

## "Auroville is spreading the message of UNESCO"

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**You have this scheme of World Heritage Sites. Do you see a danger in this scheme? To take India's example, in some places they attract millions of tourists resulting in environmental degradation.**

I am aware that the sites on the World Heritage list attract a lot of tourists. In most places it is welcome because it brings a lot of economic revenue to the area. However it is not solely a problem in India; it is one also in many other places: how to balance or reconcile the economic interests of a cultural site and the preservation of that site? I think that it is the biggest challenge that we have to face apart from other issues, such as archaeological excavations and preservation activities.

**How do you handle it?**

Well, we advise governments, but we do not discourage tourism and its

economic activities. We understand that for many countries they are very important. One of the basic criteria for being listed [by UNESCO] as a World Heritage Site is its 'outstanding universal value'. If millions of people want to visit such sites, it is a good and very positive thing. The World Heritage Sites unite us; they are also a message of intercultural dialogue, providing more knowledge and more understanding about each other and, at the same time, encouraging governments and communities to pay much respect to the environment and keep the authenticity of the monument.

**This trip to India has been one of your first official visits after your election. You will stay five days in the country. What is the purpose of your visit and how do you see the relations between UNESCO and India?**

I have come to India to pay respect to this great country, to the great culture of India. I have come also to meet offi-

cial. I met Mr S. N. Krishna, the Minister of External Affairs, and Mr Kapil Sibal, the Minister of Human Resources Development, who is also the Chairman of the Indian National Commission for UNESCO. We talked about cooperation between UNESCO and India, as well as the comprehensive challenges in the field of education, although India has made huge progress in the fight against illiteracy and in primary education. I congratulated the Minister for the adoption of the Right to Education Act, which will now have to be implemented.

I delivered a lecture at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which is one of the largest Open Universities in the world. I was very honoured to be invited to the inaugural function for the 25th anniversary of this University; it was called the Silver Jubilee Lecture. I had also the opportunity to speak to the faculty and staff about the possibility of extending our cooperation by creating joint programmes and UNESCO Chairs in the areas of Technology and Communication. In this way, we will have cooperation with IGOU in the area of media and education. I am happy that they accepted.

Moreover, I have visited some of India's World Heritage sites. I will also be going to Bangalore to visit the Indian Institute of Sciences, as well as one of the large IT companies (Infosys) to see if we can work with the IT sector, which is booming in this country. I want to see how it is developing and if there is the possibility of synergy [with our programmes] in this sector.



**Ms. Bokova writes in the Visitor's Book: "I spent an unforgettable time at Auroville, full of reflection about those things that bind people and not divide them."**

**Are you first a Bulgarian or a Citizen of the World?**

(laughing) Yesterday I met in Delhi Dr Karan Singh, who is the Indian Representative on our Executive Board, and during dinner (Mr Kapil Sibal, the [HRD] Minister was present), a very interesting discussion took place on globalization and its impact on our identity. We all agreed that we have several identities. I consider myself to be profoundly Bulgarian, but at the same time I am a European because Bulgaria recently joined the European Union and because Bulgaria is one of the oldest European cultures. I consider myself also to be a citizen of the world.

Claude Arpi



**Ms. Bokova being interviewed by Auroville Radio**

## Auroville: a World Heritage Site?

Many Aurovilians were taken aback when Kripa, in her welcome speech to the new Director General of UNESCO Ms. Irina Bokova, mentioned that Auroville is considering applying for the tentative lists of World Heritage "as a living symbol of mankind's aspiration for human unity" in the – not yet existing – category of 'World Heritage of the Future'. The Aurovilians were disconcerted because this issue has neither been discussed nor agreed upon in the community nor has the Governing Board taken a stand on it.

The topic became alive after the celebration of Auroville's 40th anniversary at UNESCO in October 2008. In her address to the Aurovilians, Ms. Bhaswati Mukherjee, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of India to UNESCO, said that after this celebration she had recommend to the Indian authorities that such status be given to Auroville and that she could not 'think of a better future heritage of humanity.' For according to Mrs. Mukherjee, Auroville has 'outstanding universal value' and would meet the criteria for recognition of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee.

### World Heritage status

World Heritage status can be given not only to ancient monuments, but also to natural parks and wildlife sanctuaries as well as to 'modern heritage properties'. The third category was introduced in 2001. It aims to create awareness of the heritage of architecture, town planning and landscape design of the modern era, 'which is considered to be particularly vulnerable because of weak legal protection and low appreciation among the general public'.

In order to be registered as a World Heritage site, a government has first to place the site on the List of Tentative Sites. UNESCO only decides on the granting of World Heritage status to sites placed on the Tentative List. In India, the task of recommending a site for placement on the Tentative List rests with the Ministry of Culture.

In February last year, the Government of India introduced the National Commission for Heritage Sites Bill. If this Bill is passed by the Indian Parliament, a National Commission for Heritage Sites will come into existence which has the power to recommend sites for World Heritage Status, as

well as give binding directions on the management of World Heritage sites and levy fines if any of its directions are not complied with.

In India, 22 ancient monuments have been registered as World Heritage Sites, as well as four natural parks and one wildlife sanctuary. Nineteen properties have been submitted on the Tentative List. The most relevant for Auroville is the inscription in this List of the urban and architectural work of Le Corbusier in the city of Chandigarh. This was enlisted in 2006 as being of outstanding universal value, amongst other reasons because 'no change has been permitted in the urban core of Le Corbusier's Master Plan, which retains the authenticity of its original form and design, materials and substance, use and function as well as spirit and feeling'.

### The benefits

The UNESCO website mentions as one of the benefits of being accorded World Heritage Status is having access to the World Heritage Fund of about US\$4 million a year "to assist States Parties in identifying, preserving and promoting World Heritage sites". Another advantage is that the Status would be "a magnet for international cooperation and the site may thus receive financial assistance for heritage conservation projects from a variety of sources". Yet another benefit would be that the site might benefit "from the elaboration and implementation of a comprehensive management plan that sets out adequate preservation measures and monitoring mechanisms." Lastly, World Heritage status would bring an increase in public awareness of the site, thus increasing tourist activities. "When these are well planned for and organized respecting sustainable tourism principles, they can bring important funds to the site and to the local economy."

### Weighing advantages and disadvantages

It is questionable if Auroville would be able to avail itself of all of these benefits. While World Heritage Status might certainly be a help in fund-raising to manifest the city, access to the (extremely small) World Heritage Fund of UNESCO will be minimal in view of international and national competition. And an increase in the already considerable amount of tourists may not be a benefit at all.

A major disadvantage, however, might be that recognition of Auroville as a World Heritage site would bring outside organisations, such as the National Commission for Heritage Sites as well as UNESCO itself, into the planning and management of Auroville. Auroville is a town in making and its Master Plan is still very much a concept, likely to change. The Government of India has already constituted a special legal entity, the Auroville Foundation, to manage Auroville and plan the township. Is the entry of other organisations required? For that would effectively limit the powers of the Auroville Foundation. The National Commission for Heritage Sites would have the power to give binding directions on the management of World Heritage sites and levy fines if any of its directions are not complied with. UNESCO could withdraw recognition as a World Heritage Site if it found that a new development might interfere with the status. In other words, these outside organisations might limit the freedom of the Aurovilians to run and develop the Auroville Township.

These disadvantages are not theoretical. The monuments at Hampi, for example, almost lost their World Heritage Status when UNESCO contended that the construction of the new bridge near the Vittala Temple would bring increased traffic, and might be a threat to the stability of the monuments. UNESCO stated that the modern-looking bridge would disturb an otherwise ancient-looking landscape. The threat was only removed when a balance between the development of the local community and the conservation efforts was found.

This was not the case in Germany. The Dresden Elbe Valley lost its status as a World Heritage site due to the construction of a four-lane bridge in the heart of the cultural landscape. UNESCO judged that "the property had failed to keep its outstanding universal value as inscribed."

The ball for applying for World Heritage Status now rests in Auroville's court. If the community and the Governing Board, after obtaining the advice of the International Advisory Council, and weighing the strengths and constraints, decide in favour of this status, a request has to be made to the Ministry of Culture of the Indian Government to formally apply to UNESCO for inclusion of Auroville in its tentative Heritage Site list.

There is still a long way to go.

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## In brief

### Padma Bhushan for Mallika Sarabhai



Governing Board member Mallika Sarabhai has been awarded the Padma Bhushan, the third highest Indian civilian award, given in recognition of her distinguished service of a high order to the nation in the field of the arts. The award will be conferred by the President of India at a function held at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

### Housing Service Development Branch

The Housing Service has proposed to create a Development Branch under its umbrella. This branch would manage a Housing Revolving Fund to help finance specific housing projects within Auroville and develop strategies to generate cash surplus to create housing assets available on a pro-bono basis. The target of the Revolving Fund is Rs 100 lakhs. For more information contact: housing@auroville.org.in

### Auroville History Project

A project to write the history of Auroville has started. It will include chapters on the concept, the physical growth of Auroville, environment and land, Auroville and its neighbours, education, organisation, economy and business. For more information contact ecpillips47@hotmail.com

### Mail server changed

The AuroNet Mail provider changed from Rediff to IndianNIC, located in the US without a hitch in the night of 24th – 25th January. The new provider has a dedicated team of customer support engineers in Mumbai.

### New playground in Edaiyanchavadi

On Tuesday 26th January (Republic Day), the newly constructed playground for Edaiyanchavadi was opened. The playground is established on Auroville land near the Adventure community. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development provided the bulk of funds.

### AV Architectural Services

About 10 Auroville architects and designers have decided to create Auroville Architectural Services, a unit which would solely work for Auroville and be supported by Auroville instead of through the system of percentages charged on the overall cost of a project.

### 2009 Culture review

An overview of cultural activities held in Auroville in 2009 shows that there have been two classical Indian dance performances; seven music concerts (3 Western classical, 2 Indian classical, 1 jazz, and 1 pop rock); six theatre plays; one Tamil poetry event; twelve painting exhibitions; three photograph exhibitions; two variety exhibitions; and four art classes – calligraphy, ceramics, drawing and Ikebana.