A City with a Soul

Auroville is a City with a Soul.

This awareness sets Auroville apart from other cities or societies and lifts it up above any known concept of town planning or human or social engineering. No norms can be applied to Auroville except norms derived from the soul, either individual or collective. No expectations or opinions can stand with regard to Auroville when they are not expressions from that deeper level in us which Sri Aurobindo calls the “psychic”. One cannot even say whether, after about five years of existence, Auroville has so far failed or succeeded, if one is unable to look with the eyes of the soul. Two years before the official opening, when there was nothing yet and hardly any people had ever heard of Auroville, the Mother said: “Auroville is going well and becomes more and more real, but its realization does not advance in the habitual manner, and it is more visible for the interior consciousness than for the exterior vision.”

(Jan. 1966) Auroville is a city where likes and dislikes are irrelevant and where doubts and criticisms cannot stand the test, for the soul does not know doubts which originate, like criticisms, from a level of consciousness far lower than the City wants to manifest.

“All Things are as should be…”

It is not the Aurovilians, that group of mostly young people from all over the world, who build Auroville. There is an awareness, growing all the time in depth, that we are no more than insufficient instruments in the hands of a divine Process that is fulfilling itself in and through us. It is already a reversal of consciousness, a growth towards a new cosmic understanding to give up the reliance on one’s own means and provisions. “Who has taken the initiative for the construction of Auroville?” The Mother’s answer: “The Supreme Lord.”

We will have to learn more and more to apply this general awareness to the most concrete and seemingly trivial instances: “Who participates in the financing of Auroville?” The Mother again: “The Supreme Lord.” Then again we find things going too slow; money is not com-
At "Aspiration"

ing in the tempo we impose on its flow. It is again and again we who want to set the terms for buildings to be finished, to dictate how and at what speed the city should progress, though in every single instance we can learn from what the Mother has said: "All things are as should be just when they should be."

Prisoners who have been in jail for twenty, thirty years seem to have great difficulties in adjusting to a life of freedom. Equally hard is to live the freedom of Auroville, to give up worrying about the overall plans as well as the details of their execution, to realise that nothing is compulsory, to know that there is a beyond and another beyond for every aspect of life, that growth has no limits, and that the flexibility of even the most solid matter and of physical nature itself is increasing under the pressure of the Mother's Force, so that ultimately nothing is impossible in Auroville.

The Divine Vehicle

All this is implied in the easy statement and most difficult realisation that Auroville is a City with a Soul. Creating bodies for cities — houses, shopping centers, schools, recreation facilities — we have done before and are doing all over the world. We know the laws of execution, the mathematical, statistical and financial implications and requirements, but we also know that it does not recreate the human species. It does not open up the vistas of the beyond or the luminous countries of the soul. It all remains a variation of the same old tune. A City with a Soul does not mean a city with a body and a vague hope that somewhere in that body a divine spark may begin to glow. On the contrary, the process seems to be the inverse: elements of soul and psychic sparks are the first stones of the city. They grow, in the play of Forces of which Auroville is the garden of delight, into a psychic being; many individual psychic beings first, which carry a psychic being of a new nature, a collective soul. This is the divine vehicle for the construction of Auroville.

A City with a Soul is not a human conception. It surely coincides with a nowadays deeply felt need for recreating the face of the earth and restructuring human society on a totally new basis; but this coincidence seems no more than a leverage of Divine opportunity. Whenever it is no longer the physical, vital or mental that determine the nature of a project the accustomed ways of approach are no more applicable. Psychology, sociology, statistics, economics lose their relevance as
aids, as long as they themselves are not "psychisized". Even the idea of Reality, both as a philosophical and a practical concept, is upturned whenever the soul takes over the lead from the accustomed approaches. Auroville is in a very definite sense not 'real': "You say that Auroville is a dream. Yes, it is a 'dream' of the Lord and generally these 'dreams' turn out to be true — much more true than the human so-called realities!"

**Initiation**

Throughout the ages a chain of periods, places and groups of people have existed representing and manifesting levels of being and planes of truth beyond the average and normal. They had the function of handing over insights from past to future generations or of preparing new steps in the evolution, as representatives of humanity as a whole. Mostly they were secret societies with a strictly defined and protected membership; to be admitted one had to undergo a long and difficult initiation. Auroville, as far as it fits in any traditional pattern, belongs to this occult chain connecting the distant past with a glorious future, rather than belonging to present-day urban, social or economic planning, or to regional and global politics. Only, it seems so easy to join Auroville and no long initiation seems required. Either this, or... maybe we are unknowingly thrown right into a most difficult process of initiation? To be guided, almost compelled to live in categories and values of the world of the soul rather than in the norms and customs of our old comfortable world certainly can be called an initiation! Maybe the present state of Auroville itself is our initiation; maybe we do not have a "book of secret knowledge" as so many groups used to have, but a "building of initiation", the Matrimandir, the "soul of Auroville" as the Mother has called it.

**Daring and joy**

The great polarities and oppositions in the cosmic process of growth are the cause of grief and pain, sure, but also the occasions for the Divine Laughter in which we may fully participate — if we want. Often when the evolutionary process intensifies and is carried to a breaking point we have the choice either of becoming as tense as the tension itself between the polarities or of escaping, at each moment, the clash of oppositions into a liberating laughter, noticing the divine wink behind the event.

Cosmic experiments like Auroville — like the Integral Yoga itself — are one more proof of Divine Daring as well as Divine Humour. Not that He would play bad jokes on us; rather, the idea that, in the greater things of creation, you have to keep an eye on everything at once because everything is always its own opposite and again the opposite of that and then all that together. In philosophy we used to learn: "Everything is what it is." But in spiritual adventures everything is not what it is, on the contrary; but then again it is, though quite differently, but again not that, etc. When you think that everything has failed it appears full of new opportunity; when you are inclined to think death is the end it appears to be
full of life; the real revolutionary does not shed blood but withdraws and stands back; who wants to make great journeys must stay in his room; matter ultimately appears to be Spirit and the more I become an ego the less I become myself; the city that aims at being a new creation has to pass more than any other place on earth through the human pettinesses and we have first to get stuck in everything before we can start anything new. The Divine seems to love building with debris; the more you think you can the less you can and when you know how to give up everything, you can do, it seems, anything. “A City with a Soul” is a deadly serious thing but the concept carries in itself the explosives of laughter — maybe until it has fully manifested, at which moment the humour will turn into bliss.

Sri Aurobindo lived the divine Humour and took full part in the Play of the Divine Child; he embodied the Joy which is the ultimate basis of existence. When, as our guide towards unknown heights, he wants to lead us there, we cannot but throw ourselves into the play and go along rethinking things, seeing or setting everything upside down, laughing and enjoying along, surrendering without holding back anything, and then observing carefully how his Force is recreating the earth, creating a new species. And the humour of Auroville’s present situation is that it certainly is nothing of what we think it is, and as long as we still think about it, it keeps escaping us — and all the plans and lay-outs we are able to make now seem irrelevant, because if we knew with our present consciousness how and what Auroville is there would be no need for an Auroville.

A City of Yoga

In the meantime we feel something is growing in the depths, maybe by just being around in the Mother’s field of forces, maybe even in spite of our clumsy attempts at Yoga. Auroville is a city with a soul and that means a city of Yoga. But a Yoga so multifaceted that we often feel like one who hardly knows English must feel when he stands face to face with the Centenary edition of Sri Aurobindo’s works, volume after volume of things even beyond his primary understanding. Left to ourselves we would not know where to start doing Yoga and even with all the help we receive and all the Force pressing upon us we do not know, but we know that it does not matter so much, provided we open ourselves up and aim at the future rather than cling to what we brought along from home and school and nation and nature. Simply, we must believe it can be done. “It is certain that for living at Auroville a great progress of consciousness has to be made be. But the moment has come when this pro-

Dhana Lakshmi
gress is possible.” (The Mother, June 1968)

In questions of the soul there is no first and second. Otherwise we would say that Auroville is a city with a collective soul first, carried by many individual souls, as it is first a collective Yoga, made up of many small Yogas. But to do a collective Yoga consciously is even much harder than doing an individual sadhana; if it was not for the divine Master, Lover, Friend and Teacher Himself who is the Doer of the Yoga in the collectivity, poor Nature would have to remain for many more centuries what it has been for so long now. Still, if for eternity the stress is on the Yoga of Humanity as a whole, intensified in the Yoga of a City, for our short-range consciousness we cannot but discover the laws and mechanisms of collective change through our own individual discoveries of what it is like to have a soul, and even be one, and to live a psychic life rather than a mental and vital existence. If we are learning anything in Auroville we certainly do learn how complex man is and how difficult to replace the dominance of our ego by the qualities of the psychic being. We know however that that is why we are here — learning to live and feel and act according to categories of the soul is, we may assume, the way to become a “true Aurovillian”, for which, as the Mother describes, “the first necessity is the inner discovery by which one learns who one really is behind the social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances”.

**Vibrations**

By hitting our heads and repeating our mistakes we make our discoveries. We know now that we have to pass through a silence, a great, big, solemn silence, in order to realize in ourselves the qualities of the world of the soul which almost impatiently is awaiting us. By listening to the Mother, by reading Sri Aurobindo and by our first attempts at identification, we get to know the characteristics — surrender and consecration, sincerity and honesty, faith and trust, devotion and quietude, aspiration and courage, endurance and perseverance, calm and patience, equality, concentration, beauty and harmony, simplicity and spontaneity, perfection and exactness, collaboration and sensitivity, strength and control, plasticity and swiftness, joy and delight, discipline and obedience, the freedom of the children of God and a host of attitudes and qualities, expressed by the Mother in the names of the twelve gardens of Matrimandir, the twelve meditation
rooms, the names of flowers and trees and of the communities and projects in Auroville, and in a continuous flow of messages. The vibrations of these soul-sparks all around us ultimately seem stronger than our smallness and closedness, and that is what gives us all confidence that slowly our deeper being will open up and begin to vibrate to the intensities with which the Auroville atmosphere is charged.

A Conscious Link

A city made up of individuals, each doing his own sadhana, is enough to deem it an experiment in human living and applied spirituality. “Auroville is an endeavour to translate into physical forms what has been determined on higher levels”; “Auroville wants to be a new creation, expressing a new consciousness, in a new way and according to new methods”; “Auroville is a model town as the beginning of a new creation”; or the definition given by M. P. Pandit: “Auroville is a cosmic sacrifice, presided over by the Mother”. More solid achievements and profounder depths are suggested than could be reached through individual Yoga. We must assume that a City with a Soul implies something of a totally new and different order; something that has not been on earth yet, a first attempt towards consciously realizing a whole new phase in the history of evolution. And so we slowly grow towards the awareness that we are involved in an adventure that, even much more than our personal Yoga, reaches out beyond our understanding: we are chosen to be the tiny cells of a large body, at the level of a city that is doing its Yoga—a corporate Yoga, a collective Yoga, the Yoga of Nature and of evolution intensified in the growth and blossoming of a city. “All life is Yoga”, Sri Aurobindo declares, the whole process of the self-discovery of the Spirit out of dumb matter, the whole process of hominization and of the many cultures clustering and uniting and searching for their common depth. Auroville stands somewhere in between that huge Yoga of Nature, all-including, all-pervading, but slow, and the individual sadhana of searching souls the world over. Auroville intensifies both movements, the cosmic and the individual and serves as a conscious link between the macro- and the microcosm.

No Wax in our Cracks!

In this huge Yoga it certainly is not me or my neighbour who is the Doer of the sadhana. Until there are true Aurovilians, we feel it is first and foremost the Mother who carries in her Being the Soul of Auroville as a particularization of the Cosmic Soul whom She personalizes. It is too early to see the great lines along which this Yoga fulfills itself — it is too young, too dynamic, too fathomless. But since Sri Aurobindo indicates an identity-in-nature between the individual soul and the group-soul, we may assume that the sadhana of the group-soul will pass through similar stages as the individual Yoga, a growth demarcated by the three great transformations: the psychic, the spiritual and the supramental
transformation. The height of the process dictates the attitudes required of us: total surrender to the One who sustains our group-soul in its flight, complete opening of all the layers of our being to the larger body, so that the Big Body becomes a "Yoga of the Cells", as the Integral Yoga on the individual level is called too. And no wax in our cracks! — as they used to put in the cracks of the Roman marble statues covering up the deficiencies; a crackless statue was highly valued and was called "wax-less" — sine cere, sincere. All the attitudes are required that make us into integral and flexible members of the Body Divine; perhaps foremost is the strong awareness of being a cell, a member, nothing more, nothing less.

Collective Sadhana

Nothing is wrong with attitudes, of course not, provided they find an embodiment in life. In the individual sadhana right thinking and right feeling must materialize in right acting. So must a collective sadhana find expression in forms of communal living, communal working, communal attempts to express the awareness of the group-soul in beauty, harmony, delicacy, in construction, education, agriculture, in all the fields of life. This is the difficult and often disappointing leap out of the height of the Light into Matter's obscurity, into the primitive problems of learning to live together and suffer and bear each other's idiosyncrasies, deficiencies, cultural and spiritual otherness. As each one has to break the domination of his vital and mental, so all together we have to burst the bounds of our group-vital and group-mental and come to a shared awareness of our collective inner being. It is the Lord Himself who becomes aware of His identity-in-diversity in our collective Yoga, it is the Divine Mother who unites our separate souls into one new being, it
is we and our small communities who have to raise this process going on in the depth of our social being above the threshold of our communal awareness. Here, as in the individual growth, there are no sudden leaps, no flashing miracles, but a spontaneous and guided process of daily, monthly growth, observable for the rough eye maybe only at long intervals. We are right in the beginning of a beautiful process of small groups trying to find their identity, their basis-in-depth, their communal privacy, the extent of their collective property, their unity-in-diversity. For quite a time this process will require our living in small communities where the awareness of the group-soul can materialize more easily in forms and expressions. When a first awareness of the group-soul comes about, most probably the small groups will naturally begin to form larger units, will start clustering into more inclusive totalities and richer and more various expressions of the one soul sustaining all, until we reach up to the level where a whole city can live in its one Being, its one source of Knowledge and Joy.

The Blend of Cultures
“Auroville wants to be a universal town, where men and women from all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and nationalities.” The great stress on “Human Unity” suggests an intimate link between Auroville as a City with a Soul and the universally felt need for peoples and cultures to grow together on a global scale. Again this is taking place in Auroville on two levels, the individual and the universal. As for
the small-scale level, our best teachers in supra-national feeling, talking and behaving are the children in our midst.

On the level of the blend of cultures taking place in our century, Auroville seems destined for a major task. As it is difficult for individuals to grow into a real unity on a mere vital or mental level, so for nations too the lower levels of their being seem to be more the international battlefields than the temples of divine occasion. Only in an exchange on the soul-level can world union be achieved — by definition, for the mind and the vital stand for division, the soul is the principle of unity-in-diversity. And that makes this century’s greatest challenge, the world’s important issue, into a matter of Yoga more than of geo-politics, economics or development-aid. A Yogic forum is to be created where different cultures can find their own dharma, their soul, and then come to an exchange of values and qualities on that level.

Precisely this seems to be the importance of Auroville’s international sector where nations, or maybe groups of nations who share the soul of a similar cultural trend, can express their beings through national pavilions. Participating countries are bound to examine their cultural heritage thoroughly in order to find their soul-sparks and the psychic elements of lasting value. It is another proof of divine insight that, contrary to some trends among universalists, Auroville is meant to contribute to the integration of cultural values, not by blending them into one big superficial middle-level culture suited for general consumption, but according to the principle of the soul: diverse unity, multifarious wealth of expression. Achievements will not be exhibited to increase the image of a national ego or to outdo the others, but to contribute to the osmosis of the scattered elements of the Universal Psychic Being. The parallel between the individual sadhana and the Yoga of Nations is obvious; initially, this universal Yoga will be more difficult because, as Sri Aurobindo writes, there is an identity-in-nature between the individual soul and the group-soul or nation-soul, but this latter type is more crude and “more complex because it has a greater number of partly self-conscious mental individuals for the constituents of its physical being instead of an association of merely vital subconscious cells.”* One large sector of the City with a Soul will then be an almost palpable manifestation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision of “the luminous countries of the Soul.”

The Yoga of Matter: Matrimandir

The Yoga of the individual Aurovilians, then, is taken up and carried by the collective Yoga of the group-soul; this medium-level Yoga again is the basis or the Yoga of Nations or the Yoga of Humanity. But it may well be that none of these Yogas is what ultimately constitutes Auroville as a City with a Soul. For that, something even more daring, more integral, more divine is required. That culminating point of all the Yogas on the various levels, higher and higher, more and more all-embracing, is in Integral Yoga the total reversal, the leap back, the plunge into Matter. The Yoga of Matter is what
finally makes Auroville. And that is why, in these early days of the emergence of the town, the stress is not on the communities, not on the industries, not even on the international sector, but on Matrimandir, the Golden Temple of Truth right in the heart of the Nowhere in which Auroville is projected. We can discover soul-elements and soul-qualities in many aspects of Auroville, but Mother condenses and crystallizes everything around this one symbol and expression of the Divine Manifestation: “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.”

Matrimandir is a symbol, but like all true symbols it brings forth the reality of what it expresses; the symbolic value coincides with the power of realization (making real). A structure of cement and steel is a soul; and here we are in the secret heart of the alchemy, of the transformation of what is most impenetrable for the consciousness into a living dwelling-place of the Divine Presence. Matter and Spirit embrace, heaven and earth unite and the Great Mother bears the Golden Child of the Supramental Age. Nowhere have we felt so much how simple acts such as carrying the red earth out of the excavation or erecting scaffoldings and concrete forms are charged with a many-sided meaning, as if each single contribution to Matrimandir is an act with a body and a soul—a soul of divine significance and earthly transmutation. Surrounded by twelve petals, four pillars will carry a huge sphere. It is the earth bursting open and giving birth to a new age, crystallized in the crystal at the center of the sphere. It is the sphere of Golden Light descending into the crater, into the earth, enlightening the abyss. It is the cosmic Egg from the tales of old, the beginning of a new creation. It is the descent and manifestation on earth of a jewel of the subtle physical plane of existence where Matrimandir has been planned and matured and executed for God knows how long.

The Matrimandir
under construction
Playball of the Gods

Two phases have been completed: the first was the excavation of a vast crater, ten meters deep, or the reaching into the collective inconscient, or both; then, the construction of the four pillars back up to zero-level to the point where we began digging one and a half years ago. It is again at the same level but we feel enriched with an experience, slowly preparing us to go higher up and expand—very slowly, for the most difficult job is not the technical but the inner one. The right aspiration and surrender are the real pillars, the inner silence is the actual secret chamber, the new consciousness is the golden sphere. In a venture that is so concretely the Playball of the Gods all things are always true at the same time. Of course the construction does not depend on the rise of consciousness of the Aurovilians who happen to be around; but of course it does, too. It is fully the Divine who realizes it, it is totally the Mother who executes it, but it is fully us, too. It cannot be helped, for the secret Truth of God coincides with the secret Truth of Matter. But let us admit, after all, that we have no idea what we are constructing, we only know it is a privilege to be involved, and perhaps more a challenge than a privilege. We must become aware, we must aspire, we must grow in unity, and the Divine is sure to answer in this palpable way: “Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Divine’s answer to man’s aspiration for perfection. The Union with the Divine, manifesting itself in a progressive human unity.” (The Mother, August 1970)
The easy and smooth and continuous intercourse between Earth and Heaven, the Divine walking and working so concretely among humans, the happy blend of human sorrow and divine bliss, the physical presence of the Universal Mother, it all reminds of mythological ages. We are reliving the myth of all times, taking part in the eternal theme, re-enacted in the City with a Soul. But it is a spiral myth, waiting for its destined Hour to go one step ahead towards its complete de-mythologization. Each new chapter makes it less of a myth and more of a realization until the Day that it all will have come true. We are at one of those Hours of God.

* A handful of soil from 124 countries has been deposited by young people from all over the world in this lotus-shaped urn on 28 February 1968