REPORT ON THE SYSTEM ENGINEERING APPROACH

Introduction

The application of systems engineering to build the Galaxy was exhaustively discussed in Roger Anger's office, Paris, from 18 to 25 November 1968, with Mother's blessings. She took the decision after going through the 22 pages report summarising the discussion with Dr. Sidney Firstman, who represented the Planning Research Corporation, California. As Auroville was in no position to do so, the event was funded by Laljibhai Hindocha[1], the industrialist who, among others, purchased most of the land for Matrimandir. His son Suresh, a 26-year-old electronic engineer, was the one who first contacted Dr. Firstman, with Mother's blessings; he participated to the Paris event along with his brother Harish, Mother's son Andre Morisset, Gilbert Gauché (who had donated the 34 huts in Aspiration) and a few others.

After being handed over the plan and research conducted by Roger Anger and his studio, Dr. Firstman replied that it was possible to complete the construction phase within five years; commenting that it was quite a privilege, for his company and for himself, to be involved in the unique project of Auroville.

The outcome was that, on 13 March 1969, signing as president of the Sri Aurobindo Society, the Mother forwarded a fifteen pages letter to the Ford Foundation with the request to partially fund a feasibility study (which would take one and half year; estimated cost, $ 430,000) to build a town, planned for 50,000 inhabitants, via the systems engineering approach. Mother's request was accompanied by a preliminary master plan, the UNESCO resolutions and other essential documents.

In 1987 Suresh Hindocha, *the deus ex machina* of the whole operation, consigned to me photocopies of the related folder, never disclosed publicly. When I left the Centre for Human Unity, on whose behalf I carried on the research on Mother's town and Matrimandir (forwarded along with the Auroville News to the entire community), all the documents I had received were passed to the Archives, newly founded by gen. Krishna Tewari. After Krishna's passing, Gilles Guigan took charge of the Archives. When converting the Hindocha folder from PDF to Word, Gilles omitted Part II, "The systems engineering approach", 7 pages, the most relevant part of the report. To ensure that the entire report is faithfully reproduced and no parts are missing, I took care to convert myself the original PDF file into Word.

This is the first time that the Paris report was made publicly available in Auroville via its website, the Auronet. Apart from the participants, Gilles and myself, the only one who had read it was late Pashi Kapur; I forwarded it to him some months before his passing, he was elated. An engineer collaborating with Roger Anger from the beginning, Pashiji always stood for Mother's town at the highest.

What impressed me immediately when I read Part II, nearly forty years ago, was Dr. Firstman defining system engineering as being *"concerned with planning, developing and implementing a town in a manner that achieves the goals established for the town, with the least expenditure of resources (money, materials)."*

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[1] The Mother said that this Pondy-based industrialist (Horizon Sugar Mill), whom she had put in charge of Auroville's industrial zone, was a reincarnation from Egyptian times. The Hindocha family will purchase most of the land for the Matrimandir; his sister Huta was the one who made the Mother reminisce her old formation, in the thirties, where Sri Aurobindo would have been living at the centre of his town.

Also struck me, when describing the construction phase, is *"the construction of the town can proceed on a factory assembly line production principle so that it can rapidly be implemented"*. This was written in 1968!!! And further below: *"During this phase it could also be determined what people to attract to the town and how to attract them, this would result into an anticipated population profile and a plan for attracting the preferred people."*

Apropos "the preferred people", which in Part II recurs twice, it should be noted that seven months earlier, on 13 April 1968, the Mother had approved Auromodel, an enclave of 2-3000 people who would build the town, while experimenting with planning, construction, organisation etc.

The report contains this statement, by Roger Anger: *"The present status of Auroville was explained to Dr. Firstman, and in future Auroville will have a status similar to that of the U. N. in New York or the Vatican in Italy".* This early concept, however, was soon abandoned. It is indeed the Government of India that, on 29 October 1971, forwarded to the United Nations the request (redirected to Dr. Sidney Firstman, Planning Research Corporation, California) for an expert who *"will advise the Sri Aurobindo Society for the Government of India, on the composition of an expert team required for the preparation of a technical feasibility report which is needed for the development of Auroville, a new town project being established as an international cultural centre"*.

Successively nicknamed the Galaxy, this is the one and only plan the Mother approved for execution, with the help of super professionals who had just cooperated with NASA in sending the first astronauts to the moon.

Paulette