

## A Conversation with Roger Anger Including Luigi and Aryamani with Jacqueline

March 10<sup>th</sup> 1996

**Roger:** My story has been one of perfect simplicity.

**Jacqueline:** Mother knew how to catch you.

**R.:** ...The simplest adventure in the world. I have the feeling that I have been taken, from the beginning of my life, by a destiny which never let go of me. I did some studies because the Divine chose for me without me knowing it; but now, looking back, I realise that everything has always been written, from eternity. I have nothing to tell that is particularly interesting. How did I come to know about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? It is true that I came to them in an indirect way. I have always had a quest, a spiritual leaning, from a very early age. I had a painting teacher who introduced me to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda at a very early age.

**L.:** Ah yes, already at university?

**R.:** No, before university. I had not yet started my studies. I was still in secondary school, at the beginning of the *lycée*. I had a painting teacher who liked me, who was affectionate with me. He was a seeker, together with his wife, in self-taught domains; they had come up with their own theory of the universe. They were seeking a little bit everywhere. And I... in fact they were seeking together with me whom they considered a bit like their spiritual son. They initiated me. I have never looked at him other than as a painting teacher. I never met him at any other level than that of pupil to teacher.

**L.:** Is it with them then that you first heard of India – of spiritual knowledge?

**R.:** At the beginning they had, it was a somewhat Christian commitment – ‘Christian Science’ – going to sing in some gatherings which were a little strange. It seemed to me a very interesting commitment – some kind of revised and corrected Christianity. It seemed interesting to me. But soon after they were nourished by Indian thought and philosophy and I was formed a little by that; this didn’t go very far. I read a lot of Indian philosophy but in fact, it was Paul Brunton who enriched me most. Do you know him? He had a kind of mystical adventurer side to him; the ideology of inner reflection... I have always remained in contact with Indian thought; but it did not go very far. It never reached the heights... Later, I had my professional career which demanded all my time, for perhaps 10 or 15 years. I let go of spirituality though I always remained connected to the books of [Ramana] Maharshi, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

**L.:** But in your youth, at the university, you never took up any other ideologies?

**R.:** Politically no; I was not very committed. I was a revolutionary in the face of social inequalities. It seemed to me... but I never believed in a commitment, in political action. I always looked at it from a certain distance. My commitment was more professional than anything else. It is in fact here that I got caught because... it is true that at that time I had obtained sizeable financial means which allowed me to consider travelling. I travelled quite a lot... to the US, to the Middle East.

**A.:** But why did you travel?

**R.:** Probably to open my mind; to see things; to try to understand different cultures. I was fascinated by Egypt, by the relationship between the material universe, that in which I lived, and that of a quest which was always there in me. But I did not have, unlike you, a definite spiritual commitment, that worked in me... I was mainly dissatisfied by social inequalities. Did I have a deep spiritual quest? A curiosity and a thirst for something higher, a quest for the absolute: though objectively speaking this did not translate itself into a very ardent, intense inner life.

**A.:** This is interesting, because looking at you; I don’t see a mystic in you...

**R.:** No, I am not a mystic; not at all. I am the anti-mystic.

**A.:** A-mystic like Mother...

[Laughs]

R.: I am completely anti-mystic... I completely rebelled against all forms of religion, of religiosity; after having sung at church as a choir boy; it seemed to me an anachronism. Like pre-history. I was revolted by the hypocrisy of the Pharisees; I found it monstrous. In fact my quest was more like a desire for a greater social equality; an intellectual research.

A.: But you know, for me, there are two things in you which touch me a lot, which for me are something... If I have to define you in a certain way, for me, there are two things in your personality which may have guided you: your relationship with beauty and with the future. I have known three persons who always put me in contact with the future: you, Rolf the dance teacher and Kireet [Joshi]... The people I have known, with whom I have spoken and who had a constant relationship with the future. Were you already feeling this in your youth?

R.: Yes, definitely. I have been intensely engaged in the quest for beauty. This is absolutely certain; from a very early age I had a connection with forms, with beauty, with colour...I began very young. I wanted to be a painter, yes, in fact because of my meeting with that couple I mentioned earlier. It was above all an encounter that tended towards the absolute, towards beauty, towards the search for authentic values and an intense need, to imagine a better society; I was suffering because the society in which we lived, which was unjust, that seemed entirely hypocritical. That was the base of my reality, without doubt. The paradox, when I said that there was a thread present in my life, it is that – in fact I have never done anything with the idea of having a successful professional career; I have never done anything for it. I met the people I had to meet; I studied in a very good school, without wanting it.

A.: It was Picasso who said: I do not look, I find...

R.: It is not that I was looking for it. It was entirely given to me. I met the people I needed to meet at the right time. I had friends who have helped me professionally, who helped me considerably, and I have been of tremendous help to them because they all became very rich thanks to the connections I could make for them. So, my friends helped me and I have helped them to establish an economic base for themselves and this was given to me without needing to do anything for it. I never did anything to try to influence the situation – nothing at all. And when I look back at the course of my life, it is true that I am an architect because Mother willed it. I did not want to be an architect. It did not interest me at all. Some people had a career because they had a calling; I simply wanted to paint and then to study medicine – then it so happened that during the war it wasn't possible because I had taken refuge in the Cote d'Azur. It didn't work out. I met an architect a little older than me who told me, "What are you doing here; why don't you come and do some architecture with me instead of hanging around?" ...Because, somehow I was not really doing very much, so yes, why not. He told me, "Come one day and see whether it interests you." So, one day I went and indeed he taught me architecture. Later I studied at the École des Beaux-Arts; but I did it because I had nothing else to do and conditions lent themselves to it. The fact is that it imposed itself on me like the rest and during my entire life there was a thread that kept unrolling and I was aware of it at that time, that it was given to me. It is not something that... I was receiving what was already written. I had this perception.

L.: You felt that?

R.: I have never felt I should do something different from what was proposed to me. It was an easy choice; very easy. Funny isn't?

A.: But later, when you found Mother?

R.: Very easy. I had some difficulties at the level of understanding what I was supposed to do; of what I was supposed to carry as a responsibility at the material level but it was easy because it happened just like that. Thank heaven and thanks to Mother everything has been given to me. I did not have a sadhana...

[Laughs]

L.: The sadhana was done for you?

R.: The most difficult sadhana was that of Auroville. It was indeed difficult for me when Mother left her body. From the time She left it has been very difficult. But until then I was very privileged, like curled up in a cocoon. The time with Mother was the golden age.

A.: Tell us how you found Mother; how you came to the Ashram.

R.: So, I came to the Ashram when I met Purna... The first time we met, she spoke to me about the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo, which I had never heard of. And I believe it was the second time when she told me that her grandmother lived in Pondicherry and was in charge of an ashram. I did not even know what an ashram was at that time. Maybe I knew, but I had no clue of what it meant to be the head of an ashram – and especially not that of the Ashram Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. So, after that I started reading books about Mother and Sri Aurobindo and it seemed to me to be a fantastic discovery. I felt a very strong shock inside me – in terms of inner discovery. It was a great discovery with the books. From then onwards, she told me that we could visit the Ashram some time later... my encounters with India were mainly with the India of the Ashram, with Delhi, with Varanasi, with Mumbai. It was dreadful. I thought I would never be able to bear the atmosphere, or the ambience, or the moral principles; it seemed to me so terribly archaic, so full of conventions, so full of things I did not understand.

A.: And Pondicherry, how was it?

R.: I saw Mother for the first time at the Playground, after the *march past*; there had been a meditation and Mother had told Françoise: “You will bring him after the meditation” to a room at the playground.”

R.: I saw Mother in a burst of light. You see, it was sublime, because you entered this room, – it was already night, the room was lit – with flowers on the floor, colours; I remember it was bathed in an orange and green light. And Mother was there, dressed in white; it was light utterly within light. It was an amazing experience.

[Silence]

R.: She said two, three words; I did not say anything and She gave me some flowers. It was a great, a grand moment. And moreover, I did not know, I hadn't realised yet who She was. And did I ever realise who She was in all the contacts I had with her? Otherwise, it was an absolute impossibility to think, to see, to have any kind of analysis of the intellectual type; it was purely a contact of full force. It is a moment that cannot be erased.

....A grand, grand moment in silence and unity which moreover I never had again – because later I spoke with Mother. At that moment I didn't speak and I would retain the after-effect of this first shock, of the emotionalism; of my own emotionalism. It was something amazing.

A.: Auroville didn't exist at that time?

R.: No, no.

J.: I think it was in 1958 that he came for the first time. It seems to me that I worked it out.

R.: In 1958, you think? It was much ahead of [the launching of] Auroville. I saw Mother; perhaps we stayed two months; I must have met her three or four times during that period; It was being in her presence; I saw her playing music. We would go and watch her playing tennis every day.

L.: Was the most powerful contact the first one?

R.: Yes and no because I began to realise more and more what She represented – at the level of her teaching, of her presence. One cannot say that there was not a certain degree of perception that imposed itself. I saw her as a being of light which was beyond my comprehension. I didn't understand.

L.: Did something in you feel good when you were next to her?

R.: Yes, of course; some moments were very deeply moving. It was in the evening before She would go back to her room; some people would accompany her to the Ashram; we would line up and She would pass in front of us and give her blessings. These were absolutely unforgettable moments. Because every evening we did this. At that time I was not seeing her; I saw her only three or four times during our stay. I knew that I felt somewhat intimidated; I did not know what to say to her.

[Laughs]

R.: It is true. She would ask me questions and I replied awkwardly.

[Laughs]

R.: I do not know whether She ever believed that I could make a good sadhak.

L.: I wanted to ask you, weren't you afraid that She would ask you to become an Ashramite?

R.: I don't believe that She ever thought of that. I did not have that fear because I never really felt ... that possibility.

[Laughs]

A.: Besides that, when you returned to your life in France, did your life change?

R.: I set myself to reading when I returned... So, though we lived a normal life, our spiritual preoccupations were obvious.

A.: So, how did it go from there to the proposition of Auroville?

R.: Year after year we went back to the Ashram. I had my own relationship with Mother. She would give me some small works to do, you see, a plan to do some work at the playground. I worked in Golconde in a room She had made available for me to work. I would do some small jobs. I designed Pavitra's tomb, some small things like that. I drew the garden of the Hand Made Paper unit. I did small jobs, this and that. She would give me some small work, I would do it, and I would go and see her, communicate about the designs. Then one day She sent me a letter to ask whether I was interested in an important project, that She was expecting me.

A.: You were in France?

R.: Yes. I was living alone in Paris and I received that letter from Mother together with a letter from Purna explaining to me that Mother had a major project, which Mother wanted to entrust me with – a major project but I did not know what it was. I thought it was a project like those I had already done. She was expecting me so I said I would come and then She said... No, in fact, I received a letter from her telling me that She was happy that I had accepted and that She was waiting for me. I went there.

A.: You had no idea what it was all about?

R.: No, I did not know what it was about. It is Mother who explained it to me, who gave me a drawing: "Here, I have a grand project, the project of a city for many inhabitants; here is the sketch I have drawn. Are you interested? I said yes. "So I think you should contact Nava so that he can show you the site and you can tell me what you think. What can be done?" So I went to see Nava who told me he had started to buy land and that we would go to the site the next day to see. I went there and the site that had been selected was at "Promesse", across from "Promesse" and on either side of the National Highway, and what is now Auro Orchard.

L.: You noticed all that immediately?

R.: It seemed to me to be completely anachronistic to build a city that is cut in two. It did not seem to alarm Nava who kept buying land on both sides of the highway, and who – that's the best part – had already started to divide the land and sell it in small parcels...Small plots. He had started to speculate with real estate. It looked extravagant, mad and completely ridiculous. For a few days I did not do anything and then...

R.: When I was there... actually at Golconde, at my drawing table, my little drawing table, there was Mother's sketch and then the map of the land near "Promesse". These maps did not even show any contours. They came from the army. I don't know where he had found such maps.

L.: These were not good maps like we have now.

R.: Luckily they were not maps from Aurofuture!

A.: All that is new now, the Banyan tree, all that did not exist?

R.: Yes, the Banyan was there, but the Banyan, it was Mother who ... Listen, there is an interesting story because I found some maps that were in fact of some empty land with only the village of Kuilapalayam – two or three small villages were there. So I went to see Mother and said: "Mother, a city cannot be built on two roads; it is absolutely impossible. Let us leave the land near Promesse as it is; it will be useful at the start because there is a customs check-post. It was the French customs post on the way to Pondicherry. Let us keep them as the first offices. And then we move the city towards Kuilapalayam – more inside." She said, "Of course, it is very good. We'll do that. It is not a problem." It was only that there was the "Grand Etang" [Usteri or Ussudu Lake]. She liked this place very much. She told me, "The Grand Etang can be used later; when it is possible to connect it with Promesse". She did not object to shifting the city. A few days later I brought her a map and asked her: "Where shall we put the centre of the town?" At that time, I did not know, there was no [proper] map – except for her own sketch on which the Matrimandir was marked, because She had marked a spot; the centre was already defined.

L.: Her sketch was circular.

R.: Yes, it was round like a flower. So, She pointed to a spot on the map and it was the Banyan. It was the only existing tree on the site. There was no other tree than this one.

A.: Why did She point to this particular spot?

R.: Because I had asked her where the centre should be and She pointed to it. We made a mark there and went to identify the place with a jeep. There was no road. There was nothing. There was nothing on the land. There was not even a tree, nothing. The only place where there was some greenery was the Banyan and that's where She marked the centre of the town. That's how it all started.

L.: Didn't Navjata have a reaction because he had already bought the land. Did he take it well?

R.: He didn't mind. As soon as Mother told him how something was to be, he never questioned it. He acknowledged that there were good reasons for the objection. Later I drafted a document which still exists in which I tried to summarize the problems that I had asked her about. What was the town? What should we provide for? What should be the nature of the reflection associated with it? Defining accommodation, a global reflection, the problem of cars, of transport... You must know this document?

J.: When She presented her sketch with four zones, were you surprised to see the four zones?

R.: She explained her plan to me in detail: What the four zones were for, each zone. Why She wanted to have cohesion among these four different activities. The purpose of the city: It was to realise Human Unity. All this seemed to me very vague at that time. I did not want to contradict her. She wanted it. She wanted it.

A.: Did you speak to her about why a city? Because Sri Aurobindo spoke of a Gnostic community, of a group of beings who could – you know – even Mother brought this concept of a city to life; She always spoke of a city. Did you speak with her: why a city? Why that size?

R.: I think I spoke at length with her when we decided later – while analysing how to start the city by Auromodèle. She explained to me that building the city would be an experiment – that spiritual research could be carried out: in the work of the town, in matter, through the friction of relationships with people, – and the difficulties. This is what I understood from the outset; that it would be a collective adventure.

J.: She explained it in this sentence: Auroville is a Tower of Babel in reverse<sup>1</sup>. They became divided while building it, but here they unite through building.

R.: This was underlying – that the adventure started, before all else, by bringing together volunteers to make a collective experiment. It was obvious to me. I did not even have to discuss the matter. It seemed to me so true that – from the outset – when we started to imagine the construction of Auromodèle and we were making plans for 2,000 people; for me there was no hesitation possible; it was only through the experience gained from the construction of Auromodèle that the construction of the town could be considered.

A.: But tell us, at the time when She indicated the centre of the town, the Galaxy model didn't exist as yet?

R.: No, there was nothing at all. I hadn't even begun to make a simple sketch.

A.: How did it come, the concept?

R.: The concept came after the discussion about the note I had asked from Mother. We went into explanations. I asked a lot of questions about the nature of housing, about the activities that would take place, about the transport system. What was fabulous with Mother was the aspect of no limits on possibilities – absolutely without limits. Already prior to drawing a single line, it was of a considerable dimension. She spoke to me about Chandigarh. "Have you been to Chandigarh? Did you like it?" I said no. I did not like Chandigarh. I liked the architectural quality of Le Corbusier but I did not like his concept. She said not to do that but something more alive; something more on a human scale. Water was necessary – desalinating seawater. Energy was required – She even considered nuclear energy. It was at a level... of a considerable vastness. The Olympic Games. There were no problems anywhere. Money? No problem at all. Money would flow. Everything was possible. The dream was complete, without limit. It is perhaps this capacity that She passed on to me – Mother. It is perhaps this capacity not to be satisfied with mediocrity. That is what She passed on to me from the outset and which She passed on to me very early on – because I was able to pass it on when I returned to France to the whole

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<sup>1</sup> Mother's Agenda, Vol. VII, p. 208, 21 September 1966. "Voilà, une Tour au Babel...a rebours." "Ah, it is a Tower of Babel in reverse. That's interesting! They united and divided in the construction, so now they come together to unite in the construction.

architecture team who worked with me. I came back saying that there was an absolutely fantastic project in India. There is a concept of something that has never been done – of an unheard of dimension. Nothing stopped us at the concept level. We thought of underground roads, of rolling side-walks... everything was possible.

L.: Everything imaginable...

R.: Yes. That is how the Galaxy was born. Because if at the beginning Mother would have given me some financial or economic constraints, we would only have made something small with possibilities for improvement taking into account India's economic reality. ...Not at all. It was exactly the opposite. She wanted perfection without any constraints. That's how we started to dream about it. We all dreamt. Was Mother dreaming? In all likelihood also because She always said that the city existed already and that it only needed to be brought down on the material plane. She kept saying, her face, I remember, with her face turned upwards with her two arms raised, She said: "but the city, my child, it is made, it exists, one has to bring it down." Ah, yes, it was a moment of extraordinary prestige that She brought. ...And to pass on the message to us, it was something very precious because we were able to pass it on to others. Even in Paris, when we made the first outline, the first sketches: we had meetings, at the Indian Embassy to make Auroville known. All this was in 1968. In '68 it seemed completely mad. Besides, it was before 1968.

J.: '65.

R.: But people believed in it because we believed in it – and Her along with us. Because [André] Morisset was there. There was... We were all sitting around a table, before a press conference at the Indian Embassy [in Paris] with the sketches we had brought. We explained the city to journalists who said; nothing is possible in your story. But everything is possible.

A.: But what were these sketches? Was it the Galaxy?

R.: No, the first press conference we held was for the circular city.

L.: The 'Nebula'?

R.: Later I came with two projects; it was in '60 something (*1966*)... One year later. As I did not know exactly what Mother wanted – whether it was a city open to the world, or an inward looking city, like a fortress of spirituality that was protected, we came up with two projects, two concepts. Two teams worked separately and so I came with two projects. She chose immediately. She said "it is the open city". She was very clear about it; there was no need to even discuss it. She told me: "You have understood what I wanted. It is perfect." We were very pleased, very happy. Satprem came, there was a series of contacts and it is only afterwards that we held the press conference in France to make the project known. It took about a year to make the plans. These plans were only ideas, sketches and then we re-worked the chosen project to try to improve it because it seemed a bit static. It took at least another one and half years, two years. I brought other projects to Mother the following year or six months later, I don't remember, perhaps six months later. I brought her another concept which was interesting – which started to be a little more dynamic, which started spinning a little.

L.: The beginning of the Galaxy, but with two long lines of force.

R.: Like Yin and Yang, there were two energies.

L.: Two lines of force which hid the view of Matrimandir – the view of the centre.

R.: It hid it without hiding it; but it enclosed the Matrimandir in a kind of valley with buildings around it which locked it in somewhat. It was interesting but it was a mega-structure. It was extremely theoretical but what was interesting was that the beginning of the Galaxy was there. So, I showed it to Mother. I must say that I felt it was not up to the mark when I showed it to her. She did not say anything... She said it was interesting but I could feel that it had not reached its potential. I also felt it had established something but that it wasn't entirely there as yet. So the whole team worked on it again. It took another six months – one year – rather six months. I worked on it at Théméricourt, an estate I had in the countryside. We withdrew for months and worked on project number two. I worked a lot with Charles Gianferrari.

L.: With Ferrari, did you work on the plans themselves or on the decor aspect?

R.: We worked with an architect. Gianferrari came on Sundays. We worked on the concept. Mainly, we made some models; we made an incredible number of models; I don't know how many... I still have photos of them but I don't know where they are. Do we still have the photos of these models? I am not so sure. Because we took photos of the models; it moved little by little; it ventured forward. And then one day we took the concept and we cut lines in it – the famous lines of force – and we said that in fact it pertained to a matter of functioning; to a question of density. We couldn't find enough space to locate all the inhabitants – it was quite difficult in terms of density. The circulation was not good. So, it made a lot of problems.

A.: Was Mother already speaking of 50,000 inhabitants?

R.: Oh yes. From the outset, when I started to have talks with her, She fixed the number at 50,000. I think it was number required for the experiment to have complete reality.

L.: Was it because of a suggestion from you or from her own initiative?

R.: No, I think it came after a discussion about the number of inhabitants. I believe that She gave a number. We fixed it at 50,000. It was close to what She wanted or to what She told me; I don't remember very well how it happened. Fifty thousand, it had always been 50,000. Personally, I don't know why I would have given a number. If She had told me 10,000, I would have put 10,000; 20,000 I would have taken 20,000. In 1968 it was quite... It was a number which was far from being uninteresting in terms of environment, in terms of densification of cities. ...Because beyond that, one loses the feeling of a small town and enters into that of a mega-city. At 50,000 you still have contact with people and visually you are still able to associate urbanisation to something one is used to.

A.: So, you were saying that you had reached a point with this team of finding the lines of force.

R.: Yes, we came up with the Galaxy concept. Then it was only a question of working things out. We made two models, we thought about the type of buildings. After that everything flowed smoothly. When something comes like that, naturally, it is a good sign. There was nothing to discuss. We knew that we had come upon the answer. We knew that we had come into contact with something that was the essence. I went back [to India] with a model which was the small model at that time – and I came to see Mother – and Mother found it.... This time it was accomplished. She said, "It is a movement of nebula which already exists... in the cosmos." For us it was an achievement. And the Galaxy, I don't know who gave it this name. It remained the Galaxy. Then there was the 28<sup>th</sup> February.... Ah no, the 28<sup>th</sup> February [inauguration ceremony on] was much later.

J.: This must have taken place between 1965 and 1968.

R.: No, because in 1968... In 1968 the model was already there. I was wondering whether the model had not already been enlarged at that time. I don't remember at all.

J.: I have the feeling it was enlarged later.

R.: There was only the model, the small model which I presented to Mother.

A.: So, you came to see Mother with the small model.

R. Yes, it is then that the city was born. Moreover, I don't think She was surprised. I don't think that She was astonished by the Galaxy, to her it was what was to be achieved – what had to be built. After that we started working on the drawings. I came back with the model and we worked on the drawings. And I returned sometime later, a few months later with the drawings. I am thinking about what She had told me at that time.... Yes, we spoke of how long it would take to build. She saw that it would be completed very quickly, Mother. For her it was a simple descent into matter. I never felt any difficulty about building the city, not at all. It seemed to me that it was going full swing on the scale that She had given to the city – and that it would follow the normal procedure and it would be built in 10-15 years. This appeared to me to be absolutely logical: Especially as the first Aurovilians had started to arrive at that time. There must already have been at least a dozen people working in Auroville, no more in '67.

J.: There must have been no one in '67.

R.: Yes, there were some people. Frederick must have been there; perhaps ten people or so, ten Indians who worked on the structures. Yes, there were already...

J.: It was those who had already arrived for the inauguration that helped to prepare ceremony?

R.: Yes, perhaps ten people or so.

J.: Piero was there – wasn't he?

R.: No, but there were some people there who are not here anymore. This adventure of the laying of the foundation stone, that was something incredible, because I don't remember how it took place. It is Mother who gave the date 28<sup>th</sup> February. Mother gave it six months before the beginning of the construction site. In fact the land at the centre had just been purchased – the Amphitheatre. The land for Matrimandir hadn't even been bought. There was perhaps 15% of the land in '68.

A.: There is something Mother must have told you... such as the request... when She invited the countries of the world to participate in the birth of Auroville. She said that it was time to help, during the construction, because after it had been built it would be a city like other cities... I do not understand what She meant by a city like other cities.

R.: What I understood from Mother, about the city, in any case, about its function... She wanted the city to serve as an example; to be a kind of experimental model, a first model that would stop expanding after reaching 50,000 inhabitants and that other such cities would be built in other parts of the world. It was destined to be an example as an experiment, as a human laboratory. I believe that this is what She saw. She saw that the economic, political, aesthetic, and human organisation would manifest in a very short time and that later we would be able to make any necessary changes, on other sketches.

A.: So you believe that this relationship between the completion of the town, and let us say that Mother saw this within a short time. She spoke of twenty years.

R.: I do believe She saw it happening very quickly.

J.: Five years for Matrimandir and ten years for the city.

L.: Afterwards She spoke of twenty years.

R.: Ten, twenty years; I was pushing for ten years. Mother said twenty years.

J.: She saw the Olympic Games in 1980.

R.: I thought that the city could be built in ten years – which was probably possible.

A.: It is interesting because I think it had to be like that. I remember how Brasilia was built in Brazil. I remember, it was something completely different in fact. I was small. I remember there was such an enthusiasm in the country. It is something one remembers. Precisely, as you said, everything was possible. You know, the President had decided, he had a kind of inspiration to do it and he said they would do it in five years. You know, it was done.

R.: *Niemeyer* (the architect of Brasilia). It took five years?

A.: Some people were against it, some people were in favour, but there was nevertheless an enthusiasm, an opening, that everything was possible.

R.: It seems to me, on the level of spirituality in the world, that the conditions were present to facilitate the birth of Auroville. We lost an opportunity, I am deeply convinced. I believe that Mother felt the possibility because She saw that the means were there; for example She said that money was supposed to come from the United States; there was no problem whatsoever; it is true that at one point in time all the means were there – even on the international level; there were incredible possibilities. Instead of using them, we started to be in disharmony. A tremendous obscurity descended immediately over Auroville.

L.: That's it. There is still a formation over Auroville that if we had built Auroville within the time foreseen by Mother, we would have made some major mistakes, that it is better the way it went because there is an organic growth and certain things came later on the way. What do you think of this formation?

R.: I think that She was concerned that there should be a first experiment attempted – like a first laboratory. The mistakes that were made; they were not made at the level of the concept, but by individuals themselves who became the instruments of the whole opposition – from the day Mother decided to build a city. I have the impression that there were some elements that had come to prevent the city from being built. Paradoxically, as soon as She started the town some people were against it. I am convinced that if the city had been built within ten years, we would have built it the way SHE wanted it. Not the way people want it. It is the city of Fra Angelico. It is the town which is waiting. Perhaps the city would have waited for the right inhabitants, paradoxically – whereas it is the inhabitants who prevented it from being built. I am certain that if there had been a harmony, if the help She wanted had come, She would have built a city at her scale, the way She envisaged it, the way She had seen it in an already existing

plan. It is bad will which made it impossible and not the lack of people; it is the refusal of people to participate: because, from Auroville's first steps, there were some destroyers. Auroville's demolishers were already there before its builders. And when people speak of impossibility, it is entirely incorrect – because at one point there was an American team who came... You knew that... who had come to plan the construction. It was Lajibhai who had had this idea; the son of Laljibhai, of engineering with the Perth method. The American team worked with us in Paris for two months to set up a work program, for the construction, and they fully envisaged...

**NB Here there is an interruption in the recording...**

L.: Is better that it did not happen this way?

R.: Not true! Not true at all.

L.: It is important that we undo this idea. There is a formation which says, "Fortunately the city was not built in twenty years because huge and colossal mistakes would have been made."

R.: Who would have made the mistakes? Mother?

L.: No, No, us.

R.: Who is "us"?

L.: We, the planners; we, the Aurovilians.

R.: ...Is it for us to plan the city? Does the concept of this city refer to HER vision or to our will? This is the whole question. Because if one admits that it is a human decision to build a city, then the planners and architects are not more stupid than those of Brasilia or others: building a city is not something so extraordinary; it can be done in ten years – five years, four years. Anywhere in the world a city of 10,000 can be built in four years. It is not something amazing. So, if we don't give credit to Mother for having the vision and capacity to analyse, at her level, to define the main lines of the city and make them not only operational but also realistic, it means that we do not have confidence in her. Or that we don't see with her scale because I think that building a city in ten years was entirely possible on one hand, and perhaps what we should have done, contrary to what some people may think, because She gave all the force of projecting her vision. Even if some things could have been corrected; I don't know. I don't know how it works. The drawings weren't ready but I know we could have drawn them. When the American team came, we were supposed to produce all the drawings of the city in three years. After that it was a question of infrastructure and already the infrastructure was coming together. So, there was an analysis very much to the point, and Mother was there to advise, to give her agreement in person concerning the social organisation of the city, which could have been debatable. So, we were all instruments to realise her dream and her project. Why didn't it happen? Because... it is not because it was not what was to be done, it is because people did not want it to be done. It is completely different. If Auroville had been built, maybe there would have been an acceleration in human consciousness. Instead of hesitating, of being small and miserable, afraid and trembling, later She might have brought in people to build the city who would have had the responsibility of improving things or building a second Auroville – which is what She intended to do. Instead of still being at the babbling stage after 25 years, like a baby who doesn't manage to be born and who probably requires an extraordinary benevolence in order to come out. That's all. I do believe the Auroville adventure is that of a missed opportunity. I do not say that it is desperate; I say that it has been delayed by terrifying bad will and stupidity.

L.: It looks like the forces of division were unleashed.

R.: Immediately, they were unleashed. I believe that there was this will to anchor on earth the cradle of something and that it unleashed negative forces which united so that it didn't happen – and even today it is very obvious. One can see the difficulty we face in Matrimandir's embodiment. (They say) It is impossible. It is not impossible; it will take some time. The process will speed up when Matrimandir is finished, complete – which is what I hope and wish for. But I consider that saying, 'luckily we haven't built the city', amounts to justifying our stupidity. Were we more clever or more conscious of the city 20 years ago? I don't think so. We were closer to the city when She was physically present than now that She has left. It doesn't mean that She is not helping. I believe She is still present – Mother – maybe

even more than ever since She has left. She is helping Auroville. But I want to say that some disarray is there in the realisation – which is a daily attempt to postpone; a will for things not to happen or to be postponed – So it is a fact that the adventure is lagging behind.

A.: If one looks. It is almost normal that things should happen like that. Meaning that the concept of the ideal city, of the divine city, has been something that has come in various times in man's past and always there was an attack to postpone or destroy it.

R.: Destroyed in Egypt.

A.: There is at the same time in man an aspiration to build this city. Always, always, and it is happening again. But you have said that from the outset, even before the builders, people were against it. Were you able to identify them at that time? How did they manifest?

R.: There has always been some opposition to Mother's project, on one side at the Ashram...

A.: Even at the Ashram?

R.: Of course...There was some opposition to the project which could already be felt at that time, some from the Sri Aurobindo Society and from new people who came soon after May 1968 – as soon as the city became open so to say... after its inauguration. Difficulties started in matter and it resulted in financial difficulties. And then some people openly opposed the realisation of the city. The starting of Auromodèle also provoked – as soon as the creation of Auromodèle near Kuilapalayam was announced – the first resistance, the first opposition. Instead of building in the framework of Auromodèle, people would build in the city area and there were various tendencies, the greenbelt. There were all the hippie types who came in unbelievably large numbers – who had not come for the city, but rather for...

A.: Already at that time.

R.: Supported by some movements that used them. And it is true that they have been useful. These were the first attempts of life in nature. Auroville wasn't easy. The first pioneers who settled in huts. It was quite something. There was no water. One had to live a kind of Robinson {Crusoe} life. It wasn't simple.

R.: These were the first forms of organic life which were opposed to those which existed already at Auromodèle, which reflected a will to organise things, to have schools – but already with the first schools there was a tacit opposition. To locate the first schools, I remember that I had to call for Mother's arbitration, i remember.

L. Was there some philosophy?

R.: No, there was a need to express oneself; of choices which were entirely anachronistic, anarchic which led to wanting to create the first schools two kilometres away on the beach whereas we were building here [at Auromodèle]. It was madness. Yvonne [Artaud] in particular.

A. Ah, yes, I read about this in the *Agenda*.

J.: Dispersion.

R.: There was already the will not to do what Mother wanted.

L.: Was it an unconscious opposition or less conscious?

R.: The two were mixed together. We are all puppets or instruments depending on the case. There are puppets and there are instruments and these were instruments that were clearly against Mother's project and all the others were puppets going haphazardly from right to left instead of focusing on a certain direction. That's where the dispersion started. At a certain point Mother couldn't do anything any more. It was gone from her consciousness.

L.: Was the launching of Auromodèle much contested? On one hand there were people who were saying that the city area should have been started first and on the other hand those who were against it.

R.: I am not going to give the names.

L.: Not the names; I am speaking of tendencies.

J.: That's what the tendency was. Those who wanted to start the city right away and those who...

R.: People would say, "But Mother..."

L.: Those who wanted a forest and not an urban habitat.

R.: But yes, absolutely. Yes, urban habitat, but in the city... So the excuse was that we don't build in the city area. When I began saying that nothing will be built in the city area the first difficulties with the Aurovilians started. If you want to build... What I had asked Mother, because the first opposition I had met was with 'Certitude'. So, I had asked Mother, "Should I let it happen or should I completely oppose it because it is contrary to what we have decided: to start with Auromodèle and to bring everyone together there." And Mother told me at that time – seeming to let it happen – "Okay, you see with them to put them in a place which doesn't disturb, which won't disturb the city." So, 'Certitude' was located outside the perimeter of the city. That's how it started. As soon as one house was there, all the forces came together – to add, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Nothing could be done. Everyone had his own justification because one house had been built. There was water, it was by the side of the road which had not been made motorable – but which was there – access was easy. A small sports ground was built not far from the Matrimandir, which had not yet started. People knew it was the centre of the city. So it was in competition with Auromodèle right from the beginning.

L.: Had Auromodèle been started?

R.: Yes, there were some huts. 'Aspiration' was there; there were about fifty people.

J.: When we speak of Auromodèle, it means that Aspiration was part of it.

R.: Immediately, there was some competition between the people who wanted the city and who were in fact privileged financially and could build a house; the green-belters who had taken over the greenbelt thanks to financial support from Pondicherry and the people in Auromodèle who had come in principle to... and who were going to see Mother every week to receive some directives from her. Immediately there was some friction which launched Auroville's political difficulties.

A.: Which never stopped.

R.: Which never stopped. It never stopped for a second and it is worsening. It is increasing in size and complexity because of some twenty five-year old bitterness which repeats: old judgments, old mindsets, old attempts at rejection. So, in fact, one continues not to want what Mother wanted.

A.: From a historical perspective, Mother was still here when this movement started; let us say the seed of what one sees now; and then it became obvious after Mother left her body.

R.: Then the forces were unleashed. All this took on proportions which were impossible to stop. During Mother's time, all this was contained.

L.: But it was all there under the carpet.

R.: But of course. When we started to create the first organisation which made some sense and was called the C.A.A, the Comité Administratif d'Auroville, it was what She had constituted. Already there was some opposition, opposition of power, of jealousy; of people who couldn't stand each other. How do you want to build a city dedicated to Human Unity and harmony with these tendencies which were within the administration itself?

L.: Right from the beginning.

R.: It was not only the Indians. The Westerners, too.

L.: You must have spoken directly to Mother about these problems – because I think it had a lot to do with the emergence of the city.

R.: Mother knew very well.

A.: Quite so. She said that the spirit of Auroville wasn't yet on earth; that this spirit of Auroville needs to be formed; that it doesn't exist. And Roger asked her when this spirit would manifest – or something like that and She said it would take some time.

R.: The most disheartening thing is to think that while She was here physically, attentive to the experiment in all its details – it is incredible – in the smallest of its smallest daily occurrences, in the reaction of some Aurovilians; She would ask when a birth occurred; She was aware of everything... There was already an obvious latent opposition which was in place to fight her project. I was not fully conscious of it because I could not believe that there was such bad will. I thought it was a question of tence.... To go and settle outside Auromodèle I said, all right, it corresponds to periods of freedom, of a time to find oneself in a less collective environment. I found excuses for it but in fact this is not what happened; it was obviously a manipulation by forces which were indisputably opposed to the project from the start.

One can now understand why it took so long for Auroville to kick off. And Mother, I believe, realised very soon that the adventure wasn't possible the way She had envisaged it. It now stands revised and corrected; one has to rethink the whole thing taking into account the fact that these forces are waiting for one thing alone: that one opens the doors for them to enter. As long as we haven't locked the latches, one won't have done what is necessary and we will be attacked all the time and Auroville will not be able to take its true dimension and won't manifest as fast as people had hoped.

I believe that the potentiality to build Auroville is still there.

L.: It looks like one of the tendencies of mankind is to always reduce the level of inspiration...

R.: Of the message.

L.: Of the message. A great work is being prepared on earth, a great push forward is being prepared and there is something in human nature which rejects it – not only which rejects it, but deviates it, distorts it, reduces the quality of the inspiration...

R.: What you said the other day has given me back a certain clarity about the reconnection I could have with what Mother passed on to me in terms of potentiality and energy to make Auroville manifest. It is that somewhere we had lost the sense of the city; the main thing has been nibbled at along the years. It is true that She asked us to build a city and that it has been completely forgotten. I am grateful to you for reminding me with a lot of force. It is true in its essence. We did not come for anything else than building a city. And maybe I am reconnecting with the destiny I had. She made me an architect, it is to give me the power to somewhere mobilise; it is to build the city. She did not need a sadhu or a yogi for that. She needed an instrument that had a particular professional competence, with a particular capacity of strength to mobilise behind. I find very essential what you have said because it is something I had almost forgotten in our internal discussions: to know how to answer to environmentalists, philanthropists, and to regional and ecosystem developers. The strength of the basic message has been lost: which is that of our spiritual commitment which is contained in the city. Fundamentally, I think that is it.

Yesterday I met our good friend Marty who interrogated me saying: 'You have misunderstood me. I came to try and make people understand that there are other paths, etc.' I was telling her: 'Marty, the main thing is that you have forgotten that we all came here to build a city. We didn't come here only to do regional development. That's all, you have forgotten. That's all. Or maybe you were never aware of it.' And paradoxically I had somehow forgotten some of it because I was drowned in discussions, in confrontations, in political adjustments, in fears, in dreads. We don't even have the courage anymore to impose our vision.

A.: There is something else that is ruining Auroville/holding Auroville back/bringing Auroville down; it is the people who say: 'Ah I came for the city but we are not ready'. You imagine building a city with people like that. You see this one. You see the Cultural Zone. One doesn't even realise anymore. For me it is definitely the opposite: the more you call the town, the more you push for it to manifest, the more things fall in place. You know, it is as if... The more one thinks this way, the worse it becomes. There is something loose, and precisely, one attracts the kind of people who are the opposite.

R.: That is the excuse. That is fear. That is the not-wanting. That is to say that it is part of the resistances in order not to do. Because, on the contrary, Mother picked up three poor guys who were arriving from California, four dropouts, completely disconnected from spiritual life and She told them: 'You build the city'. I am not looking for advanced yogis, I am only looking for people of goodwill.' And that's what Mother says. People of goodwill; but bad will has set in. She was not expecting anything other than goodwill – Mother. She did not expect "yogic" heroes. She expected heroes with goodwill. We were not capable of that, that's all.

L.: Roger, can't we say that one is called to experience a spiritual life of a new kind?

R.: I think it is what She wanted, Mother. Isn't it? When She said that the Ashram had to accomplish a role and that Auroville had to accomplish something different; maybe it is what She wanted to express. I think; it is what I have understood from her anyway. It is a multi-dimensional city – all experiences brought together. One cannot limit it to the human experience; but it is an experiment in social life, in circulation of money, in the relationship with the children, with day to day truth, and I believe it is through this that one can think of yoga in daily life.

L.: There is another aspect, the mysterious aspect of the great challenge when Mother speaks of the cradle of the Superman.

R.: I think Jacqueline is better able to recall what Kireet was saying about this. I think when She put the question to him, Kireet answered at a level which I feel put things in the proper perspective. I let Jacqueline speak about it.

J.: First, he was very interested by the question – to the point of getting out of the car that was taking us to the airport, going into the airport with us, sitting down to explain to us that, for him, it was obvious that when Mother left her body, the work had been completed and that now She needed this city for it to materialise. It was clear. For me it can be translated as... Okay, 50,000 inhabitants so that maybe out of these 50,000 there will be a handful of beings who could receive ‘this’ and make it happen. She speaks about it in the Agenda saying She hopes that the Supramental being won’t be annihilated by human beings who won’t understand what it is. I think She said 50,000 so that in this mass there will be at least a few people who will be capable of understanding what is happening and to receive it... The cradle of the Superman means that. A cradle is a place which ‘receives’... I don’t think She believed that all 50,000 inhabitants would be conscious of this, but out of these, compared to the rest of humanity, there would be, perhaps, a handful of beings who could... Who would receive this being. At a given moment it will happen for sure. If Mother’s work is done, it means that, the work of transformation is done. There is a being... one doesn’t know what it means... A being that will incarnate...

L.: Because this is the essential mandate.

J.: This is what Auroville is... The cradle of the Superman; the cradle is to receive... when She says, ‘A new world is born’; it is powerful... She doesn’t say that it is transforming itself... She says, ‘A new world is born’, and it reminds me of the idea of the cradle. If it is born, it must be received. That’s what Auroville is about.

[Kireet] was very interested in this question. I think it is the question we all should ask ourselves today: Why a city, precisely...

L.: It is strange because it is the thing I felt to take up with the newcomers – straight away.

R.: How do they react? Are they surprised?

L.: No, on the contrary...

R.: It is by homeopathic doses that we are contaminated. One doesn’t notice it.

J.: Veiled.

R.: Veiled, like a veil which falls thicker and thicker. And everything in Auroville can be contested now because all the veils have fallen: regarding the attitude towards education, the responsibility towards children, the problems with money, human relationships, philanthropic falsehood. All these have become false arguments which lead us to a dead end. And it is true, Aryamani has said the most important thing for me; it is indeed that we must once again find the original commitment: the city as a spiritual experience, a spiritual commitment which She has asked of us. She didn’t ask us to do the integral yoga; it is not true. She told us ‘Come and build a city’. It is well understood that it implies this of course; this implies the experiment as a whole and it implies collective work which is to preserve what is essential, this implies the work She must accomplish through this city – as Kireet said.

L.: It is also this passage you spoke of earlier: what will be interesting is the construction phase. This construction process, it is the way to widen ourselves and become true Aurovilians.

R.: It is actually well understood; if there was the slightest goodwill, what scale the experience of Auroville could take! What shared knowledge! What perception of things! What knowledge of the other – of oneself!!! It is a fabulous experiment which She wanted us to follow...

A.: The feeling I have is that here we repeat all the experiences of the past in an accelerated manner, like this conflict of forces which takes place in a battlefield and even this thing of initiation – in the entire past of man, in the spiritual quest, there are times when one forgets, precisely where one says, ‘But one has forgotten’; there are times in the spiritual life when one sees, in poetry, the great mystics speak about it – meaning this unconscious which rises and then one forgets why one is here. I have the feeling that we are now experiencing such a time, of ordinary values. The ordinary life of a small bourgeois in which one settles and forgets – and then even the spirit of Auroville when the city starts; the eco-city, the

communities, all this is completely besides the point; but what to do now Roger to...? Because I remember that when we came here one important thing at that time was that one was accepted if one was against the Sri Aurobindo Society, for example. If one was against, if one was in the battle, one was considered as an Aurovilian. Nothing else was required.

R.: This was already a lie... It is what we were saying earlier; this succession of veils which came before our vision of Auroville, which has hidden the essential. Shouldn't one start by removing this succession of veils to try to find again the essential. One has to come together with a small group of people who would remove these veils so that the light becomes more and more transparent.

A.: There are things like that with people who are coming; it is imperative that these people are really...

R.: Of course, there is some progress, even so, I believe... it seems to me, that the human quality is growing.

J.: It is true that what is needed is a handful of people who embody a certain dynamism, because there is a kind of despair in people who see the project taking so much time with so little happening. An exhaustion. People have forgotten that if we are together, this can create a dynamism which can set off an acceleration they can't even imagine. If there were such a dynamism... Truly in five years... if we call all these newcomers who come for this ideal...

R.: It is the old habits of those who have been here a longer time that are difficult.

J.: I believe it is accepted that it will take time whereas the process can be accelerated.

R.: As time passes, the longer it takes. For example, when we came with a project, like planning for education in the Cultural Zone, I wrote that it would take forty years to build Auroville; it is ridiculous. It is something that drives me to despair. And people tell me, 'You are a Utopian'... Forty years for the city to be built with its 50,000 inhabitants; this means something. People tell me I am completely...

J.: And it is possible.

R.: It is possible.... It is terrible to think in terms of forty years; it is terrible; it means that none of you will see the city complete – or so badly that...

J.: We shall see it!

R.: You shall see it; yes, maybe. I wish it for you. I hope that it would accelerate. I say forty years; we have adopted these norms so that it appears... That it gives them some sense of their responsibility – meaning that you can do nothing that may compromise this time frame – this planning. And so, this appears to them to be completely utopian. Forty years; but you must be dreaming. It will take a hundred years; two hundred years. ....As a justification for mediocrity.

[Silence]

One has to be the guardian of a faith...

J.: Unshakable.

R.: Unshakable otherwise you die, here. It is terrifying the faith that one has to have. It is what one has to aspire for; this faith must be kept because if it disappears or goes away, one suffers; one suffers martyrdom here. In the face of the pettiness of our human condition, it is terrifying. I believe that one has always been confronted with the pain of the commitment; which is to face one's own limitations; and Auroville is a limitless field of experiments.

[Silence]

R.: We have been speaking at length about what Auroville is.

A.: Roger, couldn't you speak again about something before we end; something about Auroville and the world; this idea of the Universal Town which corresponds to the symbol of the spiral. Something which is not closed; rather something very dynamic, which opens and is infinite, because of the movement and weight of the spiral it opens up and... if you could say something about that.

R.: I think so; it is true that there should be.... One day I hope there will be a dynamism in Auroville that can be a model, and that this concept of the city will be able to express what it carries in itself: which is the capacity to create changes because of its new discoveries and experiments. When we were saying earlier that Auroville won't be limited to one Auroville; I think that it is a bit what Auroville wants to demonstrate; it is to bring solutions to the human condition. Is it realistic? Yes, probably if as Mother says, if She is given the means to create a handful of men who can manifest this new consciousness. I

believe that the entire story of Auroville is in this. Will we be able to initiate conscious beings who will be able to help others? I hope so; I wish for it and I think that it is what She has asked us to do – to accomplish. The message of Auroville within the Galaxy; it is very meaningful; this opening like an explosion.

A.: It expresses the vocation of Auroville.

R.: Yes, that's why this Galaxy plan carries something exemplary. If there is a force in it, it is Mother who inspired it; it is for this very reason. To conclude I can affirm, that this Galaxy is in fact Her realisation, Her will. When I said earlier that I was carried, I did not bring anything to it personally – only being a kind of instrument, a draughtsman and designer; but the whole idea, the inspiration came to the team. It is a concept which imposed itself, like that of the Matrimandir. The Matrimandir did not come from man's imagination; it came directly; it imposed itself through the plan which She gave, everything has been... everything came together. There is no mental concept in it.

That's why it took place very simply, without suffering. Creation without pain, that is the true inspiration. That is when things are in the true tone. Whenever there is suffering, there is something coming from the mind, the relativity of things, but when it imposes itself there is indeed something which seeks, which seeks to exist. It is something like this for the Galaxy and for the Matrimandir.

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