In Golconde Mother has worked out her own idea through Raymond (the architect chosen to design Golconde) and others, to make a beautiful dormitory for the disciples.

In one of the most remote parts of India, one of the most advanced buildings in the world was constructed under the most demanding of circumstances concerning material and craftsmen. This reinforced concrete structure was completed primarily by unskilled volunteers with the most uncertain of supplies, and with virtually every fitting custom-fabricated. Yet this handsome building has a world stature, both architecturally and in its bio-climatic response to a tropical climate 13 degrees North of the equator. It has the reputation of being the most comfortable building in Pondicherry, although it has no mechanical cooling system.

-‘Solar World’ Congress, Perth
In Pondicherry, on the south-east coast of India, behind the agitation, the colours and the odours, a secret garden is hidden, a minuscule universe called Golconde, where Peace reigns. Surrounded by high walls and rarely accessible (we have had the exceptional permission to photograph it), it is the dormitory of the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo, which accommodates some 30 persons of the 500 disciples living in or around Pondicherry. An Ashram is the residence of a spiritual Master: there he receives and houses those who come to him to follow and practise his teachings.

-Mallory Lane   (translated from the French)
The realisation of Golconde was not merely the construction of a beautiful modern house in reinforced concrete for sadhaks, but a vehicle for the spiritual awakening and development of innumerable people who otherwise may not have been touched by the Light for a long time to come. It was the first practical means of contact and communication of any important size between East and West that the Ashram had. (continued)
From many points of view Golconde is a milestone (may we even say “touchstone”?) in the spiritual growth of the sadhaks and the Ashram. In its way, it too is a temple, joining men and women of all the world irrevocably to the Divine, like a jewel from the original mine that gave it its name. Agni (Agnes Sammer) wife and collaborator of Frank Sammer, c. October 1974
Golconde needs no introduction. People who understand architecture have acclaimed this construction in concrete widely. The work commenced in October 1938 and it took almost a decade to get completed. The final finishing of some parts of the floor was done sometime in the early 1960s.  

(continued)
The history of the construction of this building has no analogy with others where a big number of labour force work under the supervision of engineers and contractors to build a large structure in the shortest possible time. This building however, had on the contrary, a slow growth and almost an organic one, where the individuals working there poured in their love and dedication to develop a concrete structure. They were few in number - a handful of labourers working in harmony with a small number of engineers, supervisors from divergent walks of life. They were all sadhaks. This was their way to serve the Mother. All through these years of construction the Mother gave her guidance and help for the outer problems of constructing the building. Simultaneously she sorted out as well, the human problems of the disciples working there. The people and the building developed together. -Chitra
I decided to accept a very interesting invitation from India. Our French friend, the engineer-mathematician Philip St. Hilaire, with whom we had taken refuge immediately after the earthquake in Tokyo, had gone through many varied experiences since that time. St. Hilaire, who was profoundly interested in Eastern mysticism, had gone to Mongolia and China to further his studies of Northern Buddhism, had naturally gravitated to India and had finally become a disciple of the famous Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo Ghose at his Ashram in Pondicherry.

–Antonin Raymond
It was in their first years in Tokyo, that Raymond and his French wife Noémi came to know one M. Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire, a highly qualified civil engineer who had graduated from the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique of Paris—who later became Pavitra, of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

- Mrityunjoy

Sri Aurobindo Ghose intended to build in his very active and growing Ashram a truly up-to-date modern dormitory for his disciples. St. Hilaire had been writing to me about the project for some time. He sent me photographs of the Pondicherry architecture, eighteenth-century French colonial, with high-ceilinged dark rooms behind colonnades and roofed terraces. These I had criticised as unsuitable in this day and age of advanced techniques and an absence of formal elegance.

- Antonin Raymond
An unexplainable confidence in me from Sri Aurobindo brought about his request for my photograph, upon the receipt of which he apparently formed a judgment of my character and sent me a considerable amount of money for expenses to cover the transportation of my wife, son and myself to India.

– Antonin Raymond
Dear Philippe,

The sketches which I am sending for your perusal are preliminary studies. Meanwhile I like to think that you will feel the beauty in them, because under the fire of the first inspiration, I think that we have found something very beautiful, a solution of great simplicity which, at the same time, opens to us great possibilities of comfort and economy.
I would hope that you are not shocked by the appearances, because I do not have the least doubt that this building will be very different from anything that is there in Pondicherry. But in modern architecture we try to rediscover the prime values, to respond directly to the physical and spiritual needs of man without going through the prejudices which have impeded us during all the last centuries and from which the forms of the buildings of Pondicherry have resulted. We are setting down the base of a new architecture founded on the principles and not on the established mental customs. It is similar to what you are doing in your philosophy first of all the free spirit, open, as much as possible free from preconceived ideas. Nothing will prevent us from profiting from the practical experience acquired in the ancient buildings, on the contrary, we have pondered deeply on the lessons that they teach us. But we have tried to translate them into the materials that the modern world has to offer us.

**Layout:** Our plan is of the simplest. We have turned the building to align our rooms so that all of them open on the south and southeast, to keep out the sun from the west. We have centralized the staircases which are in direct communication with the entrance. The toilets, bathrooms etc. are also well situated.

Due to the angle given to the house, the gardens have interesting forms. Enclosed on all sides, they become peaceful cloisters where one can walk or relax happily.

**Construction:** Note the great simplicity which gives style and elegance to the building
while keeping the cost down.

Please study these plans carefully. If they at all interest you, please let us know your ideas on this subject. After that we must study the details of the construction. If you agree to build, we would like to make these details in “full size” etc. We could even send you one of our architects who will be able to construct the building with the help of your engineer.

Yours, Antonin
Why the name “Golconde”? To set up such a large building required quite a lot of money and, in those days, much money was not available. So the Mother spoke to Sir Akbar Hydari about it, and as he was the Dewan to the Nizam of Hyderabad he was able to get from the Nizam a donation of one lakh of rupees for this building through the Finance Department which was under Raja Shamraj. Today, one lakh does not seem much, but in those days it was indeed quite a large sum, as its buying-power was over twenty times what it is now. Especially at Pondicherry where things were remarkably cheap. A ton of cement, good Japanese cement, cost only around Rs. 25/- and steel about Rs. 200/- per ton. Pondicherry was then a free port and there were absolutely no Customs or Import charges or restrictions. And as we had then a good off-loading pier, shipments from Japan could come directly to Pondicherry. Hence with this large sum of money the building work was taken up. Now because the first money came from Hyderabad, the Mother wanted to give a name to the building which had some connection with Hyderabad and so she chose the name Golconde, the French rendering of Golconda, the famous diamond mine in Hyderabad. –Udar
Golconda Fort
View from the top of Golconda Fort
Golconda

Before the city of Hyderabad was founded the Deccan was ruled from Golconda fort. Founded originally by the Kakatiyas in the 13th century the existing structure was expanded by the Qutub Shahi kings into a massive fort with granite walls and ramparts extending some 5 km in circumference.

The fortress city within the walls was famous for the diamond trade and the Ko-hi-noor diamond is said to have come from here. The historic Golconda fort lies 11 kms west of the city. The name originates from the telugu words “Golla” and “Konda”, “shepherd’s hill”. Later the fort was taken over by the Bahamani kings, subsequently passing to the Qutub Shahi kings who rebuilt Golconda over a span of 62 years. -from the internet
Golconda Fort
Shepherd’s Hill or ‘Golla Konda’, as it was popularly known in Telugu, has an interesting story behind it. One fine day, on the rocky hill called ‘Mangalavaram’, a shepherd boy came across an idol. This was conveyed to the Kakatiya king, who was ruling at that time. The king got a mud fort constructed around the holy spot. Over a period of time this lowly construction was expanded by the Qutub Shahi kings into a massive fort of granite, which has been a silent witness to many historic events.

-Vilas (as told by Gautam)
Sir Akbar Hydari was born in 1869 to Seth Nazar Ali Hydari, a Suleimani Bohra businessman of Bombay. His mother was the sister of Badruddin Tayabji, a judge of the Bombay High Court, who later became the president of the Indian National Congress. Of the 40 Prime Ministers who served the Nizams of Hyderabad, only three were from outside the State. Out of them only one – Akbar Hydari – was a civil servant in British India.

- Narendra Luther

Sir Akbar Hydari offered his farmland in Shamsabad for housing the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, which was later established at Pondicherry.

Golconde guest house at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, is so named in gratitude for the funding by Sir Akbar to build it. Designed by Antonin Raymond, it is possibly the first work of architecture in the so-called International Style to be built in India.

-Narendra Luther
The Plan of the position of Golconde in connection with the Pondicherry Town plan.

The plots marked A show Golconde's position.
Ground Floor of the Painters’ House

First floor of the Painters’ House
Plan of Mother’s property called Nouveauté
Plan of Bandari House situated on the Canal Street (Quai de Gingy) which was bought 3 years later. The length of Golconde was then extended and rooms added.
There was an old house on the plot where now Golconde stands. The few artists of the Ashram had put up an exhibition of their paintings here. The Mother had come here to see the exhibition. This building was demolished for the construction of Golconde. The area available was quite small for a building of any large size to be built in. Nevertheless, Raymond took up the challenge. As the length of the land lay from east to west, this suited him very well, and he designed the building oriented very strictly east to west, with all the openings only on the north and south, and he designed that both faces should be openable fully, so that it could get the fullest current of air which is south to north in summer and north to south in winter. He also arranged that the sunlight should not enter any room directly and bring its heat directly with it. So the rooms are always cool and do not need any fans, etc. -Udar

Mother arranged for a small exhibition of the works of Ashram [artists] and I had a place there. It was in 1937. A small house was there on the north-east corner of Golconde. (Golconde was yet to be built; this small building and other huts were later demolished to become the site for Golconde.) Here the paintings of Krishnalal, Anil Kumar, Sanjiban, Nishikanto and mine were exhibited. -Romen Palit
The conditions under which Golconde was constructed emerge from the personal accounts of some of the people involved in the work. The most extensive to hand is that of Mrityunjoy Mukherjee, an elderly sadhak of the Ashram.

Golconde is often referred to as "a guest house of the Ashram"; but we have seen that it was originally intended to house permanent members of the Ashram. Thus the architects designed it as a "dormitory" or "hostel".

"The work, as it started physically from the plans on paper to the digging of the earth, revealed itself as an opportunity for the disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who volunteered for the work, to make an attempt towards an all-out offering to serve the divine through a new contact with people of the most materially developed countries with their technical knowledge and corresponding formation of mind and nature. So the story of Golconde’s birth and growth is revealing!"
The plan of the building is strikingly simple. Its two long staggered wings are set at an angle on the narrow plot, thereby making the most of rather limited space. Each wing consists of a series of single rooms that are strung out along a north-facing gallery, which runs the length of the building. On both the north and south sides, the entire building surface is equipped with operable horizontal louvers to afford protection from the sun and from violent winds and rain, while allowing for ventilation.

The body of the building is of reinforced concrete, left natural except for the native white plaster on the end blank walls. The building achieves the architectural distinction by thorough integration of plan, structure and final design. The fundamental principles of architecture - simplicity, economy, directness and closeness to nature - were consciously and consistently observed.

-Antonin Raymond
The building I had in mind was to be reinforced concrete throughout – something without precedent in India. Since I had to depend entirely on the local labour, who had neither any modern tools nor any know-how in their use, I decided to build a working model first. I started at once to establish a laboratory for testing the materials and the strength of our concrete mixture. The enthusiasm and seriousness of everybody concerned, as well as of the disciples quite unconnected with the work, was remarkable. The final result was more than satisfactory.

-Antonin Raymond
To get the practical details he needed to know for his work, Raymond proposed to send one of his assistants, a young Japanese-American architect named George Nakashima, to the Ashram for some time to study on the spot. The Mother agreed.

-Mrityunjoy

A few months before leaving I sent George Nakashima, then working for me as an architect, ahead to survey the situation and report to us so we could finish our drawings in Tokyo.

-Antonin Raymond
Nakashima sailed for Pondicherry in June 1937, no doubt to do an on-the-spot survey of the site for Golconde and the climatic conditions in Pondicherry. He returned to Japan sometime after the August darshan that year. Then came back to Pondicherry almost immediately, in November 1937. Sammer and Raymond arrived in Pondicherry in January 1938.

-Antonin Raymond
Accordingly Mr. Nakashima came, remained for some months, and, returning to Japan, gave a detailed report to his chief. The plot was a long and narrow one, surrounded by streets on three sides, in the vicinity of local inhabitants and only three blocks from the sea to the east—the Bay of Bengal on the Coromandel Coast—from where the salt wind was directly blowing; also there were typhoons and periods of rainy weather, although mostly there was a blazing sun; the climate was hot and damp.

-Mrityunjoy
The first principle which all great architecture teaches us is to regard local conditions as the one known basic factor from which to start, and to allow the structure to take the most logical shape dictated by these local conditions...

–Antonin Raymond

The building was designed to have three floors with a semi-basement, that is to say, a basement only half below the ground level. Hence the building was to have four floors in all. As the land was narrow, there was only one line of rooms on each floor – two wings and one centre section. Seen from the air, it looks like a bird in flight.

–Udar
The wings of the building have eight rooms on the west side and nine on the east, making seventeen rooms on each floor, so fifty-one rooms in all. But the rooms on the top floor west are double rooms. This is done by just omitting the dividing wall between the two rooms – so making the eight single rooms into four double rooms.

Between the two wings is the centre section in which are the stairways, bathrooms and toilets.

-Udar
Very soon this handsome, short-statured young man became intimate with some of us, through his childlike, lovable nature. But as he came on a special mission, a study of the building-site of Golconde, he devoted himself immediately to his job. -Mrityunjoy

His job was that of assistant architect; he had to follow his master's bidding and do the day-to-day planning of details, the calculations and drawings. He also supervised on site the erection of the formworks for the concretings, and being himself a first-class carpenter, worked alongside the local Tamil carpenters. He had to deal with coolies also. -Mrityunjoy
Antonin Raymond, the head architect of Golconde, wrote to Pavitra about his own increasing curiosity to discover the mystery behind the Ashram! Pavitra, the promising and brilliant French engineer, had befriended Raymond in Japan, and then got stuck here in Pondicherry. Now Nakashima, this young Japanese lad, a miserably pessimistic type, always a misfit and dissatisfied with everyone and everything, returns from the Ashram and tells Raymond that he wants to go back there; in fact he suggests that Raymond should send him as his assistant to continue the work, saying that otherwise he would resign from his Tokyo service and return on his own to the Ashram!

-Mrityunjoy
Ref No 134/37
Mr. Nakashima
C/o Mr. Antonin Raymond, Architect
Seisho-Kwan. Ginza. 4-Chome Kyobashiku
Tokyo, Japan

Dear Mr. Nakashima,
We have received today quotations for M S round bars for reinforcement, from France.

The average cost of round bars tested to French specifications, accompanied by a test certificate, works upto about Rs 170/- per ton, delivered at home.

These quotations are much more favourable than similar quotation from British India.
The Mother has, therefore, decided to order our requirements from France.

Bricks
We had decided the size of bricks to be 210 m/m x 100 m/m x 70 m/m. The brick supplier points out that 70 m/m is too great a thickness to dry in this season; and that if the bricks are not quite dry before burning they will crack. I have therefore reduced the thickness to 55 m/m. The size of brick will finally be 210 x 100 x 55.

Kindly pay my respects to Mr. Raymond
Hoping you had a good voyage, and expecting to meet you again very soon.
Best regards from Pavitra.

Yours sincerely,
(Chandulal)
Engineer, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry

19th November 1937

Ref No 164/37
Dear Mr. Raymond,

**Test digging** Re: Mr. Nakashima’s letter dated the 13th October.

It is possible to drive a tube well of 6 inches diameter to a depth of 12.50 M as suggested by you, or to any greater depth, if necessary. There are a few contractors, equipped with tools and implements to do the boring. As the bearing power of the substrata is to be judged by an examination of the materials coming out from the boring, we believe it will be better to do the boring in your presence. We have made an agreement with a contractor who can do the boring to a depth of 12.50 M in two or three days, if no rock is met with. However, if you desire the boring to be done in advance, kindly let us know, and we shall do it, as soon as Mr. Nakashima reaches here.

**Cement** Re: Mr. Nakashima’s letter dated the 29th October.

We are placing an order for 300 tons of Japanese Onoda cement in casks of 170 kg net, which we expect to receive by the end of December 1937.

Yours sincerely,
(Chandulal)
Engineer, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry
In December 1937 or January 1938, the chief architect himself came to the Ashram accompanied by his wife, Mme. Noémi, and their only child, Claude, a charming little boy of eleven, full of life-energy.

-Mrityunjay
This young man Sammer was quite tall, in contrast with Nakashima who was rather short, but equally handsome, energetic and simple. He was Czechoslovakian by birth and nationality, and spoke French better than English in communicating with non-Czech people. I still remember his first meeting with some of us, as we were working on the site that was to become Golconde. Without waiting for any introduction by Raymond or Pavitra, this simple-natured person came directly to us and said, "Mon nom est Sammer." This was enough for us to accept him quickly into our fold and into our hearts.

-Mrityunjoy
Upon my arrival, I tried to impress the client by the efficiency of our work, by the exactitude of our estimates and the rigid working schedule that I intended to follow. I found out eventually that it did not matter how long the job took, nor did it matter very much what it cost. What was important was that the process of building should be a means of learning and experience in the life of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where not only the spiritual but all other aspects of man’s nature must be developed and perfected.

–Antonin Raymond

All my dealings were with the Mother. My interview with Sri Aurobindo was of a few minutes’ duration. I stood before him as he sat facing me. Neither of us said a word. Nevertheless I was profoundly impressed by the peace and beauty of his countenance and an extraordinary light which emanated from him.

–Antonin Raymond
It is difficult in a few words to convey the idea of the significance of the Mother. To the disciples of the Ashram, she was both their spiritual guide and the manager of things secular. She was always intently watching over the welfare of each individual, seeing to particular needs of each one, for each disciple lived according to his own particular rule. The Mother is a truly remarkable person, organizing everything concerning this large organization, giving out instructions to every individual of the community as to his duties, and even as to his daily work and diet. Among many other things, she took care of the accounts for the design and construction operations. Her attention even to the smallest details of the administration of this complicated community filled me with wonder and seemed often quite miraculous.

—Antonin Raymond
The purpose, a matter of fact, of the dormitory was not primarily the housing of the disciples; it was the creating of an activity, the materialization of an idea, by which the disciples might learn, might experience, might develop, through contact with the erection of a fine building. –Antonin Raymond

Time and money were of secondary value. This situation was quite other than the usual one of being pinched between a client and a contractor. Here everything was done to free the architect completely so that he might give himself entirely to his art and science. –Antonin Raymond

Now the real work began in full force. Raymond's original idea was that the entire construction the building should take about six months. The total estimated cost was one lakh of rupees, of which Rs. 75,000 was for the actual construction; Rs. 25,000 to cover salaries and other items. –Mrityunjoy
Back: left to right: Shankar, Mitran, Nirod, Purushottam, Chandulal

Front: left to right: Rajangam, ?, Shanti
The first shock to the chief architect, a formidable one, came when the Mother announced that Sri Aurobindo did not approve of his proposal to employ four to five hundred workmen daily for the work. Sri Aurobindo had said, she explained, that employing outside workmen would bring in some "labour movement" which would spoil the Ashram atmosphere, and this could not be allowed.

-Mrityunjay

Except for Nakashima and Sammer, the Czech architect, I had only the disciples of the Ashram to work with. Many offered their services, including scientists, engineers, bankers as well as those who had no specific education or training. I found them to be most industrious and very capable.

–Antonin Raymond

Apart from the professionals—the architects who came from abroad to design and guide the construction of Golconde, and the local craftsmen and labourers who were employed on it—many sadhaks of the Ashram were involved in the realisation of the Mother's project.

-Shraddhavan
My particular task was to design and help construct Golconde, a multi-story dormitory for the disciples. This was to be the major structure in the Ashram. It was to be one of the first high-strength, reinforced concrete buildings in India. Since the design was to be completely open, the task was to build a straightforward structure that would solve the problems peculiar to this type of architecture in a tropical country. Since ventilation was important, large horizontal louvers were installed. These could be closed during the rains, which at times would come in horizontally. All of our architectural problems had to be solved within the spirit of Sri Aurobindo’s teachings.

-Sundarananda Nakashima
“It required a supreme boldness on the part of the Mother to push through her idea, knowing very well the limited and obscure conditions in which it had to be worked out – through an inexperienced engineer, a handful of assistants with little or no technical training, and a few unskilled labourers who had never even seen a reinforced concrete building, let alone worked on constructing one.”

- Mrityunjoy

It is almost impossible to imagine the magnitude of the task that the Mother undertook, in addition to her detailed management of the rest of the Ashram with its thousand and one odd problems, and her personal contact with the hundreds of Ashramites in various forms both psychological and physical.

- Mrityunjoy
Not only was the life in this Indian monastery the revelation of another way of life but the conditions under which the work of the building was done were so remarkable when compared to those we had known in this materially bewildered world, that we lived as in a dream. No time, no money, were stipulated in the contract. There was no contract. Here indeed was an ideal state of existence in which the purpose of all activity was clearly a spiritual one.

-Antonin Raymond
Chandulal, who was then the chief engineer, was the most devoted worker of all; his life was dedicated to the service of the Mother. He ate only the Ashram food, slept on a mat and pillow on a cot, dressed always in half-pants and Ashram sandals, and had no other hobbies than the Building Service. The Mother had great confidence in him. Yet he had never had any experience with reinforced concrete, or with such a big building as Golconde. His junior engineer, Jatindranath Baul, who came a little later, knew much more in this respect.

-Mrityunjoy

Mother: 4.9.37

My dear child, your observations are correct; this sincerity is the sure way to make progress.

I bless you very affectionately.

Chandul Ashram architect and engineer
Chandulal:

_ O, Sweet Mother, _

*Mr. Raymond needs a paper tray on his table to keep all the letters that Vishnu has to classify or type. Will You give me something, O Sweet Mother?*

*Salutations to You, marvellous Mother.*

-Translated from the French (from Chandulal’s notebook)

Mother:

The Japanese baskets like the one Nakashima has, are the best. I’ll see if I have one, otherwise you will have to give him yours.

Blessings.
The necessary materials and equipment, such as combustion engines running on oil, winch parts, wood-sawing and planing machines, were shipped from Japan, unloaded at the Pondicherry pier and brought to the Ashram.

–Mrityunjoy

Steel bars of various lengths and diameters were ordered from France; zinc sheets to be used for the window-louvers were ordered from Italy; electrical sanitary appliances most of the other fittings were to come from Japan.
Boats on Pondy beach

Chandulal
Chandulal: 15.6.38

O Sweet Mother,

The contractor in charge of drilling the bore-well has brought about forty pipes this afternoon!!!

Mother:

Magnificent! -Translated from the French (from Chandulal’s notebook)

Chandulal:

(...) After the meditation, Mr. Raymond spoke to me about the visit [of the Governor] and I told him what I wrote to the Mother. He said it was not necessary to show the governor the circular saw and that he will probably to the "experiment room ".

Salutations to You, O Sweet Mother.

Mother:

I think it is better to let Raymond guide the governor and show him everything; if some explanations are needed, you will provide them. That will make things simpler and easier for you. I am not sure if it is necessary to take him to Harpagon. This place is a little disorganized (untidy) and does not give a good impression after the visit to the main site. But here too let Raymond decide.

It is better if each one remains in his place and does his work. Blessings.
Shanti Doshi, at that time a young boy, was given work by the Mother in the Golconde. We reproduce here the Mother’s letter to him:

I wanted to ask you something. You know that we want to put up a new building, using the most modern methods. A great many workers are needed to supervise the work. I thought the time had come for you to take an active part in the overall work. Of course this will imply regularity, steadiness and a great sincerity. You would have to work eight hours a day *regularly* Sundays. The architects, who will arrive from Japan in a few days, will give you all the instructions required for the work. Tell me what you think of it, and whether I can put your name on the list of workers.

- The Mother        1 February 1938

*I am happy with the work You have so graciously granted me. O Mother, let me feel Your presence constantly.*

- Shanti  10.2.1938

I am glad that the work pleases you. I am sure that it will do you a lot of good to work; it increases receptivity considerably.

- The Mother
June 16, 1938
Dear George:

Please convey my appreciation to Mr. Chandulal for the report and data of the loading tests. Mr. Raymond’s commentary on the 3rd load test and his proposals and opinions have been noted and I am on the whole in favourable agreement with his ideas.

I am told that Mr. Raymond intends to continue on his journey soon. Please convey our regards to the Raymond family. With best wishes to you and Sammer, I remain,

Cordially,
John Minami

Soil test and bearing power of soil

Test excavations were made at 4 places on the building site, and experiments were made with “Compressimètre Desinfary” to evaluate the resistance of the soil. The results obtained were plotted on sketch No.P5 and on a graph and sent to Japan through Nakashima.

The building was designed with bearing capacity of the soil at 2 tons/ i.e. 22 tons/m2.

Apart from an architectural model, a full scale prototype room was made before starting the actual construction. The execution of the building left nothing to chance. A laboratory was set up for testing cement, aggregates, sand grading and test blocks of concrete etc. (in ‘pre-standardisation’ days). A workshop was set up to custom build all fittings required in copper, bronze and brass. A machine was designed to cut large size cuddapuh stone tiles for the floor.

-from the Brochure GOLCONDE
As it was the first building of this kind, a mini-Golconde – a one-room model was built first. Nakashima's job was that of assistant architect; he had to follow his chief’s bidding and do the day-to-day planning of details, the calculations and drawings. He also supervised on-site the erection of the form-works for the concreting.

-Chitra Sen

One room model of Golconde built in the courtyard of house opposite Ganesh Temple
Jotindranath Baul was an engineer trained in England, who worked for the Tatas on dams. His superior was a Mr. Kohl, a 60-year old specialist engineer from America.

-Anurag

Chandulal and Nakashima built the first trial model room of Golconde. Nakashima gave a beautiful picture of the engineers working here: "When it came to the construction, there were three of us working on it: Jotin Baul, a Bengali engineer, Chandulal, the Ashram engineer and myself. We had to work together on it. It was a team work. We got going on the building. The three of us supervised. Everyone pitched in and it was a wonderful kind of feeling."

-Sundarananda
We talked everything over with Mother. She was interested in all the details. She had an amazing knowledge of what we were doing and what was going on with the construction principles. She took my design and recommendations and gave me her opinion.

-Sundarananda

As project architect, Nakashima developed many of the building’s careful construction methods and details on site. During his stay, he maintained a meticulous diary of the construction progress (a practice followed by several members of the Ashram, as a way to regularly communicate with the Mother) and dutifully submitted it to the Mother for her commentary.

-from “The Introduction of Modernism in India”
Dear Mother,

Pavitra has told me about keeping a notebook of things which pertain to Golconde. It makes me happy to think of being able to do such a thing. May I be more and more an instrument by which Thy work may be done. May my ego be overcome.

–[Sundarananda]

Mother:

Our blessings are with you in your endeavour
Dear Mother:

Pavitra has told me about keeping a notebook of things which pertain to Bokarde. It makes me happy to think I am able to do such a thing. May I be more and more in insitution by which my work may be done. May my ego be overcome.

Our blessings are with you in your endeavour.
30 April 1938

The organisation is more and more complicated and I am more and more anxious. I don’t know where all these obstacles are coming from; up to now everything was going well.

–Shanti

Cement vibrator - 1938

Mr. Raymond wants a particular organisation; he himself has explained to me what he wants and I fully agree with him. It is the resistance of egoism in certain people which is complicating the situation—otherwise everything would be very simple. -The Mother
2 May 1938

Mother, do You know that I am thinking all the time about the work—which perhaps is not very good.

-Shanti

On the contrary, it is very good; it teaches you to concentrate.

-The Mother
Reinforced pillars and foundation

Post card from Raymond

Architect’s office, Ashram de Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry, French India
Girdharlal has asked Sundaranand [Nakashima] to teach him how to read the plans, everyday from 2 pm to 2.30 pm. Sundaranand is asking for your approval.

Mother:

I have no objection if it does not interfere with the work.

Mother:

The list of the 33 missing parcels has obviously been added later on, and it is also obvious that one has forgotten to correct the figure on the first page: it should be 33 and not 18. Maybe you could bring it to the notice of the accountant and request him to add: except for 18 parcels + 15 parcels fallen into the sea = 33 parcels. -Translated from the French (from Chandulal’s notebook)
The Artists:
Krishnalal,
Sundarananda,
Sanjivan,
Vishnu,
Romen
Nakashima:

I have asked Jyotin if he would teach me a little Bengali and he said he would be glad to do so. May I go to him in the morning say twice a week?

The Mother:

I have no objection provided it is not too much work for you and him.

For some time the idea has come to me to start again to paint. Tiny voice has been giving me some encouragement. Anilkumar has asked me a number of times to go with him and next Sunday we have planned to make a little sketching trip.

It will be after about 10 years when I gave up painting because of the feeling that it was
too personal and egoistic.

My Father writes from Portland, Oregon (USA) of about 80 people who are interested in Sri Aurobindo there, meeting once a month to discuss His teachings.

My mother also from there says my new name is “so nice” especially since Sri Aurobindo gave it to me.

-Devotedly, Sundarananda Sep 2, 1938

The Mother:

Love and blessings.
Preparation for laying the concrete. Sammer and Chandulal at the back

one page from Sundarananda’s notebook dated 2.9.38 [drawings]

September 2, 1938
- from Sundarananda’s notebook
Mother,

The shaded portion of the west wing is now erected. We plan to do the remaining corridor cantilever (W7) and take final adjustments along with the necessary steel this coming week with a proposed concreting of the first room (W5) about Tuesday the 24th Feb. as soon as the concrete has set the same wall formwork used for this room would be reutilized at the ends shown dark.

In the meanwhile we would go ahead with rooms W2 and W3 and W8 when its end wall is ready.

-Sundarananda
Scaffolds for the 1st floor
One more carpenter can be given for removing the formwork – but it would be better, I think, that the carpenter who has erected the formwork should remove it as he will know better how it was done.

Blessings, -The Mother

The removal of the formwork is a fairly big task. Last week Jyotindra and I have spent a good deal of our time in that work and have succeeded in removing only a part of the first room.

As a permanent arrangement I wonder if another supervisor could not be had to attend to this. -Sundaranananda

one page from Sundarananda’s notebook dated 5.2.39 with transcript
Aside from the removal there is a good deal of work incurred such as scraping, oiling, transportation of forms to new site, and chipping out the tying wires and bad concrete. Devotedly,

-Sundarananda

I shall see if it is possible to find somebody for that.

-The Mother
In the case of Golconde, the details were innumerable and became more and more complicated—externally because of the war, internally because of the upsurge of the lower vital elements in us: egoistic feelings, love of power, a display of tactics among co-workers.

—Mrityunjay

March 26

With proper cooperation a way should be found to make this work go smoothly. Although we must do with the present number of men this week it appears that one more coolie and one more boy will be necessary on a permanent basis. Especially since one boy has been absent for about a week.

Devotedly,

—Sundarananda

Blessings, the Mother
He (Nakashima) was very friendly with the workmen, though my work was more with the concreting machines (the crude-oil engines, winch, hopper and vibrator) and with the steel-framework (bending, laying, and tying the iron rods of different diameters), I was in fairly close contact with him, and so I had a good opportunity to observe and appreciate the neat, meticulous, concentrated, hardworking and cheerful spirit of the typical Japanese character. Gradually I noticed that not only was his work going on outwardly for the construction of the building, but work was going on inwardly in him too, for the construction of himself. The fact that he would not miss the pranam and Meditation, that he stopped taking pocket-money for his work, that he took his food in the dining room like all the rest of us, even that Sri Aurobindo gave him a new name, "Sundarananda", by which he came to be known to us thereafter, all speak for his sincere inner work.

- Mrityunjoy
"Golconde was something of a ‘do-it-yourself’ project. I found myself not only the designer, but something of a general contractor." He worked in close collaboration with Chandulal, the Ashram engineer. “It was the first high-strength reinforced concrete building in India.”

-George Nakashima
Since Pondicherry didn’t have a wharf, the steel was brought in from a freighter anchored in the Bay of Bengal on boats made of palm trunks lashed together. By the time they were unloaded on the beach, the steel rods had been bent so much that they looked like a mass of spaghetti. From the shore they were dragged by bullock carts to the building site, where long lines of labourers hammered them straight.

-Sundarananda
When the steel for the Golconde construction was brought in the carts to the site, "The Mother had stipulated that there should be no noise when unloading steel (so as not to disturb Sri Aurobindo) So it was done. Tons of steel bars, not just a dozen or so, brought down from the carts without noise! How they did it I cannot envisage. I can only lose myself in admiration."

-from *Mother India*, Jan 1998, p 99, Poornananda
We had to be extremely careful to get concrete that held together instead of breaking off the aggregate. Mother was very insistent that it be of the highest quality. We got a very good quality with proper strength.

-Sundarananda

The fact is that from the first stage of the real concreting work, the unskilled labour and lack of modern equipment proved to be a big obstacle to the planners.

-Mrityunjoy
Kalyan, a hydrological engineer by profession, was part of the concreting team. After each day’s work he would go to the Mother who listened very attentively to his report of all the work that their team had done that day.

-Mrityunjoy
From left:
Krishnalal
Sanjivan
Romen
Vishnu
Romen, a young man, was in concreting work. Soon after, Romen left the Ashram for some time. Sanjivan, with the Mother's approval became also a part of the concreting team under Chandulal. He worked right from the basement up till the roof on the curved tiles. It was a precision work of rolling etc. After curing with water overnight if there was any mistake it would break apart. The work of the curved tiles was exciting and demanding. Sanjivan worked with the vibrator in concreting work. He came in close contact with Antonin Raymond, Sammer and Nakashima. Both Raymond and Sammer were also painters in water-colour and the Ashram artists learnt a lot from them due to this interaction.

-Mrityunjoy
"I never knew that I would be one of the main workers at Golconde for five, six years, dealing with the labourers and the technical group of workmen with sand, cement, crude oil and machines. But it became one of my main jobs; some days I even worked 14 hours there, especially when a big concreting work was on . . .
I was a layman from the standpoint of construction work: but Sammer and other engineers and architects instructed and guided us so well that after one or two years we could understand as well as any supervisor or technical advisor, and we conducted the work with the workmen very confidently."

-Mrityunjoy

East view of the service stairs scaffolding. *Shanti in foreground.*
“Poornananda needed no assistant and kept no stock-book. He had it all in his head. Any item moved or removed at once caught his eye . . . He often claimed, referring to the construction of Golconde, that no other work had been done with the same spirit since then in the Ashram.”

-from *Mother India*, Jan 1998, p 99
Poornananda and Khirod both from the Ashram Building Service were in-charge of the store. The store was situated on Harpagon Land. "They were given the job of keeping stock and taking care of all the steel rods used for the building. It seems the rods were always neatly stacked according to size and there was not a spot of rust on them!" In the store all the cement bags were rearranged every day from top to the bottom of the pile. This was done to prevent the possible hardening of cement which could have happened if stacked in one place for too long a time."

-Mrityunjoy
September 1938  Chandulal:

I had asked Sammer to check if the casing was all right. Today again I asked him to go and check. He said it is not bad. I ask for the vibrator, I give instructions for mixing the concrete. It works fine.

Sammer said:

"Chandulal, look: this plank is not straight. Better straighten it (rectify that).

Finished I ask them to stop the work.

We have to call for the carpenter Maniappa for he works with Mritunjoy. I cannot straighten the plank immediately. The work is postponed till this afternoon. (continued)
Mother: What a waste of labour and materials! If indeed the plank wasn't straight, one should have noticed it before starting. But once you start, how can you stop the work?

Mother: September 1938

Each one thinks only of himself and wants to prove at any cost that he is right, and as a result the work is badly done, money is wasted in the most horrible manner, and time passes in vain. If things continue in this way, I prefer to close the site and stop the work until Raymond returns.   Blessings.   -Translated from the French (from Chandulal’s notebook)

September 14, 1938

Even during my fever there was a fine feeling of strength entering my body but these last few days there has been a deep feeling of melancholy overcoming me. It usually makes me want to withdraw into myself – as a young boy at such a time I would like to go into the forest, or mountains, or lake alone to try to find the answer.

Humbly,

-Sundarananda

Try to find out the peace, strength and light that are behind the superficial melancholy and you will make a big spiritual progress.   Blessings,   The Mother
Drying clothes in the open terrace

Drying clothes in the closed area

Drying bedsheets with the Golconde sign in the open terrace
Dear Mother,

Pertaining to the roof drying area – it is divided into three parts, one part under roof for wet weather and two parts open. Under the proposed scheme the 3rd the smallest and higher than the others with a lower wall would be lost. I had thought this would be permissible as clothes would dry faster in the open rather the covered area,

Devotedly, Sundarananda

The Mother:

The idea seems to me good. But is it necessary to take a decision just now? It is difficult to make a final decision before Mr. Raymond is back. Blessings
Beautiful concrete steps to drying area on the open terrace.

Clothes drying in covered terrace. Water tank at the centre left.
Dear Mother,

Before having been taken ill the question came up as to whether there were enough toilets. A few days ago upon asking Chandulal what had been decided he explained to me the various proposals and what had been sketched but there was another one which was suggested to Sammer which might bear consideration.

It is to make the laundry a toilet, moving the laundry to the roof and [the] tank up another flight... There would be a stairway and access to the laundry and drying area without going outside as is now necessary.

-Sundarananda

If the drying area is taken away from here, where would it go? It is a rather indispensable item. 

-The Mother
19.10.38

I don't know why I have lost my peace and self-control. I pray to You: give me the right attitude and peace in all circumstances.

My salutation to You. O Sweet Mother — Chandulal

Mother:

What a pity! You may be a little tired. I hope you sleep well. I would like you to go to bed earlier. Is all this work after the meditation (meetings, accounts, etc.) really indispensable? To remain master of oneself, one must have enough time to turn oneself inwards and regain one’s calm and tranquility.

-Translated from the French (from Chandulal’s notebook)
Sundarananda's notebook

Sannyas is against asking him to our ride because he bught the "comme nous sommes fort". Of course our work is amaterial which is all in one reason why it would be hehriacial to have such an experienced man come. He should much interst when we mentioned it and perhaps there are some of our special things which would interest him. I wonder if we might return his coutnry? Only last night I heard from Jodhpur about what is back for J.w. in Calcutta. He said he was surprised when he say saw that we were using mango that in Calcutta the contractors would not think of using it. Unquestionably it is a heathly food for this purpose as it is merely, yungly, shriner and contris.
November 5, 1938
Mother,

Recently we had several interesting visits to the work being done for the Travaux Publics. The foreman there is a man of much experience and gave us much good advice on local and Indian practice.

Sammer is against asking him to our site because he might see “comme nous sommes fous”. Of course our work is amateurish which is all the more reason why it would be beneficial to have such an experienced man come. He showed much interest when we mentioned it and perhaps there are some of our special things which would interest him. I wonder if we might return his courtesy?

- Sundarananda
Cement vibrator to settle cement concrete evenly and expunge water
Chandulal supervising workers
Only last night I heard from Jatindra about what wood is used for f.w. in Calcutta. He said he was surprised when he saw that we were using mango – that in Calcutta the contractors would not think of using it. Unquestionably it is a beastly wood for this purpose as it is unruly, warps badly, shrinks and contracts.

When we first saw it after coming to Pondicherry we almost despaired of doing f.w at all but as Chandulal said it was the only wood available we have made the best of it. It is in such points where a man of experience can help us.

I would like to stress the importance of the finer work in the progress of our work – also the difficulties we will probably have.

Devotedly,

Sundarananda

The Mother:

Pavitra will give you my answers. Blessings,
O Sweet Mother,

I ask for your forgiveness for all the mistakes I have made and I kiss Your Feet with love and joy.

Salutations to You. O Sweet Mother

Mother:

My dear child, you are quite forgiven and I give you my blessings. -Translated from the French

November 1938

Chandulal:

O Sweet and Divine Mother,

Today was an exceptional day for me.

The feeling of gratitude fills my heart and makes me weep. The joy that I feel surpasses the joy that You give me when You kiss me on the forehead.

I regret all the lost opportunities You gave me, lost because I was not open to You, when You "scolded" me - really scolded! – in the past.

I rejoice today because I was conscious that my attitude was not correct, and as soon as Mother showed me my mistakes I admitted them immediately. (...
How patient You are! Each time You made the same effort to convince Yourself that I had made some progress in the meantime and that this time Your effort will not be in vain. But alas! how disappointed You have been!

If to be open just for a moment gives so much joy and solves so many problems, what will it be for those who can remain open all the time! I marvel at the very thought of it, and I pray to You from the very depths of my being to help me remain open in this way always and for ever!

Scold me always, Sweet Mother. Mentally, I open myself, retrospectively remembering all the occasions when You scolded me, so that my joy may increase.

Mother: It is good.

Chandulal: 

I kiss Your Feet, I sing Your praise and I salute You, O Mother Divine.

Mother: With my blessings.

Mother: Now that your eyes have opened, you must never again commit the same mistake. My force is always with you to help you overcome your weaknesses. With my blessings.
The water would come from the well into two cisterns- the push carts backed to the edge and the material dumped in, then washed by hand and lifted up by hand to the washed storage area. There could be two or more cisterns, one to be discharged and one or more where the material is being washed. If the bullock carts came faster than what can be handled the material is stored in the space allotted to it. There would be a certain initial cost because of the supply line and a discharge clay pipe line. Besides that there would be little additional cost.

–[Sundarananda]

The Mother:

The idea seems good. You can see with Chandulal how it can be worked out.
Upon examination I have found the level of water in our artesian well sufficiently high to run a pipe line to a washerari artesian from this, directly into the canal all by gravity. There would be no lifting of water and lifting of the washed material only, as it could be so arranged so that the sand or gravel could be dropped directly into the artesians to be washed. Krishn says the carts could be asked to come at certain regulated intervals, so that just enough time lapsed for the washing and discharging of the artesian.
Upon examination I have found the level of water in our artesian well sufficiently high to run a pipe line to a sunken cistern, from there directly into the canal all by gravity. There would be no lifting of water and lifting of the washed material only once as it could be so arranged so that the sand or gravel could be dumped directly into the cisterns to be washed. Khirod says the carts could be asked to come at certain regulated intervals so that just enough time lapses for the washing and discharging of the cistern.

The Punjabi ordered through Kanai came back as a short sleeved shirt, the kind I use on work. As I am told a Punjabi can mean only one thing. Do some of these people run into fog during their higher ascent?

-Devotedly, Sundarananda

Mother:

There must be some misunderstanding. Keep the short sleeved shirt and ask once more for a Punjabi—Herewith a chit for it.   Blessings

November 12, 1938
- from Sundarananda’s notebook
Concrete formwork detail

Steel framework for reinforced concrete pillars
November 28, 1938
Mother

... The last concreting day we all felt was the most successful to date. With good results the mixing time for one room was 2 ½ hours with no particular strain on anyone. Chandulal had organised the workmen in a fine fashion with his “dress rehearsal” the night before.

Jatindra who has good experience surveying in the Assam jungle says there should be no error in the instrument at all for these short distances and at the most 2 or 3 mm for the human element.

-Sundarananda

Jotindra Baul (left) with Jyotirmayee & Nirodbaran
Dec 4, 1938

For the window ledges we are preparing three small sets of formwork. I wonder if it would possible to make one set of teak boards just to see how the two woods react? These three sets can be reutilized 17 times if the wood is good.

Devotedly.

-Sundarananda.

Mother:

Yes, Blessings
Chandulal:

O Sweet and Divine Mother,

Since a few days I was not getting peace. I was not happy, I knew vaguely that in my work I did not have the right attitude. I was struggling and from time to time I managed to see things clearly, then I fell back into the darkness.

Yesterday evening and during the night I prayed ardently to You to give me the light and guide me. And my prayer has been fulfilled.

Now I have regained my peace; it is the obvious proof that I have become conscious and I pay homage to You for that. I rejoice that this transformation is taking place in me, and I ardently pray to You to hasten it. My attitude towards those who serve You has changed. Make it even more Correct. How to erase completely the past?

Mother:

Reject completely the feeling that one person is superior to others because no one is superior or inferior to anybody in front of the Divine.
8.12.38
Chandulal:

O Sweet Mother,

The "Entrance": to manage to keep the steel rods in position so that they don't move after they have been placed, and the columns remain perfectly centered is a difficult job. Many trials and errors are needed before one can find the best method.

A prayer: Give me the light to solve most efficiently the problems that come up, and establish the harmony between all those who work for it.

I bow before You and kiss Your Feet.

Mother:

Blessings.

-Translated from the French (from Chandulal’s notebook)

Chandulal, Pavitra
Jatindra who has good experience surveying in the Assam jungle says there should be no error in the instrument at all for these short distances and at the most 2 or 3 mm for the human element. He says usually one allows only about 12 m/m in a mile or about 30 readings – less than a millimeter per reading.

His opinion is that whoever does the leveling it should be checked by someone else.

We are stopping the erection work for the time being.

Devotedly,

Sundarananda

This is far too serious a matter to be decided hastily - I first thought that none but Mr. Raymond should make a ... 

The Mother

(reply continued)
final decision – but he is so far away...
As things stand the first step to be taken is the verification of the leveling. This verification will be made by Pavitra with the help of Jyotindra who might hold the staff or check its holding and of Chandulal who will give the necessary explanations. Pavitra, Chandulal and Jyotindra are informed.
Blessings

-The Mother
Work in full swing. Girdharlal & Uday Singh supervising.