

Sri Aurobindo's statue unveiled at UNESCO

On 16 September 2009, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO joined Mr. Rameshwar Pal Agrawal, the Secretary for Education of the Government of India, and Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, to unveil a bronze statue of Sri Aurobindo at UNESCO's headquarters premises in Paris. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, India's representative to UNESCO's Executive Board and Ms. Bhaswati Mukherjee, India's Ambassador to UNESCO, also participated in the ceremony.

Observing that the crises that the world is facing not only economic and financial, but moral, ethical, and spiritual, Mr Matsuura said "The teachings of Sri Aurobindo, who will forever be associated with the founding of Auroville, the unique international township founded as a place where people from different cultural, educational and political backgrounds could work together towards their common goal of human unity and sustainable living, resonate particularly strongly as we search for long-term solutions. Last year, we celebrated Auroville's 40th anniversary with a Round Table and cultural performance in this very room. Dr Vatsyayan and other Members of the Executive Board have observed in recent days that the crises we are traversing at present are not only economic and financial, but moral, ethical, and spiritual. The teachings of Sri Aurobindo, and the model provided by Auroville, resonate particularly strongly as we search for long-term solutions to these crises."

Following the unveiling ceremony, Mr Matsuura inaugurated a cultural performance. A small quartet of Aurovilians and Ashramites joined in chanting a music suite, composed for the occasion by Shoba Mitra of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, followed by a 45-minute Bharata Natyam dance recital by a group from Chennai.

The statue is situated in the yard of

the UNESCO Annexe at some 800 metres from the main building, facing Rue François Bonvin. Members of the public won't be able to see the statue at close quarters as the entry is strictly reserved to UNESCO's employees and special guests.

How it came to be

"Nobody knows how this came to be," says Lalit Verma, the maker of the statue of Sri Aurobindo. "We have always been told that as a matter of policy, UNESCO doesn't allow statues of people of national importance to be put up in its premises; for if they give permission to one country, they'll have to do the same for others. But Sri Aurobindo somehow passed. Is it because Sri Aurobindo exceeds national boundaries?"

For Lalit, the idea of having Sri Aurobindo's statue at UNESCO came to him when he did the first cast of the statue for the Parliament House in New Delhi (see *Auroville Today* #212, October 2006) "At that time I wondered if we shouldn't also cast a statue for some place outside India. Then the idea of UNESCO came to me, for UNESCO's ideals on human unity come close to Sri Aurobindo's. But everybody told us it was impossible. Yet we decided to make the cast. For over 2 years, that particular statue was kept in storerooms of the India International Centre for the Arts in New Delhi.

This statue of Sri Aurobindo is one of six. "The first statue was installed in the House of Parliament of India; the second in the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan in Calcutta; the third in a diamond factory of a devotee in Surat; and the fourth in Savitri Bhavan in Auroville. The sixth is still in my garden in Pondicherry," says Lalit.

All of a sudden, in April this year, the news arrived that the Director General of UNESCO had shown willingness to have Sri Aurobindo's statue at UNESCO. "I was dumbstruck," says



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At the inauguration of the statue: From left to right: His Excellency Mr Yai Ambassador and permanent representative of Benin and Chairman of the UNESCO Executive Board, Lalit Verma, President Aurodhon Pondicherry, Mr. M'Bow, former Director-General, UNESCO, Mr Koichuro Matsuura, Director-General UNESCO and Dr Karan Singh, President ICCR & Chairman Auroville Foundation.

Lalit. "I contacted Ms. Bhaswati Mukherjee, who obviously was the person behind this development. I thanked her and observed that it was a great honour for my guru to be there. Pat came the reply that it was a great honour for UNESCO to have Sri Aurobindo's presence!" The statue was installed on August 16th, and the inauguration scheduled for one month later. "Quite remarkable, actually," says Lalit. "August 16th marks the independence day of Pondicherry – independence from the French!"

"Evidently, many people at some

point in time helped to get this realised. There is a beautiful Bengali song that says, 'The Lord does all himself, but all of us feel we do it.' I believe that it happened because Sri Aurobindo chose to be there now." Does he feel that the inauguration of this statue carries a special meaning? "I certainly do," replies Lalit. For me, this is an assurance that *Satya yuga*, the legendary Golden Age or Age of Truth, has arrived and that *Kali yuga*, the era of moral decent and spiritual bleakness in which we have been living so far, has finally come to an end."

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OPEN FORUM

A new approach to sustainability

Up to now, Auroville's development has been, by and large, a spontaneous development; each person was able to enjoy the freedom that the lack of central organization implied, and find his/her unique way of being part of this unconventional experiment. This phase in Auroville's development seems to have reached its full capacity. Economically, it becomes more and more difficult to cater for the basic needs of 2000 inhabitants, while socially it is no longer a small group of pioneers willing to share the same plate.

Auroville's social and physical complexity is about to increase and Auroville should get ready to enter this new, perhaps less spontaneous and more "conscious," phase of its development. "Conscious" here doesn't have to mean more rules and regulations, only a collective consensus on a way to utilise the new possibilities which face Auroville. It is perhaps at the unique point that complexity scientists so beautifully describe as "the edge of chaos" – a critical point in any complex system's development – that can lead either to complete chaos or to a new, more advanced, stage in a system's development pattern.

The spontaneous process of any society's development can be described as "subconscious" in that it is carried out before a conscious understanding has been fully acquired. Some Aurovilians think there is no need to plan Auroville's development and that the whole idea

is to let unorganised activities spontaneously create the society and the city's structure. But when Mother was approached with the idea that "many in Auroville say that an organized working is not desirable in Auroville; they are for spontaneous working," She responded: "*spontaneous work can be done only by a man of genius. Is there anyone claiming to be a genius?*"

In fact, the central characteristic that most clearly distinguishes development from other forms of social change is organization. The essential nature of the process is the progressive development of social organizations and institutions that harness and direct the social energies for higher levels of accomplishment.

So how can Auroville move from a spontaneous, "subconscious" process of gradual development into a more organized, "conscious" and possibly more rapid development process? How can it develop an organizational structure which is flexible enough without leading to complete chaos?

The way in which Auroville is currently organized can be the tool or obstacle for its further development. A new energy or will for change, in itself, is not enough to drive this change forward. It should be accompanied by an appropriate organizational structure that can accommodate it. It is therefore important for Auroville to invest some time and energy in defining a new organizational structure for itself that can enable it to rise to its next level of development.

From our point of view, ecological planning is firstly about recognizing the organizational vitality of a place. This requires at the same time a possibility to experience the place as "an insider," as well as an ability to systematically analyse it as an observer. We began by dividing the collective into three fields of reference: the physical, the social and the natural. In the physical infrastructure we identified: architecture, waste, water, energy, mobility, communication, food and housing. In the social infrastructure we identified: health, education, economy, culture, communication, spiritual development, governance and villages. And in the natural environment we identified: farms, forests, Land and horticulture.

We believe that merely recognizing one's position within and in relation to the whole system that is Auroville can make a difference. Simply by becoming aware of one's 'role' within the whole one's perspective can change. A second step in ecological mapping is to become aware not only of one's position within the whole but also of one's relationships with the other parts that compose the same whole.

The main assumption is that increased connectivity implies increased sustainability. Systems thinking, ecological philosophy and complexity sciences all teach us that the connections between the parts of



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Batel Dinur and Alon Yakolchik with their baby

a system are the "essence" of that system, its vital force. The more connections that exist between the different parts and different levels, the more resilient the system is considered to be – i.e. more sustainable.

Now, how does all of this relate to town planning and to Auroville's future planning in particular? The main idea is to shift the focus of attention from investment in isolated projects, which together compose Auroville's physical, social and natural landscape, into an investment in interlinking projects. What does this mean in reality?

Firstly, and most importantly, it entails reaching a consensus about the future line of development for Auroville. Secondly, we suggest that as a substitute for planning rules and regulations in Auroville there be guidelines for anyone who wishes to develop a new or already existing project. These guidelines will promote increased connectivity with other Auroville projects. Planning permission will then be based on the contribution of the project to the larger whole.

Alon Yakolchik and Batel Dinur

In brief

Land consolidation

The Working Committee has appealed to all Aurovilians, Newcomers and Friends of Auroville who own land within the Master Plan area to make these lands relatable to Auroville. The Working Committee also issued a public statement asking Aurovilians not to be associated in any way with land brokerage in Auroville.

Regional Council

The Working Committee reported on its efforts to create a regional development council that will include the Collector as Chairman, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, the Secretary, Auroville Foundation, the *Tahsildar*, the Panchayat Presidents of the surrounding villages, Working Committee representatives and others. This council will address issues of security, land-related topics, and concerns regarding non-Auroville guesthouses and businesses.

Security issues

In a meeting with the Collector and Superintendent of Police (SP), it was agreed to create a police outpost in Kuyilapalayam on a plot of land allocated by the Auroville Foundation. Auroville will assist in building the outpost. The SP agreed to look into the issue of unregistered/private guest houses and other commercial enterprises on the Auroville periphery.

FAMC work-plan

The Funds and Assets Management Committee has outlined its work plan for the period September 2009 – April 2010. It aims to achieve an equitable economy by encouraging a simple life style for all in Auroville and asking those with large personal means to align their life-styles accordingly. Other objectives are: to reduce the amount of cash circulating in Auroville; to promote housing with collective funds for those who do not have personal means and work full time for Auroville; to improve the environment for commerce so that new enterprises can grow; to work towards a self-sustaining economy; to raise the level of collective discipline; and to set-up new services that would ease the life of Aurovilians and make possible the pursuit of activities that promote personal growth.

Medhananda archives

On September 15th, the Medhananda Archive in the Savitri Bhavan Reading Room was inaugurated. A note on Auroville by Medhananda was shared: "What is important in the experiment 'Auroville' is not the possibility of discovering a clever new way of organizing human communal life. It is the possibility of a first step beyond man. Even if this step is faltering, it does not matter. What matters is that for the first time man tries out if evolution itself can evolve, whether man and thinking and common sense are forever his final limitations. A clever organization, an illusive success of common life, would be the end of the experiment. As long as mental endeavours fail, there is hope. There were many pious communities in the past trying to build the city of God, who succeeded to live peacefully together for some time. A success of such a kind would be a catastrophe for Auroville. The oneness which Sri Aurobindo explored was not to be imposed by rules and regulations or saintly behaviour. Only a sudden mutation can take us beyond man. Auroville is such a force-field for mutation. So don't expect to find here bigger potatoes."