

Main Theme: Planning the city

Town planning is in the news once again. Some months ago construction began on a perfectly curved section of the Crown road, resurrecting concerns among some Aurovilians that geometry was more important to the town planners than sensitive development, and that major developments would be pushed through without proper community consultation.

Then, in May, young design professionals from all over India attended the workshop 'Bikescapes' which, among other things, was designed to facilitate different patterns of mobility in and around the city.

The next month Aurovilians were invited to attend a one day workshop by a group of Auroville architects as part of a participatory planning exercise. The organizers expected no more than about thirty people to attend. In the event, over a hundred Aurovilians showed up and spent the day engaged in enthusiastic discussion about planning issues, demonstrating the high level of interest in the topic.

Interestingly, the Governing Board and the International Advisory Council have also expressed concern about the state of Auroville's planning and development, and the fact that the renowned architect and planner Dr. B.V. Doshi is now a member of the Governing Board may give a new impetus and direction to our town planning work.

In truth, planning has been a hot topic in Auroville for many years. Although a Master Plan was finally approved by the Residents Assembly in 1999, Aurovilians continue to differ over whether development should be closely guided by the original 'Galaxy' model or should happen more 'organically'. There are also different views concerning how far non-specialists should be able to participate in the planning and decision-making process.

For this issue we talked to architects and planners who have devoted a great deal of time and thought to the issue of planning in Auroville. While there are clear disagreements concerning the pace and type of development that need to be adopted, everybody is agreed that the time has come to create a denser, more urban environment. But how? And what will it look like?



The newly laid section of the Crown Road from the Solar Kitchen to Surrender community

B.V. Doshi: "What happened to Auroville's spirit?"

Balkrishna V. Doshi is one of India's most eminent architects. He is a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Architects. In his early career he worked in Paris for four years with Le Corbusier then returned to Ahmedabad to supervise Le Corbusier's work there. He has also worked closely with Louis Kahn and Anant Raje.

Dr. Doshi has designed many institutional campuses, including the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, and his urban planning work includes the proposal for the new city of Jaipur. He also designed Aranya, a slum redevelopment township in Indore, which won an international prize.

Apart from his international fame as an architect, Dr. Doshi is well known as an educator and institution builder. In 1955 he established his environmental design studio, *Vastu-Shilpa*, and in 1962 started the School of Architecture, Ahmedabad. In 1972 he founded the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT) one of India's top architectural schools, now called CEPT University.

In 2008, a film documentary on his work and philosophy was released. Recently the film was shown in Auroville when Dr. Doshi visited the community in his capacity as a new member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. Auroville Today interviewed him at the end of his visit.

Auroville Today: What was your reaction when you were asked to serve on the Governing Board?

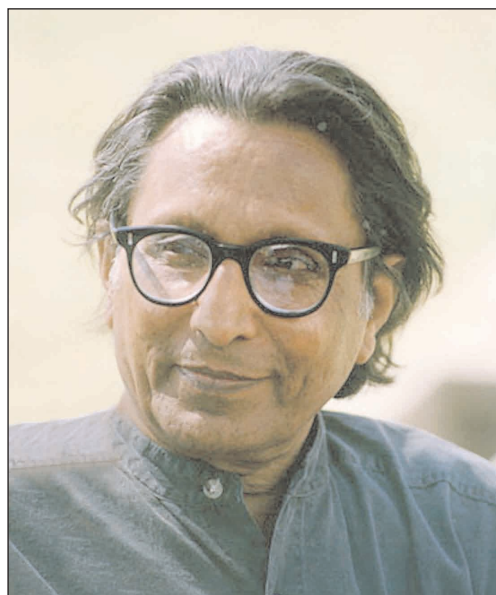
I said 'yes' immediately. What else could I say? It's The Mother's place.

What role do you want to play?

I don't know yet how I can contribute to Auroville. Firstly, I want to look around, to see where the energy of Auroville lies and how that can be used positively. Then, if I am asked to express an opinion, I will do so. I have never stopped expressing my opinions wherever I go because as a professional, individual and academician I have an obligation to say what I believe in. If what I say is not acceptable, fine. If it's acceptable and I'm asked to participate, I will do my best.

What is your response to the Galaxy concept and to the Master Plan?

When I first saw the Galaxy plan many years ago I thought, 'My god, what is this?' It was so dynamic; it had power. It felt as if it was constantly expanding and connecting with a tremendous magnetic force the visible and the invisible cosmic forces. The question is, how can those forces manifest today? That was forty years ago and many changes have happened since. So the Galaxy is a good plan but it has to be studied not only in the context of the land, the natural waterways and the climate but also in the context of changes that have happened to our aspirations, values and our relationships to the world as a



Balkrishna V. Doshi

whole. No doubt, Mother's vision will guide us, but what about our mindset? Today many people have computers and can work at home so you don't need so many office buildings. Also it's important to conserve energy to the maximum so transportation and the need for physical distances need to be reviewed. Then, when you look at how the villages around have expanded, you need to ask yourself, 'Will Auroville be isolated or will it act as a magnet through providing something which is missing within

and around?'

Auroville must make people want to go there because it offers what people cannot find anywhere else. Silence. Peace. Light. Auroville should radiate ideas of a new world by representing the future in every aspect of life. It should be an ideal community of the future.

You've been visiting various projects in the community over the past few days. Do you feel that Auroville is succeeding in doing this?

To answer this I need to give a little history. When I came here first in the early 1970s, I was completely bowled over by the kind of architectural experimentation that was happening. Here were houses with thatched roofs, houses built half into the ground and with arches made out of bricks and ferrocement. At that time Indian architects were asking themselves how to make do with the minimum of resources yet develop something else, like the long-term overall sustainability one sees in nature, bio-diverse yet harmonious. When I looked at Auroville then, I thought it was probably the most important architectural pioneering work happening in India because the Aurovilians were using natural ventilation and passive cooling while taking advantage of all the latest building technologies, closely knit into the natural fabric and societal ideas.

The other thing that interested me was the kind of life people were leading. I was fascinated that people would leave everything and come here to become devotees. I saw a life of simplicity and frugality and felt the aspiration towards something else – the unknown, the immeasurable. This was my early image of Auroville.

Some years later I came again and met Roger. I saw some of his buildings. Those buildings told me about the adventure of the spirit. Later I went to Roger's office and it was full of models and drawings, just like Le Corbusier's Chandigarh office. It really felt like a new world was emerging.

The last time I met Roger we visited the recently completed Matrimandir. That's when I understood for the first time what silence and light really is, and I realized that it is possible to realize some dreams.

However, on that visit I noticed that some of the old buildings I had liked had disappeared and that the recent constructions were static; the dynamism was missing.

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● Matrimandir:

- ◆ entrance shields completed
- ◆ progress in the *Garden of Existence*

● GB and IAC meet in Auroville

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● Revisiting our planning process:

- ◆ AV architects David, Lata, Suhasini, Prashant and Helmut
- ◆ L'Avenir d'Auroville coordinators Sauro, Lalit and Pino

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● Kanniappan and the puncture and repair service

- Alain Grandcolas: researching the psychic being
- 20 years of AV Earth Institute

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● Passings

- Youth biodiversity symposium
- Première of film *City of Dawn* at Chicago conference
- Francis Rothluebber's story

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