

AUROVILLE EARTH INSTITUTE – MAJOR PROJECTS

VISITORS CENTRE AT AUROVILLE



Visitors centre – 1992 International Award “Hassan Fathy, Architecture for the poor”

The visitors centre has been built by the former AVBC/Earth Unit in Auroville between 1989 and 1992. This centre of about 1200 m² has been granted the 1992 International Award “*Hassan Fathy, Architecture for the poor*”. It was mostly funded by HUDCO, The Housing and Urban Development Corporation – Government of India, to be a demonstration in appropriate building technologies and renewable energies. HUDCO wanted this centre to use extensively earth and ferrocement technology, wind and solar energy, and a wastewater recycling system.

The concept of the Visitors Centre had been initially designed by Suhasini Iyer, but she had absolutely no knowledge and experience about earth architecture and site management. Satprem Maïni joined Auroville to design fully and build this centre, and at the same time create the former Auroville Building Centre / Earth Unit. Satprem trained Suhasini, gave a technical design to the concept and mostly managed the construction site.

This project was the opportunity to design and develop the [Auram Press 3000](#). When Satprem came to Auroville, end of August 1989, a few Astram presses from Bangalore had been purchased to produce the blocks of the Visitors Centre. Unfortunately these presses were not versatile enough and they had a low output. They were not giving blocks up to the requirement for this centre. These presses had to be modified in order to increase their productivity and quality.

Thus, the Auram Press 3000 came into existence early 1990 and it had at this time a productivity of 850 blocks per day with 6-7 people on the press. Since then, the press has been developed a lot and it can produce now 1000 blocks per day with 7 people on the press. The Auram Press 3000 proposes now 16 moulds for making about 70 different types of blocks and it is sold worldwide.

Satprem introduced in Auroville the comprehensive construction of arches and domes with compressed stabilised earth blocks, using the Nubian technique. This construction site was also the opportunity to try for the first time stabilised rammed earth foundations, for the watchman’s house. The Visitors Centre has been the starting point for the development of earth architecture in Auroville, under the influence of the former Auroville Building Centre / Earth Unit.



Building a segmental arch, 2.38m span



Building a dome on pendentives, 3.70m span



Closing a dome on pendentives



Inauguration in 1992



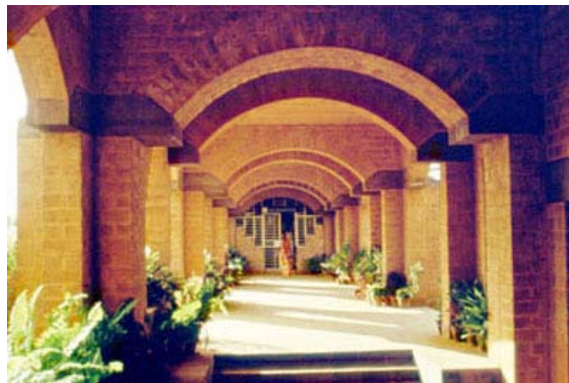
Inauguration in 1992



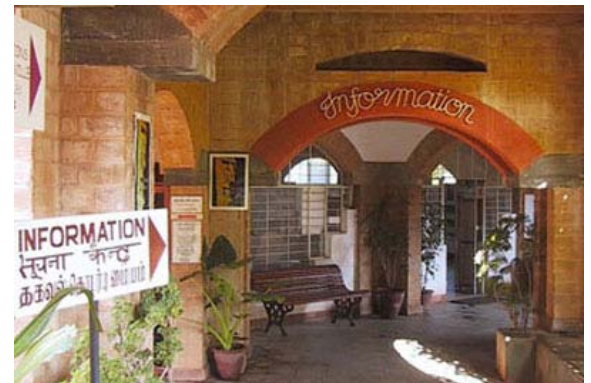
Entrance side



Side view



Gallery towards the cafeteria



Towards the information



Gallery towards the courtyard



Information desk



View to the Courtyard