, as Mother told me, in whatever garden one enters one will feel, “physically and concretely the significance of each garden. In the *Garden of Youth*, they will know (Mother emphasised this word) youth, in the *Garden of Bliss* they will know bliss,” etc.

The fourth garden is the *Garden of Light*, manifesting from Satchidananda. It too has as its representative flower, the hibiscus, *Light of the Purified Power*, a medium to large single milk-white flower with long slender petals that are separated and recurved.

...light is primarily a spiritual manifestation of the Divine Reality illuminative and creative; material light is a subsequent representation or conversion of it into Matter for the purposes of the material Energy.

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 979)

Our sense by its incapacity has invented darkness. In truth there is nothing but Light, only it is a power of light either above or below our poor human vision's limited range.

For do not imagine that light is created by the Suns. The Suns are only physical concentrations of Light, but the splendour they concentrate for us is self-born and everywhere.

God is everywhere and wherever God is, there is Light.

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 188)

Light is a general term. Light is not knowledge but the illumination that comes from above and liberates the being from obscurity and darkness.

(*The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 83)

The light is everywhere, the force is everywhere. And the world is so small.

(*Words of the Mother*, CWM Vol. 15, p. 69)

With the advent of Light there is Life, the fifth garden of the Matrimandir Gardens. It is interesting to note that the **Garden of Life** is the closest garden to the Banyan tree, the geographical centre of Auroville and for me, the symbol of Unity. On the western side of the Banyan are the twelve **Unity** gardens. In fact, Mother said to me, "I would like you to begin with the **Garden of Unity**." (Emphasis mine.) The representative flower for the Garden of Life is the *Power of Consciousness*, a double hibiscus with forms both large and small and colours ranging from raspberry pink through red to crimson.

Life itself here [on earth] is Being at labour in Matter to express itself in terms of conscious force; human life is the human being at labour to impress himself on the material world with the greatest possible force and intensity and extension.

(*The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 157)

Life is the dynamic expression of Consciousness-Force when thrown outward to realise itself in concrete harmonies of formation...

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1292)

...life [is] not only a play of forces or a mental experience, but a field for the evolution of the concealed spirit.

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 505)

All life is only a lavish and manifold opportunity given us to discover, realise, express the Divine.

(*The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 148 )

The *Garden of Power* is the sixth of the twelve Gardens of the Matrimandir, of which Mother has said, “The Gardens are as important as the Matrimandir.”

I see Power as the strongest force emanating from Life, and this garden too is represented by a hibiscus, *Aesthetic Power*, one of the oldest varieties in India, cherished for its beauty and its generous flowering. Blossoms are medium to large, single with smooth separated petals of reddish pink with a dark red centre. Each petal is splashed with white on one lower edge.

Power means strength and force, Shakti, which enables one to face all that can happen and to stand and overcome, also to carry out what the Divine Will proposes. It can include many things, power over men, events, circumstances, means etc. But all this not of the mental or vital kind, but by an action through unity of consciousness with the Divine and with all things and beings. It is not an individual strength depending on certain personal capacities, but the Divine Power using the individual as an instrument.

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1203)

The seventh of the Matrimandir Gardens, the *Garden of Wealth*, is the inevitable result of *Power*. *Wealth* is one of the two gardens represented by flowers other than the hibiscus. Its most significant flower is the water lily which, in the spiritual significances of the flowers given to us by the Mother, represents *Wealth*. The many colours of water lilies respond to the messages of the flowers in the hierarchy as given by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Hence we have the following: *Supramentalised wealth*, pink with a large golden centre; *Wealth in the Mind of Light*, blue with a large golden centre; *Wealth under the psychic influence*, white flowers shaded pink; *Emotional Wealth*, lavender flowers; *Wealth in the vital*, vivid magenta pink flowers; *Wealth in the most material vital*, deep rose red flowers; *Generous wealth*, yellow flowers; and *Integral Wealth of Mahalakshmi*, white flowers. These water lilies will be complemented by various cacti which represent *Riches*.

All wealth belongs to the Divine and those who hold it are trustees, not possessors. It is with them today, tomorrow it may be elsewhere. All depends on the way they discharge their trust while it is with them, in what spirit, with what consciousness in their use of it, to what purpose.

(*The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 12)

Wealth is a force—I have already told you this once—a force of Nature; and it should be a means of circulation, a power in movement, as flowing water is a power in movement. It is something which can serve to produce, to organise. It is a convenient means, because in fact it is only a means of making things circulate fully and freely.

This force should be in the hands of those who know how to make the best possible use of it, that is, as I said at the beginning, people who have abolished in themselves or in some way or other got rid of every personal desire and every attachment. To this should be added a vision vast enough to understand the needs of the earth, a knowledge complete enough to know how to organise all these needs and use this force by these means.

If, besides this, these beings have a higher spiritual knowledge, then they can utilise this force to construct gradually upon the earth what will be capable of manifesting the divine Power, Force and Grace. And then this power of money, wealth, this financial force, of which I just said that it was like a curse, would become a supreme blessing for the good of all.

(*Questions and Answers 1955*, CWM, Vol. 7, p. 55)

True wealth is that which one offers to the Divine.

(*Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 49)

The correct use of wealth leads to the eighth garden which Mother named *Utilité*, which was originally translated as *Utility* and is now *Usefulness*. *Usefulness* is again represented by a hibiscus, *Usefulness of the New Creation*, a medium to large single flower, solid deep pink with a reddish pink centre and flat petals. As I recall, all the flowers that bear, as a part of their significance, the *New Creation* were originally given by Mother the name *Auroville*. Therefore, *Usefulness of the New Creation* along with *Beauty of the New Creation*, *Charm of the New Creation* and others, were formerly, *Usefulness of Auroville*, *Beauty of Auroville*, etc. Mother wanted a more universal significance and selected the *New Creation*. So these flowers, approximately twelve in number, carry the dual significance. And is not Auroville the New Creation?

The outcome of usefulness is naturally progress, which is the ninth garden of the Matrimandir Gardens. The *Garden of Progress* is represented by a hibiscus and, as many of the gardens, may also contain many of the ‘companion’ plants that bear similar significances such as *Catharanthus* (common name *Vinca*) which Mother named *Progress*. The Garden of Progress is represented by the *Power to Progress*, a small to medium single, cream white flower with a large prominent, deep pink centre and pink veins that extend towards the edges of the petals.

A spiritual atmosphere is more important than outer conditions; if one can get that and also create one’s own spiritual air to breathe in and live in it, that is the true condition of progress.

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 651)

The first condition of inner progress is to recognise whatever is or has been a wrong movement in any part of the nature,—wrong idea, wrong feeling, wrong

speech, wrong action,—and by wrong is meant what departs from the truth, from the higher consciousness and higher self, from the way of the Divine. Once recognised it is admitted, not glossed over or defended,—and it is offered to the Divine for the Light and Grace to descend and substitute for it the right movement of the true Consciousness.

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 662)

**Youth** is the tenth garden of the Matrimandir and surely, after passing through the previous nine gardens and experiencing the states of consciousness they represent we will see that Progress will bring us to an eternal Youth, in which there will be a continuing progress and unfolding of the wonders still unknown in which the rarest gems of the spirit will be revealed with the opening of the vaults of the soul. The beautiful hibiscus, *Beauty of Supramental Youth*, has been chosen as the representative flower. It is medium sized, salmon orange or orange-yellow, speckled with pale yellow and has reddish veins and a red centre.

Youth does not depend on the small number of years one has lived, but on the capacity to grow and progress. To grow is to increase one's potentialities, one's capacities; to progress is to make constantly more perfect the capacities that one already possesses. Old age does not come from a great number of years but from the incapacity or the refusal to continue to grow and progress. I have known old people of twenty and young people of seventy.

(*On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 257)

The eleventh garden of the Matrimandir is **Harmony**, that most elusive and important aspect of man's evolutionary journey to the Supreme. *Harmony*, too, has been chosen by Mother to be represented by an hibiscus along with other flower significances that vibrate with the Divine Harmony. There are many forms of the hibiscus *Power of Harmony* but basically all are medium to large single bright yellow or bright golden yellow flowers with pink, red or orange centres.

When all is in agreement with the one Truth or an expression of it, that is harmony.

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 560)

Lastly we come to the twelfth garden, the **Garden of Perfection**, represented by the Plumeria, (Common name, Frangipani or Hawaiian Lei flower) with a few forms. There is *Psychological Perfection* bearing white flowers with a large yellow centre; *Psychological perfection on the way to fulfilment* with predominantly deep rose to purplish red flowers often shaded with deep yellow to orange; *Psychological perfection in Matter*, with predominantly white flowers edged with rose pink, with a rose pink band on the back of each petal and a tiny yellow centre; *Integral psychological*

*perfection* with large white flowers whose petals are widely separated; and finally *Perfect psychological perfection* with large white flowers with overlapping petals. One of the most beautiful companion plants will be *Supramentalised psychological perfection*, the beloved and intensely fragrant *Michelia champaka*, commonly known as Champak.

Perfection in the sense in which we use it in Yoga, means a growth out of a lower undivine into a higher divine nature. In terms of knowledge it is a putting on the being of the higher self and a casting away of the darker broken lower self or a transforming of our imperfect state into the rounded luminous fullness of our real and spiritual personality. In terms of devotion and adoration it is a growing into a likeness of the nature or the law of the being of the Divine, to be united with whom we aspire,...

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 698)

Out of imperfection we have to construct perfection, out of limitation to discover infinity, out of death to find immortality, out of grief to recover divine bliss, out of ignorance to rescue divine self-knowledge, out of matter to reveal Spirit. To work out this end for ourselves and for humanity is the object of our Yogic practice.

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 97)

Perfection is not a maximum or an extreme. It is an equilibrium and a harmonisation.

(*Words of the Mother*, CWM Vol. 15, p. 78)

Perfection is eternal; it is only the resistance of the world that makes it progressive.

(*Ibid.*)

It may be said that perfection is attained, though it remains progressive, when the receptivity from below is equal to the force from above which wants to manifest.

(*Ibid.*)

And, as T.S. Eliot writes in *Little Gidding*, the last of his *Four Quartets*:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

And so we arrive once again at ***Existence***, the first principle of Sat-chit-ananda.

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## “LIFE IN A LIVING LABORATORY—AUROVILLE”

*(A soldier in the Indian Army then, a soldier now in a battle of another kind, Major General Krishen Kumar Tewari (Retd.) writes of the different challenges.)*

I look back today upon a memorable and adventurous 35 years spent as an officer in the Indian Army followed after retirement by more than 30 years in the ‘Living Laboratory’ called Auroville and I reflect on the strange variety and complexity of experiences which have constituted my present existence. The challenges faced in the earlier part of an eventful life as a soldier on active service in the Army, the constant perils and risks in the many wars—starting, in my first 5 years, with World War II in the then British Indian Army. Followed, after Independence in 1947, by the partition of India which demanded the agonising division of a single army, formed into a cohesive unit in the crucible of a world war, into two opposing forces; followed over the years by numerous wars fought by free India. All of this comprises the mosaic and pattern of memory to be compared to the present long years spent in Auroville as a soldier in another type of army striving for victory still, but over very different problems and challenges.

I was not forced to join the Army after my graduation in 1941. It was by personal choice at the height of the World War II, when Japan had joined in and overrun most of South East Asia, approaching the very borders of India. We went through a tough and no-nonsense training built upon rigid army discipline, based on a strict hierarchy of command and control, to be commissioned into the Army. I was immediately sent on active service to the Burma border against the Japanese advance. It was a strict “Do or Die” approach with the war at its height.

In contrast, in a strange switch from one type of life to a totally different atmosphere, I joined Auroville, also voluntarily, knowing that there were no specified rules and regulations and no hierarchy of command and control. I could imagine the challenges that would arise with people invited from all over the world to live and work together in a collective life and build a new city for 50,000 people on what was then a completely barren piece of land in South India.

How was I introduced and attracted to join Auroville? It was due to what seemed to me a divine intervention which took place in the 1971 war with Pakistan resulting in what was then East Pakistan becoming independent—as Bangladesh. I learned later that the Mother had taken a personal interest in this unique event. What is beyond coincidence is that most of us senior officers in the then Eastern Command at Calcutta had received the Mother’s blessings before the actual war broke out. This was made possible through an old devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who happened to be one of my staff officers. We had also received a booklet *Sri Aurobindo and Bangladesh* written at the Mother’s behest by Satprem and circulated widely through India well before the start of war in early December 1971, even though Bangladesh



existed at the time only on paper resolutions. This booklet presented Sri Aurobindo's perspective on India and her neighbourhood security concerns in a marvellously incisive and far-sighted manner that no modern political analyst would be able to do. I was intrigued.

The war lasted just two weeks after which, in a unique, militarily inexplicable event, almost a lakh of regular Pakistan soldiers surrendered to the Indian Army under their Commander in Chief, Lt. Gen. A. K. Niazi. It was indeed a prized moment for the Indian Army after the humiliating experience suffered by it in October 1962 when the Chinese had attacked unprovokedly across the high mountains on an Indian Army which was then completely ill-prepared and ill-equipped for high-altitude operations. That had been for me an especially dark moment, for I was commanding a regiment and was taken Prisoner of War by the Chinese. I had gone to the forward areas to visit my troops who had had no earlier training or experience in mountain warfare and did not even have proper clothing to fight in the snow-covered mountains.

After the Pakistani surrender on 16 December 71, I was the first officer in Head Quarters Eastern Command at Calcutta who had resolved to come to Pondy to have the Mother's darshan, having received Her blessings earlier. It seems interesting in hindsight that my leave fell around the Mother's birthday—21<sup>st</sup> February 1972. And so, along with my wife, Major Dr Kamla and our three younger daughters—Deepti, Abha and Shubha—we reached Pondicherry a day before this very special date in Sri Aurobindo's centenary year.

It was indeed a Divine arrangement that on our very first visit, Kamla and I were able to be present at 4 a.m. for the foundation laying of Matrimandir at Auroville, also scheduled for the 21<sup>st</sup> February 1972 (Mother's birthday). This was the first we heard of Auroville. What an experience it was! To arrive in the middle of a completely barren piece of land and see in the dawn light a "shubh agni" burning within a huge crater next to the lone and majestic Banyan tree with beautiful and inspiring music being played. This experience certainly managed to link us to this unique project for life, although we were not conscious of it then. Auroville was founded on 28 February 1968.

On 22 February 1972, all five members of my family were granted a special darshan and one by one we sat at Her feet and looked into Her eyes. She placed Her hand on the head of each one of us and gave a different-coloured rose to each one. The most significant part of this event is that entirely independently, each one of us has settled here in Auroville today. Our eldest daughter, Uma was then undergoing training to join the Army as a doctor and could not meet the Mother. She too, after her retirement with the rank of Lt. Col. from the Army, is here today and her two sons study in the Ashram School.

As a result of this life-changing encounter, I decided and applied for immediate release from the Army Service on return to Calcutta, a decision which was met with incomprehension and derision because I had just then been given an award for meritorious services. But, much to my embarrassment, I had to withdraw my request



later when I was informed by telephone in Calcutta by the late Shri M. P. Pandit that the Mother had entirely disapproved of my intention to leave the Army. I was told that She said it four times—"He is not to leave the Army, he must continue in service, he must not leave the Army, we shall decide when he should leave." I did not know then that I would be promoted, soon after. Ultimately, I retired towards the end of 1976 and moved 'lock stock and barrel' from Kashmir where I was last posted, to Pondy. My daughter Deepti had already been in Pondicherry for almost 2 years by then.

To an old soldier of the truly secular Indian Army, having commanded men of all religions in war and peace, it appealed to me when I read Sri Aurobindo's remarks about religions: "The days of religions are over. Go beyond religion. Every religion has served a purpose ... But none have solved mankind's problems."

After having seen the senseless killings of millions of people and destruction in the wars, it was wonderful to be part of another type of quest. And, in spite of the fact that I was at the age of retirement, once I read the Mother's call to this new kind of adventure I felt as youthful as when I first started my army training—"I invite you to the great adventure, and in this adventure you are not to repeat spiritually what others have done before us, because our adventure begins from beyond that stage. We are for a new creation, entirely new, carrying in it all the unforeseen, all risks, all hazards,—a true adventure of which the goal is sure victory, but of which the way is unknown and has to be traced out step by step in the unexplored. It is something that has never been in the present universe and will never be in the same manner. If that interests you, well, embark. What will happen tomorrow, I do not know."

Once in Pondy/Auroville, we had to get down to work. We rented a flat in Pondy. Luckily I had arranged to get an 'army disposals' Jonga which proved indispensable for daily movements to and from Auroville on its non-existent roads. My wife, as a doctor (gynaecologist), was immediately involved in health work, not only in the Ashram Health Clinic but at the Auroville Health Centre near Kuilpalayam village next to Aspiration community. Sub centres for health needs of the local people in various villages around Auroville were set up. She had also set up a Multi-Purpose Health Centre where besides Allopathy, alternative systems of medicine such as Homoeopathy, Ayurveda, Acupuncture and the like were practised.

I decided to set up a farm on vacant and barren land available then in the Auromodel area. The first priority was to plant trees and grow crops. Water was a big problem. It had to be carried in drums in the Jonga from the nearby village tank. Each sapling had to be protected against marauding cattle in the farm which I named Amba Garden. With the blessings and encouragement from senior sadhaks in the Ashram, a well was bored later and a pump installed. This proved to be a marvellous well which has always given us such abundant water—it still remains the main source of water for the Auromodel community. Over the next few years we built a house also and moved into Auromodel.

It was hard but concentrated work at the farm, growing seasonal crops with my

hands which until then had been used only for pen-pushing. A fence was set up around the farm and hundreds of trees planted. But after some years, I was called up for other work in Auroville. With my background, I seemed more required for contacts and work with the Government and other agencies. I had to hand over the farm to a French couple who ‘translated’ the name of the farm to ‘Jardin de Mère’.

The Mother had said:

*Auroville will be a self-supporting township.*

I want to insist on the fact that it will be an experiment, it is for making experiments—experiments, research, study. Auroville will be a city that will try to be, or will tend to become, or attempt to be “self-supporting”....

Purchase of land, its development, setting up industries to generate funds, research into different activities, all required money which introduced both temptations and challenges. Human as we are with all our failings and egos and the varying perspectives that come from different cultures from various parts of the world combined with the distinctive Auroville spirit given it by the Mother of no rules and regulations and no outward artificially stipulated hierarchy, produced many problems, especially after the Mother had withdrawn from Her body in November 1973.

On 20 September 1969, She had said:

Earth needs

a place where men can live away from all national rivalries, social conventions, self-contradictory moralities and contending religions;

a place where human beings, freed from all slavery to the past, can devote themselves wholly to the discovery and practice of the Divine Consciousness that is seeking to manifest.

But this was harder to live than had been anticipated, and Auroville found itself embroiled in a struggle around the age-old issue of land and ownership. Many of the choices made were governed by the logic of the conditions and not necessarily in keeping with the utmost ideals of Auroville. The need for agreement, for harmony, for a rising of all concerned to higher levels above, that She had repeatedly called for, appeared not to be within the capacity and the collective consciousness of the human guinea pigs in Her living laboratory. Once again I had to live through the painful consequences of partition and division but this time amongst people, each of whom felt in his or her own way committed to this Dream. “The liberty we seek to realise in Auroville is not a license where each one does as he likes without caring for the welfare and the organisation of the whole”, She had said.

Fortunately through the initiative of some individuals, time was taken off from the day-to-day physical activities to study Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's writings and vision and attention given to education and research. Some books were written on important topics like *The Aim of Life* and *The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil* in which I contributed. Proper schools were set up for not only the Aurovilian children but for those from villages around. For me it was always a pleasure and welcome change to conduct classes for the youth on general knowledge and on my own personal experiences in life and the lessons learnt therefrom.

In the last thirty years lived in Auroville, I have been actively involved in various activities—some of deep significance in the process of growth. There was the time when certain problems arose in its functioning and the Government of India's intervention had to be sought. And when this Government action itself was challenged, the case had to be fought out in the Supreme Court of India before a five-judge Constitution Bench on a petition under my signature. The Government won its case and its intervention became *de jure*. Today, through an Act of the Parliament, there is a body called the Auroville Foundation which is meant to provide the safeguards. There is, located in Auroville, a senior IAS officer as Secretary under a Governing Board of eminent Indians and an International Advisory Council of other eminent international personalities.

But the ideal of an organisational structure that is more plastic and organic and not based upon external offices and positions—the old, artificial, worldly hierarchy—rather than something built upon the true worth of a person, a 'discipline in action' as foreseen by the Mother, remains still elusive in Auroville and has yet to be evolved. She had said:

Organisation is a discipline of action, but for Auroville, we aspire to go beyond arbitrary and artificial organisation.

We want an organisation which is the expression of a higher consciousness working to manifest the truth of the future.

During my service career, I had carried out deep studies on the problems faced in war and peace time and experimented with possible solutions. In fact, I have recorded these experiences in the book I have published under the title *A Soldier's Voyage of Self Discovery*. Numerous insights from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother helped me greatly to evolve a deeper perspective and record my experiences from these new and evolving points of view.

The Mother had obviously foreseen the problems arising out of human weaknesses. Her guidance can be discovered always in the extraordinary four-point Auroville Charter She had given, along with Her other messages and remarks on Auroville. In any case, the path of this yoga is not an easy one as can be seen from this remark of Sri Aurobindo from a short piece called 'The Way':

Imagine not the way is easy; the way is long, arduous, dangerous, difficult. At every step is an ambush, at every turn a pitfall. A thousand seen or unseen enemies will start up against thee, terrible in subtlety against thy ignorance, formidable in power against thy ignorance, formidable in power against thy weakness...

Auroville, in its 40 years of existence has had ample proof regarding the relevance of warnings by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We may be slow in absorbing the meanings behind Their words but we are certainly on the way. This I say with the faith and certitude in what Sri Aurobindo had said in February 1919:

Even in failure there is a preparation for success, our nights carry in them the secret of a greater dawn.

For the last 15-16 years, I have committed myself to the setting up of the Auroville Archives. It is essential that a full record is kept of all the experiments undertaken by us humans in this laboratory, the only one of its kind in the world. A temporary space was found below the Sri Aurobindo auditorium in Bharat Nivas and minor modifications done for protection against humidity, heat, dust and insects. All available records—written, photographs, videos and audio are being collected here, sorted out and stored in steel cupboards in separate acid free cardboard boxes. A project for a permanent specially designed building for the Archives is ready and now awaits financial resources. In the meantime all the records are being transferred also on to a data base for permanent preservation.

For a man of action like me, used to command and to being obeyed immediately and used to taking on responsibilities, I still have to keep reminding myself of what She has said:

The city will be built by what is invisible to you. The men who have to act as instruments will do so despite themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger forces. Nothing depends upon human beings, neither the planning nor the execution. Nothing. That is why one can laugh.

\* \* \*

## FOUR POEMS

*(By Chandresh)*

### **Trust the Dream**

Auroville is working,  
Trust the Dream—  
Slowly opening  
As a lily in sunbeam  
White and pure  
From mud insecure—  
Stress at  
every seam.  
Come, hold hands  
And lift this dream  
Of Truth Supreme.

### **Call To Auroville**

It was the moment  
When She touched my soul,  
Brought forward the tenet  
The consecration whole.

The true wisdom of unity  
The purpose of Hero Warriors,  
The manifestation of infinity  
The amalgam of carriers (of consciousness).

That occasional difference  
Surely raises its ugly head.  
The high and pure essence  
Remains elusive ahead.

The challenge drowns us  
Yet nudges on towards the goal.  
The undulation annuls  
With love bathing from Soul.

Weaving one into the other  
Emerges colourful fabric of the Mother.

### **The City of Auroville**

A bird I would be  
Or from flower to another flee  
Like a bee, sharing poems  
And laughter and glee.

Stuck would I be not  
To a watering hole!  
Why would I limit in a clique  
My adventure, exploring the whole?

I would jostle and tug  
Tussle and wrestle and hug.  
Timid would I be not  
Yet just as surely sweet.

Who would join freely, largely  
Her adventure called Auroville?

### **Should I be an Aurovilian?**

That is the question!

It is a privilege. A short answer.

And the long of it is:

A willing servitor of Divine Consciousness:

Serving the Truth of the One in many (others)

Serving the Will that is realising the harmony of the many (others) from the One.

Humility to accept the long arduous march ahead with fellow seekers seeking perfection.

Strength and courage to be at it at every and at all odds.

Joy and harmony to co-create, not at the expense of others. Win-win rather than win-lose.

Not a zero sum game.

Survival of the champions rather than the fittest.

Play ball not hard.

I know some very fine Aurovilians around the world. They are serving the Divine where they live and imbibing the Auroville spirit day in and day out.

But there is also the city to be built here and now.

The City of the new Dawn.

The City that inhabits the willing servitors of the Divine consciousness.

The City that is the abode of the new beings.

Simple, beautiful, rich, harmonious, quiet, joyful, peaceful

and yet with the sweet laughter of the children and playful mirth of the youth.

Not aping the rest, finding ever new.

Youth that never ages, plastic.

The city that radiates truth in living.

This will come in spite of us:

—so I have been told and I start the journey of a thousand lifetimes with this small faith.

But we are asked to be willing, be an instrument.

Collaborate, within and without, in all spheres of life.

A lifelong commitment, to learn, to grow, to be plastic.

Am I worthy? Now, that is a difficult question!

\* \* \*

## GROWING WITH RESEARCH IN AUROVILLE

*(A personal account by Chamanlal Gupta)*

### Introduction

“Tomorrow morning: SUNRISE”—with these words of the Mother spoken on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1972, the eve of the anniversary of Supramental Manifestation in Sri Aurobindo’s centenary year, the first professional research facility in Auroville later known as ‘AUROMET’ was launched. It was a B1 class meteorological station with autographic recording instruments and Sun Radiation and sunshine instruments—no power, no electronics at that time. Janet brought UNESCO Gift coupons worth \$ 3,000 to pay for it. It continued for five years continuously with Charlie, Allen and later Navoditte manning it and with data analysis being done by Chamanlal. Piero designed and constructed a hut for a princely sum of Rs. 2,500 for keeping records

etc. Later Tim Rees, Frederick and Chamanlal set up an 'Auroville Centre for Environmental Studies—ACES' to receive the first Government research grants in 1974 amounting to half a million rupees. Also, Mother gave the name 'Success' to the tree-planting programme started by Tim and Bob Lawlor at Forecomers. Then the blow struck unexpectedly. Someone, unknown till now, ransacked the station and threw all the instruments into the bushes. They were smashed beyond repair. However, the seeds were sown and Auroville now has thriving research programmes in many areas of work. In this fortieth year of Auroville, it may be sobering to recapitulate those humble beginnings of research and its resurgence in spite of tragedies en route.

### **First Major Research Projects**

The first project was two Eco houses at Certitude—one to serve as a laboratory and the other for living in later on—of which only one was built, where Dipti and Arjun stay now. It had rainfall harvesting, multi-feed biogas plant as waste recycling system, integrated solar water heating and cooking systems, venturies for natural ventilation and low-energy experimental roofs. A projected wind-electric machine was not put up on the stairwell because of possible breakdown during cyclones causing damage to the building. It provided hard data on system costs, insight into difficulties of working in building design teams and was the first such Eco house in the whole of Asia in 1976. Most systems were not proven at the time and have since gone into disuse, even though the house is still in use. Vikas from Auroville and Ranajit from the Ashram School had worked on this project and William Netter was one of the concept providers. Today Eco houses and Eco communities are standard bearers of sustainable living all over the world.

The second project was on a low-temperature solar pump for which a "SOFRETES" solar motor was gifted by Auroville International, Paris and the rest of the funds came from the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. Flat-plate collectors were made at Auroville workshops. Luc Venet and Andre Viozat were the original investigators. Afterwards Agami Reddy of the Ashram School and Santhanam did the measurements, which were subsequently published. The efficiencies were low and finally the project was discontinued for they were neither cheap nor simple nor efficient. Later, solar PV pumps came into operation all over the world for which AUORE Unit of Auroville Centre for Scientific Research has become the leader in India and has also won the International Ashden Award a couple of years back. An interesting episode took place in the gifting of a solar motor because AVI France ran short of funds and there was no money left to cover shipping expenses in foreign exchange. In spite of tight controls, the Reserve Bank of India cleared our request and granted the release of 3,500 French francs against project funds in rupees in one step. The local State Bank Manager kept shaking his head and went on saying, "Impossible, impossible..."



The third project was natural cultivation of algae called *Chlorella*, firstly at Forecomers and later at Mango grove just with sea water and cow urine as provider of nutrients and a vertical axis wood rotor providing the stirring. 24 grammes per sq.m were obtained as daily output—the world maximum in Japan's sophisticated laboratories being 28 grammes. Of all the six centres, as part of All India Coordinated Project on Algae, Auroville was the only one to provide 50 kg of dried algae to the Government of India. Total project costs were only Rs. 80,000. Bob Lawlor and Jim deVries worked on the project and Udar from the Ashram took great interest. *Spirulina* at Auroville came much later and is now widely used in India and abroad. *Spirulina* is more difficult to grow because of easier contamination, but is easier on the digestive system because of thinner cell walls.

### **A Stormy Interlude**

Apart from work at Matrimandir, several major activities of creative nature came to a standstill in Auroville during 1977-1985. A strange change came over the people: reasonableness was replaced by extremism, smiles were replaced by scowls and one really did not know what was happening and what caused this explicit polarisation. Many in the big family of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were affected. The clue came from an unexpected quarter. The Secretary for Science and Technology in New Delhi, Dr. A. Ramachandran told us: "When an ordinary mother from an ordinary family goes, there is upheaval. Yours is no ordinary family and Mother was no ordinary mother and so you are all facing this. You have been overtaken by history but hold tight and it will pass. As for me, I have no doubt about Auroville's potential and future in research and your own technical and financial integrity." Within a time frame of three or four years, this 'cleansing through fire' took place at Auroville after Mother's physical withdrawal. Dr. Ramachandran kept his support and advised us to fold up the projects decently and keep one open with a token sum of money so that channels remained open—this was a wise counsel. Internally, there was sound advice and support from Nolini-da, Champaklal-ji, Monsieur André and Shyam Sundar-ji. Also, when default funds were to be cleared (before Government research funds could be received again at Auroville), the Sri Aurobindo Society was cooperative and all the process was gone through with good grace to open the way again. Things got really cleared in 1988, when a descent took place on Auroville's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, which was perceived by many. Then it was, in the words of Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* "A might of storm chased by the might of the Sun". The situation was clear once again.

### **In-house Research Projects**

Apart from major funded research projects, in-house projects continued with small funds. Some examples were:

- While trying to correlate discharge rates with intensity of rainfall, the autographic level meter anchored by Tim in the canyon of Forecomers was swept off by the fury of flash floods and it was a great lesson. So the work began on soil and water conservation and afforestation initially at Pitchandikulam and Forecomers.
- Johnny had already started work on organic agriculture and this also took off with greater speed. Now there is an active programme of organic vegetables by Stefan.
- Work at Nursery of documenting plants and their growth by Narad was supplemented by seeds exchange and documentation of trees by Walter at Shakti and others.
- Research in mud housing by Poppo resulted in a widely acclaimed publication and now Auroville is a world leader in Compressed Earth Block through the work of Satprem Maini and others.
- Search for fire-proof roofing material began after a devastating fire at Toujours Mieux workshop and this led to Ferro-cement in which Udar was very interested. Auroville is the most successful promoter of this technology in India and has successfully made airtight biogas gas holders and the ribs for the first concrete Solar Bowl in the world. Gas holders are even shipped to Andaman & Nicobar Islands and insured by Mother's blessings packets. Tency is the moving spirit behind Ferro-cement technology.
- Auroville was invited to pick up the debris of well-designed wind mills of National Aeronautical Laboratory—NAL, which were in disuse because of lack of care (under Indian democratic procedures, they had to be sited on Perambroke land and no one took care of them). This led to a research programme in Wind pumps which has culminated in the most efficient and cost-effective wind pump in India. These are designed, manufactured and marketed by Robbie at AUREKA.

### **Later Research Projects and Birth of CSR**

In 1984, the Centre for Scientific Research (CSR) was started and major research funds started flowing in again. More importantly, students started coming in and in-house Auroville research teams started evolving.

As stated earlier, Ferro-cement biogas plants, Floating Drum and Fixed Dome were designed and fabricated here quite successfully along with building components like roofing channels, door shutters and portable lavatory blocks and recently,

decentralised waste water treatment modules (Dewatt systems). These have been extensively used in rural areas and for Tsunami relief work and earthquake resistant housing in Bhuj with Tency as its pivot.

With the development of stabilised mud bricks for walls and Ferro-cement elements for roofing, two very low-energy buildings came into being namely Visitors' Centre and Solar Kitchen, which has a solar bowl integrated within. These were conceived and designed by Suhasini and Gilles with support from technology teams. They are passive buildings and have been widely acclaimed.

And so the process goes on...!

## Conclusion

The writer has been associated with most of these projects at some level or the other. The following pointers for Research have emerged from this experience of growing with Research in Auroville:

- Research programmes growing organically in response to the needs of the community evolve their own paradigms, which are not structured mentally as in normal organised research but evolve a pattern of their own as seen by an overarching presence. This leads to creativity and good results if one is flexible and receptive in attitude but meticulous in detailing and actual execution in matter.
- Funds are never in abundance but are never the prime limiting constraint—they flow in somehow, if one observes the Laws of Mahalakshmi in handling them: scrupulous care in spending and accounting with minimal waste.
- If harmony in the research team can be achieved, the Grace pours in and achieves miracles i.e. outputs are far out of proportion to inputs and one is left wondering with a grateful heart, bowed head and misty eyes.

\* \* \*

## THE TRIP TO BANGALORE

*(Georges Van Vrekhem remembers his years as a teacher in Auroville. Freedom, innovation, discovery and self-discipline—these are as essential in the life of a growing child as they are for a growing city.)*

### 1.

In 1980 the idea matured to reactivate Last School, as the first generation of the children born in Auroville was growing up and in urgent need of education. I had

then been living in Auroville for two years, after having been in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1970 onwards. How I came to participate in the meeting to discuss the first school activities, I do not remember. But the result was that I was asked to teach some elementary English to Tamil boys and girls from Kuilapalayam who wanted to join the school. (Most of them are now active in responsible positions in the Auroville community and have their own families.) That was my first commitment to Last School, where I would teach for eight years till stopped by a heart attack.

Gradually I became more and more involved. I continued teaching English, but my main subjects were history and “general knowledge”, allowing me to talk about anything under the sun. I soon found out that the best way of teaching such matters was by showing video tapes of documentaries and appropriate feature films. When talking about Julius Caesar, for instance, the droning voice of the teacher can cause the eyelids of young ones to become very heavy; but if he shows them parts of a film like *Cleopatra* the class will be interested and acquire an idea of life in ancient Roman times. The important points are that the teacher should introduce the subject well, comment during the showing of the tapes if necessary (compact discs were still unknown then), and at the end answer the questions which have risen in the minds of the young ones.

At the time teaching by video was not an easy thing to do, for I could find such tapes only in the shops in Pondicherry. I visited them all regularly, copied their lists of available tapes, and had to spend many evenings watching my harvest on the Last School television set, often till midnight. For out of ten tapes only two, on an average, were in good condition, and out of five of these only one might be suitable to show in the school. Another frustrating problem, this one during class hours, was the quite frequent power cuts which left us time after time unexpectedly in the dark, uncertain that the power would come back and that the class could be continued.

Yet I may say that those teaching years of mine were very satisfactory. I had three excellent batches of those children and adolescents, originating from so many different backgrounds; now most of them have gone ways, even at foreign universities, which nobody expected of them or dared to foresee. For generally those youngsters were very free and considered to be “wild ones”. But I had the privilege of being with them in a position where “discipline” was a matter of personal relationship (in our school there was no “punishment”), and I never had any doubt about the presence of their living souls. Even if this sounds somewhat inflated, it is the truth.

## 2.

Strange to say, I had my best days with the Auroville youth not in our beautiful Last School, but in the garden city of Bangalore. It so happened that thanks to the contribution of an unknown donor my colleagues had the idea of hiring a bus and going on a school trip to Bangalore. We had a good bus with an excellent driver from the Pondicherry Tourist Corporation, equipped for a ten-day journey like this. And

early in the morning on departure day there they were, our students, expectant, well-groomed, in their very best jeans, and with some money from their parents in their pocket.

Even before the bus started somebody put the first cassette of “their music” on the audio system. I had experience as a guide on touring buses in Western Europe and knew that this was not the right thing to do. One has to address the “passengers” and make them aware that they are travelling as a group, and that this is only possible if they show consideration for the others in the group under all circumstances. So I took the microphone and assured everybody that we would have a great trip together on condition that they stuck to some simple agreements, in the first place that all would be punctually present at every appointment fixed by the leaders of the group—my four colleagues and myself—even with a broken leg!

During those ten days there was not a single problem. We visited all there was to see in Bangalore, spent a day in Mysore, rode out to the giant Jain statue in Shravanabelagola, saw the wonderful temples at Belur and Halebid, ate once or twice in a restaurant, went to see a movie together, and sometimes let our “tourists” freely roam on Brigade Road. Each time about ten minutes before the departure of the bus I saw them in the busy crowd of the city, drifting nearer to the bus in their twos or threes, checking their watches ready to embark. We never had to wait for any one of them. Nor was there a fuss in the restaurants when we pointed out the simple dishes to choose from because they were what our budget could afford.

I can still see those smiling young boys and girls enjoying their trip, attentive, interested in what they met and discovered, helping each other when necessary, and courteous to one and all. I still see the youngest girl come running towards our bus with a gigantic red balloon, and one of the older boys who, with his pocket money, had bought an English dictionary... This was the way of educating our youth which I had dreamed of: in life and fully involved in it. At the time there was an American ship sailing around the world like a floating university, visiting country after country in continent after continent. It was what I would have liked to do with those children. At least I have had a glimpse of it.

Those “wild ones” have now children themselves. It should be remembered that they were born in Auroville, which did not mean automatically that they would want to spend their lives here, or that they would retain any tie with Auroville’s ideals, with what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother stand for. Yet all the ones whom I have been able to follow have this intimate connection, also when living in faraway countries.

## THROUGH YOUNG EYES

*(Vasanthi, age 15, a student of “Future School”, looks at Auroville.)*

Auroville is a sweet drop of water amidst the earth’s salty sea invasion. Of course, sweetness always comes along with a tinge of sourness—in this case it would be the long hours of discussion for a simple decision, the limited amount of “wants” available, the way everyone seems to know everything about each other’s private lives, etc.; basically, a typical village-like ambiance.

But, in the broad picture, Auroville seems to me to be a place of freedom, of joy, of light and, most of all, it treasures the power of achieving things together; as a whole, a united, family. The small children cycling on the red-earth roads, the teenagers playing sports in “Certitude”, the adults all meeting up in the queue of the Solar Kitchen, and the elders settled under the grand banyan tree’s shade.

Yet, we are all connected, somehow...maybe it is our beliefs, maybe it is our similarities or, perhaps, it is the simple need and want of being all together to share a smile and exchange ideas. This yearning for united happiness is what gives Auroville such sweetness; it is what overcomes the salted, so common and usual, sea surrounding our own little bitterly sweet world.

*(This is a ‘collage’ from journal writings by a class of “Future School” students, age 15.)*

Auroville has been to me, so far, a place for personal development or even just awareness.

Auroville, because of many reasons, can be a very intense, beautiful and ‘living’ place. I have met many great people and experienced wonderful things, along with things I never thought I would experience.

It is a great place to live and grow up in.

Everyone is always so encouraging in [pursuing] your dreams and, as in a family, everyone helps you out.

There isn’t too much influence of the outer ‘superficial’ world and people are more ‘true’.

\* \* \*

## THE GRACE BECOMES OUR CERTITUDE

*(Divakar muses on the Auroville adventure.)*

Does Auroville today, after 40 years of existence, carry a message of hope for humanity at large?

Are its progresses and achievements relevant and indicative of an actual evolutionary path in the unprecedented, multiple and radical crisis both mankind and the earth-being are facing?

The goals the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have set before us are not merely ideals to be served: they require total commitment and self-giving.

This process of self-giving—the central action to which all our acts and movements must gradually learn to unite—goes through stages; as our receptivity develops, our comprehension of the task and of the stakes undergoes changes.

A large part of this process is letting go of the baggage.

There are times of negative realisation: the fact of unity is not exactly romantic, as we discover that the traps and snares and nests of obscure resistance and treacherous malice and perversity are as much at home in “oneself” as in the next person, and separatedness is merely a device—albeit a necessary one for the evolutionary phase presently ending.

And when we must perforce endure the battling in the very substance of what we are, hope alone, however fine and welcome it may have been, is no longer sufficient or adequate to help us bear the intensity of the contradictions: that is perhaps when we become most aware of the Grace.

And the Grace becomes our certitude.

This awareness of the Grace is only possible because our psychic being has been awakened by Her; our true being is born in Her and by Her touch.

This is the sign of the new Age the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have ushered in: souls have matured through their long journeyings, psychic beings are ready to come in front to replace the ego-formations.

And only the psychic being can find the way of a true progressive unity: it IS the way.

For there is a collective psychic being as well.

But, just as the individual soul is consciously free of any fixed identity, be it racial, cultural or social, so is the collective psychic being; any particular physical collectivity must learn to resonate with it, to unite with it.

This experience is alive both in the Ashram and in Auroville.

The Ashram is a congregation of souls, a psychic family, indestructible in the lap of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, with a focus on individual sadhana, within an organisational structure provided and elaborated by Her, based on self-discipline, acceptance and trust.

With Auroville, the Mother widened the circle, the action and the search.

Perhaps the purity of purpose has seemed lost.

But the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have placed so high the bar of excellence, and the aims of Auroville are so vast and inclusive, that as long as we steadfastly contribute our perseverance, we are bound, somehow and despite our muddling, fumbling and stumbling, to be instrumental to some real accomplishment.

For in Auroville is emerging a new way of collective life, of living together upon earth: a multi-racial society, fairly peaceful, with a high sense of physical beauty, cleanliness, honesty and trust, where everyone is first concerned with their own progress but contributes faithfully to the whole, where nothing can be claimed as one's property but everyone is respectful of the needs and capacities of the others, within a thriving natural environment, endeavouring to be innovative in all fields of activity and eager to communicate and to share...

This is no more a dream, and one can no longer conceive of any other acceptable way to live, for a long time to come.

And this is the supportive milieu needed for the further stages of the transition to the new species.

Indeed, there are also shortcomings and betrayals and distortions and abuses.

And perhaps the worst enemy of Auroville is what the French tongue can sum up in two words: "*la bêtise*"—a small, narrow-minded, judgmental, self-righteous, parochial, impervious, self-serving formation of humanness.

Nonetheless, can it be said that Auroville as an experiment has already yielded results and discovered processes which can then be replicated in adapted forms elsewhere?

To some extent, it may already be happening.

But Auroville is a child of Mother India: without the foundation that She gives it, of Her age-long realisation—the Divine IS the truth and reality of every phenomenon —, could Auroville exist? Could the Spirit of Auroville actually have taken birth and begun to develop?

It is unlikely.



Auroville is necessarily part of the action Mother India must have over the entire world, to show the spiritual way to a true physical world.

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## THE ASHRAM, AUROVILLE AND AUROVILLE INTERNATIONAL

*(Ananda Reddy explores the ‘Complementary Expressions of a Single Truth’ in this extract from the keynote address delivered at the Auroville International Conference, 2002, held in California.)*

### **The Ashram and Auroville ... A Continuance**

It is indeed a very happy privilege to have been invited by this very dynamic body of the builders of the future, builders of the City of Tomorrow—Auroville.

On this occasion of the AVI 2002 Conference being held here in the USA, I wanted to delve deeper into the roots of Auroville. Hence, I decided to refresh my knowledge of what the Mother had said about Auroville and its development. At the outset, I discovered to my great joy a couple of messages by the Mother which opened up a deeper understanding of my joining Auroville. When I had graduated from the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in 1969, I had asked the Mother as to what work I could do for Her. If I remember exactly, She had asked me to choose if I wanted to work at Auroville or at the Ashram. After some days of cogitation, I went and told Her: “Mother, I would like to work at Auroville.” After a brief moment of concentration, She replied: “Bien.” Later, I was instructed by Her to join the Aspiration School.

Thus, I was the first student from the Ashram to have crossed over to Auroville. It was my next step in life—from a student life at the Ashram I wanted to graduate myself to a wider, international experience of what I had learnt at the Ashram. From a specific experience of spirituality within the well-defined boundaries of the Ashram, I had stepped into a collective experience of spirituality by walking over to my hut at Aspiration, Auroville, on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1971, carrying with me the new year calendar given by Her with the message: “Blessed are those who take a leap towards the Future.” (CWM 15, 189)

And the deeper significance of the decision of the Mother to send me to the “next step” of “a collective effort” was revealed to me when I read what the Mother had written in 1969 for a UNESCO Committee:

The task of giving a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's vision was entrusted to the Mother. The creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. By the very nature of things, it is a collective ideal that calls for a collective effort so that it may be realised in the terms of an integral human perfection.

The Ashram founded and built by the Mother was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind.

(CWM 13, 210)

This message of the Mother, amongst many others on Auroville and the Ashram, gives us the right perspective of Auroville. In our eagerness to build the city we are so very focused on activities and planning that we seem to forget that Auroville is a universal township needed by the earth and being executed by the Mother according to Sri Aurobindo's vision and dreams. Let us not forget even for a moment that "Auroville wants to be the first realisation of human unity based on the teaching of Sri Aurobindo..." (CWM 13, 221) and that "Auroville is meant to hasten the advent of the supramental Reality upon earth." (*Ibid.*) It is Their dream and Ideal that is to be manifested and not *our* idea of Auroville—that is mostly based upon "an old world ready for death"—that should be pushed through.

Auroville is essentially the seed-plot for the realisation of the third dream of Sri Aurobindo, i.e. "a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind", (*SABCL* 26, 405) and as described in detail in the Mother's own Dream of "a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth..." (CWM 12, 93)

In our mental attempts to be open, flexible and even comprehensive and international in spirit, we may tend to forget this innate truth of Auroville—that it "offers itself to all who aspire to live the Truth of tomorrow", (CWM 13, 208) as envisaged *only* by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In our seeking to manifest the city of Tomorrow, we have to be, however, very careful about not repeating the past in Auroville. Although Auroville is supposed to be a bridge between the past and the future, we have to be sure of the elements of the past which could be useful in the building of the future. Just because we admire or appreciate some of the institutions of the present or the past out of our "slavery to the past" (*Ibid.*) we should not include them in this City of Tomorrow. We have to keep in mind the futuristic aspect of the city and the consciousness and the Truth that it wants to manifest and judge all the life-activities and expressions that are to be integrated into it in their usefulness to the future spiritual society and the 'new humanity' that the Mother wants to herald at Auroville.

Once we are clear about this inner dimension of Auroville, it then becomes easier to grasp its outer expression. This perspective too is clearly delineated in the message from the Mother quoted earlier:

The Ashram founded and built by the Mother was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt... (*Ibid.*, 210)

On another occasion, the Mother wrote to a disciple:

The Ashram is the central consciousness, Auroville is one of the outward expressions. (*Ibid.*, 211)

And again, to a clear-cut question, “What is the difference between the Ashram and Auroville?” the Mother replied in categorical terms:

The Ashram will retain its true role of pioneer, inspirer and guide.  
Auroville is the attempt towards collective realisation. (*Ibid.*, 202)

What we understand from these messages is that the emphasis has always been on Auroville being a ‘more exterior’ expression, ‘an outward expression’, a ‘collective realisation’ of a Truth that has been worked out successfully on the individual level in the community framework of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The Ashram, since its inception in 1926, has been a laboratory for the Consciousness and Force that Sri Aurobindo has been wanting to bring down upon earth—the supramental Truth-Consciousness. Herein, many individual sadhaks, under the direct supervision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother ‘recreated themselves in the image of the Spirit’. That is to say, these individuals not only recognised integrally that the spiritual evolution is the great need and destiny of man but they also lived the spiritual knowledge inwardly and integrally preparing the next stage of realisation—that of the collective realisation formulated as ‘Auroville’. This is clear from what the Mother clarified to a disciple:

There is no fundamental difference in the attitude towards the future and the service of the Divine.

But the people in the Ashram are considered to have consecrated their lives to Yoga....

Whereas in Auroville simply the good will to make a collective experiment for the progress of humanity is sufficient to gain admittance. (*Ibid.*, 210 )

Perhaps this is what the Mother had meant when She had said that the “project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior...”. It was a ‘next step’ not only chronologically

but it was so in the process of the realisation of the Mother's own work for the earth. It was but an organic growth of Sri Aurobindo's yoga which proceeds from the individual to the collective, and from the collective to the universal level of manifestation.

Before the collective body of Auroville could be built, the important thing is to manifest the soul of Auroville. When a disciple had asked Her: "When the project of Auroville is so grand and stupendous and our means so limited, what should we do for its realisation?" the Mother had replied: "You build the Matrimandir, the rest I will do." (*The Golden Bridge*, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, 1972, 205)

The soul of Matrimandir has descended; it is in its place, in its 'psychic-body' glowing with the pink light on the inner walls reminding us of the "chamber of flame and light". (*SABCL* 29, 527) "The golden tower" is completed, (the Mother had initially talked of the outer form of the Matrimandir as "a kind of tower with twelve regular facets..." (*CWM* 13, 291), 'the flame-child' is born, and the influence and the power of this luminous and pulsating centre is becoming more and more real and the realisation of the collective-soul of Auroville—which "does not proceed in the usual human way"—"is more visible to the inner consciousness than to the outer eye." (*CWM* 13, 196)

Unless and until all these three movements—the Ashram, Auroville and Auroville International Centres, (which in a way represent the world at large)—that is to say, the Individual, the Collective and the Universal levels coalesce and are open to a more transparent and dynamic symbiosis, none of these units by themselves can fulfil their role and purpose. They are as if the three strides of Vishnu in his march towards the divinisation of earth life. ...

*(After discussing several aspects of organisation, collective life, internationalism as well as the inherent dangers in such endeavours, Ananda Reddy concluded the address with these words.)*

Sri Aurobindo is hopeful that a cataclysmic danger could be avoided if only humanity consented to be spiritualised. He writes:

It is not impossible that the indispensable inner factor for this outer frame might be increasingly created, in its very process of growth, but certain psychological elements would have to be present in great strength. There would be needed, to make the change persist,

a religion of humanity or an equivalent sentiment much more powerful, explicit, self-conscious, universal in its appeal than the nationalist's religion of country;

the clear recognition by man in all his thought and life of a single soul in humanity of which each man and each people is an incarnation and soul-form; an ascension of man beyond the principle of ego which lives by separateness,—

and yet there must be no destruction of individuality, for without that man would stagnate;

a principle and arrangement of the common life which would give free play to the individual variation, interchange in diversity and the need of adventure and conquest by which the soul of man lives and grows great, and sufficient means of expressing all the resultant complex life and growth in a flexible and progressive form of human society.

(SABCL 15, 539-40—*Division of the paragraph is the author's.*)

To fulfil, to realise these four psychological elements in the 'progressive form of human society' is the *raison d'être* of Auroville. The first element, that of 'a religion of humanity much more powerful than the nationalist's religion of country', could be the ideal of human unity which, *per se*, must be based on supramental consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo indicates that the human mind's best achievement has been the creation of nations. They are its best creations but mind-born, they are still divided and self-centred. Under the influence of the New Consciousness, the supramental consciousness, human mind has in the recent past decades ventured into the realisation of continental groups, which, however, are under the grip of mental and vital ego.

It is only with the increase of the supramental consciousness on earth, its increasing influence on human life, that the sense of universality and unity can grow. That is because the very essence of the supramental consciousness is universality. Supermind requires the entire humanity as its footstool, unlike all other forces till now, like the religious forces which were satisfied with nations or creeds or sects—big or small—as their footstools. Hence the immense importance of a body like Auroville which wants to be the very physical foundation of the supramental consciousness upon earth.

The third element that Sri Aurobindo speaks of: "an ascension of man beyond the principle of ego which lives by separateness...." is indeed the very cornerstone of the beginning of this realisation of inner unity. Ego was the helper till man evolved into the mental consciousness, but when man has to evolve beyond mind, ego proves to be a bar. Sri Aurobindo has not only given the idea and the ideal of the spiritual religion of man, He has also given the means to achieve this transition—from man to superman. That means and the method is, what He calls, Integral Yoga. It is a long and arduous yoga, for it aims at a total transformation of the human being—including the body.

There is, however, a shortcut to it. It is to invoke Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the harbingers, the concrete embodiments of this New Consciousness. We do not have to go too far in our attempts or too long in our *tapasyā*. Fortunate is humanity at present as it has got these two physical embodiments of the New Consciousness and it should be comparatively easier for us to turn to Them. To say that our consciousness should turn towards Supermind could be very ambiguous, quite difficult and we may

not know what it means. But all these difficulties decrease when we turn to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They have given us guidelines on the level of Yoga, on the level of nation-souls, on the level of continental groupings, on the level of human unity and we begin to read the blueprint of human evolution. It is by guiding itself by Their Consciousness and Force that Auroville could work out a principle and arrangement of common life “by which the soul of man lives and grows great.”

In fact, this is the inner secret of building Auroville: to let Sri Aurobindo and the Mother be the builders of Auroville and we be only the labourers of love and the servitors of the Supramental Truth whose wages would be:

Harmony and beauty of the mind and soul, harmony and beauty of the thoughts and feelings, harmony and beauty in every outward act and movement, harmony and beauty of the life and surroundings...

(*SABCL* 25, 31)

As our surrender to Them increases integrally, we begin to see that all is Her doing: the Ashram, Auroville and the Auroville International Centres, expressed through the International Zone, are the three poises of Her working and that each poise gets fulfilled only when all are fused in one's consciousness. There is an absolute oneness of purpose and plan in these three poises because behind these individual, collective and universal poises is the unifying transcendental consciousness of the Divine Mother:

Behind them in a morning dusk One stood  
Who brought them forth from the Unknowable.  
Ever disguised she awaits the seeking spirit;  
Watcher on the supreme unreachable peaks,  
Guide of the traveller of the unseen paths,  
She guards the austere approach to the Alone.  
At the beginning of each far-spread plane  
Pervading with her power the cosmic suns  
She reigns, inspirer of its multiple works  
And thinker of the symbol of its scene.  
Above them all she stands supporting all,  
The sole omnipotent Goddess ever-veiled  
Of whom the world is the inscrutable mask;  
The ages are the footfalls of her tread,  
Their happenings the figure of her thoughts,  
And all creation is her endless act.

(*SABCL* 28, 295)

## AUROVILLE, INTEGRAL YOGA AND THE FUTURE OF MANKIND

*(Sraddhalu Ranade looks at the meaning of Auroville in its larger context. An extract from a talk at Savitri Bhavan in 2006.)*

The future of mankind can be understood only in terms of the development over the past billions of years....

There is an evolution even in dead matter. And out of that somehow, life has emerged. And then life has evolved into varieties of forms and complexities. And out of that somehow, the human mind emerged. We don't know exactly how these transitions have taken place, but that they have taken place is clear.

And we notice in this entire evolutionary movement something quite peculiar—that evolution has a... direction.

We cannot explain it purely in terms of Darwinian evolution.

As we study the process of evolution, we are compelled to recognise that there seems to be some intention, however veiled: something wants to become—the urge to become is directed. And this direction has brought us to what we are as human beings today. Where will we go from here, the future of humanity, is dependent on what this deep impulse seeks.

There is in the early stages of human existence, a fragmented individuality. But after a while, the conscious group forms. And gradually larger units form: aggregates of families, aggregates of tribes, of communities, nationalities, cultures. There is a progressive evolution towards a larger and larger collective unity.

The collectivity needs the individual for its growth; the individual needs the collectivity for his growth.

The collective life begins to regulate the lives of the individuals in order to sustain itself. Without that regulation, there can be no sustained collective life. But the moment the regulation has started, the individual begins to suffocate.

How do we resolve this dual need rooted deep within all of us?

In Auroville, this challenge has been brought together: individual needs; collective life. There is a practical working human unity on the basis of this third principle: a deeper mutuality, commonness. If it works here, it can work everywhere. And this experiment of Auroville could not have been done by bringing a few people and saying, “Hey, you guys are most likely able to do it. Let us solve the problem.” Because tomorrow, when the same solution is attempted to be applied in a different circumstance, it would fail there. And therefore, it was necessary for Auroville's objectives and its success, as a precursor for world unity and its solution, to bring in every possible culture, every representative of human type, to have every nationality included and to bring them together on this new foundation. Because without this new foundation, Auroville also will fail.



The Mother said:

*Conditions for Living in Auroville*

*From the psychological point of view, the required conditions are:*

- (1) To be convinced of the essential unity of mankind and to have the will to collaborate for the material realisation of that unity;*
  - (2) To have the will to collaborate in all that furthers future realisations.*
- The material conditions will be worked out as the realisation proceeds.*

Given the psychological condition, one must be convinced that there is already an essential unity of mankind. Collective life can be brought together and human unity established in its truest, progressive sense.

Now you'll find that the Mother is very careful in her formulations. When she described Auroville, she said:

*Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics, all nationalities.*

Straightaway transcendent of apparent forms of division, you want to live in peace and harmony; but it is also possible to live in peace and harmony that is imposed, crushing individual freedom. So that's why she says, "peace and progressive harmony." It is not a static harmony we seek, but one where everything grows, in the individual and in the collectivity. It is very carefully chosen. Just that one word, 'progressive', changes the whole objective and theme of fulfilment.

*Auroville: At last a place where one will be able to think only of the future.*

So the entire turn is towards where we are going. What is meant to happen ten thousand years from now? Can we actualise it now in our lifetimes? So our goal is not to look back at the past, except to the extent that it is relevant to the present, learn from the lessons, draw from the best achievements, but we want to go there, and actualise it here, not wait for it to happen after ten thousand years.

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Each is unique. It's as if in evolution there is an urge to express the full diversity of possibilities. And so within us, there is equally an urge to uniqueness, starting from the uniqueness of my truest deepest identity in the psychic. And this is why we find it is so difficult to compel unity by external means. The moment you impose a structure or a system of thought, of emotion, or material organisation, something deep



inside rebels because it doesn't want to be bound by a system. Because this is the deepest spiritual truth: to be unique. Therefore, no external partial compromise or organisation will satisfy.

Now you can see that again we have come back to the original question of individual growth. But you see it from a different light. You cannot impose anywhere on the individual growth any partial compromise. Eventually this will rebel, however long it takes. But what is interesting is that this unique core within us is essentially the common core within all of us. It is the same Divine which exists in each form, though uniquely. The self of each is the same one because it is the one Origin from which all of us flow.

And here then, comes the secret of harmonising both the collective and the individual life. There is only one point of awareness: deep within us our source, which is both one with all things and unique from all things. And therefore, if a collective organisation is based on that, then it can accept spontaneously the freedom of each individual and yet hold it together in a larger oneness because we are one.

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In a human unity, the future of humanity itself rests upon humanity being able to establish itself on this deeper base. Auroville, therefore, must be founded on this. Otherwise, it won't work.

So, in the Charter of Auroville, Mother starts with:

*Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.*

And straightaway you see this idea reflected: "It is not mine, and yet it is mine in the wholeness of me." Therefore, the very sense of belonging of Auroville is not to the fragmentation of ego, but to the unity of our deepest truth. And then it belongs to us. It belongs to me in all our forms; in all our bodies.

*But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.*

Here is a very interesting result: the Divine Consciousness within you is you truly, in your deepest sense; and you, now as the surface ego-sense, must consciously serve It. Otherwise, there is no sense of unity. The unity won't last. So there is automatically this movement of serving the Divine, either as the truth within me, or as the Truth above or around that unites us in that deeper Oneness to serve the deepest Oneness. Automatically, it implies the abolishing, or dissolution, of the ego, however gradually. Also it means: in service to the Divine, I give myself: I give all that I am.

The second step of the Charter is:

*Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.*

And here comes automatically this forward movement of growth and change based on that consecration, that service to the deepest truth and to the Divine Consciousness. And here you have already the unity of individual and collective life: constant progress unendingly in absolute freedom. So far, so good, at the level of understanding and thought.

Now comes the problem, when you translate into action. So, let us all unite in our psychic, in our self. “Hang on. It’ll take me another three, four years at least for me to find my psychic. What is this psychic or soul? I can’t find it. What do I do? Will I remain in conflict while I still search for my psychic?” So there have to be steps. Not only that, after all, the psychic searching and self-finding, who will look after the food? We still come back to the original problems.

Though we have a starting-point, how do we implement it? Here, Sri Aurobindo gives us a solution. He says that, increasingly, as one turns towards this deeper truth—and it can be progressive—, as we turn towards it, we recognise or automatically align ourselves with each other on a different foundation.

Any form in life can, therefore, be taken up in this way in a free, natural grouping of self-expression. Any of the things we have criticised of mutual interests can become a base for that deeper thing to express itself through. And therefore, nothing in life need be rejected. All aspects of life are taken up into that.

So, the third element of the Charter comes:

*Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future.  
Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.*

Take up everything life has offered us as an experience, and vivify it with the breath of the spirit of this deeper unity that already exists within us. And then it has a new meaning. Sometimes as we proceed, a form becomes hardened. It begins to become rigid. It begins to suffocate. And eventually it cracks from this pressure, the pressure to be free. It cracked because it had hardened; it had lost a vivifying spirit. And we don’t mind breaking it because we were never bound to the form. We create new forms, or we allow new forms to emerge, as long as they are supported by that spirit from within.

And so another characteristic of Auroville is discovered: that nothing is fixed, nothing is static. There is no arrangement where we can say, “Now we have done it.” Nothing is ever done; nothing is ever finished. Everything is continuously progressing,

continuously changing, meeting at each step the reflection of the collective consciousness, the state of the collective evolution.

And yet, even as all these forms may change, one thing is constant: the base on which we are here; the goal to which we are growing; the foundation on which this whole experiment is based. That is constant. It changes only in the form of its expression. Rather, it takes up forms, uses them to manifest itself more and more progressively.

In a sense, one can say the success of Auroville will be measured by the extent to which this deeper unity already present within can actualise itself in the forms of life of Auroville. That is how we will measure the success. That is how we will measure the growth. Has that taken place in the last thirty years, twenty years, ten years, five years, two years? And you can judge for yourself. Has it taken place within your individual life; in your immediate collective life? And you can judge for yourself. To the extent that it has taken place, the ideal that Auroville represents is more and more actualised.

This brings us to the core of this effort itself. How can we actively, consciously actualise it? And it is this process of actualising this deeper truth, which has traditionally been called yoga. The systems of yoga represent various specialised means by which this deeper truth has been actualised.

Let us look at the whole problem from several angles. Actualise your deepest truth, your deepest aspiration. What you have been seeking since the baby was born and which is now conscious in yourself as a thought, as an ideal, an actualisation of one's self. That's one way of looking at it.

Or look at it another way. Where are you going? What you are seeking as goal, as an end result, the direction you are growing towards—actualise that; actualise the future into the present. Which is still the same thing because the goal is precisely that which is deep within you, not yet fully manifested, seeking manifestation. But there are two ways of looking at it, and depending on whether your consciousness is more extroverted or introverted, you prefer looking at it that way or this way. It doesn't matter. But we will take it that the two are identical.

So how do we actualise that which is within us? How do we manifest the goal that we seek? How do we unite ourselves with our truth, with the Divine?

The word "yoga" itself means "to unite". Unite the individual with the Divine Consciousness. Unite the outer with the inner; the lower with the higher. And they all mean the same thing, effectively. Each is a different starting-point of experience or effort. The end-result eventually represents the same thing. Unless we can actively, consciously, support this process, the actualisation of the Auroville ideal will be necessarily slow and painful. It is certain that what Auroville represents is already achieved in a certain sense on a spiritual level, and so the goal is certain. But how fast will it be? How easily will it be? That depends on our conscious participation.

Someone asked Mother after the Supramental had descended, had manifested:

“Mother, you promised that everything would be done now. Where is the change? The feeling is still the same. The weather is still the same. I am still the same.” So Mother said: “Wait another thousand years and then you’ll see.”

“Where is the new species?”

“Wait another thousand years.”

In evolutionary terms, a thousand years is extremely short. It takes millions of years for some new limb to evolve. Here is something dramatic: a new species appearing in a thousand years! It is very short. And it will happen. The point is that we have a choice of participating in the process. It will take a thousand years if we do nothing, and it will be a painful thousand years. Because evolution, life itself, will hammer away at all the resistance within us.

But the moment we open and consciously dissolve those barriers, even consciously remove the ossified forms and bring forward new forms, or vivify the ossified forms with a deeper truth, it will be a rapid change because you’re malleable, you’re plastic to the evolutionary need. It is a thousand years painfully, or something much less. We can speak in terms of time: it can be one year; twenty years; one hundred years. It doesn’t matter. Whatever it is, we realise rapidly, joyously. That is the only difference: the choice of conscious participation, joyously.

That opportunity the Mother has created in forming Auroville: short circuiting the many thousand of years of human painful evolution here with the few aligned to the ideal. That is why we are here.

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## “DON’T LOSE THE PIONEERING SPIRIT”

*(The late Mr. J.R.D. Tata was something of a legend in India. Eminent industrialist and pioneer aviator, he was a friend of Auroville and, for some time, member of the International Advisory Council. In February 1993, he made his final visit to the community and gave this impromptu talk.)*

I first heard about Auroville in 1969 when I attended an exhibition of Auroville handicrafts in Bombay. There I met some Aurovilians and heard about this concept of a city that belonged to nobody. It sounded a bit strange, impractical, but sentimentally I was very attracted by the idea.

In 1971, I visited for the first time. It was all rather barren. I wanted to see trees here, and I wanted to help the rural population of the area. So when Auromitra (a funding channel for Auroville projects) was set up, I gave some support. But you took very little from me—obviously you people don’t need money! When I came back years later, I was amazed to find that Auroville had become a forest. But even as

I drove in yesterday, I felt that there's still room for another million trees...

Another reason I became interested in Auroville in the 1970s was that a battle was going on here, and I was afraid that both the spirit and substance of Auroville would be destroyed. I wanted to prevent this. Now I understand that the matter is settled. But I see that Auroville is still not free. I approve of the Foundation. But if I'm asked my opinion—I won't be, of course—I'll say that I would like the Aurovilians to keep their freedom. I don't mean a legal freedom, but a soul freedom. There is always a chance with governments and politicians that your freedom of thought and right to pioneer will be interfered with. You should resist this, you should fight against institutionalisation.

Above all, the Aurovilians should not lose the pioneering spirit and your sense of adventure which comes from the strength and creativity of the Mother. I have always believed in living a little dangerously and taking risks. Don't be afraid of danger but keep the power to dream.

Auroville is not just an idea. It is the future, the future of the world. It is the only model that I know of that has survived, and I believe in it more today than ever before. I've come here to breathe the Auroville spirit. I'm not an Aurovilian, but I have the Auroville spirit!

*(The Auroville Experience, p. 269)*

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