

## Auroville Education Survey (1968-2013)

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## *Preface: Why this Auroville Education Survey?*

From its very inception, there has been in Auroville a vast contradiction between the ideal to be realized and the actuality of the ground reality. Auroville's aim is vast, it is as large as human life, but the material, social and psychological conditions provided for the experiment have been quite other. To sum up some of the apparent aims of Auroville:

To build a city dedicated to the future, not repeating the errors of the past, but to do so on a dry barren, socially deprived corner of rural South India. To let the experiment be peopled by a random natural 'selection' of those who chance to show up, carrying within themselves merely a wish to try such an experiment in human unity. To locate the experiment in an inhabited area that has a resident local population with little access to the basic life amenities of the modern world: water, healthcare and education, yet to insist that Auroville's intention is to co-evolve together.

And, if these material conditions were not challenging enough, there was an insistence that no 'rules or laws' be framed for this fledgling society's governance, that no one be placed 'in charge'; but rather to expect that all who choose to participate would consent to let the underlying principles of the experiment grow and develop, creating thereby the flexible working structures necessary for an organic growth. In a word, to insist primarily upon 'a growth of consciousness' but provide no prescriptive systems and methodologies for creating such a growth.

In its early years, Auroville had to secure its physical base. As with all pioneering societies, the nature of the material environment - a dry red laterite plateau facing advanced desertification - required 'doers' not thinkers. Once the land was greened and life became more settled, as housing shifted from bamboo and thatch to the permanence of cement and concrete, so too the seeking for coherence in its social and psychological collective structures came to the forefront. This was the spirit and atmosphere in which the earliest school experiment emerged in 1970. The first 'students' were the children of those who had joined the experiment, their age varying from toddlers to teenagers. Teachers were the Aurovilians who were there, inclined and available.

In this early environment, the very passion for a 'new society' created a dynamism that acted as a solvent for stability. This first educational experiment foundered on the contradictions of the moment. It seemed then that to build a settled school environment was to build on shifting sands. Thus, between 1975 and the emergence of Centre School (a primary school) in the early 1980s there were no structured school environments for Auroville youth to attend. Youth had to make shift with ad hoc and personal arrangements.

It is a truism in Auroville that organized structures emerge long after an activity has come into being. Thus it was in 1984 that the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER), the body that is now the holding agency for all of Auroville's educational activities, was formally created. All the manifold existing activities which had an educational orientation were incorporated within it.

But this organized structure did not stop the debate about approaches. A multi-national collectivity, with members influenced by their distinctive cultural, social, moral and educational backgrounds, seeking to create a common approach that wants to work from within outwards, does not find it easy to agree on methodologies, on contents and structures. What should be the contours of an 'Auroville Education'? This remains an animated point of discussion yet. It has been relatively easier to arrive at functional agreements in relation to the education of the very young. It is where secondary level education is concerned that attitudes have diverged vastly - should Auroville affiliate itself to some existing board or exam programme, or should it retain a 'free progress' approach? This argument has been at moments acrimonious and even led to closures of particular experiments.

In 1985, it was the teenagers themselves who succeeded in their demand to have an 'organized' school environment dedicated to their needs. But the stability of this experiment lasted less than a decade before it separated into 2 streams: on the one side into a programme which offered the possibility of studying and passing for one or other of external school board exams available then; and on the other to an open-ended, creative 'free progress' approach. For the last 2 decades, this seems to have become the settled shape of education on offer to teenagers and young adults growing up in Auroville. But the argumentation on approaches remains.

In anyone who has worked with teenagers, the question necessarily arises: what is their view of growing up in Auroville, particularly once they have the maturity and perspective of age and hindsight? After all they were the subjects, the guinea pigs, of this experimentation. The wish and intention of Auroville is to create a sense of universality, to take you out of your narrow social, familial or national background and give birth to a new and wider consciousness. How successful has this been? Aurovilians tend to have a subjective impression of the educational process the youth undergo, and anecdotal evidence that often confirms one's point of view. But to get some empirical data would be thought-provoking indeed.

Thus the idea of a survey of Auroville youth incubated for some years. Because of this continuing question within, I put together a somewhat desultory list of (psychological rather than merely practical) questions. It was in the summer of 2013 that a group of young adult Aurovilians expressed enthusiasm about such a self-analysis and also offered to help contact their friends and fellow youth. At this point the survey began to organize itself, to manifest. A one-page introduction that described the spirit and intention of the survey was added to the list of 12 questions. It was settled that the questions would be inward looking and psychological because

that was what needed to be measured more than the practical life skills that Auroville automatically seems to awaken. These could be explored at a later stage. No prescriptive direction was specified and the respondents were deliberately left free to understand and reply to the question in their own way, highlighting just what they chose.

That summer and the next year too, the team contacted people either personally or through innumerable emails, repeatedly requesting their contacts to fill out the survey. Only eighty odd of the hundreds contacted responded. Interestingly, many of those who did take the time, expressed their gladness at the effect the process of dwelling upon the questions had upon them. Because these were inward looking and demanded an introspection, a looking back and analysis this gave birth to new insights about growing up in Auroville. The answers themselves more than fulfilled expectations; growing up in Auroville is an experience that has shaped lives and provided their future trajectory. Auroville's founder's wish *"To have a life that wants to grow and perfect itself, that is what the collective ideal of Auroville should be, and above all, not in the same way for everyone – each one in his own way"* seems achievable.

*Deepti*

## *Introduction*

Auroville is an experimental community aspiring towards the evolution of consciousness in light of the revered Indian yogi, philosopher and revolutionary Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. His spiritual collaborator, The Mother, founded the international township in southeast India in 1968, with the endorsement of the Government of India and UNESCO. Approaching its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Auroville is the largest intentional community in the world.<sup>1</sup>

The Mother wrote and spoke extensively about 'Integral Education,'<sup>2</sup> education in the context of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, and encouraged its development in Auroville, in which it remains a foundational and aspired-towards concept and practice.<sup>3</sup> Hundreds of youth have been raised and educated in the community, and this survey sought to reveal the influence and characteristics of their unique upbringing, as well as to give voice to any suggestions they may have for the future of Auroville's educational processes.

## *The Survey: Design, Methodology and Demographics*

The survey was designed by one of the community's longest-standing educators with an "inward-looking and psychological" emphasis, given the spiritual aims of the Auroville context and the many educational experiments that have been inspired by and sought to foster these.<sup>4</sup> The cover letter accompanying the questionnaire highlighted that no empirical data of the subjective experiences of Auroville youth existed, and that this was a crucial lens through which to gain insight into the Auroville experience as whole, and how educational practices have participated in shaping it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Suryamayi Clarence-Smith, "Auroville: A Practical Experiment in Utopian Society" (BA Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, The Mother, *Education* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix D for a brief history of Auroville's educational endeavours.

<sup>4</sup> See Preface.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A.

Participants were asked to answer the following 12 questions<sup>6</sup>:

1. *Were you born in Auroville? If not, at what age did you come to Auroville?*
2. *Kindly describe your schooling details, both in and outside Auroville.*
3. *Where do you currently live and what is your current work/sphere of action?*
4. *Which part of your education, whether in Auroville or not, has been the most formative for your personality?*
5. *Which aspect of your education has proved the most effective for your life and action (what skills, perspective, ideas do you use the most)?*
6. *In which way do you feel Aurovilian? What are the signs of this feeling? Can you identify its characteristics?*
7. *Do you have a sense of connection with the idea forces as embodied in Auroville's founding texts (such as "To be a True Aurovilian" or the Charter)? In what way do you connect with them?*
8. *Do you feel that you have benefited from the Auroville experience/upbringing?*
9. *Would you say that there is an "Auroville type" and, if so, how would you describe it?*
10. *Were Auroville to create some form of recognition for its educational processes, what according to you, could be its criteria?*
11. *Do you have any wishes or suggestions for the future of Auroville education?*
12. *Would you like us to keep you informed about the survey and its results?*

Note: Names and ages of the participants were recorded, but the survey was circulated with the agreement that the names of participants would be kept confidential in any report or publication. Throughout this document, quotes will be referenced using a number assigned to the respondents, indicating the birth year and schooling details as relevant.

Between June 2013 and August 2015, the questionnaire was circulated by a group of current and former Auroville youth to their peers residing in the community and abroad. A list of eligible participants – people aged eighteen and above when the

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<sup>6</sup> For the full survey form, please see Appendix A.

survey was launched in 2013, who had experienced an Auroville upbringing and participated in any of the community's educational experiments since its founding in 1968 – was compiled from the Auroville Archives' registers of residents. This initial archival research was complemented with additional names obtained from the survey team, who contacted a number of Aurovilian youth asking them to recall, identify and trace any contemporaries that might have been missed. This final list of names was then shared out between the team who decided amongst themselves whom each would contact, based on personal connections and relationships. Initially, oral interviews were planned, and there were some completed to start with, but this was found to be too labour intensive and very quickly it was agreed to shift to an online survey.

The collection of responses was analysed by a former Auroville student who participated in the survey herself and is currently undertaking doctoral research on Auroville. As such this research is auto-ethnographic, qualitative, and subjective; and given that much of the data contained, and lent itself to formulating, recommendations for Auroville's educational practices, it intends to become 'applied research.'

#### Demographics of the survey:

- Survey responses were collected between June 2013 and April 2015.
- 81 answered the survey, 72 by email and 9 in person. This figure represents *at least* a third of all Auroville youth over the age of 18 in 2010,<sup>7</sup> possibly significantly more.<sup>8</sup> The lowest response rate reported by those who circulated the survey was one third, the highest response rate described as "most" of those contacted.
- Spanning over 40 years, the oldest to fill in the survey was born in 1959, the youngest in 1991. 16 were born between 1959 and 1969, 25 between 1969 and 1979, 25 between 1979 and 1989 and 14 between

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<sup>7</sup> The youngest to fill in the survey were born in 1991, and thus would have been 18 in 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Based on data of youth raised in Auroville obtained from the Data Management Group.

1989 and 1991, so that, presumably sufficient data was collected to identify any potential diversity in responses across time.

- 41 respondents (approx. 50%) were born in Auroville. The remainder moved to Auroville between the ages of 6 weeks and 14 years old.
- 46 of respondents were male, 35 female.
- Students from across Auroville's kindergarten, elementary and high schools responded, presumably enabling any significant divergences according to schools in Auroville to be identified.
- One third of respondents completed the entirety of their primary through high school education in Auroville (born 1972 onwards). Another 9 respondents (born 1959 onwards) completed all but one or two years of primary school in Auroville (either abroad or in the Ashram before joining the community, or at "Equals One" in the early years). The sum is 44.4% of respondents.
- 58 respondents (71.6%) went on to pursue higher education outside of Auroville. Of those, 34 had attended high school outside, and 24 inside Auroville.
- 36 respondents (44.4%) lived outside of Auroville at the time of taking the survey.
- Respondents were active in a number of different fields. Interestingly, close to 30% (24 people) listed teaching as at least one of their roles.
- 91% of respondents were interested in hearing of the results of the survey.

## ***Analysis of Responses***

### *Summary of Salient Commonalities:*

- The vast majority of respondents feel they have significantly benefited from their Auroville upbringing.
- The Auroville upbringing as a whole was considered an educational experience, reaching beyond schooling. Responses did not differ significantly according to the school students attended, or even if they completed their secondary schooling elsewhere.
- The qualities of Auroville education/upbringing that are the most valued are freedom, openness, support, well-rounded personal development, exposure to the yoga of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and a multicultural and multilingual environment.
- The vast majority of respondents feel very identified with Auroville. Whether they live in the community or not, they consider themselves Aurovilian in resonating with, aspiring towards or practically applying its ideals, in feeling connected with other community members, and in considering Auroville to be “home.”
- The majority of respondents recommend that Auroville develop internal forms of recognition for the range of educational experiences of youth within the community, and move towards international accreditation for these.
- Suggestions for the future of Auroville’s education include upholding diversity, flexibility and orientation to the individual, and that it continue to experiment – responsibly – by supporting training of teachers and drawing inspiration from developments in educational processes worldwide.

### **I. An Auroville Education and Upbringing: Benefit, Characteristics and Deficits**

Common themes related to the benefits, characteristics and deficits of the upbringing and education of Auroville youth emerged in the responses to Q. 4, Q. 5 and Q. 8, which specifically addressed these interrelated points.

## 1) Beneficial

In answer to Question 8 *“Do you feel that you have benefited from the Auroville experience/upbringing?”* 71 participants (87.65%) answered that they felt they had benefited from being raised in Auroville. 58 respondents (71.6%) strongly expressed this and many went to some length to qualify and support their answer. Many expressed how ‘grateful’ and ‘lucky’ they felt about being raised in Auroville, describing it as ‘invaluable,’ ‘immeasurable’ and ‘priceless,’ something they would repeat, would never trade, and could never repay. A significant number of respondents expressed a strong identification with their Auroville upbringing and could not conceive of putting its benefit into question (it is interesting to note that this type of response came from the earlier generation of Auroville youth):

*“Yes! That’s a stupid question, that’s like saying ‘how do you feel about being yourself at 42’? I mean... it’s completely connected somehow to who I am”<sup>9</sup>*

*“No question about it. It IS who I am”<sup>10</sup>*

*“Could I have been raised elsewhere and still be the person I am today? Unlikely... I had it all – the freedom, the generosity of humanity, and the tolerance of others. What more COULD one ask for?!”<sup>11</sup>*

*“Yes, it has formed who I am. I am thankful all the time that I had the education and childhood that I did.”<sup>12</sup>*

## 2) Formative “Life Education”

In answer to Question 4 *“Which part of your education, whether in Auroville or not, has been the most formative for your personality?”* the majority (50 out 81, 61.72%) responded that their education in Auroville was the most formative. 19 (23%) cited a combination elements from their education in Auroville and outside of Auroville, so that in total Auroville was identified as formative in 69, or 85.17% of answers. Responses to all three questions highlighted the Auroville experience as a whole as formative and educational, with life skills reaching beyond schooling.

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<sup>9</sup> #62, 1973, Fertile School.

<sup>10</sup> #3, 1967, Fertile School.

<sup>11</sup> #4, 1964, Fertile School.

<sup>12</sup> #28, 1972, Aspiration Kindergarden, Center School, Fertile School, Transition School, Last School.

*"Living in Auroville is an educational experience and has been formative."<sup>13</sup>*

*"My education in Auroville reached far beyond just the schools. I was given the freedom to grow as a person; was given responsibility in my own life. These things helped me learn from all my experiences... Growing up in Auroville prepared me more than just academically for the world."<sup>14</sup>*

*"The 'out of classroom' learning that took place in every stage of my life - growing up with a diverse group of people, being involved in different aspects of the community, and being associated with mentors that gave a lot of individual attention."<sup>15</sup>*

*"The most formative part of my education for my personality was being engaged in building and creating Auroville."<sup>16</sup>*

The early youth of Auroville - born in the 1960s and early 1970s - who answered that Auroville education was formative of their personality, stated that this was due to the *lack* of structured education, which pushed some to seek formal education elsewhere:

*"My time without a formal education in Auroville taught me more than my attending school could ever have done. I am a maverick, a lateral thinker and pretty fearless. Life skills have made anything life today has to offer easy to deal with."<sup>17</sup>*

*"My formal education in Auroville was almost non-existent but Auroville provided me with a wealth of experience that has influenced who I am today."<sup>18</sup>*

*"I think that my lack of education has made me so eager to want to learn, and want to achieve. I really worked hard to get my BA and MA, not for the sake of getting a diploma but to have a goal and reach it."<sup>19</sup>*

### **3. Valued Characteristics of Auroville Education**

Answers to all three questions (Q. 8 on benefit, Q. 4 on formative, Q. 5 on effectiveness) highlighted common aspects of the Auroville education and upbringing as strong positives, notably

- The qualities of openness and freedom:

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<sup>13</sup> #32, 1964, Aspiration School, Kodai Swedish.

<sup>14</sup> #28, 1972, Aspiration Kindergarden, Center School, Fertile School, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>15</sup> #49, 1986, Transition and Future School.

<sup>16</sup> #15, 1964, Aspiration, Fertile, Last School.

<sup>17</sup> #4, 1969, Kindergarden, Last School, Fertile School.

<sup>18</sup> #38, 1961, Auroville School.

<sup>19</sup> #9, 1975, Centre, Transition, Last School and home schooling.

*"Children can express themselves freely. They can discover on their own what they like/don't like. They are not formatted in a "should be" mould. We were free."*<sup>20</sup>

*"Even though many 'experiments' could not be sustained the knowledge gained, the openness and freedom to think (even at that young age) has stood me in good stead."*<sup>21</sup>

*"The opening up of my thinking to ask important questions, the feeling of being allowed to be who one is, and at the same time the good preparation for whatever one chooses to end up doing."*<sup>22</sup>

*"The freedom made possible in Auroville, to explore one's potentials and skills enables the students to totally focus their attention on the things they love to learn. The result for me personally was... the ability to stay in touch with my passions."*<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, freedom was often positively correlated with responsibility:

*"Freedom in every way, early responsibilities, being one big family feeling responsible for others and surroundings."*<sup>24</sup>

*"I really enjoyed the freedom of choosing which subjects and courses I wanted to follow which definitely increased my sense of responsibility for my own life."*<sup>25</sup>

➤ The opportunity for authentic and well-rounded personal development:

*"Being in Auroville has given me so many opportunities to discover various aspects of myself, has given me the confidence to be true to myself."*<sup>26</sup>

*"The tools and understanding I have gained not only covered the basic knowledge and skills of education, but also developed my being into a more rounded individual striving to progress"*<sup>27</sup>

*"The education in Auroville has been most formative, because it is geared more towards the growth of the individual, to spark an interest in as many varied topics as possible and to develop not only the academic but the athletic and artistic sides of our personality as well."*<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> #75, 1986, Kindergarden, Transition

<sup>21</sup> #2, 1959, Aspiration School

<sup>22</sup> #54, 1989, Kindergarden, Transition and Future School

<sup>23</sup> #66, 1980, Kindergarden, Transition, Last School.

<sup>24</sup> #10, 1966, Last School

<sup>25</sup> #79, 1986, Kindergarden, Transition, Future School

<sup>26</sup> #55, 1981, Kindergarden, Transition and Last School

<sup>27</sup> #81, 1987, Transition and Future School.

<sup>28</sup> #44, 1990, Last School.

*"The broad spectrum of skills that Auroville education provides. And by this I don't mean just practical/intellectual skills, I mean a richness of thought, a deep awareness of my self, my surroundings and a rich perspective of life and our existence."*<sup>29</sup>

- The interconnectedness of teachers and students, as a reflection of their embeddedness in the community at large:

*"I feel the best part of my education was the balance of freedom in a very nurturing environment that fostered a close and personal relationship with ones teachers while at the same time developing a strong sense of self-responsibility."*<sup>30</sup>

*"Growing up with a very supportive and open-minded teaching staff has allowed me to truly allow me to be me."*<sup>31</sup>

*"The approach to students and the general atmosphere created... I would say a model of human interaction for me."*<sup>32</sup>

*"The sense of community, friendship, and equality between teachers and students."*<sup>33</sup>

- The exposure to the yoga of Mother and Sri Aurobindo:

*"The more unique courses such as Awareness through the Body and Auroville Philosophy classes... Through a more theoretical understanding of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as practical exercises that implemented these concepts on a physical level enhanced ones learning ability as well as developing oneself as an individual."*<sup>34</sup>

*"I would say that living in Auroville and being schooled in Auroville has allowed the teaching of Mother and Sri Aurobindo to take hold in me, and these have formed a large part of my overall perspective."*<sup>35</sup>

*"I feel I have benefited by the knowledge of Mother and Sri Aurobindo's yoga. This could have been lived anywhere but by being in Auroville one can share with other Aurovilians, which enriches our knowledge."*<sup>36</sup>

*"The philosophy and ideals of Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and Auroville, which one becomes aware of and is surrounded by have an impact and influence on ones life. I am happy to have been exposed to these from a young age and somehow they have become a natural part of my life."*<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> #70, 1984, Mirramukhi, Transition, Last, Future School.

<sup>30</sup> #81, 1987, Kindergarden, Transition and Future School.

<sup>31</sup> #54, 1989, Kindergarden, Transition and Future School

<sup>32</sup> #47, 1989, New School, Transition School, Future School.

<sup>33</sup> #64, 1987, Kindergarden, Transition, Future School.

<sup>34</sup> #81, 1987, Transition and Future School.

<sup>35</sup> #82, 1975, Auroville Schools.

<sup>36</sup> #78, 1973, Last School.

<sup>37</sup> #80, 1966, Last School.

*"The spiritual openness (as primarily is the case in the class Awareness Through the Body) is something that I am further pursuing and will most likely be doing for the rest of my life."<sup>38</sup>*

➤ Learning to learn, for the sake of learning.

*"I learned that every skill is learnable and so in life there is nothing I will not attempt as I believe I can do/learn anything, the freedom to do what I wish not only what I've been trained to do."<sup>39</sup>*

*"I would say the most important skill/idea that I have learned is that, with enough interest and effort, one can learn/do anything. And it is not what one does but how one does that matters."<sup>40</sup>*

*"I passed every competitive exam I sat for and I think Auroville had a huge role to play. It gave me the freedom to learn unencumbered by the expectation of results."<sup>41</sup>*

*"It somehow taught me how to learn- that is priceless in my career as I consult and I need a quick grasp of the essentials."<sup>42</sup>*

➤ Thinking 'laterally,' 'creatively,' and 'outside the box,' as well as the opportunity to question critically.

*"Thinking outside the box helps in every domain of life and I'm grateful to Auroville for that."<sup>43</sup>*

*"AV education was extremely formative in that it taught me to think out of the box and more creatively."<sup>44</sup>*

*"In Auroville I learned to question the status quo but in my other schools I learned to go about it in a respectful and positive manner."<sup>45</sup>*

*"I have noticed that I'm quite adept at thinking laterally and clearly, and I think my education in Auroville has allowed this to develop well."<sup>46</sup>*

➤ The diverse multicultural and multilingual environment.

*"Auroville widened my perspective and helped me form an outlook on life. It brought me in contact with diverse people, opinions, ways of being and functioning, ideas..."<sup>47</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> #54, 1989, Kindergarden, Transition and Future School.

<sup>39</sup> #29, 1980, Kindergarden, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>40</sup> #35, 1990, Kindergarden, Mirramukhi, Transition, Last School.

<sup>41</sup> #7, 1959, Aspiration School.

<sup>42</sup> #7, 1959, Aspiration School.

<sup>43</sup> #16, 1974, Transition, Center, Last School.

<sup>44</sup> #16, 1974, Centre, Transition, Last School.

<sup>45</sup> #17, 1968, Aspiration, Kindergaden, Last School, Centre School.

<sup>46</sup> #82, 1975, Auroville Schools.

*"Learning different languages was definitely a very important part of my growth here. With each language I know, I feel connected to that culture and can better understand the people speaking that language."*<sup>48</sup>

*"Being adaptable and able to learn in what ever environment, multi-lingual expression and thought."*<sup>49</sup>

#### **4. Deficits**

9 answers to Question 8, *"Do you feel that you have benefited from the Auroville experience/upbringing?"* were mixed, with some positive and some negative aspects expressed.<sup>50</sup> These came from Auroville's early students, hence the negative aspects expressed presumably reflect the early years of education within the community. The positive points were similar to those already highlighted; the negative points raised were the lack of training of the teachers, the lack of structure and continuity of educational opportunities, and the lack of guidance for youth in the community.

*"I was influenced by adults who had many idealistic views and ideas, some were my teachers. Not being qualified or trained educators they probably had no idea of the influence and impact they had on young impressionable minds... many years later when I left Auroville I realized a formal education was required to be able to function in life... one could not but feel a sense of abandonment and even of having been cheated."*<sup>51</sup>

*"Handicap: no communication with outside world, education separated with career, not connected, no follow-through, hard to perfect any talent (sports, music) because of smallness, closed. No role models."*<sup>52</sup>

*"Not having access to school and the structure of regular adult teachers made me long for that in my life. I am very disciplined when I work or study because I have had enough chaos to last a lifetime."*<sup>53</sup>

An on-going concern for youth in Auroville that did not arise in answer to these questions but bears noting is the lack of recognition for Auroville education, which will be addressed in the next section.

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<sup>47</sup> #44, 1990, Last School.

<sup>48</sup> #39, 1968, Aspiration School, Self-Schooling, Fertile School, Kodai.

<sup>49</sup> #15, 1964, Aspiration, Fertile, Last School.

<sup>50</sup> If these were calculated, on the basis of the beneficial aspects, in the overall statistic of those who felt they had benefited from being raised in Auroville, it would rise to almost a 100% (80 out of 81 respondents).

<sup>51</sup> #80, 1966, Last School.

<sup>52</sup> #71, 1973, Centre School, Last School.

<sup>53</sup> #17, 1968, Aspiration, Kindergaden, Last School, Centre School.

#### 4. Characteristics Valued in Educational Experiences Outside Auroville

In answer to Question 5 “Which part of your education, whether in Auroville or not, has been the most formative for your personality?” 4 (5%) of people associated the most formative aspects of their education with experiences outside of Auroville.<sup>54</sup> 19 (23%) cited a combination elements from their education in Auroville and outside of Auroville. Throughout answers to all three questions, the following characteristics were sought, developed, and valued outside of Auroville:

- Discipline and structure (often actively sought)
- Organizational skills
- Professional training
- Scientific training
- Analytical thinking (while interestingly critical thinking, thinking outside the box, and creative thinking were listed as characteristics developed and valued in Auroville).

## II. Being Aurovilian

### 1) Connection with Auroville’s Ideals

In answer to Question 7 – “Do you have a sense of connection with the idea forces as embodied in Auroville’s founding texts (such as “To be a True Aurovilian”<sup>55</sup> or the Charter<sup>56</sup>)? In what way do you connect with them?” – the vast majority (66, 81.5%) felt strongly connected, 10 were unsure or said they were working on it, and 5 said they did not feel a connection.

Most (36, 44.4%) expressed the connection as something they embodied and applied in their daily lives, whether they were in Auroville or not:

*“I feel that as children of Auroville, we were brought up with the ideas of Auroville and the Charter. What ever much or how ever much we understand from the written context, I believe that we express the Charter or the ideas of Auroville better through our actions in our day-to-day life because it's part of us, it's deeply embedded in us whether we know it or not.”<sup>57</sup>*

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<sup>54</sup> 3 of these were some of the earliest generation of Auroville youth (born in 1961, 1966, 1972), and the fourth, born in 1985, was the only respondent to have not expressed any benefit from the Auroville education in answer to Question 9.

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>57</sup> #48, 1989, Crèche, Kindergarden, Transition School, Future School.

*"The ideals and spirit are automatically engrained into all who choose to study and live here whether they consciously choose to "be true Aurovilians" or not."*<sup>58</sup>

*"It's not on a philosophical level, the level of ideals, it's much more like an instinctive code. It's an imprint, it's something that exists in your nature."*<sup>59</sup>

*"What links me to the ideal of Auroville is not really what one finds in the texts, but more living and being involved/part of the experiment."*<sup>60</sup>

*"I try to practically implement and live the ideals of Auroville. I work to create and get involved in projects where the ideals of Auroville can manifest."*<sup>61</sup>

Some highlighted specific concepts from the texts in doing so:

*"I connect with them on an every day basis, whether I am in Auroville or not... I carry that atmosphere and those words in me. I try to let that feeling out and I try to express it in my everyday work. I am not a true Aurovillian, I am not sure what that may be, but I work towards it every day."*<sup>62</sup>

*"A servitor of the divine consciousness is something I am not always ready for, to say the least... But I know that the main seed, the main drive is there, it is deeply rooted... I feel it is the idea of my life on earth."*<sup>63</sup>

*"To be a true Aurovillian: Aurovilians must lose proprietary sense of possession Charter: unending education and constant progress. I try to apply them everyday to myself."*<sup>64</sup>

*"From Charter: ...but to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness. This is the only point I can relate to and see as realistic in the present moment in AV. "To be a True Aurovillian": I resonate with the whole text, it describes the way I am trying to live my life."*<sup>65</sup>

Others expressed their identification with the ideals and specific concepts of the texts as belief, even though some had left Auroville several decades ago (13):

*"After seeing so much strife over differences in religion, race, caste, denominations, I believe Auroville can prove to be beacon. With all my heart I believe in the ideal of Auroville."*<sup>66</sup>

*"I feel that the Auroville Charter and other founding texts simply make sense and are the way forwards for humanity."*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> #79, 1986, Kindergarden, Transition, Future School.

<sup>59</sup> #62, 1973, Fertile School.

<sup>60</sup> #53, 1984, Kindergarden, Transition and Last School.

<sup>61</sup> #60, 1964, Last School.

<sup>62</sup> #59, 1991, Crèche, Kindergarden, Transition, Kodai.

<sup>63</sup> #47, 1989, New School, Transition School, Future School.

<sup>64</sup> #75, 1986, Kindergarden, Transition.

<sup>65</sup> #77, 1982, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>66</sup> #7, 1959, Aspiration School.

*“Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.’ I connect with this as I fervently believe that all Humans regardless of their own thoughts are the same and deserve equal respect.”<sup>68</sup>*

A few highlighted several levels of connection:

*“I have a sense of connection in two ways:*

*- A logical understanding through reading them*

*- A inherent experience though the community living in Auroville.”<sup>69</sup>*

*“Yes I do have a connection with the idea forces, firstly I connect with them mentally, and in rare occasions I connect with them spiritually and with my soul.”<sup>70</sup>*

For the remainder, the texts act as a personal and collective reference point for what they as individuals and the community as a whole aspire towards (14):

*“It is something that I always aspire towards –I try and change my lower nature - I think the aims of the Auroville Charter have sustained me, it’s a goal worth living for.”<sup>71</sup>*

*“To be a true Aurovilian” makes me aspire, and I believe if one hasn’t got there yet but aspires to it or even just recognises its merits truly one can still be quite aligned with its ideal.”<sup>72</sup>*

*“I used the Charter for defining my own credo as a senior in college. I believe we must read them regularly to align ourselves with the purpose of Auroville and our commitment to this special place.”<sup>73</sup>*

*“They are a direct reminder of the highest aspirations and the limitless discoveries that can be made within and without! And also a reminder of the reason for which each of us chose to come here.”<sup>74</sup>*

*“I feel like these texts are like a road map, a guiding light at the harbour. They are high ideals and, although they may not all be lived up to by everyone, or myself, I feel that they are the glue that holds us Aurovilians together. They create a common aim and a common language giving a unique sense of community and comradeship.”<sup>75</sup>*

*“I see it as a great privilege to be in a place that has these texts at the centre of Auroville’s and ones own existence.”<sup>76</sup>*

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<sup>67</sup> #81, 1987, Kindergarden, Transition and Future School.

<sup>68</sup> #27, ?, Kindergarden, Transition School, Last School, Kodai.

<sup>69</sup> #49, 1986, Transition and Future School.

<sup>70</sup> #59, 1991, Crèche, Kindergarden, Transition, Kodai.

<sup>71</sup> #15, 1964, Aspiration, Fertile, Last School.

<sup>72</sup> #82, 1975, Auroville Schools.

<sup>73</sup> #39, 1968, Aspiration School, Self-Schooling, Fertile School, Kodai.

<sup>74</sup> #44, 1990, Last School.

<sup>75</sup> #70, 1984, Mirramukhi, Transition, Last, Future School.

<sup>76</sup> #65, 1978, Transition and Last School.

A few (4), however, felt personally connected with the ideals but disconnected with their being interpreted in a dogmatic way by other community members:

*"Yes, but in a very private way and I often feel disconnected from the way they are publicly aired in Auroville. I feel we have turned what was once an open and free sense of adventure and quest into something of a rigid religion with dogma and rules - I don't identify with that at all."*<sup>77</sup>

*"Yes. These texts boil down to being true to yourself, being honest, and open to the world. I feel I do embody those traits. However, I do have an aversion to the dogma that such texts tend to incite in some people."*<sup>78</sup>

*"I believe that the higher consciousness which Mother and Sri Aurobindo speak about is not confined in Auroville. And I definitely can connect with this and I try to live it everyday. However people who live in the community preach Mother and Sri Aurobindo's words and believe they are superior and righteous. This creates a barrier of ignorance and does not welcome knowledge and input from outside of AV."*<sup>79</sup>

## **2. Feeling 'Aurovilian'**

In answer to Question 5 – *"In which way do you feel Aurovilian? What are the signs of this feeling? Can you identify its characteristics?"* – all but three people identified with feeling 'Aurovilian.' Three common characterizations of this identification emerged throughout the answers. The most significant were:

- A sense of belonging and of Auroville being "home" (27, 33.3%)

*"I feel Aurovilian because even though I haven't been there for years, it is still home.... More than anything it is an internal 'knowing' that my raison d'être is intimately linked with the raison d'être of AV."*<sup>80</sup>

*"A feeling of 'belonging', like I am in the presence of something that - although much too profound for me to understand- is fundamental to me."*<sup>81</sup>

*"Auroville is like the electricity that flows through me it is not visible but without it most things are not possible. I find that words always limit my definition of Auroville, Auroville is me and I'm Auroville."*<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> #16, 1974, Transition, Center, Last School.

<sup>78</sup> #28, 1972, Aspiration Kindergarden, Center School, Fertile School, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>79</sup> #66, 1980, Kindergarden, Transition, Last School.

<sup>80</sup> #50, 1975, Center School, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>81</sup> #44, 1990, Last School.

<sup>82</sup> #29, 1980, Kindergarden, Transition School, Last School.

This was a strong feeling even for people who had not lived in or visited Auroville for years:

*"It is my childhood home. I cannot be not Aurovilian because I cannot (and would NOT) change my history. I remember the smells, the sights, the sounds as though it were yesterday (it is now 33 years since I left AV and it is 22 years since I was there last)."*<sup>83</sup>

*"I have now lived in 7 cities and travelled the world. I left Auroville in 1976 and do not even visit every year but it is still "home." I always list Auroville as "native place"."*<sup>84</sup>

- An attitude of striving for progress, individually and towards the realization of Auroville (26, 32%)

*"I feel Aurovilian in the sense of a strong spiritual openness. This materializes in the form of a longing to reach a higher consciousness and a questioning of the way that I and the rest of society operates."*<sup>85</sup>

*"I think that the characteristics of an Aurovilian is this sensation of looking towards, to always talk about what can be or what could become."*<sup>86</sup>

*"I feel Aurovilian in the way that I want to give my service for a higher purpose without expecting anything in return just like many other Aurovilians. I want to never stop learning and progressing."*<sup>87</sup>

*"The feeling of being part of a huge dream which is being realized by each and every one of us. In working together, working as an individual, and working to better yourself to the greater good."*<sup>88</sup>

- Feeling connected with others who share Auroville's ideals and experience (16, 20%)

*"I feel connected to people. If Auroville is about Human Unity, then we must care about each other at any cost. We must be of service to humanity, going beyond our comfort zones and boundaries."*<sup>89</sup>

*"A sense of sharing a common language and vision with a group of people, whether or not our specific interpretation of this vision varies."*<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> #4, 1964, Fertile School.

<sup>84</sup> #6, 1959, Auroville School.

<sup>85</sup> #54, 1989, Kindergarden, Transition and Future School.

<sup>86</sup> #62, 1973, Fertile School.

<sup>87</sup> #43, 1989, Udavi and Future School.

<sup>88</sup> #48, 1989, Crèche, Kindergarden, Transition School, Future School.

<sup>89</sup> #39, 1968, Aspiration School, Self-Schooling, Fertile School, Kodai.

<sup>90</sup> #76, 1975, Center, Transition, Fertile, Last School, Blue Mountain (Ooty), Kodai; #46, 1963, Auroville School/No school.

*"The resonance I feel with other Aurovilians is a sincere aspiration to live beyond the confines of the individual self - both by aspiring for spiritual growth (both personal and collective) as well as with a true sense of community, and that this exists in the context of daily life rather than removed from it."*<sup>91</sup>

*"My personal, as well as the collective aspiration towards a Divine life on earth is another aspect of being Aurovilian. The sense of brotherhood and family towards other Aurovilians, friends and well wishers of Auroville regardless of where in the world."*<sup>92</sup>

*"I really feel a special connection with people who were born and grew up in Auroville, based on something deeper than words or actions."*<sup>93</sup>

### **3. An Auroville 'Type'?**

Despite the positive responses to the related questions in the previous sections, a significant proportion of responses (30, 37%; 5 declined to answer) to Question 9 *"Would you say that there is an "Auroville type" and, if so, how would you describe it?"* negated its premise. They highlighted the diversity of people in Auroville, and reflected a feeling of inappropriateness with regard to defining an Auroville 'type.' This was evident in associations with terms such as 'stereotyping,' 'labelling,' 'limiting' or 'generalizing':

*"As we are all so different and all trying to achieve our goals in many different ways, I am happy that we do not have to stereotype ourselves as an AV type!"*

*"There are certain people that are attracted to this place that share common values/ideals... but attaching a word to it seems wrong to me. It seems dangerous. So no. There is no Auroville type. Auroville is a place for all types."*<sup>94</sup>

*"No, there is no Auroville type for that would limit its possible expressions every thing is possible in Auroville"*<sup>95</sup>

Responses also reflected the inappropriateness of defining an "AV type" as an isolated phenomenon of human society:

*"The Auroville type is everywhere and not only to be found in Auroville. Auroville just provides a more "open" and accepting environment for the inner being to develop in practice. However you can find this in individual people and places around the planet."*<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> #64, 1987, Kindergarden, Transition, Future School.

<sup>92</sup> #55, 1981, Kindergarden, Transition and Last School.

<sup>93</sup> #9, 1975, Centre School, Transition School, Last School and home schooling.

<sup>94</sup> #59, 1991, Crèche, Kindergarden, Transition, Kodai.

<sup>95</sup> #29, 1980, Kindergarden, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>96</sup> #32, 1964, Aspiration School, Kodai Swedish.

*"No. No labels. I have met people from abroad which I find to be what you could call a 'true Aurovilian' and Aurovilians that are barely conscious of what it should mean to be one."<sup>97</sup>*

*"I believe there are many who are not Aurovilians who are completely aligned with Auroville's ideals, so the title of being an Aurovilian is secondary to being a servitor of the divine consciousness."<sup>98</sup>*

*"Auroville is a smaller more compact version of what is happening worldwide so in my view I don't believe there is an Auroville type."<sup>99</sup>*

*"Being Aurovilian to me is an inner state and is not limited to geographical location. It is a view on life and an inner desire to grow and evolve."<sup>100</sup>*

An additional 10 people maintained that there was too much diversity to venture into defining a 'type' as such, but pointed to a sense of connection as unifying:

*"I think we are all very different individuals, but we all have Auroville in common, and that is already a lot."<sup>101</sup>*

*"No, here are many types. But maybe the connection between us all is what makes the Auroville type."<sup>102</sup>*

The remainder of the responses made a mixed attempt at defining an Auroville 'type.' 8 listed traits of an ideal type, which included "good will"<sup>103</sup>, a calling and connection to the vision,<sup>104</sup> ideals,<sup>105</sup> and charter of Auroville<sup>106</sup>, an "individual open to change,"<sup>107</sup> a "willing servitor of the Divine consciousness,"<sup>108</sup> "integral sincerity" and the "aspiration to work in Auroville."<sup>109</sup>

35 listed a variety of traits from their experience of Aurovilians. Although these were predominantly positive and echoed responses to the previous question

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<sup>97</sup> #77, 1982, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>98</sup> #82, 1975, Auroville Schools.

<sup>99</sup> #38, 1961, Auroville School.

<sup>100</sup> #70, 1984, Mirramukhi, Transition, Last, Future School.

<sup>101</sup> #72, 1979, Transition School, Last School, Self-Schooling.

<sup>102</sup> #63, 1976, Center, Transition, Last School, Kodai.

<sup>103</sup> #82, 1975, Auroville Schools.

<sup>104</sup> #76, 1975, Center, Transition, Fertile, Last School, Blue Mountain (Ooty), Kodai; #46, 1963, Auroville School/No school.

<sup>105</sup> #55, 1981, Kindergarden, Transition and Last School.

<sup>106</sup> #69, 1972, Centre School, Transition School, Last School, After School.

<sup>107</sup> #9, 1975, Centre School, Transition School, Last School and home schooling.

<sup>108</sup> #58, 1989, Kindergarden, Transition and Last School.

<sup>109</sup> #14, 1972, Ashram Kindergarden, Udavi.

(Q. 5) and section (I), none were listed in common in more than 12.5% of cases. An attitude of striving for progress was highlighted in 10 responses, of openness in 9, of being of service/helpful/friendly to others in 5. Environmental awareness also figured in a number of responses (6). 6 responses contained negative attributes, such as “egocentric,” “ego-battling,” “arrogant,” “spiritually conceited.”

### III. Recognition for Auroville Education & Suggestions for the Future

#### 1) Recognition

In response to Question 10 *“Were Auroville to create some form of recognition for its educational processes, what according to you, could be its criteria?”* 21 people explicitly stated that they felt it was important that Auroville move towards some form of recognition for youth educated in Auroville, 15 of them highlighting the importance for youth to be able to pursue educational, professional, and life experiences outside the community, and the benefits of interaction between young Aurovilians and the world at large. These points were also made in 12 answers to Question 11 *“Do you have any wishes or suggestions for the future of Auroville education?”*

*“I think it is very important for all the kids to study and be able to leave. This opens your mind and gives you true perspective to what AV is about and can be. So for that reason the education has to enable the students to be able to enter university.”<sup>110</sup>*

*“It is good that this education of Auroville works towards being recognized by other institutions/boards and the rest of the world. This will allow and help the people from Auroville to interact and be part/be connected with activities all over the world.”<sup>111</sup>*

*“Well I think the world is large and students should not feel trapped here... students need to be able to survive outside Auroville should they wish to experience something else. More exposure to other students, schools, exchange programs. Auroville's ideals need to be shared and spread, young minds are open.”<sup>112</sup>*

*“I have a deep interest in education and especially the experimental education in Auroville. While informal metrics to evaluate performance and student progress are being developed and should continue to be developed in every conceivable manner, we have to realize the importance of “certification” or “examination” in the conventional*

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<sup>110</sup> #3, 1967, Fertile School.

<sup>111</sup> #60, 1964, Last School.

<sup>112</sup> #67, 1978, Center, Transition, Last School and Kodai.

*sense because without it I would probably still be in Auroville feeling a bit "stuck" without papers that formally certify my education globally."*<sup>113</sup>

An additional 42 responses to Question 10 went on to describe criteria for recognition, intimating that they did support the development of recognition for Auroville education (in total 63, 78%). The majority (38, 47%) described criteria for an internal 'Aurovilian' system. The suggestions made included

- A broad inclusion of educational experiences from academic to extracurricular, to personal development, social skills and life skills:

*"It would have to evaluate on much wider scale- academic, athletic, artistic, capacity, the ability to think out-of-the- box, to adapt, to function as an independent person as well as in a team, to organize projects or events, the enthusiasm to pursue their interests..."*<sup>114</sup>

*"The criteria would have to be very broad. From life skills, academics, physical activities, languages, arts & music, the ability to work in a group, and the ability to innovate."*<sup>115</sup>

*"I would say that apart from academics, overall development of a person's or child's personality has to be taken into account, I know this is hard to calculate but a person's attitude to life, their involvement in the community will give a glimpse of the person's personality. Apart from that sports, dance, music and other extra curricular activities that make Auroville education unique should be given more importance and considered."*<sup>116</sup>

*"It would also have to include a social skills component. I find that the Auroville schools actually stress that – to learn to work as a part of a team and to accomplish what you've started. Auroville also teaches a lot of good life skills like getting along with people, communicating correctly etc."*<sup>117</sup>

Some listed educational approaches themselves as the basis on which an Auroville education could be recognized:

*"Auroville education should be recognized for its richness and its focus on developing the child as a whole, tending to all the parts that make up a human being: physical, mental, emotional, vital, psychic..."*<sup>118</sup>

*"Its criteria could be the quality of education, because:*

*=> The environment is better.*

*=> The student-teacher relationship is stronger.*

*=> The ability to study without any pressure.*

*=> The ability to perceive something of interest."*<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> #56, 1985, Kindergarden, Transition, Future School.

<sup>114</sup> #44, 1990, Last School.

<sup>115</sup> #35, 1990, Kindergarden, Mirramukhi, Transition, Last School.

<sup>116</sup> #43, 1989, Udavi and Future School.

<sup>117</sup> #45, Kindergarden, Transition, Last School and Lycée Français.

<sup>118</sup> #70, 1984, Mirramukhi, Transition, Last, Future School.

➤ Values that reflected Auroville's spirituality bedrock and ethos

*"It could include a "world citizen" criteria as well as that of having some environmental awareness, honesty and ethics - some inner (spiritual) knowledge and awareness."*<sup>120</sup>

*"The criteria should be focused on the spirit of learning which would follow an Integral education."*<sup>121</sup>

*"Sincerity, courage, effort, confidence & humility, kindness, joy, wideness of the mind, diligence, the capacity to take up responsibility, adaptability, and the quality of being cantered."*<sup>122</sup>

*"Human unity  
Constant progress  
Open-mindedness"*<sup>123</sup>

➤ An individualized certification that would highlight the students' range of educational **experiences** and could be developed into an in-depth portfolio.

*"A certificate that listed what the student had participated in and achieved over their years at school would be a good start."*<sup>124</sup>

*"A portfolio with specific final projects in a number of subjects that one would delve into deeper. It would include a range of written and oral work and of course potentially video, art etc. I would also have an exams based section as practice for those wishing to attend university and as a good environment in which to experience stress and time deadlines and how to cope with these. There could also be a 'work experience' part to it as well, so as to gain familiarity with a working environment."*<sup>125</sup>

One person highlighted the fact that such a form of recognition could be subject-oriented (instead of school-oriented), so that any form of education or development in a given field across Auroville's formal and informal educational landscape could be included:

*"It could be really interesting if it was more subject-oriented (as in this person has completed education in this field). That would be more relevant because of the specialized attention you can get and the diversity of fields and so many experts in Auroville."*<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> #48, 1989, Crèche, Kindergarden, Transition School, Future School.

<sup>120</sup> #15, 1964, Aspiration, Fertile, Last School.

<sup>121</sup> #60, 1964, Last School.

<sup>122</sup> #41, 1990, Kindergarden, Mirramukhi, New School, Transition, Deepanam, Last School.

<sup>123</sup> #75, 1986, Kindergarden, Transition.

<sup>124</sup> #67, 1978, Center, Transition, Last School and Kodai.

<sup>125</sup> #80, 1966, Last School.

<sup>126</sup> #45, Kindergarden, Transition, Last School and Lycée Français.

Self-evaluation was also suggested for inclusion in a recognition process.

Many highlighted the importance of striving towards international recognition for this internal system:

*"I strongly feel that the next step for Auroville's education is to set up an internal form of recognition for its education system that is internationally accepted. Essentially I would see it as an accredited qualification that recognises the superior level of learning in Auroville and at the same time preparing students to be able to work or study abroad if they so choose."<sup>127</sup>*

A few (6) pointed to drawing inspiration from other accredited alternative systems and contributing towards such efforts worldwide in gaining recognition for Auroville's educational processes:

*"I think that Auroville needs to look at other countries, where the diploma that the students receive is not based on exams but on their development, and how they have worked towards their set up goals. Sweden has a system based more on this way of looking at learning, and I am sure other countries do to."<sup>128</sup>*

*"Auroville has a lot to share with the world in helping develop new educational curriculum/methods/etc. We need to continue to recognize the positive aspects in all and work together with the outside to encourage this growth for the world at large.... It is also important not to forget that the outside world has a lot to share with us in Auroville. Let's welcome educationists and work together to create new learning environments."<sup>129</sup>*

*There are many curriculums all over the world which are being developed/changed very similar in spirit to that of Auroville Integral Education. Auroville/we can be involved in actively acknowledging these changes in curriculum from outside and work with them in bringing in aspects of Integral Education learning rather than supporting schools centred around exams. Auroville's educational ideal has to be that which supports the contact and being part of the rest of the world and not just Auroville.<sup>130</sup>*

7 mentioned aligning with formal systems of accreditation – either Indian or international i.e. IB/GCEs – in moving towards recognition for Auroville schooling, although emphasizing the fact this should not stymie the educational processes within Auroville, or be a mandatory pathway for all students:

*"One method would be to obtain recognition of Auroville's education programs from the state government so that Auroville schools can "certify" certain programs as equivalent to international standards. Schools might still be able to experiment with different methods and structures of education but would have to somehow ascertain that students*

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<sup>127</sup> #81, 1987, Transition and Future School.

<sup>128</sup> #63, 1976, Center, Transition, Last School, Kodai.

<sup>129</sup> #59, 1991, Crèche, Kindergarden, Transition, Kodai.

<sup>130</sup> #60, 1964, Last School.

*reach a level of development comparable to national standards within the experimental framework.”<sup>131</sup>*

*“I think having a diverse system like what is set up helps everyone, you have the schools looking at securing diplomas for kids that want and the other schools that give kids a different kind of education that helps the kids that are not cut out for a formal education.”<sup>132</sup>*

*“What makes sense to me is a branching out system, in the form of a tree where an individual can decide on the path they take. Once taken this path has to be gone to the end. The different branches would be different approaches or different processes.”<sup>133</sup>*

Another 7 respondents felt that Auroville should not move towards recognition but use established external systems for that and remain focused on educational experimentation within Auroville, with one person expressing that Auroville education was not ‘ready’ for a recognition process.

*“I do not think Auroville needs to go down that path. There are countless institutions that create recognition certificates for educational levels attained. I think for Auroville it is more important to focus on the inner education and desire to explore it rather than creating recognition on outer forms.”<sup>134</sup>*

*“I’m not really sure AV needs or should seek formal recognition. Students can always enter the formal, degree system at a later age by taking the necessary tests and exams. But I would prefer to leave the AV system free from formal processes in the formative stages of a child’s education.”<sup>135</sup>*

*“I don’t think we’re ready yet. I think Auroville had an impact on me, just because of it being Auroville. But I don’t think we’re ready to put any trademark/formal recognition [on education].”<sup>136</sup>*

## **2) Suggestions**

Aside from moving towards recognition, which was reiterated in answer to Question 11 “Do you have any wishes or suggestions for the future of Auroville education?” other suggestions made across both questions 10 and 11 were:

- To remain flexible, diverse and oriented to the individual (21)

*“Keep it flexible. People want different things and Auroville could be the one place that offers that choice.”<sup>137</sup>*

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<sup>131</sup> #56, 1985, Kindergarden, Transition, Future School.

<sup>132</sup> #22, 1981, Kindergarden, Transition, CFL, Last School.

<sup>133</sup> #47, 1989, New School, Transition School, Future School.

<sup>134</sup> #21, 1985, Transition, New School, Future School.

<sup>135</sup> #16, 1974, Centre, Transition, Last School.

<sup>136</sup> #51, 1978, Centre, Transition, Last School.

*"I wish that it will stay flexible and rich in its expression permitting different kind of expression and experiences I hope that it will never get fixed into a system without the flexibility to see the individual and teach that individual not humanity as a whole."*<sup>138</sup>

*"One of my wishes would be that it does not become standardized. One of the bedrocks of Auroville philosophy is that it is about inner discovery, and this journey and process is unique to each individual."*<sup>139</sup>

*"I think that a variety of methods should continue to be practiced, from conventional education to alternative methods depending on the student and his/her character."*<sup>140</sup>

*"My wish for Auroville education would be that all the different styles of education could be accommodated for in Auroville and that the students don't have to look outside of Auroville to fill their needs unless of course it was experience outside of Auroville they were looking for."*<sup>141</sup>

*"I wish for it to continue evolving in a way that provides an excellent level of education, but at the same time retaining the care and individual attention to students that makes it so special."*<sup>142</sup>

- To keep experimenting, including by drawing inspiration from educational developments worldwide (11)

*"Only that it remain an Auroville education - that it continue to experiment and evolve. The education I got in Auroville has prepared me for the world a hundred-fold better than the American system. I trust it will continue to do so, no matter how it evolves, so long as it's in the Auroville spirit."*<sup>143</sup>

*"My wish and ardent hope is that we never satisfy ourselves which that which we already know and believe 'works'. My wish and ardent hope is that Auroville courageously continues (or takes up) a constant search into new ways of functioning, of going about education – using the opportunity each child, youth brings forth by his uniqueness, to find new ways of bringing forward those qualities which are truly valuable in a human being who is to march towards a new world."*<sup>144</sup>

*"Carry on being experimental and being different from other educational systems. It is important to give students the skills to survive and adapt when they leave Auroville, but it is also important to provide them with a special upbringing that will make them excel even more."*<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> #7, 1959, Aspiration School.

<sup>138</sup> #29, 1980, Kindergarden, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>139</sup> #64, 1987, Kindergarden, Transition, Future School.

<sup>140</sup> #12, 1977, Kindergarden and Transition.

<sup>141</sup> #38, 1961, Auroville School.

<sup>142</sup> #33, 1989, Transition and Future School.

<sup>143</sup> #28, 1972, Aspiration Kindergarden, Center School, Fertile School, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>144</sup> #41, 1990, Kindergarden, Mirramukhi, New School, Transition, Deepanam, Last School.

<sup>145</sup> #33, 1989, Transition and Future School.

*"Auroville should be seen to be a leader in child education and there has been a tremendous amount of research and progress in the education of children around the world and, if we follow our charter, we should be keeping abreast with it and incorporating this into our education system, as well as contributing to the body of research."*<sup>146</sup>

➤ To support teacher development (8)

*"To be able to be recognised, and to be able to develop Integral education we need qualified teachers. That is a MUST!"*<sup>147</sup>

*"More and more dedicated, knowledgeable teachers. Adults who are embodying Mother and Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, and are well versed on the topic so as to very simply perspire their atmosphere with the children."*<sup>148</sup>

*"I see the need to improve its academic curriculum and involve trained and qualified teachers to do so. I think that the strength of Auroville education definitely lays on all other aspects of development."*<sup>149</sup>

*"There should also be a way to evaluate Auroville's schools and teachers. Even though Auroville is an experiment and I agree that there should be a constant search, I feel this can only be done in a very responsible and controlled manner. There have been in Auroville's history too many individuals that have tried out systems and ways of education based on their personal convictions and ideas, often with negative results on the students."*<sup>150</sup>

➤ To emphasize practical skills and include work experience (9)

*"More vocational training, more practicality, more touch and in tune with the needs of the community, ex. Builders (carpenters, electricians, plumbers), social skills to deal with meetings, better organizing skills"*<sup>151</sup>

*"It would be good to slowly have more apprenticeship programs for people that are more practical than academic, and this would also help to start generating our own work force so that we become less dependent on outside labour to build AV."*<sup>152</sup>

*"Preparing for a life: practical skills, spiritual skills  
Give value to hands on skills, working with one's hands."*<sup>153</sup>

➤ To work towards a university (7)

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<sup>146</sup> #50, 1975, Center School, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>147</sup> #63, 1976, Center, Transition, Last School, Kodai.

<sup>148</sup> #11, 1974, Udavi, Centre, Transition, Last School and Lycée Français.

<sup>149</sup> #70, 1984, Mirramukhi, Transition, Last, Future School.

<sup>150</sup> #79, 1986, Kindergarden, Transition, Future School.

<sup>151</sup> #5, 1977, Kindergarden, Transition, Last School, After School

<sup>152</sup> #79, 1986, Kindergarden, Transition, Future School.

<sup>153</sup> #71, 1973, Centre School, Last School.

*“There are many universities around the world that work and use other pedagogical methods. I feel that Auroville needs and should develop an accredited University system. This would allow Auroville youth to be able to get a higher education that was acknowledged outside Auroville and bring in students from the outside through exchange programs and course offering.”<sup>154</sup>*

*“Auroville has a countless number of activities from various disciplines that are not connected to each other. It would be better first to sort them out and interlink them under one umbrella. Then, gather information about each and every activity and make it available to everyone. This would provide a more organized and structured view of all the activities that happen within Auroville and, hopefully, could lead us to our very own informal university.”<sup>155</sup>*

➤ To improve links between educational actors and institutions in Auroville (6)

*“I think that Auroville should consolidate the various learning and working experiences it has to offer, by encouraging more coordinated efforts, more networking and communications between the various entities that offer these experiences.”<sup>156</sup>*

*“More contact with the community. More cooperation between people involved in education: competing schools/methods are bad for students. Parents should be more involved in the schools. More sharing of infrastructure.”<sup>157</sup>*

*“One of my wishes would be more cooperation and collaboration between the different schools.”<sup>158</sup>*

*“I think Last School and Future School should find a way to merge and create a new school that has the benefits of both. Studying in Last School was a treasure for me for my interior discovery but so was studying abroad.”<sup>159</sup>*

➤ Values (5)

*“Our exposure here is unique - we should make that precious, by valuing and further including ethics so that it is a part of our reputation.”<sup>160</sup>*

*“The values we share with our children, the public attitudes we project... Good education isn't just about getting good grades and becoming an intellectual. It is also about being able to reason through a problem, talk openly and work out disagreements with others, etc. -all skills we could really use in Auroville.”<sup>161</sup>*

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<sup>154</sup> #32, 1964, Aspiration School, Kodai Swedish.

<sup>155</sup> #48, 1989, Crèche, Kindergarden, Transition School, Future School.

<sup>156</sup> #16, 1974, Centre, Transition, Last School.

<sup>157</sup> #71, 1973, Centre School, Last School.

<sup>158</sup> #72, 1979, Transition School, Last School, Self-Schooling.

<sup>159</sup> #77, 1982, Transition School, Last School.

<sup>160</sup> #15, 1964, Aspiration, Fertile, Last School.

<sup>161</sup> #16, 1974, Centre, Transition, Last School.

*"Yes, focus on inner growth and values which we would like to have and see in Auroville. What we aspire to."<sup>162</sup>*

- Academically, developing scientific education and further support the learning of multiple languages, with an emphasis on Tamil, was recommended.

*"I would also recommend more sciences. I missed pure sciences in Auroville like Chemistry and Physics. I did study some in High School but it was a little late. We need to be more precise with our work and we can only do so when we work with sciences."<sup>163</sup>*

*"I was always disappointed that many who grew up here including myself do not speak Tamil fluently. I would like to see more focus languages, that the children schooled here really have a very good grasp of the languages they speak which is not always the case. And I would like to see the teaching of Tamil being high on the priority list."<sup>164</sup>*

## *Synthesis and Recommendations*

The themes that emerge in synthesizing these survey responses evoke a rather striking resonance with the four-pointed framework of the Auroville Charter.<sup>165</sup> In answer to how they felt 'Aurovilian', Auroville youth emphasized a calling and ethic of service to a "higher" ideal; in response to the question of an Auroville 'type,' they welcomed a diversity of interpretations. Both correlate to the first point of the Charter: *"Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But, to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the divine consciousness."* Many identified as 'Aurovilian' their attitudes of striving for progress, and Auroville as an educational 'life' experience, reflecting the second point: *"Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages."* The third point of the Charter, *"Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations"* was echoed in recommendations for the future of Auroville's education – to keep experimenting and draw inspiration from strides in alternative forms of education worldwide – and in support of Auroville youth interchanging and acquiring

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<sup>162</sup> #21, 1985, Transition, New School, Future School.

<sup>163</sup> #39, 1968, Aspiration School, Self-Schooling, Fertile School, Kodai.

<sup>164</sup> #82, 1975, Auroville Schools.

<sup>165</sup> See Appendix A.

experience in a diversity of fields and contexts. Finally, the strong feeling of interconnectedness with fellow Aurovilians and valuing of Auroville's multicultural environment are good indicators for the realization of the fourth point "*Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.*" The first condition of being a 'true Aurovillian' – inner discovery – was also noticeably highlighted.

That the Auroville experience as a whole was central to the synthesis of responses to this education survey is a hopeful reflection of our society. Auroville's 'schooling' methods and curricula did not figure as prominently however – aside from, notably, the Awareness Through the Body program, and the experiential learning of early days of Auroville's education. This inevitably raises questions as to how these contributed to peoples' educational experience, and what could be learned from that, to inform the evolution of educational practices in Auroville and to determine whether any of these can be applied out of context. Below are some suggestions for follow up and further research.

### **Suggestions for Follow-Up:**

This research is particularly relevant in that it is generative of a multitude of insights and suggestions that are applicable to improving the educational processes and practices at work in Auroville, as well as our community's understanding of these, and through them, of itself. This is a rare and golden opportunity in community-based research, which will only be as valuable as it is followed-up on. Suggestions below cover three aspects of follow-up: the first relates to the dissemination of these findings, the second to how this research can be engaged with and applied, and the third to further research that follows from this analysis.

#### Dissemination

- Share with all who filled the survey, with an invitation to participate in a group forum as an opportunity for a collective conversation and to identify elements to recommend and perhaps undertake for follow-up.
- Share with Auroville educators, also with an invitation to participate

in a group forum for a collective conversation and to identify elements to recommend and undertake for follow-up, as well as to formulate strategies for follow-up action and applied research in the field.

- Share this document with the Auroville community at large, through an announcement in the News & Notes and on AuroNet, with the document accessible online on the Auroville research site [research.auroville.org](http://research.auroville.org) and on AuroNet, and in hard copy at SAIER and the Auroville Archives.
- To further facilitate the reach of this research to a wider audience, edit the document to article-size for readability and publish in Auroville Today and AuroNet, as well as hold a public presentation.
- Share with Auroville's Governing Board and International Advisory Council.

#### Application

- Exploration into internal recognition forms for Auroville's education that would move towards international accreditation.

The individualized certificate of experience/portfolio form of recognition proposed by survey respondents are a natural progression from the experiential and personal criteria of recognition they listed, as well as the highly valued 'life education' of the Auroville upbringing as a whole which could easily be integrated into such forms. It also follows the existing portfolio practice at Transition school. Such an exploration could be undertaken by SAIER/School Board/AV educators in conjunction with a focus group of Auroville Youth who have experienced an Auroville education and expressed an interest in this type of development, and including the suggestions already made and highlighted in this analysis. Collaboration with an advisory group of educationalists well-versed in alternative forms of educational processes and associated forms of recognition worldwide would also follow from and honour the recommendations made by the respondents.

- Further support teacher training, development, evaluation and exchanges with other alternative educational 'systems.'

- Use this research to formulate recommendations for affirming some educational practices or inventing new ones.
- Use this research – design and analysis – as basis from which to develop a self-assessment process for individual schools or a cluster of schools.
- Facilitate interconnectivity between schools and other educational settings within Auroville.

Further Research:

- Conduct regular follow-up research on education in Auroville.

The youngest respondents to this survey were born in 1991, which implies that the last six years of schooling in Auroville (calculated on the basis of a graduation age of 18), and any changes the educational landscape may have undergone during this time are unaccounted for. This is potentially significant given that an external (GCE) examination centre was opened in Auroville; two of Auroville’s three high schools (Future School and NESS) underwent changes in leadership; new schools (The Learning Community and Aha! Kindergarten) were just emerging; an internships and apprenticeships program, ProSkills, is being formulated; a Teacher’s Centre for training, exchange and resources opened; efforts towards higher education and programs for visiting students are being undertaken by the Auroville Campus Initiative, a new higher education department of SAIER. Dynamic development in and of itself is not a new phenomenon in Auroville – in *The Evolution of Schooling in Auroville 1966-1980, Part I*, Heidi Watts expresses being “struck by how much happened so soon, so fast.”<sup>166</sup> This survey focused on the experience of youth educated in Auroville in its first four decades, and many pointed to the influence of Auroville as a whole as a learning environment. How the Auroville context is fostering of an overarching educational experience and “arena for education,”<sup>167</sup> with a creative multiplicity of educational initiatives (the SAIER Annual Report lists 33 ‘sub-units,’ educational entities in Auroville that it funds, as well as an even higher

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<sup>166</sup> Heidi Watts, *The Evolution of Schooling in Auroville 1966-1980, Part 1* (Auroville: SAIER, 2005), 23.

<sup>167</sup> Johnny, in Watts, *The Evolution of Schooling in Auroville*, 5.

number of 'projects'), is a phenomenon worth exploring, with potential relevance for other contexts that seek to become 'integral' learning environments, something which Heidi Watts also highlights in *Little by Little*. Here it is important to note that the experience of 'unending education' is not restricted to Auroville youth, but also embodied by Aurovilian adults, as well as visitors to the community, for whom a wide variety of educational opportunities also exist – something documented in prior research.<sup>168</sup>

- Circulate an appropriately redesigned survey in AV outreach schools.

Outreach education, serving Auroville's Tamil neighbours, has always been a crucial area of the community's educational endeavour. Initiatives of this nature were launched by The Mother in 1966, two years before Auroville was even founded. The community has at present 12 outreach schools and educational centres. These developed concurrently with Auroville schools, from the early 1970s to present, offering free education to children from nearby villages, as well as the community's hired local labourers.<sup>169</sup> Adult education, also provided by the Auroville NGO Auroville Village Action to Auroville's neighbours, forms part of the community's aim to be a learning society based upon 'unending education.' Thousands of people have been educated in these outreach schools, they are therefore a significant part of Auroville's educational landscape and effort. Education and upbringing may not be synonymous, or as strongly identified with Auroville, for students of Auroville's outreach schools (most of whom are not Aurovilian). However, the extent to which the Aurovilian environment – cultural, spiritual etc. – influences their educational processes could be highly revealing of its communicable characteristics, tangible or intangible.

- Design and conduct more specific research into students' responsiveness to teaching methods and curricula at different time periods and within different schools.

This could be as simple as adding a targeted question or set of questions to this survey. When sharing the survey results with those who participated, these

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<sup>168</sup> Dominique, Chali, Rakhal, Jean-Yves, *Educational Practices and Research in Auroville* (Auroville: SAIER, 2013). See "Research Outcome," pages 4 -7.

<sup>169</sup> "Outreach Schools," [www.auroville.org/categories/85/group](http://www.auroville.org/categories/85/group), last modified August 12, 2014.

additional questions could be attached with an explanation of the missing data and a request for responses.

- Research the Awareness Through the Body programme.

As a unique programme developed in the Auroville context, and one of the few specific 'schooling' experiences cited in common across the survey, Awareness Through the Body calls for being researched.

- Research into the development of qualities of independent assuredness within Auroville's educational environment.

The looseness of organization and informality of Auroville's educational landscape and institutions could be characterized by benign neglect or as haphazard. Although leaving some students – especially the earlier generation – seeking structure, direction, discipline and drive elsewhere, it also correlates with the development of qualities such as personal responsibility, creativity and confidence, critical and 'outside-the-box' thinking. The latter merits investigation as a phenomenon that could potentially inform and contribute to developments in education beyond the Auroville context. The tension between the responsiveness of students to this type of environment – negative for some and positive for others – merits investigation in order to responsibly support the development of the positive in all cases.

- Research into the articulation of an Auroville 'identity'

While the premise of an Auroville 'type' was rejected by the majority of respondents – in so doing affirming the qualities they elsewhere stated that they value, i.e. diversity and openness – the sense of connection with other Aurovilians and with Auroville's ideals, as well as the overwhelming self-identification of being Aurovilian and of Auroville being 'home', are strongly indicative of a shared sense of an Auroville 'identity.' This is a highly relevant topic of research for the community at large.

It also has applied research implications for the Aurovilian status of Youth who 'leave' Auroville, given that several youth expressed distress, in responses to this survey, at the contradiction between their strong identification with being Aurovilian and the lack of continuity in their recognition as Aurovilian community members due to time spent abroad, as well as the psychologically and emotionally unsettling

necessitation of formalized re-entry processes for what they identify with as their home.

A historical lens that would capture whether and how this identity has evolved over time would be important to utilise, especially given the strong identification with Auroville expressed by the earlier generation (differences in education and upbringing at different phases of community life could be examined to determine whether and how this impacted students' perceptions of themselves and of Auroville). This would undoubtedly be relevant research to pursue not only among youth, but all Aurovilians who joined or were active members of the community at different phases of its development.

## Appendix A

### AUROVILLE EDUCATION SURVEY (1968-2013)

Auroville has completed 45 years in manifestation and many questions, of a more subjective and psychological nature, come to the front. From its earliest moments, The Mother insisted that Auroville evolve its own educational forms, constructed upon the spirit of the experiment, as it emerged progressively: "Auroville wants to be a new creation expressing a new consciousness in a new way and according to new methods."

This April 2013, the Governing Board had kept time for a broad discussion on educational experiments in Auroville. They wanted to understand what makes education in Auroville different or particular to the Auroville experience. One of their requests was for present numbers as also future projections of children and youth in Auroville; figures that will be significant for planning the next future. But if an attempt is made to understand educational developments from a historical perspective, there is one facet of information crucial to making sense of the Auroville experience which is completely missing. This is the data and analysis of the past. There is some sort of history of schools; but not of individuals who went through them.

The question is: What happened to 'schoolable' persons from the beginning of Auroville to the present? Objectively speaking, how have they 'benefitted' from the Auroville experience/upbringing? Assuming there IS an identifiable 'AV type' - can we seek its spoor, so to say?

Therefore we are undertaking this social science survey: Everyone or anyone who was of an age to receive some sort of organized training or education when they came or were born in Auroville is a possible primary source for this research.

This historical survey of 'schoolable' youngsters from the beginning of AV to the present is a substantial work as we are speaking of contacting and interacting with some hundreds of persons. We hope to gather as much information as feasible and, when possible, make a recording of the conversations, so that these can be transferred into storage DVDs and stay on record as 'oral history' for future researchers.

If you were born or grew up in Auroville, you will be contacted by our team, who, like you, grew up in Auroville. If you are ready for the conversation this summer or would like us to send you the questionnaire to be filled out please contact us at our email given below. Names will not appear in the final research document.

We thank you for your time and input into this survey and welcome your feedback and any suggestions. You may contact us at our group account:

[aurovilleyouth@auroville.org.in](mailto:aurovilleyouth@auroville.org.in)

## Questionnaire for Auroville Youth

Name:

Date of Birth:

Contact details (Email):

Questionnaire conducted by (name of interviewer):

Method used to fill in the questionnaire:  Direct Interview  Email

1. *Were you born in Auroville? If not, at what age did you come to Auroville?*
2. *Kindly describe your schooling details, both in and outside Auroville.*
3. *Where do you currently live and what is your current work/sphere of action?*
4. *Which part of your education, whether in Auroville or not, has been the most formative for your personality?*
5. *Which aspect of your education has proved the most effective for your life and action (what skills, perspective, ideas do you use the most)?*
6. *In which way do you feel Aurovilian? What are the signs of this feeling? Can you identify its characteristics?*
7. *Do you have a sense of connection with the idea forces as embodied in Auroville's founding texts (such as "To be a True Aurovilian" or the Charter)? In what way do you connect with them?*
8. *Do you feel that you have benefited from the Auroville experience/upbringing?*
9. *Would you say that there is an "Auroville type" and, if so, how would you describe it?*
10. *Were Auroville to create some form of recognition for its educational processes, what according to you, could be its criteria?*
11. *Do you have any wishes or suggestions for the future of Auroville education?*
12. *Would you like us to keep you informed about the survey and its results?*

Note: Names and ages of the participants were recorded, but the survey was circulated with the agreement that the names of participants would be kept confidential in any report or publication. Quotes will be referenced a number assigned to the respondents, indicating the birth year and schooling details as relevant.

## Appendix B

### Auroville Charter<sup>170</sup>

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But, to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the divine consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.
4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

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<sup>170</sup> The Mother, "The Auroville Charter," Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1968.

## Appendix C

### *To Be a True Aurovilian*<sup>171</sup>

1. The first necessity is the inner discovery in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the centre there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville.
2. One lives in Auroville in order to be free from moral and social conventions; but this freedom must not be a new slavery to the ego, to its and ambitions. The fulfilment of one's desires bars the way to the inner discovery which can only be achieved in the peace and transparency of perfect disinterestedness.
3. The Aurovilian should lose the sense of personal possession. For our passage in the material world, what is indispensable to our life and to our action is put at our disposal according to the place we must occupy. The more we are consciously in contact with our inner being, the more are the exact means given to us.
4. Work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not put his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let the consciousness organise a bit of matter by means of one's body is very good. To establish order around oneself helps to bring order within oneself. One should organise one's life not according to outer and artificial rules, but according to an organised inner consciousness, for if one lets life go on without subjecting it to the control of the higher consciousness, it becomes fickle and inexpressive. It is to waste one's time in the sense that matter remains without any conscious utilisation.
5. The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to work consciously to hasten this advent.
6. Little by little it will be revealed to us what this new species must be, and meanwhile the best course is to consecrate oneself entirely to the Divine.

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<sup>171</sup> The Mother, *To Be A True Aurovilian*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, June 13th, 1971.

## Appendix D

### Historical Context of Education in Auroville

It is not in the scope of this survey review to provide extensive contextual and historical information regarding Auroville's educational experiments. What follows is a brief overview; the preface and glossary of schools offer some additional indications, and readers are recommended to consult Heidi Watts' *Little by Little: The Evolution of Schooling in Auroville 1966-1980, Part I*, for historical information on Auroville's education, and the Auroville website's "Education & Research" page and SAIER<sup>172</sup> *Annual Report* for more detailed information regarding current schools and educational initiatives.

Auroville's first community settlement, Aspiration, had a school (started in 1971 under the Mother's aegis) for the first young Aurovilians living on the barren plateau where Auroville was to be established, as well as those still residing in Pondicherry close to the Ashram, and local Tamil children from the neighboring villages. After Mother passed away in 1973, the relationship between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society – a not-for profit research institute Mother had established in 1960 that acted as the legal umbrella organization for Auroville<sup>173</sup> – became difficult and disruptive for the community. The socio-psychological climate of this period was inimical to maintaining regular schooling, let alone encouraging of its evolution, and Aspiration school closed in 1976, while internal ideological conflicts had resulted in the closure of Last School, the secondary and high school at Aspiration a year prior. Parents organized play groups and kindergarten initiatives, older children and young teenagers gathered in Fertile, an informal 'learning by doing' 'school' lead by a parent. Others went to Udavi, an outreach school founded in the early 1970s as per Mother's direction and intention to offer education to the local population (still in existence today), and yet others to Equals One, an alternative primary school in Pondicherry, or the French government school, the Lycée Français,

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<sup>172</sup> The Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research is the government-funded umbrella organization for educational activities, including schools, within Auroville, and allocates funding for these.

<sup>173</sup> Robert Minor, *The Religious, the Spiritual, and the Secular: Auroville and Secular India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

in Pondicherry. In the late 1970s a 'morning school,' Center Field, was established in Auroville, for children of kindergarten through middle school ages. Thus the 1970s was an ad-hoc, informal, and intermittent period for education, affected by both social and economic constraints, and both internal and external ideological challenges.

The 1980s saw the establishment of Auroville as a separate legal entity from the SAS, the Auroville Foundation, under the Government of India (finalised in 1988), of the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER) in Auroville (in 1984), a government funded umbrella organisation for its educational activities, and, concurrently, of lasting schools in the community. In 1985 the Auroville Kindergarten and Transition School (a primary and secondary school) emerged out of Center School, and in that same year Last School was re-instated as a secondary and high school. Two more outreach schools, New Creation School (now renamed Aikiyam) and Isai Ambalam, catering to the neighboring Tamil population, were also founded in that decade. All are still in existence today.

While Last School was re-established in 1985, and offered 'Free Progress' education beyond secondary schooling, high school education was a concern for Auroville youth and their parents from early years of the community up until the last decade or so; there was either no high school education available in Auroville, or no 'recognised' form of high school education that would guarantee access to higher education outside of Auroville for those raised in the community. Thus throughout the 70s, 80s and 90s, many Aurovilian teenagers who had (usually family) funds available to them for their education attended international boarding schools in Tamil Nadu, such as Kodaikanal International school, while those who were fluent or at least satisfactorily versed in French attended the French Government school in neighboring Pondicherry. In the ten year hiatus between 1975 - 1985, when there was no community high school education available to Aurovilian youth, those who did not have access to outside schools were deprived of established educational opportunity.

Pursuing a formal and accredited education required varying degrees of separation from Auroville, and this was an intensely contradictory choice for anyone

raised in the community with no wish to leave. Some chose to prepare for internationally recognised examinations as independent candidates while remaining in Auroville, appealing to community members for tutoring. As this number of self-motivated and disciplined youngsters grew, the Centre for Further Learning opened in 1997 as a tutoring center. It gradually developed into a formal school, offering a hybrid program of GCSE preparation courses for students wishing an international high school accreditation, and a variety of non-exam based courses. Renamed Future School, it now houses a GCSE examination center on its campus facilities.

The 1990s also saw the opening of another high school, After School, aligned with primarily Indian external accreditations systems (State Board, National Open School, and also British GCSE). It was renamed NESS when it became affiliated with India's Central Board of Secondary Education in 2008. This high school largely serves Tamil teenagers from Auroville's neighbouring villages.

It is important to note that the numbers of non-Indian Aurovilian students leaving for international schools have drastically reduced, while Tamil Aurovilians who previously might have left as early as the last few years of secondary school to join Indian government schools are staying and attending Auroville high schools.

Throughout the years and to the present day, there have regularly been parents and educators dissatisfied with the existing educational options in Auroville, opening for various lengths of time experimental educational alternatives (i.e. Mirramukhi, New School, and more recently The Learning Community). Yet even the schools perceived to be the most 'established' and 'formal' similarly developed from informal attempts, community members and parents volunteering their skills and knowledge, very few of them professionally trained teachers. Thus all of Auroville's educational endeavors can be said to be 'alternative experiments'; they have sought in various ways to provide for the needs of the intentional community's youth while attempting to actualise Mother's vision of integral education.

The survey captures voices of this wide range of experiences.

## Appendix E

### Glossary of Schools Referenced

Ashram School: Sri Aurobindo Ashram School in neighbouring Pondicherry. (Non-Auroville school)

Aspiration School: The first school in Auroville, it was started in 1971 at Mother's urging, for village and Auroville children as well as some who came from Pondicherry. Closed in 1976.

After School: Opened in 1992, in Fraternity, Auroville, offering an academic program, and skills training in accounting and electronics. The school moved to the Last School compound in 1997 offering a purely academic program from 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade using State Board, National Open School and GCSE. In 2008 it became affiliated to the India's Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and changed its name to NESS (New Era Secondary School). Current student population is mostly from the local villages, with some Auroville residents.

Blue Mountain School: Founded in 1961 and located in Ooty Valley in the Nilgiri Hills. A residential school with an alternative approach to education for pre-school through high school. (Non-Auroville school)

Crèche: *See Center School/Kindergarden.*

Center School: Begun in Certitude, Auroville, in 1978 as a 'morning school', it moved in 1979 to Center Field. In early summer of 1985, it split into Kindergarden (which remained on-site) and Transition School.

CFL/Future School: Located in the 'Curd Pots' on the Auroville Last School campus, Center for Further Learning (CFL) opened its doors in January of 1997 as a tutoring center. This learning center grew and evolved and became Future School, a high school of Auroville, in a new location and campus in the Cultural Zone near Transition School, in January 2003, offering a hybrid program of GCSE preparation courses for students wishing an international high school accreditation, and a variety of non-exam based courses. Future school encourages students to forge their own path for progress and develop self-awareness and self-motivation.

Deepanam: After the Auroville school Mirramukhi closed, Deepanam School was eventually opened on that campus in 2006. Deepanam caters to students between the ages of 7 to 14, giving each the opportunity to develop at their own pace and attempting to balance freedom, creativity and joy of learning with responsibility and independence.

Equals One: Equals One was an experimental school founded in Pondicherry by a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It was active in the early years of Auroville and attended by some of its children, especially during periods when there were no schooling options within the community. (Non-Auroville School)

Fertile School: At the beginning of the decade-long Auroville schooling hiatus (1975-1985), Johnny, a parent living in Fertile, Auroville, began home-schooling his children and some of their friends. The initiative grew into an informal 'school' in the early 1980s, characterised by a creative learning-by-doing approach.

Kindergarten: The Auroville Kindergarten began in the early summer of 1985. What had been known as Center School turned into the Kindergarten, while the elementary school which had been there relocated to its permanent location and was named Transition. There are currently up to 15 children in each of 4 class groups, and the children are between 2 1/2 and 6+ years old.

Kodaikanal International School: International boarding school, 1<sup>st</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades, located in Kodaikanal, in the Palani Hills in Tamil Nadu, offering IB. Founded in 1901. (Non-Auroville school)

Kodaikanal Swedish School: Started by the Swedish Church to provide 1<sup>st</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> grade education for Swedish missionaries who had created a settlement in the Kodaikanal area. School closed in 1983. (Non-Auroville school)

Last School: This school has had two incarnations, the earlier was inaugurated in 1971 in Aspiration, and named by Mother. Other buildings/schools planned on the campus were given the names After School I, II, III, and Super School. A Secondary and Higher Secondary level school facility, Last School reopened in 1985 and continues to follow a "Free Progress" approach by inviting students to progressively define their own rigorous program of development. Last School is also known for its arts education, and offers adult learning. In 2014 it relocated to a new facility next to Future School in the Cultural Zone.

Lycée Français: French government school in neighbouring Pondicherry offering the French Baccalaureate program. (Non-Auroville school)

Mirramukhi: Mirramukhi opened in Auroville in July 1989. The school offered a program based on free progress and integral development with strong emphasis on art and subtle senses awareness. It started with a small group of children from 7 to 10 years old and progressively was enlarged to include from 2 to 17 years old. It closed in the year 1998/1999 for children aged 8 and above, and closed permanently in 1999/2000.

New School: A short-lived primary/middle school, opened in the late 1990s and closed in 2000, New School, located in the current Arts and Crafts building of

Transition School served as an Auroville alternative to Transition School for students aged 8-14 who were no longer accepted at Mirramukhi. After Mirramukhi and New School relatively concurrently closed, teachers from New School formed part of Deepanam school, which occupied the previous Mirramukhi campus.

Transition School: Begun in 1985, Transition is a primary and middle school located in Auroville's Cultural Zone, near Future School offering Auroville youth an integral education that aims to develop the mental, emotional, and physical natures, and to open students to their spiritual consciousness. The program is child and process oriented, and the school fosters an atmosphere of protected freedom and harmony in which the Auroville community's multicultural student body develop an understanding that we are citizens of one world.

Udavi School: Opened in 1972 as Auroshika School, one of the first outreach schools near Auroville. It was supported by the Ashram incense factory in Edayanchavadi village and intended by Mother to provide education to the poor children of that village. Covers 1<sup>st</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> grades. The school curriculum includes intellectual as well as physical, vocational and artistic activities, and morning meditation (Auroville Outreach school)

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