**Auroville Charter**

1) Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

2) Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

3) Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future.
   Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

4) Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

   **THE MOTHER**
   28 Feb 1968
There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment. In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organise; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities. Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position. For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one’s living but a way to express oneself and to develop one’s capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual’s subsistence and sphere of action. In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.

The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess sufficient knowledge to understand and adopt it nor the conscious force that is indispensable in order to execute it; that is why I call it a dream.

And yet this dream is in the course of becoming a reality; that is what we are striving for in Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram, on a very small scale, in proportion to our limited means. The realisation is certainly far from perfect, but it is progressive; little by little we are advancing towards our goal which we hope we may one day be able to present to the world as a practical and effective way to emerge from the present chaos, to be born into a new life that is more harmonious and true.

The Mother
Bulletin, August 1954
CWM Vol. 12, pp. 93-94
The City of Dawn

Auroville was born as ‘the city of Dawn’. It was a glorious sunrise witnessed by the residents of Pondicherry on Auroville’s birth date, 28.2.1968; we remember it. In our hearts there was the glow of hope for an ailing world, the dawn of a new city with a new consciousness.

Why are we speaking of the dawn of that eventful date as if it is a thing of the past, with a wistful longing? Because things have not turned out the way they were expected to. Because the reality is almost that of a stark contrast. A contrast between darkness and light. The aspirant for Mother’s Auroville has a difficult time. But when did Mother promise an easy one?

The conception of Auroville calls for a radical change in the human consciousness. If we remain glued to the old consciousness, the Auroville of new consciousness cannot materialise. And because the ‘if’ of ‘old consciousness’ is an obstinate fact, the city dreamt of, the ‘city of dawn’, lies wrapped up in the mantle of the night of old consciousness. There is a safe and certain way out of the grisly night, and that is a conscious rejection of the old human frailties and obscurities, whatever be their names and forms and garbs of justification. No compromise or patchwork is acceptable to either side. The divine Auroville waits patiently for the conscious collaboration of the participants; the forces arraigned against it are equally conscious and alert. Hence the night, and although many a time we felt that the greatest darkness had arrived, yet a still darker one followed, and who knows what more is to come?

Let it come. It will, whether we wish it or not. Let the darkest hours of the night come in their full potency so that a dawn brighter than all that has come up until now will rise on the horizon. For the darker the night, the brighter the dawn.

The first chapter in the epic Savitri is ‘The Symbol Dawn’, and it ends with the line,

*This was the day when Satyavan must die.*

Then follows the unfolding of the legend and the symbol. Death takes its toll of Satyavan, but Savitri does not accept the decree of Fate. She wins in the end, but all is not over even when Death is vanquished and Savitri brings Satyavan back to earth. In the last line Sri Aurobindo says,

*… in her bosom nursed a greater dawn.*

Auroville, the city of Dawn, will be a place of an unending series of dawns, dawns of progress and light, with nights intervening, nights of horrifying darkness through which they who hold to the Spirit of Auroville will surge forth to hail the rising suns.

Shyam Sunder
(Reprinted from an earlier issue)
The Mahashakti, the universal Mother, works out whatever is transmitted by her transcendent consciousness from the Supreme and enters into the worlds that she has made; her presence fills and supports them with the divine spirit and the divine all-sustaining force and delight without which they could not exist.

SRI AUROBINDO
(CWSA Vol. 32, pg. 15)
Auroville

Substance of a Talk given in Andhra University, Waltair, on 29th Feb 1968

Friends:

You may have read in today’s papers fairly detailed accounts of the solemn Dedication, at 10.30 yesterday morning, of a new International City named ‘Auroville’ — City of Dawn — near Pondicherry. Owing to my long association with Sri Aurobindo Ashram and because of the importance of the occasion, I was to have been at Pondicherry yesterday. But conditions in the Campus made me that I should be here in these troubled days. I thought, however, that some of us should meet and ask ourselves what exactly this grand experiment — some have called it a ‘grandiose’ experiment — is about, and what we may hope for.

It is not, of course, the first time that such an attempt has been made to bring into being a Utopian society in a Utopian habitation. Even in our own country, at Adyar near Madras almost a century ago, Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott established the international headquarters of the Theosophical Society. It still retains something of its international character. When you visit the place, you see the magnificent banyan tree that seems to be symbolic of the Society itself. In other countries too there have been such experiments in international living that have endured for longer or shorter periods. On the face of it, then, the ‘Auroville’ adventure — the plan to organise an international community at a chosen consecrated spot — is nothing altogether new. And yet, if it is no more than a repetition of what has often been tried before, it may not make any great appeal to us. We must ask ourselves therefore wherein lies the uniqueness of this particular experiment.

Most of us assembled here are associated with a University, and even the ladies and the children are members of the university community. The very concept of a university asks for the widest possible enlargement of our sympathies and sensibilities. We may give a university a local twist, a communal, regional or linguistic adhesion, but a university by its very definition is an international institution where no area of knowledge is alien, where everything that is vital and important in the past is sought to be preserved — and preserved, not as a mummified curiosity, but as something that is still relevant for us today and tomorrow. The past has led up to the present, and the living present is projecting itself into the future. To remember this, and to act in the light of such knowledge, is after all the cardinal aim of a university community. The Dedication of Auroville yesterday must then have a pointed relevance to our own broader aims and endeavours.

From the newspaper description of the Dedication Ceremony we learn that all the States of the Indian Union, and most of the Nations of the World, were represented there. From her rooms in the Ashram, the Mother in her rich and resonant voice welcomed to Auroville all men of good will, all those “who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life”. The Auroville Charter was read in sixteen languages — and that was nevertheless a single song in several notes. From 124 nations and from the 23 States of the Indian Union, pairs of children brought handfuls of earth, and these were deposited in a tall urn in the shape of a lotus bud — then the urn was sealed before the vast assembled concourse
of expectant humanity. The ceremony was over.

The ceremony in its majestic simplicity of unfolding must have been impressive enough. But there were symbolic dimensions as well, and these are even more significant. The Urn itself, implanted at the heart of Auroville: no doubt, when little handfuls of earth are gathered — from here, from there, from many places — and are mingled together in an Urn, by this means alone we may not be able to bring about universal harmony, but even such a physical symbol can generate some creative and unitive force if it is interpreted in the right spirit and translated into action. The Urn at the heart of Auroville is also the heart of the Global Village, and its pulse-beats may very well reflect in the fulness of time the condition of humanity’s health everywhere.

In that extraordinary ceremony that took place yesterday, aside from the mingling of portions of the nations’ and states’ variegated earth into an integral whole in the Urn, the role of the children of the world and the role of the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram were uniquely symbolic. Auroville is to be a city of the future; it is the Future City, the City of Dawn. Of course any house that we build is for future habitation. Any township or city that is the handiwork of one generation is for the use of the coming generations. But ordinarily when we talk of the future, we mean only the more or less mechanical prolongation of the present (with all its insufficiencies and discontents) into the near future. A little marginal improvement here and there — wider roads, more spacious parks, better drainage facilities, and so on — but no radical departure from the present! But as regards Auroville, the Mother has a very different view of the Future. It is to be another world and time, it is to be the ‘Next Future’, a future governed by the Supermind. It is a Future as yet deep-guarded, but a Future that is preordained and inevitable:

“The supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness.”

But the auspicious Present does nurse within itself “a great Dawn” heralding The Next Future. Auroville is to prepare for that Future; Auroville is to embody that Future.

The role of the children of the world in yesterday’s Dedication Ceremony hardly needs any explanation. Children are verily the seedlings of the future humanity. When middle aged or elderly people talk of the future — even of the near future — they think less of themselves and more of the children. In another fifty years’ time, most of today’s elders may have left the scene. They will not be here to share with their children the glories or anxieties of the time. All our plans — Five Year Plans, Perspective Plans, 100-Year Plans — have meaning only when we dare into the future, and this future concerns the children more than their fathers or mothers.

Besides, since it is a radically changed — or supramentalised-Future that is to be Auroville’s theatre of fulfilment, it is logical to make children the principal actors in this desired drama of change and transformation. Isn’t it our experience that the animosities and differences — whether of colour, race, creed, caste, language or occupation — which divide people have hardly any play in the lives of children? Let loose a bunch of children, and leave them alone; and see what happens. Even when they cannot speak the same language they manage to play together, for their gestures are eloquent and their eyes have the tongues of angels. They plan and build, they demolish and build again, as if imitating the lila of the Supreme! If something like a ‘colour-bar’ erupts in their relationships, it is the parents who have to answer for the mischief. When children come together, they generate an ambience of inner understanding that facilitates the play of freedom and creative joy. Given the first symbolic push of global unity by these pairs of children from all over the world, there is no reason why the unfolding of The Next Future shouldn’t be successfully enacted on Auroville’s consecrated ground fulfilling the prophecy:

I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,
The massive barrier-breakers of the world...
The architects of Immortality.

As for the Mother, at yesterday’s Dedication Ceremony she wasn’t of course physically present on the scene, but the vast congregation heard her voice and felt her presence. Her absence really promoted the experience of a powerful Presence more potent than the merely physical. But the Mother — who is she? She is French by birth, and she first came to Pondicherry on 29 March 1914 when she was thirty-six. She was in search of the true Master who had the key to the Truth. In Europe and Africa and in many parts of the world she had sought him, and found him at last at Pondicherry in Sri Aurobindo. She recognised in him the Krishna — the Lord of the Gita — she had often encountered in her dreams. The quest was ended, Sri Aurobindo was the Lord of her being and her Lord, and she made a total offering of herself to him. And Sri Aurobindo, on his part, saw her as Mahashakti herself in visible human form.

One result of their meeting was the launching of the philosophical journal, Arya, the first monthly issue of which appeared on 15th August 1914. The Arya was to set forth, in all its amplitude and fullness, their joint Agenda for the future — the double feat of man-transformation and earth-transformation. In the meantime the First World War had thrown civilisation out of gear, and she herself had to return to France, and then proceed to Japan; but the journal continued to appear month after month. Sri Aurobindo spoke...
She was ninety about a week ago, she is more or less confined to her rooms in the Ashram, but she remains the Mother of Radiances and Benevolences to her children everywhere:

“A mother to our wants, a friend in our difficulties, a persistent and tranquil counsellor and mentor, chasing away with her radiant smile the clouds of gloom and fretfulness and depression, reminding always of the ever-present help, pointing to the eternal sunshine, she is firm, quiet and persevering in the deep and continuous urge that drives us towards the integrality of the higher nature”.

The concept of spiritual Motherhood, the adoration of a visible Holy Mother or a Mother Divine, can be a purifying and liberating experience preluding the enactment of the brotherhood of man and the realisation of human unity. The Mother has been such a source of cleansing and transforming Power to her disciples and children now numbering tens of thousands. And it is this spiritual Power-House that is to engineer Auroville the Future City of Dawn.

In the disturbed world situation today any mother, any human mother, however obscure, however humble, must needs bear a heavy load of misery. Men continue to make wars, and women and their children reap the suffering and the loss. Whether it be a war between nations or an eruption of civil strife, whether the scene is the Middle East, Nigeria or Vietnam, men are mangled, and women and children are rendered destitute. Thinking people might well wonder what is going to happen to our children in the wake of the current terrific explosion of science and technology. The children don’t worry about it, they’re too young; it is their mothers...
and grandmothers who worry about the future. They see the
children smile or play, and feel all the more anxious about
the future. They can only pray, and invoke Divine Grace to
redeem the time and safeguard the future.

The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram is all the mothers
in her love and anxiety, but she is transcendent Power too.
Even as early as 1912, she had thought of a “typic society”. In
the Arya, Sri Aurobindo had asserted in 1918 that “a spiritual
religion of humanity” alone was the hope of the future. Over
thirty-five years later, the Mother shared with others her great
dream of building a kind of city where the Life Divine could
actually be realised as a pilot project for the rest of the world
to copy in course of time. Her ideal city would be an extension
of the Ashram, as it were; no nation would be able to call it its
own; and it would be “a place of peace, concord, harmony”.
This seminal thought was duly to take life as the Auroville
Project, aiming at the reconciliation of the highest spiritual
life with the compulsions and possibilities of our industrial
civilisation. At once incarnating the love and anxiety of all
the mothers of the world as also the wisdom and power of
the Divine, the Mother has launched the Auroville bark on
the waters of the future, a modern Noah’s Ark to redeem
and change and transform humanity. The Mother is love,
she is wisdom, and she is power too and executive ability.
And all is needed to bring Auroville into being and sustain
it in its career. This is the reason why, like the Lotus-shaped
Urn symbolising the heart, there will be a Matrimandir or
Sanctuary of Truth symbolising Auroville’s soul.

It is a trite saying that the foolish think of yesterday, the
worldly-wise of today and the truly wise of tomorrow. You
will remember that recently a conference was held at Oslo
attended by seventy eminent intellectuals and scientists. The
thrust of their discussions was towards the future. The pace of
change is so fast that, unless we take care, we’ll be overtaken
by events and cast into discomfiture. In a world reduced to
the Global Village, in a revolutionary situation created by
the smashing of the atom and the cracking of the genetic
code, the rigid attitudes of the past must spell disaster. The
two rival super Powers are themselves now drawing closer
and sustaining negotiations to avert total disaster. A hotline
connects the rulers of America and Soviet Russia. More and
more people are coming round to the idea that the current
arms race is the sheerest lunacy. The nations that inhabit the
earth must thus learn to enact brotherhood or be resigned to
racial suicide. From primitive humanity to civilisation with its
arts of peace has been a long and glorious march. But the best
—the march from the mental to the supramental man— is yet to
be. To preserve human unity is our immediate responsibility.
If this can be assured, the transformation or divinisation of
man too may be possible. It is with this double aim that the
Mother in her knowledge and compassion and power has
given a start to the Auroville adventure.

A blessed seed has been cast indeed in Time’s receptive
soil, and our immediate response is deep gratitude. How this
Dream City or City of Dawn will grow—how the dream will
translate itself into actuality and reconcile the need for human
unity and harmony with the claims of human diversity and
multiplicity, the need for order and the need for freedom,
the need for power and the need for Grace, the need for a
solid material base and the need for the life, mind and Spirit
dimensions—how Auroville is going to find the means
of self-growth and self-realisation and fill the proposed
industrial, cultural, residential and international sectors with
shining purpose derived from the central source of light and
life, Matrimandir,—all this is still wrapped in the future. But
we must hold on to the faith that a firm beginning has been
made with the Auroville Dedication ceremony yesterday.

\textit{To raise the world to God in deathless Light,}
\textit{To bring God down to the world on earth...}
\textit{To change the earthly life to the life divine.}

\textsc{Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar}
\textit{Reprinted from Sri Aurobindo’s Action}
\textit{March 1978}

Auroville wants to shelter people happy to be in Auroville. Those who are dissatisfied
ought to return to the world where they can do what they want and where there is place
for everybody.

\textsc{The Mother}
\textit{2 Oct 1972}
Guest Editorial

Auroville at Fifty, an Anniversary to Remember

Anniversaries are sacred occasions in the lives of individuals and institutions. Celebration of birth anniversaries seems to be a trans-cultural phenomenon. No one knows when and where such a practice began, how it found acceptance and how it gained currency historically in so many societies and cultures. Yet the practice is worthy of our attention. It is not so much the question of cutting a cake or blowing out a candle in the presence of near and dear, or a romantically inclined companion, that is the true significance of a birth anniversary. Candles, festoons, festivities and a ceremonial dinner may be part of a birthday protocol, especially one that has come to us from the West, but it is not its real significance.

According to the Mother, birth anniversaries are worth remembering and observing since this is the day the soul decides to take birth in order to continue its journey in its path of transmigration and completion of experience, towards a more integral perfection and self-realisation. The more conscious the soul, the more conscious the birth, and yes, even the death. In the final analysis, birth cannot be delinked from death. While both remain mysterious and inexplicable, it is the first that is welcomed and celebrated widely, while death is universally mourned. Even in the Christian context, resurrection after death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, does not conceal the fact of sorrow or grief after death.

Like the birth of human beings, the anniversary of institutions too seems to be accidental; the outcome of a chosen set of circumstances, a matter of convenience from the organisational point of view: a decision perhaps made by an institutional Head, a Priest or an official decision maker. Seldom is the day or a date of an anniversary viewed as the result of a collective aspiration or prayer.

In the context of the working of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, years and dates have not been arbitrary or accidental: 1926, 1956 and 1968 are notable events in the Aurobindonean context. The founding of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926 and the descent of the Supermind in 1956 are as significant as 1914, which marks the Mother’s first meeting with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, and 1968. While Auroville was born and inaugurated on 28th February 1968, its antecedents go back in time. In a sense, the vision and idealism of the founders are intimately connected with the birth of the Prophets and the Avatars. It is no different in the case of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In the evolutionary scheme of things, Auroville had to happen: it was divinely ordained.

While spiritual institutions may have had a divine origin, much of the outcome depends on the response of the participants at a given moment. That is why we speak of the Circle of a Jesus, a Ramakrishna, a Ramana Maharshi or that of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We misread the divine purpose by the mere act of surrender. For, the Mother constantly asks of us as to whether we are ready for divine work, Her Mission on earth. The choice indeed is between Truth or Abyss. A mechanical surrender while we pander to our ego, our desire and self-centered behaviour will never help us reach the cherished goals.

It is perhaps for this reason that many institutions that have enjoyed divine blessing have been marred by ordeals and obstacles in the path of progress and growth. Setbacks happen because of complacency, self-deception and egocentric, divisive behavior.

* * *

Auroville, we know, was preceded by decades of careful planning and organisational effort. Right from the dream, the vision, the choices of the location, the blue print, the architectural planning and design, the precise message, the number of invitees, the flag bearers, the lotus shaped urn, the amphitheatre, the exact message in the invitation card, all were meticulously planned by the Mother, and carefully executed by a group of faithful devotees and followers. The ancient banyan tree and the balloon in the blue empyrean were the symbolic sentinels that kept vigil over the sacred event in 1968.

* * *

The 50th anniversary of Auroville has rightly generated a mood of joy and celebration. The panel discussions in New Delhi’s, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and the UNESCO, as well as exhibitions of the many activities of Auroville in different cities in India and abroad, have created the right atmosphere to welcome the event. The proposed activities leading up to the visit of India’s Prime Minister to Auroville in February 2018 and the final celebration on the 28th will beckon us to the journey ahead.

* * *

There are lessons that we must quickly learn regarding the setbacks Auroville suffered after the passing away of the Mother in the 70’s of the last century. The disputes between
the major stakeholders, the prolonged court cases, etc., are all symptomatic of a lack of resolve and sincerity. We must resolve all differences and make rapid progress based on harmony and understanding. The Mother’s ideals of national and international living through the pavilion models, the growth of the international township following the model of city planning she has left behind, need to be followed if Auroville is to move towards the creation of a vibrant international township.

The latest resolutions in UNESCO ‘endorsing the importance of Auroville’ augur well for the events to follow. Let us hope that by joining hands collectively, we can take the cherished dream of the Mother forward.

The present achievements of Auroville are noteworthy by any standard. A multilingual and multinational community that is at the forefront of globally accepted innovative practices in ecology, urban planning, sustainable development, forestation, not to mention the expansion of the *Matrimandir* project, are all pointers to a progressive destiny.

On this auspicious occasion we need to salute the vision of the Founder, the Mother, and those pioneers who worked tirelessly and faced ordeals and hardship to bring Auroville to the present moment.

Congratulations Auroville! Welcome to your 50th anniversary!!

*SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY*
Utopia

Auroville is a utopia and an intentional community. Intentional communities have existed since the beginning of civilization. Alone, man is a weak creature, unable to defend himself against wild beasts or forces of nature. In hunting communities, each team member has a role to play, and is specially trained for it. Man has even included the wolf in his team because of its olfactory sense. Different kinds of dogs have been bred to perform specialised tasks. Gurkulas are educational communities, just as residential college campuses are. Students group together for a period of time, then disperse. Spiritual sanghas, monasteries, ashrams are intentional communities. Sadhana Forest in Auroville, Damanhur in Italy, Findhorn in Scotland are communities that green the planet.

If a community is aiming for holistic growth, individual and collective, then it can be a candidate for an ideal community, or a utopia. When it will have accomplished these aims, then it will be called a utopia. It is a tall claim, which not many communities can muster. Even if utopian groups have existed, they have been short experiments and ended, sometimes with the passing of a charismatic leader, or because influences from outside contaminated them. Community membership has seldom been more than a few hundred. Diversity has been a challenge. A common religion, or religious persecution, has held people together. Nineteenth century religious communities lasted the longest, like “New Harmony” in the US, which survived a hundred years. Auroville, on the contrary, has about two thousand people, from about fifty countries. As Auroville celebrates its golden jubilee, let us pause to recognise this momentous achievement.

What is a utopia? When I was a child in the Ashram school, we had a name for our utopia - Timbuktu. If we lost something valuable, we knew we’d find it in Timbuktu. After a quarrel, we promised we would patch it up in Timbuktu. It was a mythical place that made us feel safe, happy and fulfilled. But we knew it did not exist. Imagine my shock when I grew older and found it on the world map. It was in Africa, Mali, on the other side of the world, but it did exist. I felt cheated, like a child when she gets to know Santa Claus is not real. Later, I found Timbuktu was one of the earliest civilized cities in Africa. Is that where its mystique came from? I wondered if Timbuktu was an Ashram cultural trope. But it could not be, because it was all over India, at least in my generation. A band I liked - Bombay Vikings - has a song called Timbuktu where a man declares to his girl, “Wherever you go I’ll go with you, still that be for Timbuktu.” There is even a collection of eco-villages in Andhra Pradesh served by the Timbaktu Collective, started by one of my generation.

For Western peoples their Timbuktu is Atlantis. It was a mythical place, that is said to have evolved to be an ideal place. Plato referred to it in his Republic, an early utopian work describing ideal society, but did not cite Atlantis as the ideal. Later in 1516, Sir Thomas More, raised Atlantis to the status of a utopia. Faithful to its Greek roots, the word means u-topia or “no place”; it is a purely fantastical place. But in English we can easily imagine an alternate spelling – eu-topia, meaning “good place”. Thomas More deliberately conflated the two meanings in his work called “Utopia”, indicating that, “Yes, it does not exist right now, but it could very well exist in the future and be the good place we desire it to be.”

Some sense of utopia has always been part of the human aspiration. The epic Ramayana has evolved the phrase “Rama-Rajya” — an enlightened king’s governance. As for aesthetic utopia, even the demon king Ravana’s Lanka, is described as being paved with gold. Where else is paved with gold? The Christian paradise. Here fountains flow with clear water and angels sing melodious songs. For the Old Testament folk living in the desert, flowing clean water was heaven. For Indians livings within competing tribes, such as the Kurus and Pandavas, Rama-Rajya was heaven. Very often the golden age is a throwback to the past, and a hope to bring it back: the present situation has never satisfied anyone.

If a golden age existed before, it is easier to imagine it can exist again. But if your sense of history is not cyclical, then you are left to imagine an otherworldly Garden of Eden. Worse still, if you have a single life upon earth, chances are that you will never live in the golden age. These constraints compounded with the present unsatisfactory state of things, produce dystopias. Be they scientific, political, or social, dystopias abound in the collective imagination. Innumerable stories and films create a macabre world — twenty, thirty, forty years hence. George Orwell’s “Nineteen Eighty Four”, describing a totalitarian dystopia was written in 1949. In 1905, H.G. Wells imagined “A Modern Utopia” where machines do menial tasks and man has the leisure to do what he really likes doing. E.M. Forster very soon came up with a short story rejoinder, where the machine renders man helpless. When “the machine stops”, it’s the end of man. Buckminster Fuller imagined a technologically advanced utopia: flowing water, electricity, cars, and machines that would wash clothes and dishes. But these exist now, so we are living in someone’s utopia. But do we feel it? The “Brave New World” of Aldous Huxley created a mechanised future where robots would make things easy for humans; so easy that man would find it hard to justify his existence. Suicide would be his only option. When I saw Stanley Kubrick’s film, “2001: A Space Odyssey”,

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where a supercomputer, Hal, has killed all the people he was supposed to protect, I could very well slip into the shoes of the last man alive. It was a traumatic place to be, and even though Kubrick made sure the day was saved, he himself did not seem convinced.

Contrast this bleak image with that of civilizations which believe in cyclical time. Buddhists who worship Amida have a concept of Pure Land, or Sukhavati. Its geographical location is not important, but it is definitely a place the spirit can live in. Pure Land Zen temples are constructed on an island, with a bridge that connects this island to the garden surrounding the temple. An ancient Chinese legend is called the “Peach Blossom Spring”. A fisherman loses his way in a river and finds a land of perfect joy. Here everybody loves everyone else. They have enough food to eat and warm homes. In fact, they don’t have the concept of money. Nor hierarchy. For a starving populace, crushed by superiors, this is heaven, no doubt.

A Western author who translated his need for a throwback age of perfection, created an Eastern heaven for his Western compatriots. This is a famous book and film titled “The Lost Horizon”. James Hilton imagines Shangri-la, the pure land of Tibetan Buddhists. It is very hard to reach, on the summit of the Himalayas, but the rewards are worth the search – eternal joy and eternal youth. The Westerners who land here play music, walk in pleasure gardens, eat sumptuous food and are waited upon by “natives”. I cannot help but chuckle at the last point, because I am from the colonised hemisphere. But we must allow each his own fantasies.

We create our individual utopias all the time. We escape into them while listening to a song we like. We surround ourselves with people we like. We pursue our hobbies there all day long, and no one judges us. Even an escape to addiction dens is a sort of personal utopia. Meditation teachers who use the technique of Creative Visualisation, tap into these sources. They ask you to imagine yourself in a place you like, such as a forest or mountain or an imaginary place like a secret garden. If there is a person who cannot imagine a safe harbour for himself, I think something is wrong: either as a child he or she was not encouraged, or did not have the leisure, or worse, was told not to daydream. Some of these daydreams become future realities, and we would rather have these as our collective destiny than a dystopia.

It takes courage to imagine a society that perhaps existed beyond the mists of time, or perhaps only in a creative mind. Mother imagined such a utopia, soon after one of the worst holocausts humanity had ever seen. In 1954, she conceived of Auroville, an international township that would focus on human unity. In 1956 the Supramental Consciousness descended upon the earth. Ever since, there have been international movements that touch a deeper chord than hitherto, the counterculture of the sixties, for example. Songwriters expressed a yearning for a better world in bold tunes, such as John Lennon’s “Imagine”, Michael Jackson’s “Heal the world”, Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the wind”, and this verse from U2, “She is running to stand still.” In 1964, Mother refers to what Sri Aurobindo had told her, “Transformation will come in stages. First a small creation that will receive light and be transformed, and that’s what will work as leaven for the general transformation.” (Agenda, Vol. 6, pg. 25). By 1968 her dream began to materialise.

There have been intentional communities throughout human history, including the joint family in India, socialist collectives, Israeli Kibbutzim. Various reasons bring people together. Often the utopia they try to achieve is so humble, the word ‘utopia’ sounds like hyperbole. But underlying these efforts is a seed of utopian hope. These days, many communities revolve around green technologies, better governance, freedom, beauty, peace. But Mother’s goal for Auroville falls outside the chart. Experiment on human unity using diversity as the key? It comes straight from a textbook, called the Life Divine.

Sri Aurobindo says the Overmind embraces diversity and can establish each in its right place, encouraging each to bring out the best that’s within. But it can do so remaining outside.
Another step is needed – a community of gnostic beings. “an overmind creation of knowledge in the Ignorance might therefore be something separate from the surrounding world of Ignorance and guarded from it by the luminous encircling and separating wall of its own principle. The supramental gnostic being, on the contrary, would not only found all his living on an intimate sense and effective realisation of harmonic unity in his own inner and outer life or group life, but would create a harmonic unity also with the still surviving mental world, even if that world remained altogether a world of Ignorance. For the gnostic consciousness in him would perceive and bring out the evolving truth and principle of harmony hidden in the formations of the Ignorance; it would be natural to his sense of integrality and it would be within his power to link them in a true order with his own gnostic principle and the evolved truth and harmony of his own greater life-creation. That might be impossible without a considerable change in the life of the world, but such a change would be a natural consequence of the appearance of a new Power in Nature and its universal influence. In the emergence of the gnostic being would be the hope of a more harmonious evolutionary order in terrestrial Nature.”

(CWSA Vol. 21-22, pp. 1005-6)

But gnostic beings live in the Supramental Consciousness. And here we are in the mental, unable to understand or empathise with one another. How can we reconcile the disparity? Well, we can start with believing it. The Mother told us about the Supramental Descent, and Sri Aurobindo wrote about its action upon the earth. We can strive towards the goal they have envisioned. Auroville is the intentional community, but the utopian ideal can exist anywhere. We can always participate in it, whether we live in Auroville, or in an Ashram or outside. Even a single person can participate. If I take this ideal seriously, it would change the way I deal with people in my office, with family members, with friends. Even with strangers I can interact meaningfully. A smile, a nod, or simply a transmission of goodness can happen with people and creatures. Who would I enrich but myself most of all? It sounds like a very attractive proposition, and by setting concrete short-term achievable goals, I may get somewhere.

Humanity is taking baby steps together. In the corporate world, now there is a job profile called “diversity consultant”. In India there are trainers who teach call-centre folk the American accent. When Indians travel abroad, they go through culture training. They are taught to eat with a fork and knife when in the West, chopsticks when in the Far East. They are taught what to say in greeting, how much to bow, what topics are taboo, how much to share. In Waldorf schools, culture studies form an important part of early education. Children are taught foreign languages, field trips take them to different communities, they are encouraged to volunteer in foreign countries. All these efforts to soften the heart are having an effect. The number of intentional communities around the world are now in the thousands. They may not last decades, but they are valuable experiments. Ex-Aurovilians have returned to the West bringing their learning home, and spreading utopian ideas. There is much more inter-cultural dialogue than ever before. The utopias that have under-delivered, according to some, have still contributed elsewhere. One may want to criticise the United Nations for its spinelessness in politics, but its offshoots such as UNESCO and UNICEF have been leaders in their fields.

As global inquiry increases, researchers are unearthing new facts couched in old customs. Environmental challenges have brought humanity together. As eco-friendly communities struggle to fight corporate funding of artificial seeds, they turn to look back at the wealth of knowledge in our ancient ways. The Bishnoi community is an example. They live in the desert of Rajasthan, but have enough food and water. They are vegetarians who nurture animals and create shelters for them. They are a peaceful and thriving group of closely-knit families. Vandana Shiva, eco-activist, says our grandmother’s little rituals during the planting season were actually scientific methods for picking the best seeds. She has created a seed collection farm, an intentional community called Navdanya, meaning “New Gift”, that follows grandma’s tenets and green fertilising methods. Here even weeds are recognised as important sources of vitamins and fodder.

Thinking about plants and sustainable lifestyles brings us back to the research centre that Mother mapped out. We are still referring to Auroville. She wanted it to be a forerunner in sustainable development as well as a spiritual laboratory for human unity. Man will live symbiotically with Nature again, in harmony with his fellow beings. When Auroville solves a problem, it will be shared with the rest of the world, be it a brick-making technology or conflict resolution technique. Auroville will keep growing as more and more people will settle, pass by, or return. Youngsters will come to learn, elders will teach, and all will be welcomed in a Golden Embrace.

Lopa Mukherjee
Mother’s Appointment

Pourna Prema came to see me one evening, early February 1971, with a message from Mother to see her next morning. It was something very important and in connection with Auroville. She knew what I will be told, but thought it would be better if I heard it first from Mother herself.

Mother had stopped seeing people from early December, and in the latter part of January, Nolini had resumed going to her and then Madhav also. But it was just coming and going, work was not resumed yet.

There was some natural suspense in my heart. Never before had Mother sent for me and on the way I felt its importance.

I did my pranam to her as usual and when I lifted my head, she smiled and asked, “Will you do what I say?.” It was an unexpected start, but I immediately answered, spontaneously, “Yes, Mother.”

She was still very weak and her voice feeble, but clear. She first spoke of the sad state of Auroville and of the way things were being done there. She specifically mentioned the name of Nava and wanted a change.

“I have no one else in view,” Mother said. “You are my last chance for Auroville.”

Then she spoke of the hard and difficult work that was being assigned to me, in spite of my weak health of which she would take care.

She also said, “Don’t think that I am giving you a big and comfortable chair to sit on. You will have lots of difficulties, but I will be with you. You will not give up saying that you are incapable.”

She added, “And I will hold you morally responsible for all that happens at Auroville.”

In the end she said that if I agree to do the work, she would see me daily with my report and problems, and with her divine solicitude and humility, she added, “I will try to help you.”

I repeated, “Yes, Mother.”

The very next morning she asked with expectant smile, “So, what did you do yesterday?” I reported to her, and for further steps suggested to wait for Navajata’s return. Mother did not like to wait, and we started in full gear.

A chapter in my life had ended. No more of silent pranams and blessings.

The Auroville work was a full-time occupation. Mother relieved me of several activities, mainly concerning Sri Aurobindo Memorial Fund Society, Sri Aurobindo’s Action, and the non-Auroville part of Sri Aurobindo Society.

A sort of Auroville office was there at Navajata’s residence and people were called there by him for meetings. We then needed a bigger place for the Auroville office and shifted to a big hall owned by Sri Aurobindo Society on the seaside. It came to be known as the beach office of Auroville. When Mother told me that meetings should not be held at somebody’s house, but in the office, I arranged accordingly and informed Navajata about it.

The land for the Matrimandir building had not yet been purchased. Its construction was a priority of which Mother had been reminding before. Land purchase for the other zones of Auroville was another neglected priority. Regulating the admission of peoples to Auroville and making the people aware of the needed discipline for the Auroville life was another. Financial management was absent.

I had to look after almost every detail. Here are some of her directions:

For the proper progress of Auroville all personal demands concerning the life of Auroville will be presented to The Mother exclusively by Shyamsunder.

The Mother has advised that all requests to the various Auroville associations abroad, for money, books, any objects or equipment should be centralised by Shyam Sunder who will organise the distribution of the requests and establish an order of priority according to the needs of Auroville.

Auroville is still in the state of elaboration, and those who want to remain there have to collaborate to its erection according to the plans made and to be made, approved by me and signed by Shyam Sunder.

For the affairs of Auroville and whenever Aurovillians are concerned it must always be done in consultation with Shyam Sunder to whom I have entrusted the responsibility of Auroville.
Auroville

Auroville is the Mother’s Project, a symbol and nucleus of her future divine world. So many dedicated and devoted workers are working on it trying to make it, especially the Matrimandir, a supreme wonder of the world. I have no doubt that with the Mother’s grace they will succeed.

But that is not enough. It is just the physical symbol and the nucleus of the divine world that is to come out of it. The divine world of the future will be built not with cement and bricks but with our human flesh and bone turned into divine material by the touch of, and identification with, the Mother’s truth and consciousness. How to achieve that is the big and decisive question.

For this transformative event to take place a mere paradigm shift will not do, a quantum jump from devotee to divine will have to take place by identification with the Mother’s being and truth. The Mother is the turning point for our transformation from human into divine. We shall have to be not contented with mere devotion but shall have to abolish ourselves by pouring and merging ourselves into the Mother. Then She will remake us in her image and content, that is, make us Her Children (Sons and Daughters). These divine children of Hers will constitute the foundation of Her world or be the forerunners of Her future world.

Auroville is the divine Laboratory of the Mother where She is forging the prototype of Her divine world using the raw material of our human world. In her new creation lies the fulfillment, not of only our little human selves but of the planetary life of the earth being itself. It gives sense and meaning to our insignificant existence. So it is in our supreme interest that we consecrate the totality of our existences to the Mother as oblations in Her Yajna for divine Creation. She is our be all and end all. She is from where we come and to where we return. She is our source and our destination. She is beginningless and endless. In this realisation lies our fulfilment. Out of Her grace She came down to the earth in a human garb to introduce Her divinity into the physical world. She has come down to us and, receiving Her grace, we have to rise up to Her divinity and be fulfilled. Auroville is Her Yajna Vedi for this purpose.

Perhaps, many of us may not know that, while laying the foundation of Matrimandir, Mother in her own hand had written ☀ on the foundation stone and blessed it with her signature in the usual way. It means that Mother charged the Stone with the Dual or Integral Power of the Supreme Truth: Transcendental represented by Om and Immanent or Divine represented by Mother herself. The foundation Stone of the Matrimandir represents the soul of the Matrimandir and of Auroville. It also represents the soul of the Earth and the entire Creation.

This is the supreme significance of Auroville and the Matrimandir.

Swami Om Poorna Swatantra
The Matrimandir will be the soul of Auroville

The sooner the soul is there, the better it will be for everybody and especially for the Aurovilians.

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There is only one Matrimandir, the Matrimandir of Auroville.

The others must have another name.

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The Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Divine’s answer to man’s aspiration for perfection.

Union with the Divine manifesting in a progressive human unity.

***

The Matrimandir is directly under the influence of the Divine and certainly He arranges things better than we could do ourselves.

***

Let Auroville be the symbol of a progressive Unity.

And the best way to realise this is a unity of aspiration towards the Divine Perfection in work and in feeling, in a consecration of the entire life.

Message for the beginning of construction of the four foundation pillars which support the Matrimandir sphere
North Mahakali, South Maheshwari, East Mahalakshmi, West Mahasaraswati

Significance of the four pillars


Significance of the Matrimandir gardens

Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Goodness, Generosity, Equality, Peace.

Significance of the twelve small Meditation rooms situated within the large earthen petals surrounding the Matrimandir
the newness, the dawn

coming to the end
of a long long line
- time wrought connection -
umbilical cord
million years old
starkly aware in the back
- the thread throughout the ages
still holds me -

confronting the ‘nothing’
the unknown of old
gaping in halls filled with form
rays of golden colour
appeal to the being
take over the heartbeat -
in-pouring dawn

- a totally new era
totally new call -

the medium’s still matter
- feet always find solids to walk -
but the consciousness is groping
sends feelers, is searching
unicorn’s concentration, piercing an opening
drilling the barrier
the dark
timelessly suspended
in zero-point nowness -
shocked into spaces
of ether-fine air
then
trembling awakening
to breath-taking newness
silence
oneness
aware

nowhere to go for information
no slogan to hang on for help –
facing New Life in its rawness
un-knowing the known
the self
golden I AM pervading
beckoning smile within
stretching in matter to hold it –
oh wonderful city
of dawn!

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Matrimandir Rose and Cement

Grey perfume stains our hands
A strong sweetness,
The future grows
And in a dovetailing o suns
A ray is caugth.

Eternity
seed of fragrant steel.

Mauna (at Matrimandir)
13.12.‘89

Anandi
Realisation
Matrimandir Nightwatch

Vast endless eternal presence
Our beginnings and endings
Are small flares of ego-flame -
Re-kindling of aspiration.
We go to make a new beginning
To satisfy our need for pageantry,
To make an ego-signpost along the path of ignorance,
Knowing birth to be a choice, more or less clear,
And death, for most, to be an accident
Born of long-practiced ignorance -
Endless cycles of beginnings and endings
Superimposed upon yet fully pervaded by
The ever-existent, unbroken process of love.

3 September, 1972

After the pressured rush
In the midnight hush
Remain a thousand living whisperings;
Wholesome presences of work well done.
Concentrations, dedications
Live on, though the workers are gone.
Each hammered nail, lifted stone, sweep of broom,
The single small movements made by many men
Uniting to create a vast construction
Greater, finer than all the work we do.
For God gives in measureless bounty
To fulfill our efforts
And we are made anew, single yet combined
As we build this temple of divinity.

31 May 1974
LORETTA SHARTSIS

Cornucopia

Your hesitant chest is
the cornucopia of the stars.
The future is just the past
of another present, an answer
stood in the future generated
the flames of your questions,
the force that quenches your heart
is the same that thirsted it.

GIACOMO COLOMBA
Wandering in the Archives of Memory

Leaves of Grass

How much does one remember the day of one’s wedding more than fifty years after? For me it remains somewhat of a blur, just doing what others are asking me to do. In spite of studying all those romances as a student of English literature and gobbling up Georgette Heyer by the bushelfuls, there was little romance in my own approach to this new chapter. Arranged marriages were the accepted norm in my generation. My worry, however, was something else. How am I going to manage the ‘four salutations’?

The auspicious moment had come, the sapta-padi had concluded. Nandakumar and myself had taken the seven steps assuring each other of lifelong friendship and it was time to start the rounds of ‘salutations’, the very best binding exercise created by the Srivaishnava community among the Tamils. Usually women had to bend down, flexing the knees four times and men had to stretch themselves on the earth in sashtanga namaskara, also four times. Some kindly souls would stop us even as we were doing the second salutation, saying, “Enough, enough.” The first person we had to salute now was the family matriarch.

Nandakumar’s grandmother was a learned lady and very, very orthodox. It was her desire that I should wear a nose-screw. What, pierce my nose? But then rebellion never came easy to me; indeed it never has! So now I had a tiny diamond on my nose, flashing away its jaguar blue to be in tune with my earrings. To one who was used to wearing light cotton sarees, the nine yards of heavy Conjeevaram silk seemed a burden; my two plaits that dangled free were now a single strand, also made heavy with yards and yards of flowers and jewels. Jewels on hands, neck . . . it was all quite eerie to me. My worry, however, was something else. How am I going to manage the ‘four salutations’?

Then we were in front of grandmother, a wisp of a figure, clad in pure white, her head covered by the sari, not a single jewel on her person. “Amma, the children have come to take your blessings,” says my father-in-law. We start saluting. I can think of nothing except keeping count. Four salutations over. But the usual ‘enough’ has not come. Fortunately my mother had warned me that when taking the blessings of grandmother I must go on saluting till she said ‘enough’. What do I do? I lose count in my confusion. Meanwhile her clear-toned words of blessings in a sing-song tone come through. After half a century, I remember two phrases: “Itta kaiyum, raja peru vazhvum” and “aal pol thazaithu, aruhu pol verodi”. I do not understand any of it but then the welcome words are heard. “Enough, enough. Sammandhiamma, you have trained your daughter well in traditional ways.”

My mother, who is standing nearby, beams. Grandmother proceeds with a few words of advice. “Listen to what he says always. And you too, take to domestic life like a good boy.” This is more comprehensible. Again, I have no breath to relax. Both of us are marched to other elders of the family and to another ritual and yet another ritual and yet another . . . .

In later years my mother used to marvel at the way the grandmother had given the blessing. She explained to me the phrases which I remembered. ‘Itta kai’ meant a hand that always gave (food); ‘raja peru vazhvum’ invoked a royal and wealthy life; ‘aal pol thazaithu’ signified ‘a growth like the banyan (tree)’ and ‘aruhu pol verodi’ assured spreading roots like the ‘aruhu’ (grass). I wondered how close our culture was to Nature around and people were taught down the generations to feed people to the best of their ability and cherish Nature.

Here there was no ‘big’ and ‘small’. All of creation is needed for one’s cultured life. We treasure the lone banyan tree near the Matrimandir. It is a living god for many of us. Just watching it can be yoga. If it is important to us as the very centre of Auroville that was pointed out by the Mother to Roger Anger in 1965, equally valuable is the grass that grows all over the area! For it is grass that teaches us how to be “near to earth’s wideness”. The roots of grass that are spread wide beneath the topsoil teach us the value of fraternity.

Fortunately, even today, we have kept up some closeness with grass. Indeed who has not seen grass? Right now I am lying on the turf in the shadow of the fort wall of Thanjavur’s Big Temple. It is a picnic-cum-holy spot for our family but these days I prefer to spend most of the time here resting my arthritic knees. A little away is an ideal, nuclear family. The lady is opening a hamper and placing cups and plates on the green spread, while two little children appear to be running around chasing butterflies. The young father is busy taking snapshots of his family, of the elephants, of the sculptures.

My own early recollection of grass takes me back to the village. I am a child of seven or eight watching my brother and our cousins bringing in patches of grass, cut like cake and scooped along with the earth from the banks of Tambraparni river. It is holiday time, and they are trying to fashion a
the seemingly insignificant grass on which we tread with am never tired of hearing the several meanings attached to even have meant that Rama was going to pull out Ravana's grass for himself once Rama destroys Lanka. Well, Sita might by this she indicated that Ravana will have to make a hut of Pillai, a 14th-century commentator on the verse, says that Ravana as common as grass, to humble his ego. Periavachan not cross the grass. Also it would signify that Sita considered by placing a blade of grass or sprinkling water, one achieves For several centuries, commentators have lavished intense mind away from me. May it have love towards your wives.” placed a blade of grass in front of her and replied: turn your desires to possess her, “the lady with the pleasing smile of her, as if it could prevent the evil rakshasa from advancing! what is the lady doing? She is placing a leaf of grass in front tree? Who is this terrible ten-headed figure who is trying to is this lady sitting on a patch of grass beneath the Ashoka when Ravana says that he is overwhelmed by Sita and My mind speedily walks around in the archives. Ha, who is this lady sitting on a patch of grass beneath the Ashoka thinking of how Ganesa in Vedic Theology is happiest when worshipped with ‘aruhu’ grass. Also known as Durva grass (Cynodon Dactylon), it is sacred for us and it is available almost everywhere. I whisper to myself with a sense of pride: “Only Indians know how to see the whole world as God and find all creation a sacred edifice.” My mind speedily walks around in the archives. Ha, who is this lady sitting on a patch of grass beneath the Ashoka? Who is this terrible ten-headed figure who is trying to demoralise the lady by exhibiting his power and pomp? And what is the lady doing? She is placing a leaf of grass in front of her, as if it could prevent the evil rakshasa from advancing! Trrnnamantaratah krrtvaa pratyuvacha suchismita Nivartaya mano maththa svaajane priyataaa manah When Ravana says that he is overwhelmed by Sita and desires to possess her, “the lady with the pleasing smile placed a blade of grass in front of her and replied: turn your mind away from me. May it have love towards your wives.” For several centuries, commentators have lavished intense attention on this blade of grass. One of the explanations is that by placing a blade of grass or sprinkling water, one achieves a dividing line which cannot be crossed. Hence, Ravana dare not cross the grass. Also it would signify that Sita considered Ravana as common as grass, to humble his ego. Periavachan Pillai, a 14th-century commentator on the verse, says that by this she indicated that Ravana will have to make a hut of grass for himself once Rama destroys Lanka. Well, Sita might even have meant that Rama was going to pull out Ravana’s heads as easily as she had pulled out this blade of grass. I am never tired of hearing the several meanings attached to the seemingly insignificant grass on which we tread with impunity. Even in this century there are traditional orators of Srivaishnavism who recreate the scene for a couple of hours in a realistic way. The sight of the emaciated Sita seated under the Ashoka tree remains in a frieze in our mind’s eye.

None of the traditional scholars have referred to one other aspect of the same scene. It never struck me either till I happened to read Dr. V. Raghavan’s play, “Pul” (Grass). The play was written long ago. In an introduction he says that the use of a blade of grass by Sita as a guardian had exercised his mind deeply. Suddenly it struck him that Rama had also used a blade of grass as a ‘brahmastra’ to destroy the crow asura, Jayanta. Raghavan imagines that Sita was amazed how an insignificant leaf could be transformed into a missile by one’s tapasya and had treasured this novel missile which she had now used in the Ashoka Vana.

How can I disbelieve all these powers latent in every atom of this creation when I have been bombarded with the LHC (Large Hadron Collider) for the past two months? Newspapers, the Net, the Radio: they have all been giving information about this somewhat frightening experiment. I believe this Collider is going “to advance the magnification of the properties of objects by the largest factor in the history of particle physics — by some reckoning, 500-fold beyond what can be achieved today . . . In the tunnel, powerful superconducting magnets steer protons around a ring where huge voltages accelerate them until they pick up an amazing amount of energy — 7 trillion electron volts at their peak.” Whoever heard of an iron machine flying high up in the sky carrying more than five hundred persons in 1908? We simply listened to our grandaunts describing the Pushpaka Vimana of Lanka. And we believed all that she told us. We were not fooled, after all. A Pushpaka-Jet and a grass-missile are all part of Mother Nature’s Dance Divine. We must have humility to believe the foundations of our culture. They were no vain imaginations of a disordered brain, but visionary footnotes of the future tomorrows. I shudder as Sri Aurobindo’s ‘A Dream of Surreal Science’ opens within my inward eye with its clinching finale: Thus wagged on the surreal world, until A scientist played with atoms and blew out The universe before God had time to shout.

The skies are grey today. Will it rain? Shall I have to get up from this grass cushion beneath the open sky and dart into the nearby mandap? I remember suddenly my early days as a journalist when every bit of important news meant dashing to the library and picking up books and taking down notes for future reference. I would also write an article which would get published, being topical. The announcement came in 1967
that Carl Sandburg was dead and I remembered reading a few poems by him. Off I went to the library and did my work. I discovered new angles and points of view. I wrote an article which was published in The Indian P.E.N. by Sophia Wadia. One poem of Sandburg which I had quoted in my article found an important place in my scrapbook. For a person not yet thirty and who was a young mother at that time, I must confess the poem came as a shock. The poem ‘Grass’ written in 1918, is terrifying in its stark statement of an ugly truth:

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.
Shovel them under and let me work —
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.

Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:
What place is this?
Where are we now?
I am the grass.
Let me work.

Somehow, whenever I have had to place my foot on a patch of grass, this poem has returned to me, making me remember the past. Would many people have died on this very spot where now it is all grass? Suddenly the history of three millennia of the Cauvery Delta clangs around me with spears and swords and cannon shots. The Cholas, the Marathas, the Muslims, the Britishers, . . . Is there any single inch of earth that can say, “No one died violently here”? Mother Earth, Vasundhara, we have been forcing you to lament for all these killings, whether it was in Tallikota or Plassey or Mewar or the Taj Hotel at Bombay! My father often used to refer to the wanton carnage that had been going on staining this green earth and sought Sita Devi, the Earth-born’s forgiveness in his epic poem, Sitayana:

O Mother, mighty, fair, immaculate
Your compassionate descent,
Your divine ministry of sufferance
Amidst us, hadn’t been in vain.
Not in vain, for although the average
And even the elect fail
Oftentimes in charity, yet we know
Your Grace will redeem us still.¹

Grace that comes in the image of grass, forgives our trespasses, covers up the clots of blood and rotting corpses and makes it all beautiful again. The heart grows somewhat calm as I wonder why I have been drawn to grass so much in my thoughts all these years. Perhaps because I am a student of English literature, the word has been floating in the flow of my memories. When K. Viswanadham taught us Old English literature in Andhra University, he explained the presence of diphthongs in the English text. He began teaching the text and unfortunately we giggled. We thought we had come to study English literature but what were these hieroglyphics? He looked up, understood our predicament and went on with the lesson. These letters were diphthongs. A diphthong consisted of a vowel and a glide, but written as a single unit, a kind of ardha-naariishwara concept! Thus ‘a’ and ‘e’ were written together as ‘æ’, which should be pronounced as a single vowel. This æ was in the very first word of the text:

Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum . . .

The only word we understood was ‘we’. The line said: “Listen! In olden days, we who belonged to the spear-wielding Danes . . .” A boy got up and asked the Professor: “Is this English, Sir? Except for ‘we’ it is all Greek and Latin!” We giggled again. That was the nearest to a riotous behaviour one could come across in a mofussil university.

“No, no. They are all English words. This is Old Saxon. The form has changed, that is all. Like ‘dagum’ becoming ‘day’ and ‘setla’ becoming ‘seat’,” He gave a few more examples. One was the familiar ‘grass’ which happened to be ‘gres’, he said and that we usually mispronounced it in India. Of course it was ‘g-r-a-a-s’ for us, we were not in Oxford or Cambridge, or Beowulf’s Old England, were we? It was a pain, studying Old English, but it fetched us plentiful marks in translation. Our classes were enlivened by our wishing each other ‘hwæt’ and how the ‘gres’ in front of the Arts College was full of centipedes, and there were very few ‘dagum’ left for the examination. I am afraid we went about christening our teachers with names drawn out of Beowulf, this was Grendel the monster, that was Hrothgar the ageing king and our English Department was Heorot, the Hall of Beowulf. The cruelty of the adolescent young!

I kept coming across grass in the books I read with anxious care, for the aim was to get a first class in the Honours course, otherwise it would be perdition for me, I thought. The Romantics and Shakespeare saved my soul in this grind of Old English, Middle English and linguistics. They were so full of life, of earth, of flowers, of grass. They chimed in with my heartbeat. So much of longing, sadness, of feeling a martyr, for no reason whatsoever! That is the inscrutability of adolescence, I suppose. The Collected Works of Wordsworth I used five decades ago is still with me, and so is the poem

¹ Sitayana, Prologue.
'Splendour in the Grass' which unknowingly inculcated in me a strong philosophy of life. Do not mourn!

What though the radiance
which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass,
of glory in the flower,
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats: they all loved nature and loved the green sward. Keats says that it is delightful to be rolling in grass and lie stretched out on it. His 'Ode to a Nightingale' recreates grass and meadow and everything pastoral. Naturally, when browsing in the university library, I was attracted by the title of Walt Whitman's book, Leaves of Grass. I had heard only of a 'blade' of grass, and it was interesting that he looked at them as leaves. The style was challenging too. Whitman was not included in the syllabus and so I wasn’t so sure about it, it was after all not written by an Englishman, and I made some silly remark. Father must have been irritated by my pretentious statement which implied that only an Englishman could write good English. He opened a page from Sri Aurobindo's The Future Poetry (the 1953 edition which he was reviewing for the Aryan Path at that time) and said: “Go on, read it aloud.” What is this? Four pages on Whitman!

He [Whitman] has the intimate pulse and power of life vibrating in all he utters, an almost primitive force of vitality, delivered from the enormous mechanical beat of the time by a robust closeness to the very spirit of life, — that closeness he has more than any other poet since Shakespeare, — and ennobled by a lifting up of its earthly vigour into a broad and full intellectual freedom.\(^1\)

There were two results from this incident. I became a lifelong fan of Whitman. And I have kept that edition of The Future Poetry with me all these years for it taught me the importance of humility. Don’t you start judging others, for you may end up judging god himself! The Mother has given 'humility' as the significance of the minute flowers that rise from the leaves of grass. There is nothing on earth that teaches us humility so well as grass, readily allowing itself to be trod upon, giving us coolth, covering our battlefields with a renewal of hope. And humility is the way to tranquillity, says the Mother:

. . . the mind, the vital, and the body must learn and feel, once and for all, that they are wholly incapable of understanding and judging the Divine, not only in his essence but also in his action and manifestation.

This is the only true humility and with it come quiet and peace.\(^2\)

It is time to come out of my reverie and go into the Big Temple with the tiny bunch of precious ‘aruhu’ grass in my hand. To go to Ganesha’s niche and pray for freedom from strife, for shanti.

**Prema Nandakumar**

(To be continued)

Courtesy: Mother India

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\(^1\) (CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 196)

\(^2\) (CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 153)
The Force behind the Indian Renaissance and Auroville

Swami Vivekananda prophesised, “None can desist her (India) anymore; never is she going to sleep anymore; no outward powers can hold her back any more; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet.”¹ More than one hundred years have lapsed since Swami Vivekananda made this prophecy. Are there signs by which we can discern that indeed a conscious, invincible, irresistible power is at work in India, preparing the country for something extraordinary? The answer to this question should demonstrate something distinct, something unique about India that transcends its economic, political, social, scientific or military, cultural or religious effloresces or successes, though these cannot be undermined or neglected.

One of the important points in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is that an individual is a microscopic representation of the universe. And, by changing all that holds him or her back, by winning over his or her inner difficulties and imperfections, one can help in winning the same difficulties and imperfections in the larger sphere of humanity. Similarly, a country like India, which has a rich spiritual wealth and inner capabilities, becomes, by the virtue of that wealth and capabilities, a representative of humanity’s advance by removing the obstacles that humanity must overcome. Just a few weeks before the inauguration of Auroville, when the Mother was asked for a message for a conference in Delhi, this subtle truth of things appeared to her with great force of clarity. She wrote: “India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind...India will be the land of its resurrection – the resurrection to a higher and truer life.”

She elaborated her vision to Satprem:

“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.

It came and it was so clear, so tremendously powerful!

...It was very interesting. It remained the whole time, for more than an hour, such a strong and clear vision, as if suddenly everything became clear. I often used to wonder about it (not ‘wonder,’ but there was a tension to understand

Aurobindo worldwide to live and to realise the ideals and spirit of Auroville.

ARYADEEP S. ACHARYA

(Eds note: In May 2017, a conference “Relevance of Sri Aurobindo and the Grand Visions of the Ancient Indian Wisdom” took place at the Mahatma Gandhi Center for Non-Violence, Human Rights and World Peace, Hindu University of America Orlando, USA. Its director and coordinator of the conference, Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra compiled shorter versions of select papers presented there. Our October 2017 issue carried the first one. This is the fifth in the series)

Symbols of Auroville — Signs for our Times

One of the most beautiful words in the Tamil language for me, is the word ‘pozuthu’. Ditto for the word in Sanskrit, ‘usha’ and in English, ‘dawn’. Something that sounds so lovely, ought to be so in form too. So when in Tamil we say ‘Pozuthu Vedinchuzhi’ (the dawn has broken) or the same in English, we literally see the dawn breaking against the dark sky that is only just beginning to get its first early morning dose of sunlight. ‘The dawn is breaking’ could be a cry of lament from lovers’ lips when they don’t want the night to end, or a shout of joy for the insomniac who awaits the day. Whatever the reason, the dawn is symbolic of a new beginning. Auroville — The City of Dawn, was definitely named so with a reason. The foremost one being the need for the Earth to break away from the old ties and start anew. In doing so, it had to also live up to all the other baptismal names — City of the Future, City of Universal Culture, City the Earth Needs, City at the Service of Truth. It was born to be a place for the Seeker of the Divine Consciousness.

What triggered this lofty aspiration of the Mother? Amidst all her loftier thoughts and teachings, this idea was manifested in a physical form. Ideas are perpetuated and preserved when transformed into a tangible form, when subjectivity transforms into objectivity. The reasons she saw could be many, but the dreamer in me says the vision could have been hastened by the words of Sri Aurobindo, straight from Canto One, The Symbol of Dawn:

A message from the unknown immortal Light
Ablaze upon creation’s quivering edge,
Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.
An instant’s visitor to the godhead shone.
On life’s thin border awhile the Vision stood
And bent over earth’s pondering forehead curve
Interpreting a recondite beauty and bliss
In colour’s hieroglyphs of mystic sense,
It wrote the lines of a significant myth
Telling of a greatness of spiritual dawns,
(CWSA Vol. 33-34, pg. 4)

To have a home, a roof above one’s head, so to say, is the wish of every human. It’s the dream of parents to be able to leave or bequeath a home to their offspring. A mother basically rears her children to be righteous, to aspire and to make a heaven of her home. The Mother set out on a search to build this home, never knowing that a banyan tree would soon be a symbol so central to the dream. This ‘dream’ as she called Auroville in the early stages, could not have found a better place to start. A tree, and especially, the Banyan, is like a mother, a giver, a provider. The wide thick leaves, the numerous branches are a shelter, the roots spreading over vast areas and giving birth to new shoots. What could be more meaningful for something so hugely envisioned? The tree symbolised a Force that had called out and that came to live as a centre piece of a Vision; it finds echo in Book Four, Canto Two:

That a diviner Force might enter life,
A breath of Godhead greeten human time.
Although she leaned down to their littleness
Covering their lives with her strong passionate hands
And knew by sympathy their needs and wants
And dived in the shallow wave-depths of their lives 
And met and shared their heart-beats of grief and joy 
And bent to heal their sorrow and their pride, 
Lavishing the might that was hers on her lone peak
To lift to it their aspiration’s cry, 
(CWSA Vol. 33-34, pg. 366)

The Banyan stood on ‘her lone peak’ in 1968, but no longer, 
for lakhs of trees of various species keep her company, along 
with the community that now lives around her. Humble (and 
now, even vast) homes in clustered groups, dot the landscape. 
Buildings of Community Development can be spotted between 
the dense trees. Fifty years have passed by, but not much has 
changed. Life emerges at varying degrees, sometimes quickly, 
at other times, at a leisurely pace, accepting the change of 
seasons and passing of years. Where once the bullock-cart 
moved aside the rare cycle, now the increasing presence of 
cars and other modes of racing two-wheelers are not out of 
place. The Banyan smiles on.

A symbol of the Soul: the Matrimandir is just that, rising 
out of the earth as a golden globe. Its resting place could 
be nothing but the space called ‘Peace’. Upholding this 
spectacular golden dome-sun, are four symbolic pillars, 
Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. 
They stand “Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her 
leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in 
her guidance of this universe and in her dealings with the 
terrestrial play”1. Concave and Convex discs, made of varying 
materials, from steel to glass, reinforced plastic and even 
fibre glass, and covered with gold but yet retaining the glow 
of the prescribed ‘hibiscus peach’, the globe magnificently 
looks down like a Universal Mother, radiating the luminosity 
of a supramental sun, a symbolic tower of aspiration on a 
lofty level, out of reach of the non-aspiring, yet a place of 
welcome to the select seeker of truth and beauty and a higher 
consciousness.

For those coming out of a domain of darkness, a light 
shining bright or even a spark, is like a beacon, willing them 
to embrace life again and emerge anew. The Matrimandir 
is the Soul of Auroville and the soul of the Matrimandir is 
concentrated in a light, whose beauty and form has radiated 
all over the world. It is an architectural masterpiece, on high 
artistic and aesthetic levels. The light of the Orb seems to

1 CWSA Vol. 32, pg. 17
trap within it the spiritual, physical and metaphysical aspect of the place where it rests. The creation of Architect Paolo Tommasi, the inner chamber has symbolic features — a point of concentration to focus the mind and galvanise the spirit to action. If looked at for a considerable period of time, the crystal orb seems to float, a mirage that is personal. Everything around is white; itself a symbol of purity and grace. Positioned in such a way that a single vertical beam of sunlight falls on the orb and diverges in muted radiance, it plays its part as the messenger of “Future Realisation” as envisioned in Book one, Canto Four:

Too seldom is the shadow of what must come
Cast in an instant on the secret sense
Which feels the shock of the invisible,
And seldom in the few who answer give
The mighty process of the cosmic Will
Communicates its image to our sight,
Identifying the world’s mind with ours.
Our range is fixed within the crowded arc
Of what we observe and touch and thought can guess
And rarely dawns the light of the Unknown
Waking in us the prophet and the seer.
(CWSA Vol. 33-34, pg. 53)

Even from rocky barren land one can visualise a dream, or sense the presence of the supernatural or divine and go on to learn about the life of earthbound men and women whom we don’t meet within the sphere of our urban living. Nature abounds in Auroville; trees and shrubs, grass and creepers, flowering and non-flowering plants and bushes overlap to form a veritable Garden of Eden. Within this overgrown garden is a planned one — some trees strategically placed, some planted for a specific reason, as symbols of Auroville and carriers of messages of the city. Hectare upon hectare of arid land transformed into a thriving, vibrant eco-system, forms the central part of the city, The Green Belt. The ultimate flower-lover and an encyclopedia of the flora that she so lovingly planted and tended and nurtured, the Mother found each flower to be a symbol and a pointer. The names she bestowed on each flower and tree, remain still, standing testimony to her belief in the world of nature as an integral part of Auroville. Flowers best encapsulate all that the creator of this place stands for. There is meaning in each one. They appeared perhaps as little miracles, thrusting their way from the sheaths that held them. At Auroville all the flowers and every tree symbolises a virtue and has been attributed a spirituality that has to be imbibed. Today, fallen blossoms around the acres are like crushed dreams or signs of an emerging new chapter, a welcome spring of hope. The five Petals embossed on the Auroville symbol stand for the Power of Expression and for Realisation — of… a beautiful dream? The world awaits “the advent of the new species”.

Maria Netto

Errata

Our apologies for a typographical error in our January 2018 issue.

On page 2, column 2, in the second line from the top, the year of Sri Aurobindo's arrival is printed as 1918 whereas it should be 1910. The error is much regretted. It has been corrected in the issue which appears on our website.

An Appeal to our Life Members/subscribers

As paper cost as well as the cost of posting has escalated significantly, we would like to request you to please consider making an additional contribution of your choice to continue receiving the journal by post. This would be much appreciated. Those of you, particularly the ones from overseas, who would like to switch to a PDF version by email please send us your email address.
To be a True Aurovillian

1. The first necessity is the inner discovery in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances.

At the centre there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville.

2. One lives in Auroville in order to be free from moral and social conventions; but this freedom must not be a new slavery to the ego, to its desires and ambitions.

The fulfilment of one’s desires bars the way to the inner discovery which can only be achieved in the peace and transparency of perfect disinterestedness.

3. The Aurovilian should lose the sense of personal possession. For our passage in the material world, what is indispensable to our life and to our action is put at our disposal according to the place we must occupy.

The more we are consciously in contact with our inner being, the more are the exact means given to us.

4. Work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not put his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let the consciousness organise a bit of matter by means of one’s body is very good. To establish order around oneself helps to bring order within oneself.

One should organise one’s life not according to outer and artificial rules, but according to an organised inner consciousness, for if one lets life go on without subjecting it to the control of the higher consciousness, it becomes fickle and inexpressive. It is to waste one’s time in the sense that matter remains without any conscious utilisation.

5. The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to work consciously to hasten this advent.

6. Little by little it will be revealed to us what this new species must be, and meanwhile the best course is to consecrate oneself entirely to the Divine.

THE MOTHER
13 June 1970
Housing in Urban India; challenges

In urban India over 40% of the land use is given over to the authorised residential development while about 30 to 50% of the urban population lives in slums or unauthorised settlements. Due to limited availability of land with reliable supply of water, electricity and waste management, along with access to social and civic amenities like health care, education, local markets and recreational spaces the cost of land is one of the major barriers to providing decent housing for all in this country. Besides framing policies to provide land tenure, the focus of the government has been on funding and promoting applied research for technological solutions with the use of sustainable building materials and technology and solar passive design to reduce the energy requirement for lighting and ventilation.

But one of the issues not addressed in either the governmental or private sector is the socioeconomic and environmental cost of urban housing layouts and typologies. The modern system of settlement planning is a direct output of the industrial revolution, with “efficient” zoning of residential, production and institutional activities with high dependency on fossil fuelled transportation systems linking these zones. Along with the environmental issues that this form of urbanisation has created, there is also the social breakdown with the ghettos of inner cities and gated communities in developed countries and the slums of developing countries.

Of the many aims of Auroville, the “city the earth needs” and “an experiment in human unity” one of the most relevant in the 21st century is to seriously address the core reasons behind the present global crisis of climate change, unfolding environmental disasters and the economic inequity that is expressing itself in the popular support for a politics of nationalism and tribalism.

Aspiration and vision of Humanscapes Habitat Project

Humanscapes habitat project aspires to demonstrate a living and evolving neighborhood that mainstreams sustainable development and an integral lifestyle; and that the outputs of integrated planning, can be relevant and forward looking for the next 20 years, acting as a bridge to the future while serving the future citizens of Auroville and meeting their needs.

The planning and design aims to become a prototype showing incremental models of population density with improved sustainability and affordability of public infrastructure in Auroville. The design will allow for a vibrant, interactive neighborhood, demonstrating simplicity and beauty in harmony in its built form.

The design of the settlement learns from local wisdom, culture and traditions while integrating new ideas, developments, and demonstrations, whether in the area of buildings, horticulture, or resource management. The construction process is involved in generating local employment and in the upgrading of local skills, especially in the building trades used in the project.

The design will elegantly integrate closed loop systems for managing resource flows to achieve a small resource footprint, raise the bar for conservation, efficiency and sustainability. The site planning sits in the consciously created natural environment of Auroville in a way that contributes to the established initiatives of developing an ecologically sustainable and resonant biosphere responding to changing seasonal conditions throughout the year. The project has to produce positive value (for society, the nation and the world) in its fields of endeavor without externalities, without unfair or unsustainable exploitation, whether of natural resources,
other human beings, or of future generations. In keeping with this attitude it will not only be a place with sustainable hardware but promote sustainable, integral lifestyle choices. The output of the project is expected to be benchmarked to the best worldwide, and will institute systems of evaluation.

**The process and output till now**

We are nearing the completion of the first phase of the project and the inhabitants will be moving in soon. This phase is clustered to create a series of layered transitional spaces starting from the public open space of the stepped plazas which are also the catchment and percolation ponds for roof run-off, to multi level smaller spaces, culminating in the personal spaces of the dwelling units. There are 4 basic co-living typology of dwelling units in this phase; from flats with 4 bedrooms with shared living spaces, to units for single parents who may share living spaces with singles and couples. There are family units that are designed to have extended families of non-related persons sharing living spaces.

A multipurpose hall with a café with a terrace sit-out, games room, small amphitheatre for concerts and performances along with a space for screening films has been built in the first phase. This is an interactive social space for the residents and the young adults of the larger community of Auroville. In the subsequent phases, we intend to create working spaces along with space for long-term volunteers and researchers/teachers, depending on funding.

To nudge the sharing aspect towards reducing the foot print of the project, all the dwelling units are planned to house only daily use essential domestic appliances, with all the rest, like laundry machines, blenders/irons and such, being accessible only in the utility building and multipurpose hall. This is done to address the global issue of waste generated from “designed obsolescence” for “economic growth” with consumption, the backbone of a market economy. Of course the buildings are designed keeping in mind the climatic context by orienting them for the least solar gain, with maximum cross ventilation, natural light that is diffused for glare control along with rain protection with overhangs and cool roofs with reflective surfaces. The structure is a mix of framed RCC along with compression roofing using segmental vaults to reduce the steel and cement use.

A portion of the building materials used in this phase is generated from waste like stone trimmings from stone cutting factories in Cuddapha district of Telengana, Styrofoam waste from packaging and the general construction and demolishing waste. The finish quality from recycled materials had to be such that it becomes a viable alternative for urban housing. With the technical help of Auroville Earth Institute, the earth building technique of “poured earth concrete” has been used extensively as the walling material. This technique is a happy mix of local earth, cement, sand and aggregate that can be built with low skilled labour using easily available construction equipment like a concrete mixer and vibrator.

When the Terms of Reference for this project were framed for building materials, energy, water use etc, the aim was to use this project as a demonstration for innovative building materials and technology to support the call for change in the national building code to make it more region specific, reflecting diversity of the climate, building materials and local building techniques for a resilient sustainability. Post occupancy, the energy use will be monitored to see if the climatic comfort impacts the applied electrical energy use per square metre and if the water saving devices along with the shared facilities will reduce the water requirement per inhabitant.

Besides the recycling of the household sewage with dwets for the reuse of the water for irrigation, the grey water from the cafe of the multipurpose building will be treated in a mulch system towards an edible garden to supply the kitchen. The organic waste is to be composted on site with the other waste being taken care of the ecoservice, a unit that manages the waste from all Auroville.

Humanscapes is research in settlement design to work on a symbiosis between built environment and change of consciousness. Some of the interventions may help, some will have hiccups needing the intervention of the inhabitants to fine tune them and some of them will fail completely. And we will learn from these failures to do better in the next phase!

_Suhasini Ayer-Guigan_
The man slowly looked up. This was a woman clearly accustomed to the finer things of life. Her coat was new. She looked like she had never missed a meal in her life.

His first thought was that she wanted to make fun of him, like so many others had done before. "Leave me alone," he growled.

To his amazement, the woman continued standing. She was smiling... her even white teeth displayed in dazzling rows. "Are you hungry?" she asked.

"No," he answered sarcastically. "I've just come from dining with the president. Now go away."

The woman's smile became even broader. Suddenly the man felt a gentle hand under his arm.

"What are you doing, lady?" the man asked angrily. "I said to leave me alone."

Just then a policeman came up. "Is there any problem, ma'am?" he asked.

"No problem here, officer," the woman answered. "I'm just trying to get this man to his feet. Will you help me?"

The officer scratched his head. "That's old Jack. He's been a fixture around here for a couple of years. What do you want with him?"

"See that cafeteria over there?" she asked. "I'm going to get him something to eat and get him out of the cold for awhile."

"Are you crazy, lady?" the homeless man resisted. "I don't want to go in there!" Then he felt strong hands grab his other arm and lift him up. "Let me go, officer. I didn't do anything."

"This is a good deal for you, Jack," the officer answered. "Don't blow it."

Finally, and with some difficulty, the woman and the policeman got Jack into the cafeteria and sat him at a table in a remote corner. It was the middle of the morning, so most of the breakfast crowd had already left and the lunch bunch had not yet arrived...

The manager strode across the cafeteria and stood by his table. "What's going on here, officer?" he asked. "What is all this, is this man in trouble?"

"This lady brought this man in here to be fed," the policeman answered.

"Not in here!" the manager replied angrily. "Having a person like that here is bad for business."

Old Jack smiled a toothless grin. "See, lady. I told you so. Now if you'll let me go. I didn't want to come here in the first place."

The woman turned to the cafeteria manager and smiled... "Sir, are you familiar with Eddy and Associates, the banking firm down the street?"

"Of course I am," the manager answered impatiently. "They hold their weekly meetings in one of my banquet rooms."

"And do you make a good amount of money providing food at these weekly meetings?"

"What business is that of yours?"

I, sir, am Penelope Eddy, president and CEO of the company."

"Oh."

The woman smiled again. "I thought that might make a difference." She glanced at the cop who was busy stifling a giggle. "Would you like to join us in a cup of coffee and a meal, officer?"

"No thanks, ma'am," the officer replied. "I'm on duty."

"Then, perhaps, a cup of coffee to go?"

"Yes, ma'am. That would be very nice."

The cafeteria manager turned on his heel, "I'll get your coffee for you right away, officer."

The officer watched him walk away. "You certainly put him in his place," he said.

"That was not my intent. Believe it or not, I have a reason for all this."

She sat down at the table across from her amazed dinner guest. She stared at him intently... "Jack, do you remember me?"

Old Jack searched her face with his old, rheumy eyes. "I think so - I mean you do look familiar."

"I'm a little older perhaps," she said. "Maybe I've even filled out more than in my younger days when you worked here, and I came through that very door, cold and hungry."

"Ma'am?" the officer said questioningly. He couldn't believe that such a magnificently turned out woman could ever have been hungry.

"I was just out of college," the woman began. "I had come
to the city looking for a job, but I couldn't find anything. Finally I was down to my last few cents and had been kicked out of my apartment. I walked the streets for days. It was February and I was cold and nearly starving. I saw this place and walked in on the off chance that I could get something to eat."

Jack lit up with a smile. "Now I remember," he said. "I was behind the serving counter. You came up and asked me if you could work for something to eat. I said that it was against company policy."

"I know," the woman continued. "Then you made me the biggest roast beef sandwich that I had ever seen, gave me a cup of coffee, and told me to go over to a corner table and enjoy it. I was afraid that you would get into trouble... Then, when I looked over and saw you put the price of my food in the cash register, I knew then that everything would be all right."

"So you started your own business?" Old Jack said.

"I got a job that very afternoon. I worked my way up. Eventually I started my own business that, with the help of God, prospered." She opened her purse and pulled out a business card. "When you are finished here, I want you to pay a visit to a Mr. Lyons... He's the personnel director of my company. I'll go talk to him now and I'm certain he'll find something for you to do around the office." She smiled. "I think he might even find the funds to give you a little advance so that you can buy some clothes and get a place to live until you get on your feet... If you ever need anything, my door is always open to you."

There were tears in the old man's eyes. "How can I ever thank you?" he said.

"Don't thank me," the woman answered. "To God goes the glory. Thank God...... He led me to you."

Outside the cafeteria, the officer and the woman paused at the entrance before going their separate ways....

"Thank you for all your help, officer," she said.

"On the contrary, Ms. Eddy," he answered. "Thank you. I saw a miracle today, something that I will never forget. And... And thank you for the coffee."

COURTESY: THE INTERNET