

## In 1964, did Navajata suggest to Mother to build a township?

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In the last quarter of 1965, Gilbert Gauché presented to Mother a questionnaire with suggested answers. Its purpose was to clarify what Auroville was about. The second question was:

### 2. QUI A PRIS L'INITIATIVE DE LA CONSTRUCTION D'AUROVILLE ?

C'est la Mère de l'Ashram de Sri Aurobindo, situé à Pondichery dans le sud de l'Inde.



Gilbert asked: “Who has taken the initiative for the construction of Auroville?” and his suggested answer was: “It is the Mother of the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo, located at Pondicherry in the south of India.” Mother discarded this answer and wrote instead:

“The Supreme Lord.”

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Mother was a perfect instrument of the Supreme Lord, constantly attentive to signs of His Will, which came to Her as intuitions, visions and, at times, also by outer circumstances. For example: a new idea would come to Her (directly or through some other instrument), and the human and material resources necessary to its implementation would come to Her naturally.

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The idea of developing a large ideal society has been with Mother from the time when She was “very small”<sup>1</sup> and kept coming to Her. It was waiting for the right time and place to manifest.

On 7<sup>th</sup> May 1912, that is two years prior to Her first meeting with Sri Aurobindo, She spoke of the need to found an ideal society dedicated to human unity.<sup>2</sup>

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During the **first half of 1938**, while Antonin Raymond was sojourning at the Ashram to conceive and start building the Ashram Guest House “Golconde”, Mother asked him to design for Her an ideal city based on Her symbol. As Sri Aurobindo was to move to a house at its centre, it would have meant moving the Ashram to an “isolated place” instead of it continuing to develop in an existing town. Mother commented: “I reckoned it would take many years before we began: at the time, I expected to begin only after twenty-four years. [That is in 1962].<sup>3</sup>

Though Raymond produced a beautiful plan and Sir Akbar Hydari found a suitable plot of land in the then princely state of Hyderabad, the conditions attached to its transfer to the Ashram were not acceptable to Mother and She dropped this first attempt to build an Auroville.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Mother's Agenda*, 23.6.65

<sup>2</sup> “The general aim to be attained is the advent of a progressing universal harmony.

The means for attaining this aim, in regard to the earth, is the realisation of human unity through the awakening in all and the manifestation by all of the inner Divinity which is One. In other words – to create unity by founding the Kingdom of God which is within us.

This, therefore, is the most useful work to be done.

[...]

Collectively, to establish an ideal society in a propitious spot for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God.

[...]

To found a typic society or reorganise those that already exist.” (*Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. II pp. 49-50)

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the decision to make a 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt to build a new town would be taken two years later, in 1964.

<sup>4</sup> More on this first attempt in *Mother's Agenda*, 23.6.65 and also, briefly, on 11.6.69.

The **December 1954** issue of the *Bulletin* published an article, “A Dream” written by Mother, in which She described an ideal society and concluded by saying:

“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.”

Hence the question was when and where to make such an attempt? Mother waited for signs.

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**29<sup>th</sup> February 1956:** A first descent of the Supramental consciousness took place. It was a sign that “the earth” was becoming more “ready to realise such an ideal”. Had it become sufficiently ready?

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### **Second half of the fifties:**

**November 1956:** The Ashram published a leaflet “New Horizon International” which spoke of creating, in the framework of the “Sri Aurobindo International University Centre”,<sup>5</sup> a school cum studio of cinema and television, an “international community” and a “model township” designed by Antonin Raymond. This project was to take place on the east side of Osudu (Ousteri) Lake.<sup>6</sup>

**1959:** The Ashram publishes another leaflet “Lake Estates” to present an “Integrated Plan for the Development of the Lake Estates under the auspices of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry”. It was to take place on “Lake Estate” and on “Gloria Land”.

On 20.8.60, Mother spoke to Satprem about these two projects, which had been combined and, together with some other ideas were **Mother’s second attempt to build an Auroville:**

“It’s at the lake. The property belonged to the mission and at that time its manager was a very good friend of ours, even though he was a missionary. He said that that they wanted to sell and that he would arrange for us to have it. Everything was arranged, and I was to receive the money to buy it (they asked for more than fifty or sixty thousand [rupees]). But then the money didn’t come and our missionary friend left. He’s no longer there; he’s been replaced by someone else.

[*Mother looks at a piece of paper*] “Calling Antonin Raymond”, the architect for the construction.<sup>7</sup> Then there was also “making ready temporary quarters for [an American film maker] Dr. Alexander Markey”. But then Markey left; he died [in 1958]. That’s what happens – things change. It’s not that the project stops, but it’s forced to take other paths.

*Satprem: But this film project has been completely abandoned now, hasn’t it?*

No, no. You see, it wasn’t a studio – it was a school, a school of photography, television and film. It’s not at all buried. But Louis [Allen] has enlarged the program. [Mother indicates the plan]. This is only a small part of his extensive total program. He is planning to have a school of agriculture, a modern dairy with grazing land – there’s a lot of agriculture, really a lot – fruit orchards, large rice fields, many things. And then a ceramics factory. [...] All this is huge. A tremendous program. We can file it with the other things.”

On 23.6.65, while describing Her plan to develop the 3<sup>rd</sup> “Auroville”, Mother commented:

“...in the Lake Estates project, there was already an airfield.”

<sup>5</sup> Mother launched it on 24.4.1951 and, on 1.1.1959, She renamed it “Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education”.

<sup>6</sup> In 1955, Louis Allen had started the Ashram Farm “Lake Estate” by this lake.

<sup>7</sup> Letters were indeed exchanged between Pavitra and Raymond who agreed to take up this project

Note that this third attempt came about because: 1) a missionary wanted to transfer some land from the Mission to the Ashram, 2) an American film maker wanted to create a studio cum school of cinema, 3) an Ashramite wanted to create a school of agriculture, etc. and 4) another Ashramite, Soni, who was a pilot, suggested adding an airfield.

Note also Mother's comment: "That's what happens – things change. It's not that the project stops, but it's forced to take other paths." Which is exactly what happened later.

Hence, in 1964, Mother had already made two still-born attempts to develop a new township; She was waiting for signs that time had come to make another attempt ... that would succeed.

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**1964, August 14<sup>th</sup>:** On the last day of its first World Conference, held at the Ashram Theatre in Pondicherry, the Sri Aurobindo Society (S.A.S.)<sup>8</sup> passed several resolutions.<sup>9</sup> One of them was:

**“To develop a township near Pondicherry, with all the amenities and facilities for residence and work for those who want to prepare for a better life.”**

Early 1965, Mother named this township: “Auroville”.

The proposed site was not on the land of the mission, which was (and is) still with it but between Osudu Lake and the Pondicherry-Tindivanam Highway (NH 32). The first plot, bought on 8.10.1964 is now part of Aurobrindavan. Many disciples, including Satprem<sup>10</sup>, at first thought it was by the Lake (where Mother's second Auroville was to be).

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Navajata submitted to the Conference this resolution, which, later, some said it was his own idea:

- On 31<sup>st</sup> May 1976, an Aurovilian, Ramachandra Rao (who wanted to be called “7”), reported that during the conversation he had on the same day with Navajata and Barun Tagore, the former had said: “It was me who suggested for a spiritual colony to the Mother in the year 1963.<sup>11</sup> The Mother had given me this work.”
- Vijay Poddar (Navajata's son) confirmed to me, Gilles G., that this township proposal had indeed been his father's idea and that, later, Mother turned it into something far more ambitious than what he had proposed at this Conference.
- Page 48 of his “*By the Way*” Pranab Bhattacharya wrote that [originally], Auroville “was the idea of Navajat”.
- Shraddhavan told me, Gilles G., that, sometime during the 1970's, Kishorilal Dhandania<sup>12</sup> had told her the same.

As some of us find this assertion hard to believe – though it is made by several persons, let us see whether there are some indications that Navajata did suggest to Mother to use the opportunity of this first World Conference to launch the “development of a township near Pondicherry” meant for the members of the Sri Aurobindo Society (and surely for other disciples) interested in building a home and working there.

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<sup>8</sup> The S.A.S. had been registered on 24.9.1960 in Kolkata (as French laws were used in Pondicherry till its *de jure* merger, in 1962). Originally, Mother was its President and Navajata its “General Secretary cum Treasurer”.

<sup>9</sup> As Mother wasn't coming down from Her room since 1962, She wasn't physically present at this Conference.

<sup>10</sup> On 29.5.65, Mother told Satprem that Panditji had been taken to a Ganesh temple that was recently purchased for Auroville. Auroville's only Ganesh Temple is that at Auro-Orchard but, in a footnote in the *Agenda*, Satprem writes: that he was taken to “a first nucleus [of Auroville] near the Great [Ossudu] Lake”.

In Satprem's transcript of his conversation with Mother on 23.6.65, during which She described Her plan of Auroville to him, Satprem added twice “near the Lake”, which Mother didn't say. (Compare the transcript with the tapes!)

<sup>11</sup> As this first World Conference was announced in the January 1963 issue of the “Information Letter” of the S.A.S., Navajata had plenty of time to discuss with the members of the S.A.S. and then with the Mother what it should try and achieve.

<sup>12</sup> Kishorilal was a close associate of Navajata and was, for example, a member of the Comité Administratif d'Auroville” that was reconstituted in 1974 by Navajata after Mother had left Her body.

The following points seem to confirm the fact that the idea of launching a new township for members of the S.A.S. (and probably some other disciples) had indeed come from Navajata and that, in 1965, Mother took up this project and transformed it completely:

- Though, during Her conversations with Satprem on 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> August 1964, Mother mentioned this and other conferences held at that time in Pondicherry by Ashram-related groups, She doesn't say a word about developing a new township. Had it been Her idea, one would have expected Her to speak to Satprem of Her happiness about it being launched.
- On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1965, Mother described Her plan of Auroville to Satprem and told him: "up to now<sup>13</sup> I took a very secondary interest in it because I hadn't received anything direct." Again, had She come up with the idea of launching this new township at this particular point in time, this would have been a strange statement.
- In the March 1965 issue of the Information Letter" of the S.A.S., Navajata wrote: "You will be glad to know that the Mother has taken up the model township project. She has named it "AUROVILLE"." In its previous issue, dated October 1964, a short report of this conference had been given, without any mention of any of the resolutions passed on that day. It does seem that the delegates had supported Navajata's proposal and that Mother took some time to consider it. Navajata's statement and the fact that, in March 1965 She offered to Roger Anger to build Her "ideal town" seem to indicate that Her interest had started to grow.
- In a 35-page long report (most probably presented to India's Supreme Court in 1981-82), the S.A.S. (that is, most probably Navajata) wrote:

"At the Society's first World Conference in August 1964, the members and delegates expressed their need of a place in or near Pondicherry where they could build their houses, start different avenues of work and practice the yoga of Sri Aurobindo under the Mother's guidance. Shri Navajata, then General Secretary and treasurer conveyed this to the Mother – the President of the Society. A big place was also required to serve as headquarters of the Society's various national and international programmes. The Mother sanctioned the setting up of a township by the Society. This is how Auroville was born in response to the need of the members and the work."

As this entire argument in a crucial court case aimed at proving that Auroville had originated from the S.A.S. and its members, many will consider it suspect. Is it true?

Facts seem to prove that launching a new township at this point in time was indeed most probably Navajata's idea. Mother had only a "secondary interest" in it at first, but then did take it up ... as a starting point. Along the following nine years (mid August 1964 – 21<sup>st</sup> May 1973), Her Auroville evolved into something very different from Navajata's original idea.

Few Aurovilians only are aware that "Application Forms for Residence in Auroville" were printed by the S.A.S. and made available to interested parties.<sup>14</sup> One could apply for "developed plots"<sup>15</sup> of 250, 500 and 1,000m<sup>2</sup> (at a cost of Rs 11/m<sup>2</sup>) and, if granted, one could then build there one's house. Everything in Auroville was to remain the property of the S.A.S. but "possession" rights were granted. Mother was signing each application. A report submitted to the "Comité Administratif d'Auroville" on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1970, stated that 281 applications had been accepted so far by Mother<sup>16</sup> [mainly on the basis of a photo and the willingness to pay].

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<sup>13</sup> Three days earlier, on 20<sup>th</sup> June, Mother had received two letters from an Ashram artist, Huta. On 23<sup>rd</sup> June, Mother told Satprem the effect these letters had on Her: "... and one or two sentences [of Huta's letter] suddenly awakened an old, old memory of something that had tried to manifest – a creation – when I was very small (I don't remember what age), and that had again tried to manifest at the very beginning of the century when I was with Théon [in 1906 & 1907]. Then I had forgotten all about it. And it came back [with that letter]: suddenly I had my plan of Auroville."

<sup>14</sup> Many of these Forms (signed by Mother) are kept at Auroville Archives.

<sup>15</sup> "Developed plots", meant that the required infrastructure (roads, water and power supply, sewage, telephone lines) were to be created by the S.A.S.

<sup>16</sup> 12 single room apartments, 17 double room apartments, 9 3-room apartments, 145 250m<sup>2</sup> plots, 59 500m<sup>2</sup> plots, 34 1,000m<sup>2</sup> plots and 6 plots of other sizes not yet decided. In all some 1,000 residents had been accepted in this way.