

COLLABORATION for AUROVILLE AREA PROTECTION Newsletter

(In brief, this newsletter is called "COLAAP Newsletter")

March - June 2010

Issue No. 47

The Mother : "And the clear vision: the same thing which in the history of the universe made the earth the symbolic representation of the universe so as to concentrate the work on one point, the same phenomenon is now taking place: India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that the Cure will be found. And then, that is why – THAT IS WHY I was made to start Auroville. (*Mother's Agenda* Vo. 9, Date 3rd February 1968)

"I tell people that the creation of a city such as Auroville has more weight in the history of the earth than all the groupings in the world."
The Mother's Agenda Vol.6 (19 October 1967)

Mission Statement:

We seek to safeguard the territorial integrity of Auroville from the vagaries of the market forces, from the unplanned and incongruous developments so that Auroville could develop into mankind's first unipue Universal Township – the Earth- Queen, the Rose flower of the Earth – which has the potentiality to emerge as a new kind of United Nations, become a major life-line of Tamil Nadu and render extremely significant service to the unity and integral progress of India and humanity.

Vision:

To create win-win situations for all the stake-holders, to secure the whole-hearted cooperation of all – the landowners, the neighboring population, the potential donors, the concerned administrative departments at the local, State and Central level – for protecting the lands for the appropriate and unified development of Auroville and the surrounding localities: an Auroville bio-region integrated development which ensures beautiful and harmonious growth of all the constituents of the bio-region.

Vision Kindler:

The underlying vision and vocation of UNESCO is more tolerance, more harmony; it is about resolving conflicts and bringing more peace into the minds of people. The same message is behind the creation of Auroville, which is why UNESCO has been associated with Auroville. It is this message of humanism that we share... I do believe that Auroville can contribute to UNESCO's search for a new balance and a new humanism in the 21st century... Auroville embodies what UNESCO has been created for and for what UNESCO aspires.My office at UNESCO is near to Sri Aurobindo's statue installed last year.



Irina Bokova
Director-General, UNESCO

Topic 1

Report for the period (March – June 2010)

During the period under review, Auroville Foundation secured a total of 4.17 acres in the planned township area of Auroville. Of these, 2.75 acres were purchased while 1.49 acres were secured by way of land exchange with the outside unutilized lands of Auroville. Most of these lands (4.17 acres) were situated in the planned Green Belt, while a tiny plot measuring .070 acres was situated in the planned urban area of Auroville.

Lands still to be secured in the planned city or the urban area of Auroville are 211 acres. Of these, 79 acres are Poramboke lands (lands owned by the Tamil Nadu state government). Steps have been initiated for a phase-wise long-term lease of these lands to Auroville Foundation.

Auroville's Green Belt as well as the proposed access roads to Auroville requires significant steps for any noticeable progress in protecting the area for their unified and appropriate future development.

We thank all our donors and friends for their continued steadfast support and contributions.

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Topic 2

Visit of the Chairman, GB and IAC

Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, together with members of the Governing Board (GB) and the International Advisory Council (IAC) visited Auroville in the first week of April 2010. The major reason for the choice of date was that it marked the centenary of Sri Aurobindo's arrival at Puducherry on April 4, 1910. We present below from their report topics that are relevant to this newsletter, along with our introductory notes and comments.

IAC Report

The International Advisory Council (IAC) is constituted under the Auroville Foundation Act 1988 with a view to advise the Governing Board on matters pertaining to Auroville. In the process, the IAC makes itself familiar with the ongoing issues and internal dynamics of Auroville by their six-monthly visits and interactions with the community. Besides, it also provides encouragement and moral support to the community through its engagements and significant international experiences.

It must be noted here that in spite of its largely advisory and mentorship role, one of the members of a previous IAC, Ms. Mary King, had taken in year 2000 an unusual step of personally writing to the then minister of Human Resource Development expressing her concerns regarding the importance of protecting the planned Auroville township area, and the need on the part of the government to extend all possible support for that.

The present IAC headed by Sir Mark Tully, too, has well-understood the importance of safeguarding the planned township area. During their last visit to Auroville in March 2010, they strongly advised “a comprehensive approach to Auroville’s relationship with UNESCO including World Heritage status”. Obviously, one of the advantages of such a listing with UNESCO would be, as they noted, that Auroville's pressing need for protecting the planned township area will get a morale boost and support. In no uncertain terms, they advised the Governing Board and the Residents Assembly of the Auroville Foundation to speed up the process.

Excerpts from IAC report:

“Auroville should have a comprehensive approach to its relationship with UNESCO including World Heritage status and key activities under the UNESCO mandate including the environment, education, science and research.

This relationship should be based on reciprocity. Auroville's achievements can be very beneficial to UNESCO member States as well. There should be a work plan to follow-up Ms. Bokova's visit in close consultation with the UNESCO office in Delhi.

Application for World Heritage Status should be speeded up for the following reasons:

- Inscription on the World Heritage list enhances the significance of the site showing that the site is significant not only to the host country but to the entire world, which is in accordance with the universal character of Auroville.
- Protection of the lands of Auroville and a respect for its integrity is provided.
- Intangibility is a key value considered in the convention, so that the values of Auroville can also be protected.

Following the visit of Dr. Sharma (Director, Conservation and World Heritage, Archeological Survey of India (ISI), Ministry of Culture, GOI), we call for a speeding up of the process of applying for World Heritage status. We encourage the community and Governing Board to support and communicate with the UNESCO working group, and congratulate them on their efforts.”

GB report (alongwith our notes and comments)

The Governing Board is another constituent of Auroville Foundation. Like IAC, its 7 members are selected by the Government of India based on certain criteria such as their services in the areas of culture, educational and social researches and services. One of the main functions of the GB is to oversee that Auroville continues to develop appropriately according the Charter of Auroville and the Mother's vision. It is also expected to advise the Government as well as Auroville on matters pertaining to the management and development of Auroville, taking into consideration the views and suggestions of the International Advisory Council. Like IAC, most or majority of the Governing Board members kindly spare their valuable time to visit Auroville twice a year for a period ranging from 1 to 3 days.

In their latest meeting in Auroville, GB members looked into several topics. Those that relate to this newsletter were “inclusion of Auroville in UNESCO's World Heritage site list”, Income Tax exemption for Auroville Foundation, and “notification relating to the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspectives 2025)”.

In context of World Heritage site, we, the authors of this newsletter, offer following comment.

Auroville was started on an arid plateau of land north of Pondicherry. Today, thanks to the work of pioneers, it is a lush green area, home to numerous bird and tree species. At the centre of the future city is Matrimandir, which is not a temple, not a religious place in the traditional sense. It is increasingly being recognized by world media, architects and many others as one of the invaluable assets of mankind. The collective life of Auroville throbs with cultural, artistic, architectural, educational, environmental, social and productive activities and development projects. Around 2200 people from 45 countries reside here. Compared to the targeted population of 50,000 sincere and dedicated people representing most of the countries of the world, Auroville's present population is still small, but we believe it is completely possible to start what Dr. Karan Singh once referred to as “a new phase in the development of Auroville” and reach the targeted population. What has happened to date can only be regarded as a beginning. Auroville's present stage is a mere springboard for the great universal city the Mother envisions. Going forward, Auroville can offer thousand-fold more to the world civilization. As renowned American cultural historian William Irwin Thomson said long ago in his keynote address at Findhorn Community in Scotland that in course of time the ideas embodied in the Auroville Charter and the vision will gradually generalize in humanity and, as a consequence, there will emerge a higher balance, a better equilibrium in human life.

"We must always consider," he said, "that we shall be as a city upon a hill – the eyes of all people are upon us.

"Today the eyes of all people are truly upon us – and our governments, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local, must be as a city upon a hill – constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and their great responsibilities." (Delivered on 9 January 1961 in The State House, Boston)

One is also reminded of the beautiful lines of the poem "City of Peace" by Aurovilian Roger Harris.

"City of silence and the rich unfolding word...
 City of man his labour born of dream, ...
 City whose song the hidden soul shall sing, ...
 City whose deep calm at the sunset does recall,
 Ages when the earth stood golden heaven tall,
 City on the night's borderline outpost of dawn's light."

"Auroville has been an adventure while remaining still; it's been a whirl around at the same time as growing settled and rooted, all of which has been a beautiful painting in the highs and lows... Auroville fosters growth, especially to the youthful mind (no matter how numerically old), and provides space for exploration, as long as you're looking for it," wrote an American student recently while visiting Auroville under the Living Routes study programme

Many of the utopias and dreams that humanity has tried out so far were violent, enforced, imposed. Often they tried to standardize life. The Mother who inspired Auroville was very clear – nothing that standardizes life was acceptable to her. Her way and approach was: Keep the goal and the vision as high and lofty as possible – like a sun - and let each individual imbibe what she or he could at her or his own pace and contribute to the overall advance.

Doubts and questions may be raised about success of such an experiment, especially when one takes into account the past attempts and failures of humanity to realise its great dreams. But as Sri Aurobindo writes, "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."⁴

We believe the experience of humanity would remain incomplete without the Auroville experiment. In fact, as late Prime Minister of India P.V. Narasimha Rao said, Auroville is much more than an experiment.⁵ Over the last 4 decades, she has deeply embedded herself within the life of India and humanity. Obviously, to protect the planned township area from incongruous developments, from forces of commercialization, ought to be a primary task for those who wish that Auroville grow and contribute her marvellous potentialities to the sum of humanity's experiences and to the unfolding of India's future.

Aryadeep S. Acharya

Ref. and Notes:

1: Sri Aurobindo, Evening Talks – Dt. 21.08.1926, 2: Sri Aurobindo – The Human Cycle , 3: Mother's Agenda Vol. 6, 19, Oct. 1967, 4: Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Aphorisms, 5: P.V. Narasihma Rao (late) Prime Minister of India: "I don't know why we call Auroville an experiment. It is life, it is part of life. But since we have gone back and called it an experiment, let us make it a success."

Topic 4

News in Brief

(We present here a small summary of notable events between March and June 2010)

Earth Day 2010



Photo: Chloe

22 April 2010 - the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, was celebrated in Auroville with much enthusiasm. A variety of events spread over 10 days from 16th April to 25th took place. These included publication of the first issue of AV Green Newsletter, a seminar on Deep Ecology, a symposium on “Awakening the Dreamer” with the theme “environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just human presence on this planet,” Children's Fun 'n' Art, an Eco-film festival, and more.

At the end of the Earth Day events, the organisers carried out an evaluation. Nina, who has been involved with the Earth Day celebrations at Auroville since 2005, had this to say:

“Auroville has celebrated Earth Day for a long time either just on the day itself or over several days with much fervour, love, and enthusiasm. Since 2005 the Earth Days in Auroville started having themes such as: No Vehicle or Organic Farming. In 2007 and 2008 our theme was “Towards a C-neutral Living in Auroville and around the world”.That task is not over yet. The slogans of c-neutral living - “Think globally, Act locally” and to “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” - have

perhaps never been so crucial and meaningful to all of us. They resonate the same underlying philosophy that encourages reflection, thinking, and innovation in all fields - be it energy, housing, transportation, food growing, land regeneration/afforestation, recycling, conservation, rights of indigenous peoples, and so on.... To help trigger a start in this path we had adopted a list of 10 things to do in Auroville during the Earth Day in 2007. That generic list can be made more effective towards observing “Earth Day, Every Day” if we can create our own list of 10 or more things to do.... To truly care for the earth it is important to look beyond the c-footprints and c-neutral living and make progress towards a lifestyle that is compassionate, just, and harmonious to its surrounding plants, animals, the living landscapes, and other human beings. There are very few places on earth other than Auroville that are better poised to take that next step.”

Small Steps

“Transform waste into works of art” was the message from Upasana Design Studio on the occasion of the 3rd anniversary of Small Steps – a volunteer-run initiative launched with the mission to reduce litter and plastic use by encouraging cloth shopping bags, created mostly from scraps. Since inception it has reached hundreds of users in more than 30 countries. The anniversary was celebrated with live music, games, prizes, and an evening of social/environmental programmes.

Centenary of Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry

4th April 2010 marked the centenary of Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry. Several programmes and an exhibition (“From Aurobindo Ghose to Sri Aurobindo”) were organised. One of the noteworthy events was a speech by Dr. Karan Singh preceded by brief but insightful observations by Sir Mark Tully and Shri Iqbal Singh, Hon'able Governor of Puducherry, on the relevance of the great event. The topic of the speech was "The Last Message of Sri Aurobindo". With great lucidity, Dr. Karan Singh dwelt on Sri Aurobindo's 15th August message and his vision of the future. (For audio CD of the speech, please write or send email to LFAU@auroville.org.in)

Shakespeare in Tamil

Tamil Heritage Centre of Auroville presented on 20th March 2010 Shakespeare's play The Tempest translated into Tamil by Padmashri Indra Parthasarathy. The play was performed mostly by young students and suited well to the native ambience thanks to the sensibilities of the translation.

America Latina

An exhibition under the title “America: The New World” was put up in March at the Visitors Centre. This was followed by videos “The closed eyes of Latin America” and “The Rainbow Warriors” and reading of poems.

Africa House Volunteer Service Project

On 26 March, African students studying in Tamil Nadu organised an “Africa House” in Auroville. They presented cultural programmes consisting of Kenyan, Rwandan and Tanzanian songs, music, dance and a fashion show. Subsequently, they offered to volunteer for the African Pavilion in the International Zone of Auroville. Since volunteer accommodation and support facilities are lacking in Auroville, Unity Pavilion, which is a co-ordinating body of the International Zone, has appealed to the community to provide the same. Those interested to support the volunteer programmes in Auroville may contact: Unity Pavilion, Auroville 605101.

Chinese language classes

Auroville Language Lab has announced the resumption of Chinese language classes through audio and written materials. It also invited people interested in exploring Chinese culture.

The earthy minister of the Sun visits Auroville



Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy, carry out due diligence of a solar rickshaw made in Auroville.

On 23 March, Sri Farooq Abdullah, Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy, honored Auroville with a visit. He visited Matrimandir and other places connected with his folio and left a mark on all with his effervescence and spontaneity. Aurore Renewable Energy newsletter described him as a “sunny minister”.

<http://www.aurore.in/Auroville%20visit%20DrFA.pdf>



Photos: Hemant Shekhar

At a round table at the Centre for Scientific Research, Dr. Abdullah observed, “The innovations here in Auroville have imagination. Their charm lay in their simplicity, making them useful and appropriate at the same time. Additionally (and unusually so) they had a very redeeming quality – that of being relevant to the social, cultural and environmental needs of a developing India”. Dr. Abdullah also recalled his visit to Matrimandir and said he felt a “palpable energy” while standing before the “ray of light” in the inner chamber.

Auroville Exhibition of Applied Green Technology

During 10, 11 and 12 April, Auroville Institute of Applied Technology organised an exhibition of renewable energy, low cost ecological building and biological wastewater treatment and allied technology developed in Auroville. Mr. M.O.H.F. ShahJahan, Minister of PWD, Transport, IT and Higher Education, Gov. of Puducherry inaugurated the exhibition while Mr. S. Singaravelu, former Executive Engineer, Renewable Energy Agencies of Puducherry and Mr. C.S. Dwivedi, Vice President, Mfg. of HCL Pvt. Ltd, Puducherry spoke respectively on “Renewable Energy Utilities in Rural & Urban Area” and “Environment Concern – the Changing Scenario”

Litter Free Auroville

On 29th January, Auroville celebrated a fun-filled and yet significant drive called Litter Free Auroville. Hundreds of people – students, children and their parents, guests and visitors – gathered at the Certitude Sports Ground to take part in clean-up work throughout Auroville, and to attend informative, educative and at the same time entertaining programmes, including a fashion show in the evening with the models wearing outfits made out of waste materials.

Award to Chairman



Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, was awarded by The Sophia Society, New Delhi, the “*Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios International Award*” on 23rd April 2010 through the President of India, Mrs. Pratibha Patil, for his lifelong efforts towards promoting inter-faith dialogue and social reform.

Award to Joss Brooks



Joss Brooks, a pioneer Aurovilian from Australia and the founder of the Pitchandikulam Bioresource Centre, was felicitated with the T.N. Khoshoo Memorial Award for his work on restoration projects in Tamil Nadu. The award was given by Dr R.K. Pachauri, Nobel Laureate and chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and Director General of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) at the T.N. Khoshoo Memorial Lecture at New Delhi in May 2010.

Joss' major project is Adyar Poonga wetland restoration in Chennai. Spread over a 350-acre wetland site at Adyar estuary, it involves the cleansing of “the typical urban wasteland environment of debris, garbage and sewage” and transforming it into “an example of species regeneration, practical environmental education and citizen/government collaboration.”¹

1: Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)



Award for Mallika Sarabhai

Mallika Sarabhai, member of the Governing Board of Auroville Foundation, was awarded Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award of the Indian Government, for her distinguished service to the country in the field of arts and culture. The award was conferred by the President of India at a function held at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

We happily recall at this moment her enriching collaboration with Auroville and her many performances in Auroville including one on Sri Aurobindo's Savitri.

Workshop on Classical Tamil

A 10-day workshop on Ancient Sangam Tamil Literature, with particular reference to Silappathikaram, to honor 100 years since Sri Aurobindo's arrival on Tamil land was organised by Tamil Heritage Centre, Auroville, in collaboration with Central Institute of Classical Tamil (a unit of HRD, Govt of India). Besides the full day workshop, special evening sessions were held to introduce Tamil language, history, and culture in English, French and Tamil.

Islamic mysticism

University of Human Unity, Auroville, hosted on 24th March a presentation by Florian Sobieroj, a researcher in Islamic Studies at Jena University, Germany. The topic was: "The way of mystical states and stations in classical Sufiism: the `Uyun al-ajwiba of al-Qushayri".

How does a City inspire

A seminar on the above theme was organised by L'avenir d'Auroville on 1st April. It was guided by renowned architect and GB member Sri B.V. Doshi and other invited persons.

Telos

A well-researched and well-planned multimedia approach to the application of Integral Yoga to human attitudes, behaviour and situations has been developed by Aurovilian Manoj and his team. On 20th March, they introduced their work to the community.

Integral Sustainability Seminar Series

University of Human Unity, Auroville, and Living Routes, USA, jointly sponsored a series of seminars on various themes related to integral sustainability.

Auroville Green Portal

Auroville Collaborative announced the launch of beta version of Auroville Green Portal. In their words, portal is an attempt at bringing at one place "knowledge resource of Auroville experiences in areas of Forest, Agriculture, Water, Waste Management, Habitat, Energy and Outreach work and contains articles, interviews, audio and video clips. It also has a directory of units and experts in these areas as well as listing of events and internship opportunities." Website: www.auroco.org

Auroville Mobility

Karl Heinz Posch, a mobility management consultant with *Austrian Mobility Research (FGM-AMOR www.fgm.at)*, based in Graz, Austria visited Auroville during April and held a series of meetings with Aurovilians regarding planning of mobility (modes and means of moving around and transportation) in Auroville. He also made a public presentation on Shared Space – an urban design concept aimed at integrated use of public spaces. This was Karl's third visit to Auroville, largely with a view to "lay the groundwork for the future workshop on a more systematic approach to mobility planning & management in Auroville."

"Collaboration for Auroville Area Protection"

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