

# Auroville Outreach

A newsletter from Auroville international township

January 2000

## Auroville at the United Nations

Auroville was recently invited to participate in a panel discussion at the 52nd Annual DPI/NGO Conference on "Challenges of a Globalized World: Finding New Directions" in the United Nations Headquarters, New York, on 17th September 1999. We would like to share the text of the well-received talk given by one of the Auroville participants. It emphasizes the larger world context in which Auroville is emerging and its role as a "laboratory for the future".

*"Dear Friends, Guests and Panel Members, I've been asked to speak about globalization from an ethical and religious perspective. However, I've taken the liberty to talk to you about globalization from an evolutionary perspective.*

*When Edgar Mitchell, the NASA astronaut, returned from his mission on the moon in 1972 and looked at that blue globe, which we call planet Earth, he had a profound inner experience that changed his life. He suddenly experienced the inter-connectedness of the vast universe around him and became deeply aware that all life on our planet is one. Later, he would explain in simple terms: 'It's rather crude to be standing on the moon, looking back at Earth and say 'I come from the United States'. That tiny little*

*point of light out there is Earth and we come from planet Earth!"*

*Whether we like it or not, we ARE global! And globalization as the emergence of a global market in terms of labour and commerce is just one facet, one expression of an evolutionary force that is guiding present humanity towards the recognition, the acceptance and the conscious experience of mankind as ONE family.*

*It is true that economic globalization has worked so far more for profits than for people! The recent Human Development Report from UNDP states clearly that the present market dominated globalization has led to a growing marginalisation of poor nations. "The global gap", says the report, "between the haves and the have-nots, the knows and the know-nots, is widening", and it makes a passionate plea for globalization with a human face.*

*However, as I already indicated, there is a conscious evolutionary force that is acting behind this rather blind creation of a global market. This force is a force of unification, which is embedded in the evolutionary design of planet Earth itself! This force doesn't look at globalization from an ethical or religious perspective. This force just knows that the planet IS global and that we, human beings on this planet, ARE one! And it works through human history and through all of us at present to manifest and materialize this oneness.*

Auroville is an international township in Tamil Nadu, South India, founded in 1968.

Inspired by the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, about 1,500 people from India and some 30 other nations are building a township dedicated to an experiment in human unity, with the eventual hope of contributing to international understanding and the evolution of human consciousness. Nearly 5,000 of the 40,000-plus local people living in the dozen-or-more villages that comprise the Auroville bio-region are also involved in the project, providing their skills and labour.

The township, projected for 50,000 people, will radiate out from the central Matrimandir and its surrounding gardens in 4 zones, the International, Cultural, Residential and Industrial. A large forested area, the Green Belt, will eventually surround the entire township area.

Present activities in Auroville include wasteland reclamation and reforestation, organic farming, village development, education, health care, renewable energy, appropriate building technology, arts and culture, handicrafts and small-scale industries, architecture and town planning.

As described by its founder, Auroville aspires to be "a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities."

For more general information visit the website: [www.auroville.org](http://www.auroville.org)

*In other words, the evolution of mankind is not finished. On the contrary, the planet is preparing for its next step in evolution. And, as a result, we are in the midst of a global crisis, which challenges all mental concepts and existing realities that are based on division and separation. We have created a world of tremendous prosperity and abundance and yet half of the world's population is still living below the poverty line. Conflicts and wars are still dividing us along national, religious, ethnic and social borders. And, at the same time, we are overshooting the planet's resources and threatening the survival of the human species itself with an ecological collapse.*

*Standing at the threshold of the 21st century, humanity is faced with the global challenge to move into the next cycle of its evolution: the creation of a truly global, gnostic society that integrates matter and spirit, unifies science and religion, and embraces all aspects of life, including economy and trade, as an exploration and manifestation of the oneness that we fundamentally are. As Andre Malraux, the well-known French writer, said: "The 21st century will be spiritual or will not be!"*

*In this context, the world needs R&D stations, laboratories for the future, where volunteers from all over the world consciously dedicate themselves to the challenge of an inner, spiritual transformation and, at the same time, embrace all outer activities and material aspects of life. Volunteers who are dedicated to the manifestation of that unifying force on this planet by creating relevant collective models on a significant scale for the world at large.*

*Auroville, the "city of dawn", an emerging international township in rural India, is such a laboratory. Endorsed by the General Assembly of UNESCO, it was founded in 1968 with the intention to become such a*

*collective model. Based on new economic, environmental and spiritual values, Auroville wants to promote peace, international understanding and to quote from its Charter -- be a "living embodiment of an actual human unity".*

*Today, about 1500 people from 30 countries are, in cooperation with the local population, engaged in wasteland reclamation, soil and water conservation, reforestation, organic farming, integral education, alternative healing, renewable energy, appropriate building technologies, arts and culture, handicrafts and small-scale industries, architecture and town*

*planning, and an integrated development of the neighbouring villages and the larger bioregion. At the same time, they are working on themselves so that that unifying, evolutionary force can raise their consciousness and transform their mind, their heart and their body.*

*As such, Auroville stands as a global, evolutionary experiment on the planet that, according to its Charter, "belongs to nobody in particular but to humanity as a whole". And it carries the vision, the hope, the challenges, and the aspiration to become truly 'the City the Earth needs'!"*

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## Harnessing the sun

In recognition of The Mother's statement that solar power will be "the energy of the future", and in a push towards self sufficiency in energy generation, Auroville has already made noteworthy progress towards widespread use of solar powered (generating) systems. In fact, Auroville has the largest private concentration of solar panels in use in the whole of India, generating some 220 kilowatts of electrical power for domestic use, water pumping, lighting the Matrimandir and various commercial enterprises.

By far the biggest installation to date has been the custom-designed solar power plant for the Matrimandir, financed with the help of the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA). This Rs.1.3 crores installation (approx US\$ 310,000) consists of 484 Tata-BP panels of photovoltaic cells in an array, set up at the edge of the Matrimandir Gardens, and gives 36.3 kilowatts of power to meet the full lighting needs of the Matrimandir and surrounding gardens, with storage capacity via



*The Matrimandir power plant*

240 two-volt batteries for 2 days when the weather conditions are unfavourable for charging. It is the biggest stand-alone power plant of its kind in India, probably also in Asia, and among the world's biggest, with independent monitoring and adjustment of power requirements at all times.

On a more individual level, a considerable number of Aurovilians have opted for solar power for their residence or work unit. Reasons include:

it utilises a non-polluting inexhaustible energy source, readily available in India, and helps conserve fossil fuels.

it makes users independent of the State grid, which is vulnerable to breakdowns, maintenance downtime and load shedding.

it avoids the cost of cabling and infrastructure for houses in remote locations or where there is a policy not to introduce more overhead lines.

A typical domestic installation sufficient to power a fridge, computer, TV/sound system plus energy-efficient light bulbs costs - with some "financial engineering" (soft loans, fiscal benefits allowed for depreciation, and direct GOI subsidies) - around Rs.50,000, and has the same life expectancy as the Matrimandir plant.

Altogether there are some 220 solar panel installations in Auroville involving residences and commercial units, with another 100 planned during the coming year. On top of this figure there are 140 solar pump installations (for domestic and agricultural water supply), and Auroville has also done another 50-plus installations elsewhere in India, mostly in Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka States. Altogether nearly one-third of Auroville's 600-plus houses are now solar powered, though often in conjunction with a conventional electrical connection.

Last but not least in this solar review it's worth mentioning that there are approximately 100 solar cookers for cooking, baking and drying fruits, etc, in use around Auroville. These simple but highly efficient box-like appliances were originally purchased from outside, but more recently have been made by an Auroville unit, Aureka.

This summary of solar power usage in Auroville would not be complete without mention of the workshops being run by CSR for Government officials, NGOs and programme managers on renewable energy systems, and of the massive 15 m wide solar collector under completion at Auroville's Solar Kitchen, due to come on line soon.

*For more information e-mail: [csr@auroville.org.in](mailto:csr@auroville.org.in)*

## Perspective 2000

(as reported to an international cyberforum)

A few months ago, in early August, there was quite a historic event in Auroville, when officials of the Central, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry Governments met with concerned Aurovilians on the stage of the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium to compare notes on the pros & cons of modern development in general; look at new planning policies, and appropriate strategies for their implementation in Auroville and its bio-region; and possibly find a

collaborative system of joint planning with the authorities concerned. Some of the invited speakers who attended were:

**Sri T.T. Joseph,**  
Chief Secretary, Govt of Pondicherry

**Sri V. Suresh,**  
Chairman and Managing Director of HUDCO

**Sri M.B. Raju,**  
Director,  
Central Ground Water Board

**Sri N. Manimurukan,**  
Joint Director, Town & Country Planning, Chennai

**Sri C.K. Sreedharan, I.F.S.**  
Chief Conservator of Forest,  
T.N. Afforestation Project

**Sri V.V. Bhat, I.A.S.**  
Joint Secretary, Dept. of Space, GOI

**Sri N. Govindan, I.A.S.**  
Secretary, Housing and Urban Development, Chennai

**Dr. G. Narendra Kumar, I.A.S.**  
Dept. of Science, Environment & Technology, Pondicherry

**Sri K.S. Sripathy, I.A.S.**  
Secretary, Environment and Forest, Chennai

**Sri Sriram Panchu,**  
Senior Advocate

**Sri N. Bala Baskar, I.A.S.**  
Secretary to Auroville Foundation

From Auroville, there were about a dozen people on the platform, and in the audience at least another 50 at any one time. Throughout the day,



*Part of the panel of speakers at Perspective 2000*

some 150 to 200 Aurovilians fluctuated in and out of the audience, and during the tea breaks and lunch many good contacts were made.

The meeting was opened by Sri T.T. Joseph, I.A.S., Chief Secretary of the Pondicherry Government, who mentioned among other things that the Pondicherry Engineering College was happy to provide connectivity to a major Auroville-located electronic company. He saw this as the model for a new initiative, and hoped that more would be stimulated in future.

The Perspective 2000 event was co-sponsored by HUDCO (Housing & Urban Development Corporation Ltd.), whose Chairman and Managing Director, Sri V. Suresh, then set the tone of the meeting with a strong and convincing talk on 'Directions for rural and urban development in the new millennium - implementation of development plans'.

"Auroville is the most appropriate place to hold this discussion", he said, "as it represents a unique example of innovative initiatives, be they in terms of advocacy, development of awareness, or people-centred and environmentally-conscious, leading to the use and dissemination of non-conventional sources of energy for services, conservation of bio-diversity, etc, to develop a highly successful model for sustainable development."

As The Mother has indicated that in India - as well as in Auroville - all the problems mankind is facing have been concentrated, it was no surprise that many of the challenges confronting Auroville are now being faced nationwide. A strong need for new patterns of land use and an environmental ethic was voiced, and Auroville's efforts in that direction were well recognised and appreciated.

Since the township now has the status, master plan and expertise required, it could - and should - become a potent model for rural planning in the next century, a role model that could be copied in other parts of the country.

While in the morning Aurovilians presented their work, their "home", their problems and achievements, in the afternoon the invited speakers spoke on a range of development challenges, giving insights into the huge scale of India's parameters. In the actual panel discussion on 'Policy and implementation mechanisms' at the end of the afternoon, efficiently chaired by Sri Sriram Panchu, invitees and hosts came together and concluded that Auroville, which looks like it could become a victim of its own successful development, now needs both participatory problem-solving with its immediate neighbourhood as well as implementation of certain legislative measures to protect the experiment and its environment. As a joint venture involving the Central, Tamil Nadu and Pondy Governments, it was suggested that help could come from these bodies to give current development trends a new boost towards harmonious and sustainable growth.

The meeting was closed by Mr. Bala Baskar, Secretary of the AV Foundation, after which a two minutes silent concentration was called for. A wide silence descended over the spacious, sun-lit auditorium and held all present in its embrace. Then, after some time, a voice chanting Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri mantra came through, giving a light and lovely finishing touch to the day.

**For more info on Auroville's Master Plan and development, e-mail: [landuse@auroville.org.in](mailto:landuse@auroville.org.in)**

## Awards, awards, awards!

With sponsorship from HUDCO, a team from Auroville's 'Earth Unit' recently participated at the India-International Trade Fair in Delhi. They took a 22-ton lorry load of compressed earth blocks, beams and equipment and proceeded to build a complete 23m<sup>2</sup> 'disaster-resistant' house (the AUM House, costing Rs.62,000) inclusive of plumbing with running water, electricity, painting and a working smokeless stove, in just 66 hours! Resulting from this achievement they received the 1999 Gold Medal for "Excellence in presentation of special display on Building Technology" at the HUDCO pavilion, from India Trade Promotion Organisation, New Delhi.

In addition, the team's leader Mr. Satprem Maini has picked up the following personal awards for his work in this field during the past year.

1999 "National Vikas Jyoti Award" for "Individual achievement for growth of the Indian economy" from the World Economic Development Association, New Delhi.

1999 "Bharat Excellence Award" and Gold Medal Excellence Award for "Outstanding leadership and extraordinary achievements in field of work and for services rendered to promote greater friendship and India-international cooperation" from the Friendship Forum of India, N. Delhi.

1999 "National Growth Award". An excellence award for "Outstanding contribution to society at large and the nation" from National Business Development Society, N. Delhi.

1998 "Bharathiya Nirman Ratan Award". An excellence award relating to building construction, given for "Individual Outstanding Achievement and Nation Building" from Indian Economic Development and Research Association, N. Delhi.

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| Enquiries or feedback relating to this newsletter and its contents are always welcome, and can be communicated to:<br>Auroville Outreach, Bharat Nivas, Auroville 605101, India<br>E-mail: <a href="mailto:outreach@auroville.org.in">outreach@auroville.org.in</a> |
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