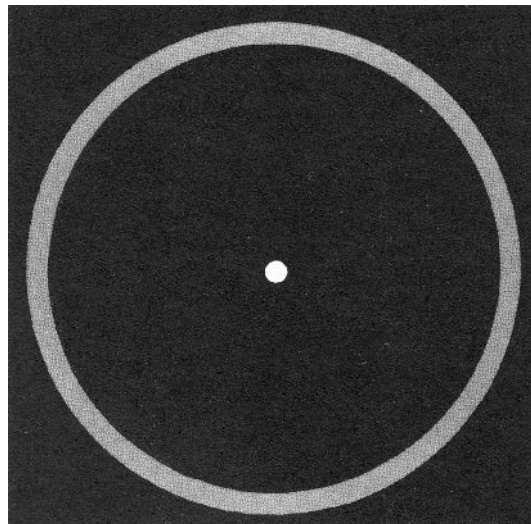


THOUGHTS ON THE SYMBOLISM OF AUROVILLE

Cities are mankind's greatest creations. The establishment of every beautiful city of the world has always implied the concurrence of multiple disciplines integrated in a harmonious approach. A powerful vision and careful planning as a starting point, the inclusion of innovative architecture, art, engineering, landscaping, and an unending flow of financial resources...these are only some of the most necessary components; to enumerate all would be a tedious exercise. Only when the conjunction of all these ingredients has been successfully achieved can we recognize great cities that awaken our admiration. When we look to the external appearance of a city we enter into contact with the first and most external layer of information. But, beyond this first layer there are other layers of information and perception with subtle and deeper meanings. The morphology, the structure, the arrangement of a city's most representative buildings, its residences and life activities, consciously or unconsciously are going to reveal to us the values and ideals, the socio-political order and the image that its citizens have of the cosmos and themselves. It is particularly interesting to notice also that every great culture of the world has attempted to create an Ideal City that could give a material form, a definitive shape to the most relevant aspects of its particular world-view. This was considered extremely important and meaningful for internal and external purposes in many cultures throughout history. From this viewpoint, the external shape of every city of the world is a permanent invitation for us to think and speculate from a philosophical perspective about its society and its underlying anthropological and transcendental principles. I believe that the study of the principles and designs used in various moments of history and its comparison with Auroville can be an interesting subject because it can help us to better understand the fundamental aspects of the experiment that we are trying to develop here and possibly to shine some light on the uniqueness of Auroville's features in relation with other cities of the world and other experiments of the past. I would like to present these reflections just as a first initial contribution to an area which until now has not aroused much interest and discussions – a very surprising fact for me in the context of Auroville.

To facilitate this analysis I will divide human history into three great periods; each one corresponding to a certain "vision of life" or broad paradigm. These three periods could be classified as the Ancient, the Modern and the Post-modern or Trans-modern. All the cities of the world traditionally have served three purposes: spiritual, political and economic. In the Ancient period, we can find in Greek and Rome a traditional pattern that was followed almost universally in the planning, design and construction of the cities. This tradition was followed later

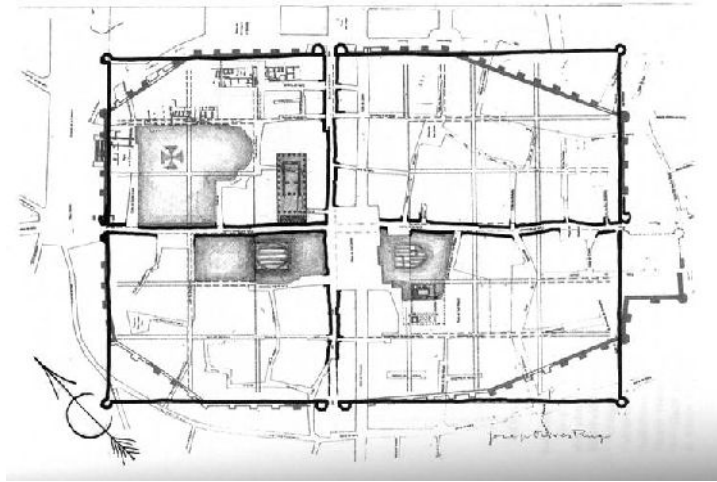
on without interruptions by the founders of the new cities in the Christian Age and was only discontinued with the irruption of Modernity. Interestingly, there are enough studies today to indicate that the models used in ancient times to plan cities have many elements in common with all the archaic civilizations.¹ The main characteristic of the ancient city is that its spiritual, political and economic aspects were incorporated in a unifying model representing its vision of the cosmic order in a hierarchical and geometrical design. The external form was only a symbolic frame, the material support to remind the citizens about and put them in contact with the deeper and latent structures of the inner and transcendent worlds. The *mandala* (square or round) was the first diagram utilized universally in a city-plan to define the master lines of its structure and the order of its different components. The Sanskrit term *mandala* not only defines a geometric form, it has broader connotations and symbolically includes the notions of symmetry, harmony and totality.



(fig 1)

If we consider the *mandala* in fig.1, we can symbolically analyze its elements as follows: the dot at the center represents the sacred, the origin of everything. Around it is the circle. In the past this line marked the location of the citadel walls. But the circle is also the limit or the periphery of the order created, and contains in itself the emanative radiation from the center to every point of its surface. This connection between the center and the periphery is applicable to the dynamics of any territorial system where its coherence will depend on the constant flow of information between the center and the surrounding areas which in that way become interconnected in a meaningful common unity.

¹ Jose Olives Puig “La Ciudad Cautiva” p. 23

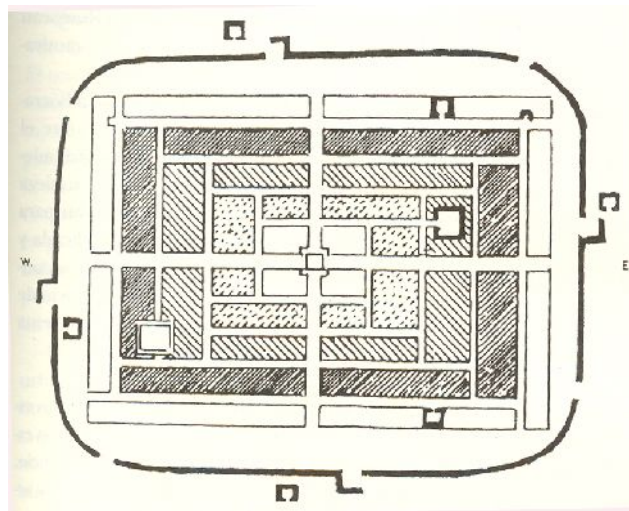


(fig. 2)

This is a sketch of the old city of Barcelona following the archeological remains.

Normally in the plan of the ancient city, whether square or round (see fig 2), we will find that the temple is located at the center. The temple lodges the presence of God and symbolically represents the centrality that the ancient mentality attributed to the sacred dimension in all the activities of life. This central place will contain its most intimate nucleus: the altar where the principal ritual to be performed will be the sacrifice. Associated with the altar another important element is the fire. The fire and the space around it was the most important place in the life of the families at that time, since it was around its warmth and light that the members of the families would gather. The fire burning in the altar is an element common to many different cultures and many times we find this element also at the center of public spaces as the Agora or the Senate. Symbolically it has always represented clarity of understanding, the inner light that should illumine every human being and his/her actions. This inner commitment of the individual to any belief system was considered to be the most stable foundation in which to base the communality of life. Around the centre and in a hierarchical order we find the public spaces for the institutions, the government, tribunals etc. And finally following again a hierarchical order we have the spaces for the residences and the economic-commercial activities. All these institutions have the mission not only to ensure the necessary security, order and good governance but also they guarantee the transmission of the collective knowledge of the city, its foundational ideals, values, laws, traditions, and individual and collective rituals. The participation of the citizens in the public institutions, and the spaces reserved for the ceremonies and rituals was extremely important to encourage their involvement in a shared belief system and the creation of a moral vision holding the city together.

Another important aspect existing in many cities of the past was the myth of the foundation. The initiative of founding a new city was believed to have a supernatural origin and the founder of the city to have received the divine inspiration about when, where and how the city had to be founded. In the West, Hercules was the main founder of many of the cities from Hispania to the Far East. The commemoration and the rituals in the mythical foundational date were very important and every year the priests of every city would perform the ceremonies to actualize the commitment of the city to its foundational ideals. We can see another example in fig. 3.



(fig 3)

This is a Hindu urban model called Nandyavarta. The axis of the major streets irradiate from the center, where the Vedic altar is situated. From its fire will emanate four concentric square rings which correspond to the four Varnas that shape the social order. The most intimate ring, next to the altar is reserved for the priest. The warriors are located in the second ring, protecting the sacred functions. The two following functions, the economic and the residential occupied the periphery. The plan that has a mandalic structure is organized also in a pyramidal sense to express the concept of hierarchy.

These ancient views about planning and the construction of cities were completely discontinued with the coming of the Modern age. Modernity was born in Europe slowly between the 16th and the 18th centuries. This movement brought up a complete shift of paradigm; slowly the ways of understanding life, the implicit values of the system, the basic way of perceiving, thinking, valuing and doing, associated with a particular vision of the reality was changed. In brief, the main characteristics of the new paradigm and relevance for this work could be synthesized thus: the sacred is no longer the center of life and all its activities as

it was in the ancient or archaic age; it is only acceptable as a private choice. The society has been secularized and there is a wall of almost absolute separation between the public and the private. Nature and physical reality are not considered any longer as sacred; the world becomes a disenchanted world. In the public spaces there is no place for any manifestation of the sacred aspect. Together with the center, the limiting circle has also gone. The citizens are now free of all the limiting dogmas, morals and conventions of the past. The only accepted limit is a reasonable pragmatism provided by reason. As a consequence there is a very interesting phenomenon of substitution in which the center and the limit is occupied now by modern man and his activities. Gods and Goddesses are substituted by Reason and the only accepted methodology and understanding of the reality is provided by Science. The spiritual concept of the community is substituted now for a free aggregation of individuals. In the best case scenario, it is by the social contract established between the citizens that the Modern state is founded and the society reconstituted.

The first consequence of this modern paradigm when applied to the area of urbanism is that the predominant approaches to planning become merely rational and utilitarian. The driving force and the shape of the cities are going to be primarily determined by the economy and by the erratic expansions-contractions of its cycles. During this period the history of Urbanism has witnessed the rise and decline of a number of different types of cities. Now at the beginning of the 21 Century we have as a predominant model the global city or the Megacity. In 1950, only two cities in the world, London and New York, had populations larger than 10 million; according to the latest reports of the United Nations, in 2015 there will be more than twenty three of these mega cities. Some of these cities, for example in China, are expected to reach populations of 40 million. At the same time there are at least 600 million urbanites in developing countries surviving in squatter settlements, called by various names: *favelas*, *barriadas*, *shantytowns* or *katchi adabis*. Some of these megacities have grown amid persistent economic stagnation as well as social and political dysfunction. Many of them have failed to provide the basic infrastructures to its residents. With the increasing size of the cities these problems are growing also exponentially and the situation of many cities is becoming more and more unsustainable.

These evident pathologies of the megacities are symptoms pointing to a more severe diagnosis, and that is that the modern paradigm is undergoing a fatal crisis. It is necessary to recognize that Modernity brought up new and revolutionary principles and has contributed immensely to positively shape our

societies in a great number of areas. But this movement had also many weak points and insufficiencies. In the last three centuries, the importance of these critical points has emerged with more and more force. Modernity helped the human being to develop its external capacities and means, science, technologies, and economy immensely, but all of it without developing simultaneously its inner counterpart, i.e. morality, ethics, and spirituality. This period of time has offered the possibility to test the behavior of societies guided predominantly by the reason in which the importance of the spiritual center and the limiting circle of ethics and morality has been disregarded. In fact, it could be pointed out that the majority of the tragedies of the 20th century, with its countless conflicts, wars, and massacres, had their origin in this basic imbalance. It is perhaps becoming more evident now that a society deprived of strong ideals and lacking any clear spiritual goal leads at the end where other similar attempts ended in the past, in an inevitable process of decay and death. It is clear also that this way of seeing life is becoming progressively obsolete and one of the most urgent necessities of our present time is to surpass it. This necessity has been recognized in the last decades by an increasing number of people and today we see a flourishing of post-modern or trans-modern approaches in a number of areas striving to articulate alternatives beyond this approach. Humankind needs desperately to find different ways of dealing with nature, society and ourselves as individuals, a new and completely different paradigm of civilization, the present one could hardly be considered as such; in reality it is more appropriate to describe it as semi-barbaric. It is clear to me also, that the real depth of the present crisis has not been sufficiently understood by contemporary thinking. Sri Aurobindo has substantiated much better its understanding when he defined the present crisis as an evolutionary crisis. This is the real dimension of the problem and only with appropriate answers at this level can we expect to find adequate solutions.

Every society in the world is always determined and it is an expression of the evolution of its individuals and not the opposite. If we look into the history from a psychological viewpoint we discover that the human society has progressed through certain distinct psychological cycles or stages that Sri Aurobindo defined as: symbolic, typical, conventional, individualistic and subjective. We are right now living in the middle of a transitional period, perhaps a passage between the subjective age and a spiritual age. The main feature of this subjective age is that increasing numbers of people are going beyond the limited truths of the social conventionalism, trying to discover by themselves the validity of the truths of life and refusing any external authority. In this *“new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity now only beginning, is there a better hope; for by that turning it may discover that the real truth of man is to be found in his soul. It is not indeed*

certain that a subjective age will lead us there, but it gives us the possibility, can turn in that direction, if used rightly, the more inward movement".² In this process towards a greater subjectivity, when knowledge is diffusing itself with an unprecedented rapidity, when the individuals are compelled to find the real roots of their problems, when external remedies for the maladies of our societies have been tried exhaustively in the last centuries and failed, that the opportunity to re-discover the neglected inner dimension of our being can become imperative again and this subjective age become the passage to a different goal: a spiritual age. Sri Aurobindo foresaw this process thus: *"Therefore the coming of a spiritual age must be preceded by the appearance of an increasing number of individuals who are no longer satisfied with the normal intellectual, vital and physical existence of man, but perceive that a greater evolution is the real goal of humanity and attempt to effect it in themselves, to lead others to it and to make it the recognised goal of the race. In proportion as they succeed and to the degree to which they carry this evolution, the yet unrealised potentiality which they represent will become an actual possibility of the future"*.³

The manifestation into matter of this spiritual vision required at a certain moment the creation of new fields of experimentation in which to test the validity of these new spiritual discoveries and at the same time give progressively a concrete shape to this vision. This is the perspective indicated by the Mother in a message written for a UNESCO committee in the year 1969: *"The task of giving a complete form of Sri Aurobindo's vision was entrusted to the Mother. The creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. By the very nature of things, it is a collective ideal that calls for a collective effort so that may be realized in the terms of an integral human perfection. The Ashram, founded and built by the Mother was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind."*⁴ From the spiritual perspective is necessary to point out that Auroville was born right after and as a direct consequence of the manifestation of the Supramental Force on Earth. This transcendental event means that the spirit is going to disclose new and supreme powers of consciousness with an unimaginable capacity of transformation that had not been operative in the earth-consciousness until now. The magnitude of this radical spiritual change and its new ideals should be better expressed with new forms and symbols. The human being from the most ancient times has felt

² "The Human Cycle" by Sri Aurobindo p. 224

³ "The Human Cycle" by Sri Aurobindo p. 263

⁴ CWM 13, p.210

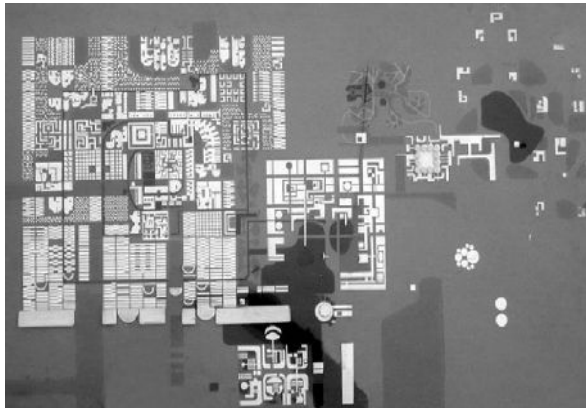
the necessity of expressing through symbols the realities which escape the scope of the rational mind. A symbol, according to Sri Aurobindo, is a form in one plane that represents a truth of another. The greatness of the art of symbol making depends on the closeness to the truth that is communicated by the symbol employed. Perhaps the highest expression of art is that which can communicate and express the mysterious, the veiled presence of the spirit.

According to the hypothesis of this paper, all the external elements of this new city should configure a symbolic geometric model with the power to establish the necessary linkages, the nexus of union between the inner and the outer dimensions of life. The external forms of the city, its most relevant buildings and spaces should be powerful generators of speculative associations, suggestive references and illuminating revelations. At its highest level, the geometry may form a “Sacred Geometry” with the primary purpose of facilitating the process of inner discovery. This possibility is of paramount importance in a city like Auroville. If we examine some of the principles and symbols that are guiding the manifestation of Auroville as a city we will discover some interesting facts. One of the most striking is the number of similarities between the symbolic-pattern followed in the design of the cities in Ancient times and those followed in the design of Auroville. The first parallelism is the presence again of the supernatural as the origin of the initiative to build the city. When the question was put to the Mother as early as 1965 as to who had taken the initiative for the construction of Auroville, Her unambiguous answer was: *The Supreme Lord*.⁵ The Mother played a decisive role as a mediator; she had in her consciousness a very well defined vision to be implemented. The next step was to find a person with the necessary qualities to receive and undertake her futuristic vision. From the beginning She entrusted the project to a well recognized French architect: Roger Anger. “...I had my plan of Auroville. Now I have my general plan; I am waiting for R. to make the detailed plans because from the beginning I have said, “R. will be the architect,” and I have written to R.”⁶ The qualities that Roger has demonstrated during all these years, his visionary capacity, inexhaustible creativity, his permanent quest for the forms of the future and most important, his capacity to synergize his unquestionable professional talent with the Mother’s vision were perhaps the reasons for her choice. In any case, they worked together in a symbiotic relationship for several years developing not only the main lines of the project, but also the details of some central elements, as it was done with the most meticulous accuracy for Matrimandir and its surrounding area.

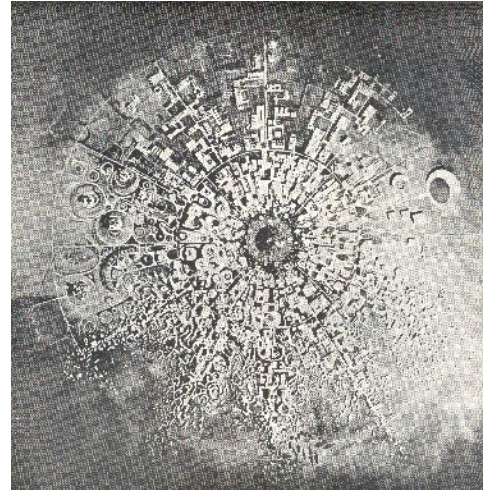
⁵ Auroville in Mother’s Words, p. 34

⁶ Mother’s Agenda, 23.6.65

Before arriving at the “Galaxy” concept several successive layouts were made, each one representing a different stage in the search for a model that could represent consistently the Mother’s Vision. Two first models were presented at the same time by Roger to the Mother, and studied in parallel, the square one. (See fig. 4) and the model called the “Nebula”. (See fig.5)



(fig 4)

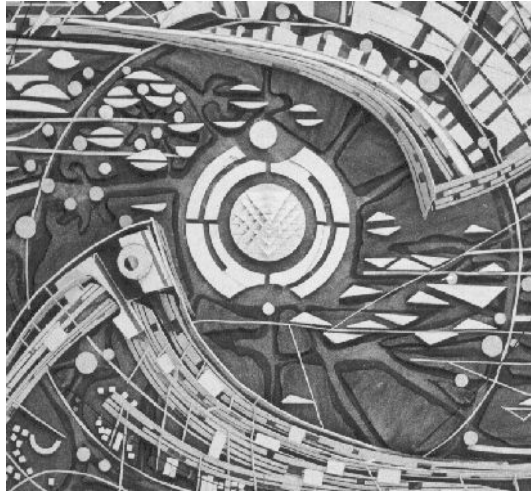


(fig 5)

One may note that the square model is very similar to the ancient patterns that we have seen before. The interesting fact is that this model was rejected by the Mother and she chose the circular one as starting point. Perhaps these forms were excessively static and unable to represent the strong evolutionary dynamism that the Mother wanted to lay down. But probably the most important reason was that this concept was not expressing what the Mother had come into contact with. In a conversation with Satprem at the beginning of Auroville, she made this enigmatic comment: “...It’s sure to work, I KNOW it exists – the city is already there (it has been for many, many years)... The city already exists...And the remarkable thing is that I simply told R. [the architect] the broad outlines, asking him if he was interested. Then he went back to France and he received my formation (my old formation, which I myself had left asleep); he received it there. I found that very interesting. He received it, he said to me, “It came all at once, I seemed to be possessed by something, and in one night the whole thing was done.”⁷

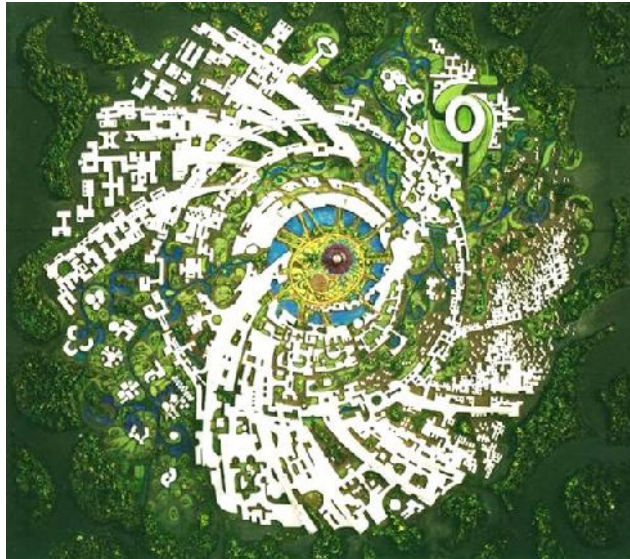
This design concept was followed by another circular module with two central mega-structures (fig 6)

⁷ 23 April 1966 in Mother’s Agenda.



(Fig 6)

Finally the “Galaxy” model emerged and received the approval of the Mother along with her “blessings.” (See fig 7)



(Fig 7) - The Galaxy model.

This model of the city allows for a maximum population of 50.000 people. It has a circular shape with a diameter of 2.5 km. The city area contains four zones: Residential, International, Industrial and Cultural, and it is surrounded by a Green Belt.

The history of the design process of the final model for the township and the Matrimandir area shows clearly that from the initial stages of planning the research of the most appropriated forms and symbols for Auroville was of paramount importance. Speaking about Matrimandir and its area, the Mother highlighted its relevance by stating: “*it’s again a symbol. Everything is symbolic.*”⁸ The same concern was expressed by Roger in an interview in 1971⁹ in which he

⁸ Mother’s Agenda, 10.1.1970

⁹ Interview with Roger Anger, “Journal of the Indian Institute of Architects” April 1971

underlined its importance, especially in the Matrimandir area, and conveyed his puzzlement at the discovery of the repetition of certain symbols and numbers, concretely 4 and 12 and the answers given by the Mother to his questions about the occult significance of the different components.¹⁰

Another interesting parallelism with the past is the circular *mandala* with a powerful center that we find again repeated under a new form. The most essential characteristic of this *mandala* is the strong dynamism that transmits immediately. This is not a static symbol but one charged with an evolutionary impetus. This form can evoke also the analogy of the real galaxies, which are always in an unending movement, rotating around its axis and evolving new and higher forms of life. This city has been designed to be in a perpetual movement of accelerated evolution, radiating from its spiritual center, the Matrimandir. At the center of the city, there is a complex containing three main elements, all placed within an area with the form of an oval. (See fig 8):



(Fig 8)

These three elements are the Matrimandir and its petals, encircled by the Park of Unity with twelve gardens, the Banyan Tree, and finally the amphitheater with the white marble lotus bud-shaped vase which contains handfuls of soil from many nations of the world. At the boundaries of this area, there will be tall trees, which will represent Aspiration and Unity. The encircling oval with its different elements was conceived as a symbol of the fundamental unity of creation. The Mother also gave the overall dimensions of this area with the gardens and the park in relation to the dimensions of Matrimandir. It is 10 times the height of the

¹⁰ The Mother vol. 25 p. 359 "Essentially the 12 powers are the vibrations that are necessary for the complete manifestation". The Mother vol. 25 p.86 "Four is the number signifying a square, fullness, completeness".

Matrimandir and 10 times its length (290 and 360 ms). In the future the entire area will be surrounded by an artificial lake. This oval was envisaged by the Mother as an island, with the lake enhancing greatly the feeling of isolation and the calmness in the area. The lake should be an integral part – not merely a decorative element – of the Matrimandir area. Besides its symbolic dimension it should have an essential function in the water supply system for the city and the green belt areas.

The Matrimandir has multiple meanings and its crucial significance was declared by the Mother in two concrete statements: *“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.”* And *“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”*. In the same interview mentioned before, Roger gives another complementary perspective: *“Here is revealed the second spiritual meaning of the Matrimandir: Until now, the consciousness was emerging from the depths of matter. But there is another force, another consciousness, which is secretly similar to the first one. Yes, remember that we spoke of the light coming from above. These are two powers: one is hidden in the sacred heart of things and is at once their reason for being, their basis and their life. It is a rising force; a power breaks open the crust of matter. But there is also a descending power that comes from the height, from the Supreme level, a down-going force that awakens. It stimulates the emergence of an ever new creation. The conjunction, the meeting of these two forces in the heart of the Matrimandir symbolizes the perfect Realization”*.

The Matrimandir is supported by four pillars. According to Sri Aurobindo, the evolutionary principle of creation is manifested through four main powers: *“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”*¹¹. Consequently, as in a supreme invocation calling for the manifestation of these powers, the pillars were named with the names of these four great aspects: Mahakali in the North, Maheswari in the South, Mahalaksmi in the East, and Mahasaraswati in the West. Even though the whole city with all its multiple activities can serve as a channel to manifest the spiritual force that the Matrimandir irradiates, there is an area in which various symbolic elements have been concentrated with the specific purpose to intensify and facilitate a process similar to a “Spiritual Initiation.” Interestingly this is another parallelism with the initiatory rituals and celebrations of the ancient times. In the case of

¹¹ “The Mother” with the Mother’s Comments by Sri Aurobindo p. 22

Auroville this process is meant to happen in the Matrimandir area. Roger has described this process: *“This inner pilgrimage which, for some, can end with the visit to the inner chamber begins with the crossing of the bridge that will connect the city area with the island. As in Sri Aurobindo’s symbol, the water represents the multiplicity, the creation. When the pilgrim has arrived, the island will be exposed facing the powerful vision of Matrimandir’s exterior, covered with the golden disks that seems to emerge from the crater of the earth between the half – opened petals. The second stage begins with the discovery of the twelve gardens; each one of them represents a specific state of consciousness: Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Light, life, Power, Wealth, Utility, Progress, Youth, Harmony, and Perfection. As the pilgrim moves within the gardens he ought to be able to internalize the experience of this specific state of consciousness. All together they reproduce the symbol of the Mother. And this is a kind of seal which is integrated into the whole project. The third stage continues going on a downward path between the petals, a descent leading to the marble “lotus pond” and to the meditation chambers. The Matrimandir’s meditation chambers are again twelve, each one of them represent an attribute of the Mother and have also the corresponding color. They are Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Goodness, Generosity, Equality, and Peace. It is interesting to note that the first eight concern the attitude towards the Divine, and the last four towards humanity. The upward climb towards the Matrimandir is made via four large stairways inserted in the four pillars that support the Matrimandir. The four entrance doors leading to the passage are self-effacing; they want to evoke in the pilgrim the feeling of being invited into the interior. The fourth stage begins with the circular entrance hall; the access to the vast interior space of Matrimandir is reached by a narrow selective passageway, comparable to the doors of hallowed places. By its form and color, the sheer size, the tinted light, the play of spiral ramps, everything is a preparation to the ascension to the inner chamber. Crossing the platform leading to the two ramps is marked by a difference in level, which creates the pause needed for the accomplishment of the last stage of the journey, the slow ascent to the discovery of Mother’s chamber. In this bare room only illuminated with the white light radiated from the crystal ball is the place where the pilgrim will face the Mother’s Darshan”.*

At this point it is necessary to remark some significant differences between the Galaxy model and the models followed in the past. These variations are very important because they are going to express important characteristics of this new spirituality and at the same time mark inevitable differences with the old religions. If we take the Hindu model for instance, we will see that the first concentric “ring” around the center was reserved to the priests in order to allow

them to develop their important function as mediators between the sacred and the faithful. This was a fundamental arrangement not only in the Hindu but in other religious organizations. In the “Galaxy” concept this arrangement has disappeared, and along with it the important function of having a sacerdotal caste; in the new spirituality this function has become irrelevant. The “spiritual initiation” and the access to Matrimandir are accessible to everyone without the necessity of any mediation. This is a very significant difference in my opinion, because what this architectural language indicates is that a decisive transition has been made between the old religious order and a new spiritual approach. The entire pilgrimage is another interesting metaphor with a double meaning, one symbolic and the other interior. At symbolic level it gives expression to one of the central tenets in Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual philosophy and praxis; i.e. the absolute necessity of the inner journey that every human being has to make sooner or later to his most inner part in order to discover, and being transformed, by the spiritual powers of his soul. As it happens in the Matrimandir, which holds at its very depths the inner chamber, the same happens in the human beings where the soul lies deep inside, silently in the splendor of its own light. The external journey, going through the various symbolic stages contributes with various psychological experiences towards the awakening of latent spiritual faculties in order to facilitate the most complete and integral spiritual experience. The last stage with the entry into the inner chamber, as happened in the ancient temples of the past, is of transcendental significance because this is the place for the sacrifice. In this case the emphasis is given to the inner sacrifice, the unconditional offering of the entire being to the Supreme Mother. The supramental divine force will descend according to the sincerity and the aspiration of the pilgrims and will grant the necessary boons towards their divine transformation.

In its insuperable style Savitri has suggested the nature of this spiritual metamorphosis thus:

*“The supermind shall claim the world for Light
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base.
A greater truth than earth's shall roof-in earth
And shed its sunlight on the roads of mind;
A power infallible shall lead the thought,
A seeing Puissance govern life and act,
In earthly hearts kindle the Immortal's fire.*

*A soul shall wake in the Inconscient's house;
The mind shall be God-vision's tabernacle,
The body intuition's instrument,
And life a channel for God's visible power.
All earth shall be the Spirit's manifest home,
Hidden no more by the body and the life,
Hidden no more by the mind's ignorance;
An unerring Hand shall shape event and act.
The Spirit's eyes shall look through Nature's eyes,
The Spirit's force shall occupy Nature's force.”¹²*

The inner transformation is only the first and indispensable movement of the human being in his ascent towards the spirit, but the second and essential movement in this new approach is the descent of the Spirit directed towards the transformation of the entire life: *“Therefore a society which was even initially spiritualised would make the revealing and finding of the divine Self in man the supreme, even the guiding aim of all its activities, its education, its knowledge, its science, its ethics, its art, its economical and political structure.”*¹³ Here is where the necessity of the city-plan became absolutely imperative. The residential, industrial, cultural and international areas represent the most essential activities of our life; each one of these activities in the context of Auroville will start from and use the knowledge and the means that past efforts had put at their disposal, but each one of these activities are also to become fields of specific research in which to apply the transformative dynamism of this spiritual force. If we observe the action of the Spirit in the past achievements of humankind, or in its movement towards the future, we will see that its action inspires a constant rediscovery, a new formulation and larger synthesis in the mind, and a mighty remoulding of all life’s activities. The most essential thing that must take precedence over the others is the transformation of the whole life, led by the Spirit, not being just a simple superficial change or a mere coloring of its activities. We have seen that the best cities of the past could thrive when they had a sacred center providing order and inspiring their inhabitants with a common purpose and shared vision. The galactic spiral whirl as a symbol indicates exactly this motion of connecting the spiritual consciousness-force from its center to the totality of the city and its life transmitting a movement of uplifting transformation. The essential purpose of this experiment has been from its beginning to embody the ideal of the human unity. The only way to move towards a real unity is to realize that it is when we live in identification with our

¹² Savitri p. 707

¹³ “The Human Cycle” by Sri Aurobindo p. 256

spiritual being that we are one with the divine Reality and one with all the other beings. It is not living in our egos that the real unity becomes possible. This basic spiritual fact neglected or ignored by the various attempts done in the past was the main reason for their failures; this should be the main focal point to be considered by any new attempt. With that purpose the city was planned for a maximum population of 50,000 persons. We can infer that this is the critical mass necessary to achieve successfully this goal. These citizens will be volunteers from different nationalities, from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, who come to live and work together. They will strive to go beyond any preconceived idea and the limitations of their own origin, religious and cultural background exploring more integral ways of facing the infinite number of problems and challenges that one enterprise like this is going to meet. They will work essentially in themselves because it is in their own being that they are going to find the most obstinate resistance to hasten the evolution of the human consciousness and make this ideal possible.

After these reflections we can arrive at several conclusions:

- a) Every new age, every new cycle in the history of humankind has seen the creation of an Ideal city as the most appropriated medium to express its highest values and ideals. This historical sequence is repeating again with the Mother's decision of choosing again a city for the manifestation of her new creation.
- b) The direct involvement of the Mother in the exercise of searching and selecting the most appropriated city-model to materialize her vision conveys the importance of the concept finally accepted. The Galaxy-concept takes the ancient *mandalic* symbol with a center and a circular shape but under new and more expressive dynamic forms. There are many parallelisms with the geometrical diagrams followed by the ancient cities, but this model introduces significant modifications giving a symbolical expression to the crucial concepts of this new spirituality.
- c) The primary and most prominent purpose of the galaxy model and its symbolism is to give the most perfect expression possible to the city's spiritual dimension, the integral evolution of human consciousness hastened by the descent of the Supermind. The other more practical dimensions, are subordinated and secondary to the main purpose. This view is reinforced by the fact that the division of the city-activities in four areas, something which is an unusual exercise in contemporary town-

planning, was one of the central elements from the very first Mother's sketches.

- d) By its dimension, the complexity of its different elements and the magnitude of its scope, this city becomes a symbolic point of concentration of the present evolutionary difficulties that the earth is facing, it is in a platform of this nature that is possible to essay the new and revolutionary solutions that the Spirit wants to disclose at this new stage of its never-ending evolution. In that sense we can say that Auroville becomes a laboratory of advanced spiritual research for humanity as a whole. The destiny of humankind was shaped greatly in the past in their most representative cities; perhaps its destiny wants to vest again in another city the best hope for its future.

Auroville 21/02/2007 by Joseba