What follows is a succinct chronicle of how Auroville was connected to UNESCO during the Mother’s years, with her blessings. All the quotes in inverted commas are reproduced from Kailas Jhaeri’s book ‘I am with you’. In 1964 she resigned her post at the United Nations headquarters in New York to become an ashramite while playing a pivotal role in the following astounding story.

The Mother’s years:
‘Secretary-in-charge, UNESCO section’

UNESCO is the acronym of “United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization”. Founded in 1945, it is based in Paris, France, and at present comprises 188 member-states. As stated in the UNESCO Website, 2000, its main objective is to "contribute to peace and security in the world by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science, culture and communication in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations".

In March 1965, in Bombay, Kailas met Dr. Adiseshiah, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO, whom she knew since working at the United Nations. She explained Ashram life and purpose to him, as well the Mother’s concept of Auroville as an international city, whose aim is human unity in diversity. Questioned about the possible help of UNESCO, Dr. Adiseshiah suggested associating the Auroville project through the affiliation with UNESCO of the Sri Aurobindo Society1 as a non-governmental organisation. The Mother was pleased with this fruitful meeting and accepted the suggestion.

“I was put in charge of the UNESCO Section of Sri Aurobindo Society, but practically, I had no office, no table, no chair, no almirah, no typewriter, no secretary and no money. I learned to use any means available. For instance, I carried out my correspondence, using the Society’s typewriter after the office hours, sometimes working till after midnight and filing my papers at home in my Ashram almirahs. Sometimes, I gave my papers for typing to Doreen, Navajata’s excellent secretary. She was faultless and superb in her execution” wrote Kailas. “It seemed that I was given responsibilities, but sometimes I had to find my own means to carry them out. Even to go to Bombay, Madras, Delhi, or to Paris for the UNESCO conference, I had to find the finances or the transport needed. And the Divine provided me with whatever was needed from unexpected sources.”

As UNESCO did not accept affiliation with religious organisations, in 1966 Kailas wrote a paper on ‘Religion and Spirituality’ that highlighted the difference between the two fields of interest in light of Sri Aurobindo’s teachings, while indicating that the aim of Auroville was the realisation of human unity involving the whole of life. As a result of her initiative, “we were admitted in 1966 to the ‘C’ category of relationship, which meant an exchange of information of our mutual activities” Kailas commented.

1 The Mother had entrusted the material realization of the project of Auroville to the Sri Aurobindo Society, of which she was the President. Navajata was the Secretary.
Designated by the Mother as “Secretary-in-charge, UNESCO section”, Kailas went to Delhi to contact some of the major embassies representing each of the six continents. Having received the Mother’s approval to contact the Ford Foundation for funds, she “also met the director of the Ford Foundation. He responded enthusiastically to the project of Auroville, saying it was a unique one, adding: ‘Auroville has all the potential to contribute in a living way to peace, unity and international co-operation. But the Foundation cannot give the seed money. The project would have to go a little further in its implementation before it can be considered.’”

In Delhi, Kailas met Dr. Prem Kirpal, President of the Indian National Commission for UNESCO and, together with Mr. Salah-El-Din Tewfik, UNESCO’s representative in New Delhi, they worked out a resolution for Auroville to be proposed by the Government of India at the UNESCO’s General Conference in Paris on the occasion of its 20th anniversary celebration. Eloquently presented by Shree E. Pouschpa Dass (India), the Director of the Division of Cultural Development at UNESCO, this became the first resolution on Auroville, which was unanimously passed in November 1966 by the General Conference of UNESCO.

On January 1967 Dr. Adiseshiah came to Pondicherry on a friendly visit; Kailas showed him the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Centre of Education, while explaining to him its free system of education. He was impressed. In view of the fact that Auroville had been proposed as a project to celebrate the 20th anniversary of UNESCO, Kailas asked Dr. Adiseshiah whether the Sri Aurobindo Society could be promoted to B category of consultative relationship with UNESCO. He replied that this should be presented by the Indian Delegation to UNESCO, before the General Conference in 1968.

At the beginning of 1968 Kailas went to Madras to inform Dr. Adiseshiah about the proposed foundation of Auroville, on February 28 of that year. She also went to Delhi to invite Mr. Salah-El-Din Tewfik, the UNESCO representative for India. The latter came and, in the afternoon of February 28, met the Mother, confiding afterwards to Kailas, “I have never bowed to another human being. But when I looked at Her, very spontaneously my heart sang: ‘Thou art the One! Thou art great! Thou alone art!’ This sacred salutation I give to no one else but to Allah during my prayers. Thank you for this meeting.’”

That same afternoon Mr. Tewfik participated in an uplifting discussion with the Ashram youth. In the evening a second meeting took place, where “He emphasised the aim of Auroville – Human Unity – and outlined its prominent features. He described how UNESCO was trying to achieve peace, unity and co-operation through science, culture and education. Quoting from [the] UNESCO [charter], he said: “Wars are made in the minds of men and so the defences of peace must be constructed in the minds of men too.” Then he spoke of some of the common objectives of Auroville and UNESCO for which a mutual collaboration was necessary.””

Kailas continued, “Mrs. Satpathy [the Minister of Information and Broadcasting] proposed a resolution which I was asked to second. Before doing so, I pointed out that mind was not capable of solving the problem of war and peace, nor of achieving human unity. What was needed was to ascend to a step higher than the mental consciousness, which even at best, is divisive and half-lit. So the aim of Auroville, as well as that of UNESCO for human unity could only be realised by a change of consciousness, which is universal in its principle and the law of its action. Hence it was imperative to remember that though Auroville belonged to the whole of humanity, to live in Auroville one had to become “a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.” I then seconded the resolution.” This was followed by a paper, “Auroville and the Ideal of Human Unity”, which Kailas sent to UNESCO.
Subsequently Kailas went to Delhi and was hosted by Mrs. Nandini Satpathy. She contacted Mr. Prem Kirpal, the President of the Indian National Commission for UNESCO, in order to discuss “the possibility of promoting the Society to the B category of affiliation, giving it a consultative status with UNESCO”. Kailas also worked together with Mr. Tewfič to prepare a second resolution on Auroville. She reported that “Mrs. Satpathy had also arranged a short talk on Auroville by Dr. Adiseshiah to introduce Auroville on television. He exalted the project beautifully and emphasised its importance both for India and for the world.”

Dr. Adiseshiah had been invited as chairman of the conference on Adult Education to be held in Pondicherry on December 28, 1968. On the morning of December 24 Kailas took him to the Mother. He kneeled before her, she looked into his eyes, concentrated, and gave him a red rose, for which she had given the meaning of “human passions turned to the Divine”, and a hibiscus which she had named “the Divine’s Grace”. During the conference Dr. Adiseshiah stated, “If man’s purpose, as I believe, is to extend the limitless horizons of his mind and soul, to move forward from man the animal to man the divine, then there can be no interregnum, no hiatus in his upward, onward march. That march -slow, steep and tortuous- leads slowly but surely to his destiny”. Kailas noted down that the conference “was attended by Pavitra-da and André, The Mother’s son. When they reported on it to The Mother, She remarked: “He is very open to my Force. Many good things will come from his contact with Kailas.”

After the conference a symposium on Auroville, arranged by All India Radio, was held at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Theatre. Kailas reported that “Dr. Adiseshiah was invited to chair it. Navajata gave an overall picture of Auroville. Kireet Joshi spoke on Education in Auroville, Mrs. Anjani Dayananda on Administration, Gilbert on the international aspect of Auroville, Gloria spoke on architecture and I spoke on the cultural aspect and human unity in Auroville on the spiritual basis.”

Dr. Adiseshiah summed up the presentations concluding with these inspired words:

“We have tried in UNESCO, and the UNESCO world, which represents the plusses and the minuses of humanity, which represents the world as it is and not the world as it can be or should be, we have tried every way and we have failed.

And so now, we turn to Auroville, and to its foundation, the firm foundation on which its human unity, its universal harmony, is to be built. That foundation is Man, Man in all his glory, in his divinity, in his unfathomable depths which he can reach, and which Auroville will make it possible for man from everywhere...to achieve. It is not surprising therefore that UNESCO has embraced Auroville as a program which embodies its major and fundamental purposes. The fifteenth General Conference of UNESCO attended by its 125 member-states, which ended this month and from which I am coming almost directly to you, adopted unanimously the resolution, making Auroville the concern of every one of the member-states of the world and the responsibility of every man, woman and child in these member countries.

And so, on behalf of UNESCO, on behalf of all of you present here, and not present here, I hail Auroville, its conception and realisation as a hope for all of us, and particularly for our children, for our youth, who are disillusioned with the world that we have built for them, and who will find in Auroville as they found at the time of its foundation ceremony, a living symbol, inspiring them to live the life to which they are called.”

Shortly afterwards Kailas felt the impulsion to go to Delhi, where she was informed that Mrs. Nandini Satpathy had arranged an interview on Auroville for Doordarshan (the popular television channel) with Dr. Adiseshiah. In spite of Dr. Melville de Mello being a famous interviewer of
diplomats and dignitaries like Nehru and others, he accepted to read, without changing a word, Kailas’s written questions; he also accepted to give her a copy of the tape for the Mother, even before editing it. The interview was to be broadcast on the first anniversary of Auroville, February 28, 1969.

The Mother listened attentively to the tape on Mahasaraswati’s day, and smiled. Holding Kailas’s hands she said, with great force, “A very powerful being came down and tied Auroville to the ground. It was needed and he did it. Now, Auroville will be a reality and the world will see it.”