

The inspiration behind the film was a remarkable 85 year old, Frances Rothlueber. Frances was formerly the director of Columbiere Retreat Center in Idyllwild, California and president of the School Sisters of St. Frances, an international Franciscan community of more than 1,050 sisters and associates headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She recently founded *New Momentum for Human Unity*, whose purpose is to create a better life on this planet through the evolution of consciousness and the transformation of human relationships.

Frances wanted to present Auroville as a living demonstration of the power of conscious unity and she arranged for some current and former residents of Auroville to participate in a panel discussion after the showing of the film. A few weeks later, *Auroville Today* spoke to some of those who had participated in the event: Deepti Tewari, Jean-Yves Lung and Julian Lines, the current Chairperson of Auroville International.

What inspired Frances to make this film about Auroville?

Deepti: She had an experience, a vision, of The Mother which led Frances to promise to present Her dream of human unity, Auroville, to the world (see box). So, on her last visit to Auroville (she'd been here twice before) she brought a team of professionals to make the film. None of us had seen it before the conference. The film is still a work-in-progress; it was merely a rough cut that was shown to the audience.

How did you respond to the film?

Julian: When I heard it would be a 90 minute film, I was very concerned. I had never met these people and I wondered if they were going to mix in their vision with Auroville's vision – and we all know about America's capacity for making a New-Age burger! So I woke up on the morning of the conference with contradictory feelings. Everyone I trusted had confidence that Frances and her team were good people with the right approach. However, the capacity to

Recognising fellow-travellers

On 27th July, a one day conference on human unity was held in Chicago. One of the purposes of the conference was to premiere a new film on Auroville called *City of the Dawn*.



From left to right: Bhavana, Deepti, Frances and Julian

get the story wrong is almost infinite.

But the movie vindicated everything. There was no ego; the movie-makers didn't put themselves forward or interpret Sri Aurobindo in their own way.

Deepti: At end of the film we all found it difficult to speak, we were so moved. The approach was different from so many films about Auroville. In the film, instead of asking us about what we were doing in Auroville, Frances asked us questions like, 'What do you think Mother would say if She saw Auroville today?' Her questions (as also the rest of the team's) were deep, forcing us to stop and reflect.

Almost all the Aurovilians in the film touched upon the spiritual aspect. My sense is that films often present the materiality of Auroville and less the spirit because we are not so confident about this aspect and are afraid of sounding merely preachy. But here was a group which came along and said, 'We're going to present the vision'. And because they presented the spirit what came

through was startlingly good. I came away with the sense of a strong reminder: 'That's why I'm there, that's what I came for, that's what makes it all worthwhile!'

Jean-Yves: The movie also shows how deeply engaged the Aurovilians are; that it's a complete commitment to an adventure into which you put all your resources, your whole life, even though you don't know what is going to happen. That came through very well.

What also comes across is that Auroville is not just a local, exotic experiment; it touches the heart of the human condition. So wherever you are on the Earth you should be concerned by the adventure of Auroville because it is dealing with the key question facing humanity – are we able to change or not?

Deepti: I think that's the key point. By focussing upon the spirit behind it rather than the material aspects of Auroville, the makers of the film universalized Auroville's present actuality.

How did the audience respond?

Julian: The film is not yet in its final form – it clearly requires some editing – so the film team invited detailed feedback from the audience. People found the film inspirational. During the panel discussion about human unity, I was interested that nobody directed any questions at the key-note speaker, Bette Sue Flowers, who collaborated on four books with Bill Moyers, a well-known broadcaster. Instead, everybody wanted to hear from the Aurovilians. Perhaps it is because the audience, which was largely made up of Christian women, was mainly concerned with the spiritual aspect.

Was that a difficult audience to relate to?

Deepti: I hadn't expected to be speaking to such an audience. But something about the organizers had filled me with confidence. Frances is an exceptional person, like a very wise Elder. She doesn't say much but whoever she touches, she leaves changed. In fact, all the women one met there were beings

of energy and power and joy and love. My impression of a lot of Christianity has been that it is very burdened – but we didn't come across that atmosphere.

Because Joan Kaeplinger (who came with Frances on her visits to Auroville) is a key member of New Momentum as well as a Sister at Misericordia, the venue for the conference was this unique residential facility run by sisters from Misericordia Heart of Mercy – a place for people with developmental disabilities such as Down's Syndrome. It is a joyful place, full of light, and they are doing wonderful work. Every 'resident' has a particular need or way of being and this is addressed with consciousness and respect. The aim of Sister Rosemary, the head of Misericordia, is perfection – everything done has to be perfect – and this reminded me so much of The Mother. I'm grateful to have encountered people at the other end of the world whom I can wholeheartedly respect and who so enriched me.

As for presenting Auroville which is, in many ways, post-religion, the audience didn't seem to have any trouble with that.

Jean-Yves: I think they have gone beyond the question of creed. They are more interested in the experience of joy and love and perfection.

Deepti: They threw off their nuns' habits thirty years ago! I'd forgotten that our audience was largely practicing Christians until a woman came to me wanting to know whether Auroville would have issues if she wanted to do Mass there!

Julian: I was remembering Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry, Ruud Lohman and others like them who had been Catholic priests. These were people totally unencumbered by dogma. They were living and integrating the heaven on earth of Christian tradition and were connecting to people on a heart level. And you feel that same kind of thing with Frances. She is a mature seeker who doesn't care about the labels and finds in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother the fulfilment of all of her dreams.

So my shorthand for this is that there is no trademark on the supramental: it's acting in so many ways that we may not see. I'm just happy to recognise fellow-travellers who come right from the heart of their own tradition and who do their work as an offering and with the right consciousness.

Deepti: I don't imagine that anybody who came to that conference will actually come to Auroville. Rather, the film will open up something in people. Chip Duncan, the independent film maker and cinematographer of *The City of the Dawn*, remarked that many people lack hope. They feel the world is heading towards disaster; they don't believe that humanity can create a world of truth and goodness. So, perhaps when they hear that a bunch of crazy people in South India are ready to give their lives for this, something may change in them. This is what this film should do – it should give people hope.

And that's how the Aurovilians in the film came across, as a bubbling, energetic, hopeful bunch of people. Finally, it seems to be not so much what we as Aurovilians do but that we have this great evolutionary 'yes' that guides our lives. And that's a promise for humanity.

From an interview by Alan

Francis's story

In the Fall of 1996 as I was on a flight to Chicago I was stunned by the presence of a woman standing near the exit at the front of the cabin. It seemed the sun was flooding her with the light. At the same time I heard deep inside, "My name is Mirra."

I had seen Mother Meera in Talheim, Germany. This was not she. I looked out the window, puzzling, and when I looked back the woman was gone. The experience was inexplicable so I let it go and returned to reading. Later I wondered whether I had really seen the woman, but I could never deny the voice.

Little did I realize the turn my life was taking that day. Shortly after I returned home, a retreat guest, a Methodist minister, shared her experience of a visit to Pondicherry and offered to show me The Mother's picture which she carried with her. She had seen The Mother standing at the top of the stairs at the Ashram and she said she felt a flow of love from The Mother deeper than anything she had ever experienced.

When I saw the photo and read the opening line of a beaten-up little book, "Mirra Alfassa was born in Paris. February 21, 1878," I knew.

Suddenly books arrived unsolicited: *The Mind of the Cells*, then Satprem's volume one of *The Mother*. I began the study of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*. I was amazed at the parallels with the thought of Teilhard de Chardin and his writings on the evolution of consciousness. A friend and I decided to go to Pondicherry in 1998 for a month. I was going to make an intense study of Sri Aurobindo's life and work. The message I received at the Samadhi was to meditate.

When we returned I began an intense study, facilitated workshops on the themes, and in 2001 created *The Great Secret*, a collection of six reflections and meditations on *The Life Divine*. Later in 2004 I offered the workshop experiences on evolutionary spirituality in a small book, *The Upstart Spring*.

In 2004 it became evident that I was to move from the Meditation Center where I had been living. But I could not find a fitting place to rent. Several days before Christmas, I sat at my desk and began a conversation with The Mother. I asked her to find me a place and then was prompted to add, "If you find me the right place by January 1, I will pick up that piece of writing that I had started and forgotten." In 72 hours I rented the "perfect" place.

The piece of writing was about Auroville. During our first trip we had visited Auroville twice and meditated in the magnificent whiteness of the Matrimandir. The more I read of this laboratory of the future, the more I was intrigued. I thought the story should be told as a sign of hope and had begun a script that could be read as an imaginative experience of Auroville. When I shared the experience with a film-maker friend, Chris, we decided to create the film, not just publish the script.

We didn't have the money. We had to create a non-profit organization so people who contributed could receive a tax credit. We established the Board of *New Momentum for Human Unity* and we began to secure funds and to complete a working script.

In 2006, Joan, Chris and I returned to Auroville to obtain permission to do the film and to meet with Aurovilians to learn of their experience directly. After a brief challenging conversation, we were received everywhere graciously and were given every encouragement.

We returned to Auroville with the film crew in 2008 and in June 2009 had the first presentation of the film, *City of the Dawn*. The final version will be completed and available for distribution in September.

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Editorial team: Alan, Carel, Dianna, Hero, Priya Sundaravalli.
Proof-reading: Alan.
DTP: Carel and Priya. Photo editing: Jean-Denis

Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by Brihat Consultants, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

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