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Towards Human Unity: Realising Conscious Communication as Development

Three Case Studies in Auroville, South India

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Dedication

To Courage, Gratitude, Goodness and Peace.

To the Tamils who called me *akka*,
Aurovilians who loved me as their own,
My family, who smiled from a distance,
And my friends, who made this place home.

To the red dirt of Auroville,
Its golden sun and blue skies,
The rays of light peeking through the trees,
This is see-you-later, not goodbye.

Merci.
Nandri.
Thank you.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

While this thesis has been submitted in part to complete a Master of Arts in Development Communications, this research focuses more on *communication* in Development than *communications*. Feeling frustrated with the tradition of development communications that has been heavily critiqued for being results- and profit-driven, losing sight of the people whom the capital-D institution of Development is meant to serve, my interests have always leaned towards people-oriented communication in Development. Particularly, I seek to explore the role of interpersonal relationships, subjective experience and the question of what it means to "develop." Therefore, the subject of Communication for Development has taken greater precedence in my studies.

After two visits to the universal, intentional township of Auroville in South India, I was intrigued by the idea of alternative communities and their contributions to sustainable development. More specific to the case of Auroville, I was inspired by its visionary, Sri Aurobindo, and his philosophy of integral yoga, with its concept of evolving consciousness as a means of realising human unity. A lightbulb moment occurred while re-reading Paulo Freire as I remembered Freire's similar concept of *conscientização*, or consciousness-building, which is both the process and product of his liberating dialogue.

Thus, while the initial research question that inspired this thesis asks what relationship exists between communication and development in practice, already proposing that the process of communicating and developing are one in the same, further exploration of Aurobindo and Freire's ideas inspired the question to evolve to ask what value a deeper understanding of consciousness can bring to this proposal. Framed by the philosophical vision of Auroville, which is inspired by Aurobindo's integral yoga, a final question emerged to examine the relationship between consciousness and communication and how this relationship supports individual and collective development. These questions guided six months of field work in Auroville, which was spent observing participatory development programmes at three community-based organisations and connecting the lived experiences of key informants with the theory proposed by Aurobindo and Freire. The results of the study illustrate development in practice to be an opportunity for individual and collective transformation embodied in a process of what I conceptualise to be conscious communication, a communication intentionally aware of self, others and the greater reality of the world, which is built on perspective-building, developing an understanding of the self, and connecting with others.

Keywords: communication, development, consciousness, Paolo Freire, Sri Aurobindo, Auroville,

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Abbreviations

AVAG	Auroville Village Action Group
AVAT	Auroville Village Action Trust
BPL	Below poverty level
C4D	Communication for development
CBO	Community-based organisation
GoI	Government of India
ICS	Indian Civil Service
MHM	Menstrual hygiene management
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NLM	National Livelihood Mission
NVC	Non-violent Communication
PLF	Panchayat-level Federation
SAS	Sri Aurobindo Society
SEDAB	Sustainable Enterprise Development in the Auroville Bioregion
SGSY	Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana
SHG	Self-help Group
SLI	Sustainable Livelihood Institute
SMCR	Sender-message-channel-receiver
SPCTN	State Planning Commission Tamil Nadu
TNCDW	Tamil Nadu Corporation for the Development of Women
TNRLM	Tamil Nadu Rural Livelihood Mission
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization
VOA	Voice of America

LITERATURE REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: Introducing the Relationship Between Communication and Development

This chapter will introduce the relationship between communication and d/Development which initially inspired the fieldwork through a literature review of Development theories and their relevant approaches to development communications. Later sub-chapters will discuss the limitations and opportunities of these approaches, particularly given the nuanced difference between communication and communications, and will finally propose the concept of communication as development.

1.1 A Brief History of Development and Development Communications

Today, many recognise the critical role communications play in Development, and as a result, development communications is an important field to understand and practice. Development communications skills are essential for the conceptualisation, planning, implementation and evaluation of projects. Its interdisciplinary nature, which draws upon teachings from anthropology, sociology, adult education and other subjects (Mefalopulos, 2008), distinguishes itself as an evolving field of theory and practice that is subject to the changing conditions and needs of Development as an institution.[1] It emerged as a more

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[1] Institution can be defined as "any collectively accepted system of rules (procedures, practices) that enable us to create institutional facts," which are "the collective assignment of a status" (Searle, 2005:21-2). Therefore, Development as an institution is a constructed system of rules, procedures and practices that enable us to create institutional facts about which societies are "developed" or not, how development can take place and who can make this distinction. Searle notes this is a subjective process of assignment built on individual point of view and the dynamic of power that allows the assignment and is created through the assignment. Thus, "institutional" Development is written in this text with a capital D to differentiate it from development, the process of developing, to acknowledge this understanding of how Development as institution is structured, organised and represented, which may be different than how it is actually practiced and experienced. An "institutionalised approach" to Development is therefore one implemented by the aforementioned socially-created system. Thus, this text recognises major political and economic powers has having institutionalised Development in the form of creating large organisations like the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and developing their respective mandates through the lens of the "developed" and "undeveloped" status assignment.

formalised separate field of study in the past five decades, though it is not new to question which method(s) of communication is or are most effective for any given development project. However, the complexity of the question is further compounded by the often-misunderstood distinction between *communication*, the human process of "creating, interpreting, and negotiating meaning" (Corey, 2019) through information-sharing and knowledge-building, and *communications*, the methods and media used to do so and/or the products of that meaning-making process (Croucher and Cronn-Mills, 2014). This thesis, for example, will be submitted in part to complete a Master of Arts in Development *Communications*—though as the text will illustrate, the research is more concerned with *communication*, and the difference between the two is critical. However, given that development communications has been the most frequently used name for the overall field concerning the relationship between communication(s) and d/Development, this initial literature review continues to use the same term (but will also demonstrate its problematic limitations).

One of these limitations is that current Development practice has only slowly come to appreciate the value of true communication in development communications. Approaches to both that are dialogic, participatory and inclusive have been recognised to be the most effective in facilitating sustained social change and progress (Mefalopulos, 2008). Yet early approaches to development communications did not grasp communication as the interactive tool many view it as today. Mefalopulos's perception of communication as more than "raising awareness, informing, persuading, or changing behaviour" and also about "listening, exploring, understanding, empowering, and building consensus" (ibid: xii) offers two understandings of communication which have framed the conceptualisation and practice of development communications. Servaes (2008a) refers to these two models—the diffusion/mechanistic and participatory/organic paradigms—as extremes on each end of the development communications

spectrum.[2] These paradigms not only reflect the communications methods used in practice, but also the attitudes that frame understandings of Development and therefore influence the approach to it. Thus, it is useful to start this research by exploring these two paradigms and understanding of the course Development as an institution has taken over the past 70 years, and indeed, where it might go in the future. I will not explain these theories in depth because many other authors have already done so (see Mefalopulos, 2008; Mefalopulos and Tufte, 2009; Servaes, 2008a; Servaes and Milkhao, 2008; Waisbord, 2001). More discussion on the implications of these different approaches is explored in chapters 1.2 and 1.3.

1.1.1 The Modernisation, or Dominant, Paradigm

Modernisation largely defined the institutionalised approach to Development from the 1940s to the 1960s. Its ideology can be first traced back to post-Second World War foreign policy doctrines mainly from wealthier countries in the Global North.[3] For example, U.S. President Truman's 1949 inauguration speech, with its emphasis on aiding the progress of "underdeveloped" countries, launched a formal initiative on behalf of the United States and allies in the newly formed United Nations to help the world recover from the economic and social devastation experienced during the war-ravaged first half of the century. The main concept of the dominant paradigm is that "all societies … evolve to a common point: the modern society," with this society being one that removes the "obstacles of traditional societies" including the "attitudes of 'backward' people" and their cultures (Servaes and Milkhao, 2008:159). The modernisation paradigm assumes so-called "underdeveloped" countries can be developed by adopting the same pathway of industrialisation, liberalisation and privatisation

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[2] The diffusion/mechanistic model is more commonly referred to as the modernisation or dominant paradigm. This text will do the same.
[3] This text uses the terms Global North and Global South to differentiate between areas of geopolitical power. The Global North can be understood to include North America and Western Europe, including Russia; the Global South includes the rest of the world.

previously taken by the wealthier countries in the Global North. Modernisation equates progress to economic, material and technological growth and encourages traditional or "backward" societies to be like those in the Global North (Waisbord, 2001). In the modernisation paradigm, this progress is not process-oriented but instead goal-oriented by being "directional and cumulative… predetermined and irreversible … progressive … [and] imminent" (Servaes, 1995:137).

Daniel Lerner's 1958 book, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, played a pivotal role in defining this institutionalised approach to Development. It also launched the beginning of more formal studies on communications as a means of achieving Development goals, which started to shape the field of development communications. One of these communications, in Lerner's case, was the promotion of pro-American propagandist information worldwide through the "Voices of America" (VOA) radio programme during the World War II and the Cold War. VOA was considered to be a huge success at the time and embodied the goal of institutions to speak to—and therefore influence—mass audiences, "leading" them to modernity. Methodologically, the programme and others like it are based on Lasswell's 1948 theory of linear communication and the Shannon and Weaver (1949) model, which determine four factors for the transmission of information: asking who (the first factor) says what (the second factor) in which channel (the third factor) and to what effect (the fourth and final factor). These theories emphasise the role of mass media as the channel through which actors can deliver messages to a passive, receptive audience. For example, Rogers's (1962) work on the "diffusion of innovations" relies on the linear model to transmit information and technology to an audience who is then automatically assumed to accept it. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) also built on this concept in the two-step model, which suggests the influence of mass media can be extended through local "opinion leaders" who, as respected and influential members of their respective communities, can share information from mass media with others

on a more personal level. Thus, the type of development communications used in the modernisation paradigm heavily relies on mass media like radio and television to transmit information from authorities to the public.

By the 1970s, this approach to development communications—and the type of Development it supported—was facing growing criticism due to its lack of expected results. At the time, critics of the linear model argued that these "silver bullet" theories ignored critical cultural, social and historical contexts, the concept of free will, the influence of community ties and opinion leaders, and the value of interpersonal communication. In short, they argued the methodological framework of diffusion "contradicts the reality" of the world (Beltrán, 1974). In communication terms, a linear mode of communication is monologic, meaning there is no opportunity for feedback from the audience to reach the speaker. Ironically, the mere idea of monologue is counterintuitive to the definition of communication, which is now understand to be much more dynamic and is "rarely as neat and tidy as the linear model would suggest" (Corey, 2019). However, the monologic model reflects this type of mid-century thinking and embodies the attitudes towards Development which defined the era. Now, as understandings of communication have evolved, we can see development communications has as well.

1.1.2 Redistributing Power in the Participatory Paradigm

A growing response in opposition to the modernisation paradigm gained momentum in the 1970s to the 1990s, which saw a turn towards the participatory paradigm within the Development field. This paradigm is defined by its emphasis on the involvement of the individuals and communities in the conceptualisation and implementation of initiatives designed to improve their lives. Whether participation is a means or an end—or both—is at the centre of many theoretical and practical discussions. In practice, this question can be approached from a social movement perspective or a project-based or institutional perspective

(Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009) resulting in different methodologies and implementations. Still, consensus generally finds that participation is first and foremost people-focused and process-versus-product-oriented, meaning that, unlike the modernisation paradigm, participation is built from the bottom of the social hierarchy (among the masses) and creates an upward movement of change (towards institutions of power). Moving into the participatory paradigm, the view on development communications became "more concerned with process and context … on the exchange of 'meanings,' and on the importance of this process, namely, the social relational patterns and social institutions that are the result of and are determined by the process" (Servaes, 2008a:21). Servaes's definition aligns well with Corey's definition of communication as a process of creating meaning, and similarly, dialogic approaches are "more indicated in achieving mutual understanding, building trust, and and generating knowledge, leading to better results" than monologic ones uncovering, and are therefore used more in dynamic social change movements and community-level initiatives (Mefalopulos, 2008:25).

This focus on working from the bottom-up creates a stark juxtaposition between participatory and modernisation methods and highlights growing support for less institutionalised, more localised concepts of Development. This is not to say one method happened independent the other; before they gained popularity in the 1970s, participatory initiatives were being implemented at the same time as modernisation projects. However, they received little widespread fanfare, given they occurred mostly in rural areas in the Global South and without the support of large intergovernmental organisations. These initiatives were mostly small-scale community development projects which focused on gathering information from locals and targeting response strategies to their identified needs. They also focused less on the economic aspects of Development and more on issues of social and environmental justice. At the time, Rogers (1976) defined this "new" Development as "a widely participatory process of social change … intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including

greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment" (225). Fuglesang (1975) called it a self-sufficient Development—speaking to the need for a shift in power from institutions to the hands of the people whose lives Development was designed to impact. Both of these insights touch on the idea of empowerment, which is a significant, if not primary, value of this approach to development. Like "Development," "empowerment" does not have one set definition, though one that is widely supported today comes from Narayan-Parker: "Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (2002:14). This definition, with its particular focus on the genuine ability for people to change the circumstances that define their lives, is essentially the purpose of participation. It can be derived from the methodology of rural community development projects in the Global South which inspired the larger shift towards the participatory paradigm, especially the work of one these projects' leaders in particular—an adult educator named Paulo Freire.

Working with poor rural and urban communities in Brazil, Freire was an advocate for the empowerment of people whose potential, livelihoods and well-being were limited, if not directly harmed, by the institutions and practices associated with modernity. Born in Brazil in 1921, he experienced extreme poverty as a child. Reflecting on this experience, he writes, "I didn't understand anything because of my hunger. I wasn't dumb. It wasn't lack of interest. My social condition didn't allow me to have an education" (Gadotti, 1994:5). As a result of this upbringing, Freire thus became interested in the concept of education not just as an institution, but as a process of building personal awareness about one's lived experiences. As an educator, his work helping illiterate adults learn to read made him a celebrated figure in Brazil until a military coup in 1964 turned state sentiment against him and he was imprisoned for treason. In exile, Freire started to write and share his unique pedagogy with the world. His major text, *The*

Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), has been incredibly influential in shaping a participatory approach to Development and social change. He is often referred to as the father of the participatory paradigm and he remains a source of inspiration for educators, social justice advocates and researchers, like me, today.

Figure 1: Paolo Freire
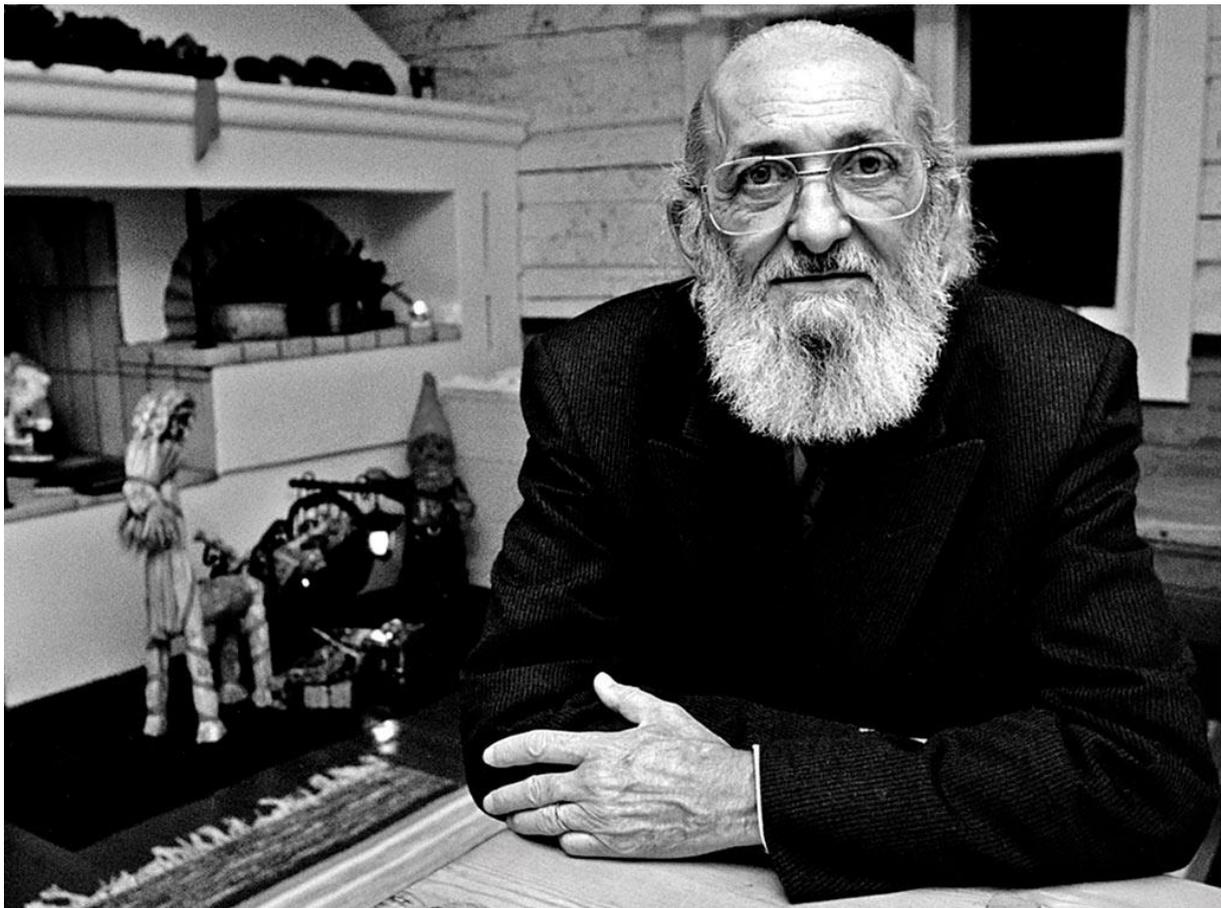
Centario Paolo Freire.

However, Freire does not often use the term "participatory" to describe his approach. Instead, for Freire, his method of social change is based on his concept of psycho-social liberation, the ultimate aspiration of which is restoring the humanity of the dehumanised— those whose humanity, or personal potential, has been robbed by structural and systemic inequality. For Freire, dehumanisation occurs both in a material sense and a personal one. By creating conditions and taking direct actions which deprive individuals and communities of

resources and opportunity, society limits the individual from reaching their full potential, disallowing them to neither survive nor thrive. The reinforcement of social conditions that drive inequality and disempower the masses dampens the vibrancy of human life by impacting the individual and community well-being and liberty. In Freire's work, conditions of oppression can therefore be broadly defined as when the context "prevents people from being more fully human" (1970:57). Importantly, in that sense, it is not only the disadvantaged who are the oppressed, but the oppressors themselves as well, the ones who benefit from the oppression of others. They too are victims of a socially constructed system which leads them to devalue human life, making them less human, for "No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so" (ibid:85). As a result, Freire is critical of the institutional concept of Development for supporting the modern geopolitical and economic system responsible for the oppression of minorities and the poor and the negative impacts their well-being: "It is essential not to confuse modernization with development" (ibid:161) he writes frankly, reflecting on the failed projects in Latin America lead by major institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Instead, he stood for a more radical approach which placed power in the hands of the masses and advocated for their ability to not just participate in their liberation from oppression but to lead it themselves. Ascroft and Masilela make a succinct summarising argument of Freire's philosophy: "If peasants [the disempowered] do not control or share control of the processes of their own development, there can be no guarantee that it is their best interest that is being served" (1994:282).

For Freire, the task of escaping oppression is of one of "unity for liberation" (1970:147) —a reconciliation to "restore the humanity" between and of the oppressed and the oppressors, and the system of power that designates and labels them as such (ibid:44). This assignment is the product of the social dynamics of power and exclusion. Reconciliation is only possible by placing the experiences of the oppressed and the oppressors in dialogue with each other. Freire

writes dialogue is "the encounter between men in order to name the world" (ibid:137), naming the world meaning owning, or having control and responsibility of one's experiences; using one's voice to willingly share them; and reflecting on the voices of others and how they may impact one's own life. Dialogue is a therefore practice of "voice, the principle of action-reflection-action and horizontal communication" between peers (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009:11). For Freire, this is the only way to overcome dehumanisation: "Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation" of this act of exclusion (1970:88). He also stresses the two-way nature of this dialogue: those in positions of authority must humble themselves and understand their role in the system of oppression to be able to listen to and understand the voices of the oppressed.

From a theoretical perspective, Freire's idea of dialogue is deeply embedded within concepts of social inclusion and exclusion, liberation, and pedagogy, which will be explored in more depth during the establishment of the theoretical background for the research in Chapter 2.2. However, practically, Freire's work also aligns with what we simply understand communication to be, which is why it has flourished as a development communications paradigm. Nora Quebral—the mother of development communication (ORECOMM, 2011)—defines communication as a "reciprocity of thought" (Quebral, 2002; as quoted in Quarry and Ramirez, 2009:35) agreeing with the distinction Freire creates between one-way information transmission (what he calls "extension") and two-way information-sharing (dialogue). Thus, the concept of participation has its roots in Freire's dialogue and his call to liberate the voices of the socially silenced. Participation is therefore "not just the exchange of information and experiences: it is also the exploration and generation of new knowledge aimed at addressing situations that need to be improved" (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009:17). It is thus effective because it actively involves the people whose lives are meant to be impacted by Development.

Erskine Childers, known for passionately advocating for participation at the institutional level in several United Nations departments in the 1970s, lauded its critical purpose in these words:

> "If you want development to be rooted in the human beings who have to become the agent of it as well as the beneficiaries, who will alone decide on the kind of development they can sustain after the foreign aid has gone away, then you have got to communicate with them, you have got to enable them to communicate with each other … No innovation, however brilliantly designed and set down in a project plan of operations, becomes development until it has been communicated" (as quoted in Colle, 2008:101-2; my emphasis).

As a result, translating this concept of dialogue into development communications means that participatory communications are often built on opportunities for dialogic exchange and collective inquiry. Two of the most well-known participatory methods are Fals Borda's (1987) participatory action research, and Chambers's (1987) Participatory Rural Appraisal. Both are approaches to information-gathering, project design and implementation that consider common people as the experts of their own lives and thus designate them the key resource persons for any project—radical concepts in the mid-century Development field that had traditionally relied on the input of academics and policymakers. Other tactics also speak to the importance the paradigm places on localising efforts in culture and context. Songs, dances, legends, art and other elements that remain highly valuable parts in communities' traditions and cultures are often used as a means to communicate. Edutainment (educational entertainment) methods like Theatre of the Oppressed and PhotoVoice do use traditional media like theatre and photography, but are structured to deeply involve the experiences of participants.

Of course, the participatory paradigm and its communications are not without their critics. Servaes (2008b) says it plainly: "authentic participation, though widely espoused in the literature, is not in everyone's interest" (202). One challenge of putting participatory theory into practice is it often takes more time, energy, travel, complex organisation and training than a top-down model. In that sense, dialogue "conflicts with the spirit of modern achievement-

oriented societies" (Hamelink, 2002:8). It is an intentional, slow process that does not often suit the interests of practitioners pressured by a demand for results, profits and efficiency (Quarry and Ramirez, 2009). Moreover, concern has risen as the ideals of participation have started to become buzzwords attached to all types of engagement with stakeholders. Some of these types of engagement do not share the same values of the participation paradigm but do want to be positively associated with it. Mefalopulos (2008) and Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) warn against a generalisation of participation, and the authors' typography of participation from passive to active demonstrates the different ways participatory theory can be applied.

Regardless, participation in its many forms has been and continues to be celebrated, which is why it remains a central concept as Development and development communications continue to evolve.

1.1.3 Interpretations of the Participatory

The new millennium offered an opportunity for other interpretations of the participatory paradigm to gain momentum, building on the ideas of Freire and adapting to rapidly changing global and local landscapes. These concepts look to the future as an opportunity to create and follow different strategies from those of the past, sometimes radically. This thesis will not define these ideas fully but notes their relevance to the discussion of what the purpose of Development is or can be. For Melkote and Steeves (2001), Development is about improving conditions of living, and another Latin American figure, anthropologist Arturo Escobar, says this can be done not through "development alternatives" but "alternatives to development" (1995). Some of these alternative ideas include Development as freedom (Sen, 1999), Another Development (Fuglesang, 1975; Quarry and Ramirez 2009), a post-development pluriverse (Kothari et al. 2019), and an ethnographic or cultural turn (da Costa, 2010; Hemer and Tufte, 2017; Sen, 2004). Regardless of the terminology, the common thread between these different

ideas is the understanding that Development is a complex, humanistic intersection of economic, political, cultural, social and personal theories, and not just a matter of achieving material growth.

What do these ideas mean for development communications? Importantly, all of these concepts are focused on improving the well-being of the individual and communities, meaning the approach to Development is becoming more localised and recognising the essential value of individual participation and collective engagement. Participatory communication therefore remains a vital foundation.

But as Development theory expands, what will development communications in turn look like? "Another communication" for Another Development, for example, favours "multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, deinstitutionalization, interchange of sender-receiver roles (and) horizontality of communication links at all levels of society" (McQuail, 1983:97). Tufte (2017) says this will be a citizen perspective, drawing on different communications tactics available today like social media, digital organising and citizen journalism. Given the rapidly changing nature of today's communications landscape, the opportunities for growth in the development communications field are plentiful.

1.2 The Problem with Development "Communications"

However, despite the many exciting potentials for the development communications field to evolve, we might not see significant growth as one might hope. As seen in the previous subchapter, approaches to development communications have shifted based on the similarly evolving definition of Development, reflecting the dominant type of thinking of the era in which they thrive (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). The turn towards the participatory paradigm has been a positive one that mirrors a similarly positive turn in attitudes towards Development. However, despite widespread recognition of the flaws of the modernisation paradigm, there is no doubt it

still continues to influence Development today, even in participatory initiatives. As "the old paradigm is very much alive" (Gumucio-Dagron, 2008:70), the problem with development communications remains that many tactics are still "not meant to communicate" but to "inform, conform and deform" their audience of "passive receivers" (ibid). Quarry and Ramirez's (2009) book, *Communication for Another Development: Listening Before Telling*, is full of anecdotes illustrating this phenomenon in real-life, all of which demonstrate the problematic nature of development communications as still being influenced by modernisation, allowing the same problems—like being too product-oriented and pressed for results—continue to persist. Servaes (2008b) says that while today the "revitalized modernization perspective" acknowledges its errors of the past and seeks to remedy them, it still is confronted with significant challenges in the field (218). Additionally, it is difficult to let go of the modernisation paradigm and its problems because the participatory paradigm still faces significant opposition from practitioners, particularly mainstream policymakers, who view it as too idealistic and difficult to implement, despite evidence of its effectiveness. Quarry and Ramirez point out the irony in this type of practice, saying we have "so much communication, [yet] so little understanding" (11). This statement is true, but I would argue the irony is one layer deeper: the real truth is we have so much of what we think is communication, but is actually extension, to use Freire's phrase. We think we are truly communicating, but instead we are just transmitting. That's why we have so little understanding.

Acknowledging this problem within the field is complicated by the simple fact that different situations might require different methods of development communications, for any good communicator knows that understanding real conditions is just as important as theorising or strategizing. Figure 2 demonstrates the different features and reasons why one might use a monologic or dialogic mode of communication. Monologic approaches are appropriate to use in health emergencies, for example, when it is in the public interest to share information quickly

and directly. This point highlights the important nuance that Development and development communications are "grey zones." Quarry and Ramirez summarise this complexity as an ambiguous and fluid experience between definitive but unattainable ends; in their words, one does not spend much time in very good or extremely bad situations, but most of the time just works "somewhere in the middle" (57). The lack of clear black-and-white problems in the world and the respective lack of black-and-white answers—or one-size-fits-all solutions, to reference Easterly (2006)—result in layers of complexity requiring dynamic navigation: "The development problem is a relative one," writes Servaes (2008b); just like how "no one society can contend that it is 'developed' in every respect" (205), no one form of development communications can be used in every scenario. In a way, this confirms the problematic nature of modernisation and its "neat and tidy" linear model because it does not adapt to the nuances of reality. It is clear therefore that Rogers spoke too soon when he succinctly declared in 1976 it seemed "safe to conclude that the dominant paradigm has 'passed'" (231).

Figure 2: The Main Features of Communication Modes

	MONOLOGIC (one-way communication)		DIALOGIC (two-way communication)	
	Communication to Inform	Communication to Persuade	Communication to Explore	Communication to Empower
Main purpose	Raise awareness, increase knowledge	Promote attitude and behavior change	Assess, probe and analyze issues, prevent conflicts	Build capacities, involve stakeholders
Main model of reference	One-way (monologic)	One-way (monologic)	Two-way (dialogic)	Two-way (dialogic)
Preferred methods and media	Predominant use of mass media	Predominant use of media	Heavy use of interpersonal method	Use of dialogue to promote participation

Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009).

As a result, we cannot say that as a field, development communications has fully shifted to the participatory paradigm in both theory *and* practice. When we use the term "development *communications*," even in the participatory paradigm in which we can generally say we work,

we are still centralising product (*communications*) over process (*communication*). I find this to be problematic for two reasons. First, it creates confusion among academics, policymakers, project planners, practitioners, communicators and stakeholders about the purpose of communication(s) in Development. As a result, the confusion encourages the modernisation theory and its top-down attitude to continue to impact Development as the dominant approach to development communications, despite knowledge that monologic communications are generally not particularly useful or appropriate in facilitating sustainable social change. As a researcher and communicator, knowing that participation, communication and dialogue are largely more effective, I then beg the question: why are we still so focused on development communications and not the practice of communication? I am not radical in posing this question, but I do not think it is asked enough. This critique is what has inspired my general interest in communication for development (C4D) rather than development communications, but also in my curiosity around how to change and improve the field.

1.3 A New Approach: Communication as Development

Given the relationship between Development and communication(s) that has evolved over the years but remains problematic, I propose that in order to better understand what exactly Development is—and indeed what it means to "develop"—from the human perspective that the participatory paradigm put into focus, we need to centralise communication (the process) as a foundational experience of development (also the process), rather than a separate tool. Different approaches to the relationship between communication and Development have already tried to do so (e.g. C4D, communication for social change, behavioural and social change communication), but they all still involve some sort of use of communication as a tool in the process of social change and sustainable development (see Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada 1998; Mefalopulos, 2008; Rockefeller Foundation, 1997; Servaes, 2008b; Waisbord, 2001). The

difference in an approach that centralises communication *as* development instead of a tool *of* Development is the concept of developing is synthesised with the concept of communicating. When one develops, one communicates, and vice versa. Three key points explain why this is proposal is important:

First, we must remember why the shift away from modernisation and monologic communication occurred in the first place. The growth of the participatory paradigm illustrates support for a Development that puts the power in the hands of the people who can then decide if and how they want to progress. The emergence of new interpretations of this paradigm also tells us that our idea of what Development is continues to change in response to current needs, past practices and future aspirations of people and communities. Second, we must also remember that participation is celebrated because it has a positive impact on individuals by facilitating feelings of empowerment, responsibility, inclusion and agency. Finally, we must look at the fundamental reason why participation is both effective and sustainable. There is a reason why Freire called his work *The* Pedagogy *of the Oppressed* (my emphasis), and a reason why he, an adult educator, has been placed at the centre of the participatory movement. His work was not about the Development of the Oppressed, the Saving of the Oppressed or the Relief of the Oppressed. Instead, it was about the pedagogy—the method and practice of teaching. Freire understood that at the very genesis of improving the lives and situations of the disempowered is gaining a fundamental understanding of one's relationship to their circumstances of oppression and those who also experience it. And this understanding—this process of learning—he said, is only possible through dialogue.

With dialogue, one can develop a critical understanding of their experiences and those of others—including ones that they do not yet even know exist. A commonly cited concept in participatory communication is the Johari Window (see Figure 3), a tool used for building understanding in interpersonal communication. From a first-person point of view (a me-versus-

you or us-versus-them perspective), the Johari Window points out areas of shared knowledge between ourselves and those with whom we communicate, as well as spaces where we might know something the others do not and vice versa. Importantly, the Johari Window also acknowledges space for shared unawareness—a "blind spot" of non-understanding. The Johari Window points out the value of dialogue in both developing knowledge and sharing it, and the potential for understanding that can be created as a result. It helps affirm how participatory communication, through its foundation in dialogue, is in essence a process of learning and unlearning; an educational experience which sees all actors as able to educate others about their own experiences and, in turn, be able to learn from others as well. "Without dialogue," Freire says simply, "there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (1970:93).

Figure 3: The Johari Window

Window 1: Open Knowledge *What we know and they know*	**Window 3:** Their Hidden Knowledge *What they know and we do not know*
Window 2: Our Hidden Knowledge *What we know and they do not know*	**Window 4:** The Blind Spot *What neither we nor they know*

Adapted from Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009).

Participatory practices are thus largely effective because they facilitate an actual, dynamic process of true communication which leads to learning and understanding. When we communicate with each other, we learn about each other. When we learn about each other, we can understand each other. When we can understand each other, we can support each other. As Kasemsuk (2011) writes,

> "It can be said that the community will develop if members in the community communicate with each other, exchange opinions and conduct activities to reach their goals. Therefore, interpersonal communication within the community is a significant mechanism to drive community power to become a 'strengthening community.'"

As Development continues to focus more on local issues and community-level impacts, understanding how communication and d/Development are linked, instead of how to use communications to support Development, is essential to drive the community strengthening that Kasemsuk references. Thus, I argue that it is not our capacity to build roads, schools or hospitals that reflects our ability to "develop." Nor is it our capacity to celebrate culture, preserve languages or conserve natural resources. It is first and foremost our ability to communicate with, learn from and understand other people, communities, and their individual and collective experiences. In full, we should not be focused on how we communicate for Development, but how we communicate as a process of developing. Quarry and Ramirez (2009) share a similar sentiment, that "it is not communication that makes good development but good development that contains good communication" (2). This vision of reframing development as a communicative process can be strongly supported by institutions and their use of communications with appropriate tools for engaging actors in conversation, but the concept of communication— expressing ourselves, engaging with others, having dialogues, listening and understanding—should be the essence of what we consider "developing" to be. Hamelink (2002) agrees: it is our "capacity for social dialogue … the capacity to talk to each other across boundaries of culture, religion and language" that should be the priority, even if that dialogue has no short-term or certain outcome. To do so, we have to reconsider the relationship we have traditionally assumed exists between Development and communication(s).

This is the concept I sought to explore at the beginning of my fieldwork in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, South India. While engaging with three community-based organisations (CBOs) in rural villages, it emerged in much clearer terms how important the fundamental ability to express oneself, relate to others, and learn from their experiences is in order to connect with others and encourage positive community development. From this observation, it was very clear that the relationship between communication and development in practice that I sought to study

was indeed not a relationship, but a single experience. Communication as development revealed itself to be a dynamic process of learning and unlearning—of continuous dialogue—about the world, its peoples and cultures, and not the means used to reach ends that it is often thought to be in the tradition of institutional Development and development communications.

Interestingly, during the research period it also became clear how the particular setting of Auroville, the township created in the vision of Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo, impacted this understanding universal of communication as development. Though Auroville was originally selected as the research setting for its uniqueness as an ecovillage engaged with sustainability, including the activities of many development organisations, and my personal proximity to it, the development of the theoretical framework for the research quickly revealed that this choice was more meaningful than originally perceived. With Aurobindo's philosophy of integral yoga influencing the evolution of Auroville, its surrounding villages and the many organisations that have emerged from the township, an evaluation of integral yoga and its exploration of consciousness and human unity was necessary to understand the sociocultural context of the CBOs, their stakeholders and their programmes. Fascinatingly, I discovered that a clear connection exists between Aurobindo's philosophy and that of Freire, centring on empowerment, liberation and dialogue.

Understanding integral yoga in alignment with the participatory paradigm added a layer of complexity to the research and, through the evolution of this comparative theory and the observance of practices at the CBOs which supported it, ultimately allowed this thesis to arrive at the concept of "conscious communication," which embodies the synthesized relationship between communication and development proposed here.

The next section will introduce Auroville and integral yoga to expand on this theoretical phenomenon in greater detail.

CONTEXTUAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section will introduce the setting for this study, the universal township of Auroville in Tamil Nadu, South India, and its significance in relation to the initial proposal concerning communication as development. A theoretical framework for the research, expanding on the literature review in previous chapters, will be illustrated through a reading of Paulo Freire and Sri Aurobindo. Connecting Aurobindo's integral yoga and Freire's liberating dialogue creates a theoretical frame for the research, highlighting the value of selecting Auroville as the research setting and demonstrating the many threads relating consciousness, an important concept for both men, to communication. This final point proved to be most important in the research process by prompting me to explore not only communication as development, but to incorporate Aurobindo and Freire's understandings of consciousness into this exploration. As a result, I was able to conceptualise a definition of "conscious communication" which builds on the values of the participatory paradigm and adds deeper meaning to the process of development through the application of Aurobindo's integral yoga.

Chapter 2: About Auroville, the Universal, Intentional, Experimental Township

Auroville is a city created to physically realise the integral yoga of the late Pondicherry-based philosopher, Sri Aurobindo, and the vision of his collaborator and successor, Mirra Alfassa, known widely as the Mother. The 52-year-old city and its some 3,000 residents[4] are located on the south-eastern coast of India in the state of Tamil Nadu, a few kilometres inland of Pondicherry and 160 kilometres south of Chennai. It aims to "realise human unity," a central

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[4] Official residents of Auroville are members of the Auroville Foundation and are known as Aurovilians. See Auroville Foundation (2019).

tenet of Aurobindo's philosophy, through a variety of means, the most well-known of which is hosting residents from around the world to connect different cultures, languages and lifestyles into one diverse but tight-knit community. Auroville has achieved recognition, including from UNESCO and the Government of India, as the largest, most diverse intentional community and also one of the most successful, in so far as longevity is concerned. Having been founded in 1968, Auroville significantly bypasses the lifespan of other intentional communities; 80 percent of which do not last longer than two years (Clarence-Smith, 2019). When current Indian Prime Minister Narenda Modi visited Auroville for its 50th anniversary in 2018, he commented on the continued value of the township, saying, "Indian society is fundamentally diverse. It has fostered dialogue and a philosophic tradition. Auroville showcases this ancient Indian tradition to the world by bringing together global diversity" (Auroville.org, 2018). The first two sections of this chapter will help familiarise the reader with Auroville by explaining the philosophical background of the city and offering brief introductions to its history and unique "soul." Of more importance, however, is the third section, which justifies the selection of Auroville as the setting for this research by drawing connections between Aurobindo's philosophy, Freire's, and my proposal of communication as development, all of which lays the foundation for my concept of conscious communication that I derived from the field work.

2.1 Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and Integral Yoga

The etymology of Auroville comes from the name of Sri Aurobindo, the Indian poet, philosopher, nationalist and yogi. Aurobindo is one of most renowned Indian philosophers of the 20th century and is celebrated for navigating and reconciling the "ideas of scientific evolution in the West with the philosophical traditions of consciousness and spiritual development of India" (Woiwode and Bhati, 2018:37). This synthesis can be attributed to him having spent his formative years in Britain before returning to India. In 1879, when Aurobindo

was seven years old, his family moved to England to enrol Aurobindo and his siblings in British studies as part of Aurobindo's father's aspiration for his children to join the Indian Civil Service (ICS), the elite civil service body within British-ruled India. Aurobindo completed his schooling as one of the top students in his class and in 1893, he set sail back to India, taking a position in the state service in his hometown of present-day Kolkata, West Bengal.

After growing up in Europe, Aurobindo's return to his native country was marked by significantly less enthusiasm for British rule. Though in public Aurobindo supported the Raj through his role in the state administration, in private he was connecting with nationalist groups and joining the call for an independent India. Notably, his philosophy called for open revolt should pacifist action not have its desired effect, and indeed Aurobindo became a well-known member of extremist groups. Having been arrested and jailed for connection to a bombing during the civil unrest which followed the partition of Bengal, Aurobindo was released from prison in 1909 and headed to Pondicherry, which, as a French territory, protected him from other outstanding British arrest warrants. According to Aurobindo's writings, the year he spent in isolation in prison was a period of spiritual awakening, and upon arriving in Pondicherry, he shed his political aspirations for yogic ones, dedicating himself to philosophy and poetry. Shortly thereafter, in 1914, he would meet a young French woman, Mirra Alfassa, at his home in Pondicherry.

Blanche Rachel Mirra Alfassa was born in 1878 in Paris, France, to a bourgeoisie family with regional ties across Europe, the Middle East and northern Africa. In her many travels with her family, Alfassa became interested in foreign cultures and their concepts of spirituality in particular. Around the same time that Aurobindo was growing into his new political leanings, Alfassa was exploring her own identity, joining a French group Le Mouvement Cosmique and becoming active in Buddhist and Cosmic circles in Paris. Throughout this time, Alfassa wrote

Figure 4: Sri Aurobindo
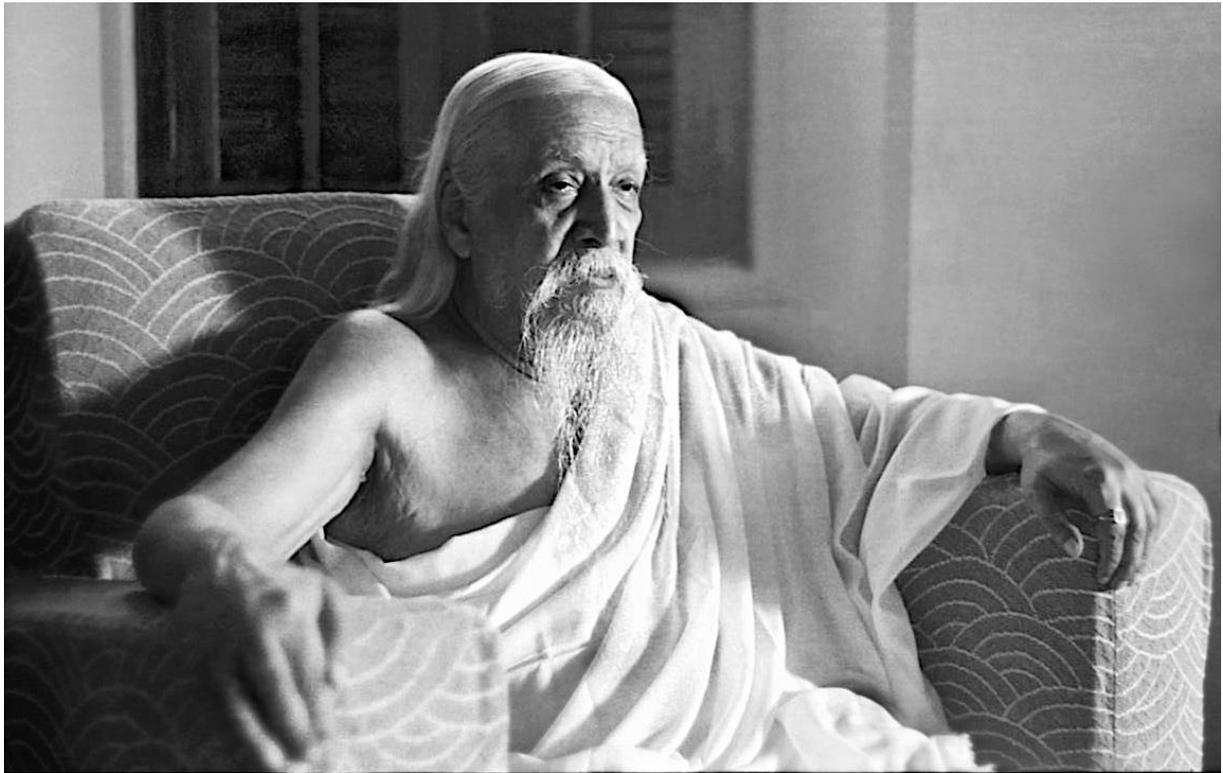
Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Figure 5: The Mother

Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

she was seeing visions of a guru, a Krishna,[5] though was unable to decipher their meanings (Majumdar, 2017:7). In 1914, her husband was vying for a French senate seat in Pondicherry, leading Alfassa to visit India for the first time.

Upon arriving in Pondicherry, the couple immediately set an appointment with Sri Aurobindo. When Aurobindo met Alfassa at his ashram in 1914, there was an immediate connection between the two. According to both, their first meeting was significant and powerful. Alfassa for one described an overwhelming feeling of recognition upon seeing Aurobindo for the first time, realising that he was the Krishna figure she had met so often in her dreams. For Aurobindo, he recognised in Alfassa "an avatar [representation] of the divine power or divine consciousness and force (Shakti), for him identical to the guiding principle of the evolution of the universe," (2012b:64). This is why he started referring to her exclusively as the Divine Mother.

By 1920, Aurobindo and his budding philosophy of integral yoga had gathered a following across India and several of his students had come to live with him. Divorced from her husband and leaving her teenage son in the care of relatives in France, the Mother had settled in Pondicherry at this point to live with Aurobindo as a spiritual collaborator. He placed her in charge of running his home as it slowly started to develop into an ashram. Meanwhile, the two collaborated exclusively on integral yoga. In brief terms—integral yoga will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2.2—integral yoga is Aurobindo's concept of humanity manifesting a divine life in the material world through the upwards evolution of human consciousness. As there are different levels of consciousness in Aurobindo's view, aligned with traditional Vedantic philosophy, ranging from the subconscious to the Supramental truth-Consciousness (Cornelissen, 2004), this yoga is integral because in manifesting a divine consciousness in humankind, the different levels of consciousness are integrated into one, a

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[5] Krishna is a Hindu god.

synthesised *yoga* (Sanskrit for union). It also integrates the four traditional branches of yoga (*karma*, *bhakti*, *rajas* and *jnana*). It is "not a specific physical or psychological methodology. Rather it is a process … [that] seeks to change our psyche inner self and social outer life as a process of global evolution" (White, 2017:10). Thus, the *sadhana* (Sanskrit for spiritual task) of man (or *sadhak*, spiritual aspirant) is to aspire to evolve one's consciousness, creating the yoga between the individual, the material world and humanity with the divine. This would, as a result, push mankind into its next stage of evolution, bringing humanity together in a more harmonious manner.

Aurobindo considers the Supermind to be the highest level of consciousness. In 1926, he announced the descent of this Supermind onto Earth—meaning he himself had reached that level of consciousness. He retreated into solitude to concentrate on it, continuing to only speak with the Mother. When he left his body in 1950, the Mother continued to lead the ashram and develop his integral yoga after his passing, which encouraged the reputation of the ashram ad integral yoga to continue to grow. As the Mother developed Aurobindo's philosophy further, she also started conceptualising the idea of a society which could embody the type of human unity Aurobindo says can be created through practicing integral yoga. This dream would one day be realised in the form of Auroville.

2.2 A Theory of Evolution: Aurobindo and Freire in Conversation

This sub-chapter will draw connections between Aurobindonian philosophy on consciousness-building from his foundational texts with Freire's liberation theory as explained in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. It will critically analyse Aurobindonian philosophy and the ideals of Auroville in relation to the values of participation, particularly from a Freirean perspective, putting into an evolved dialogue two concepts with common values but are presented in different languages. Together, they speak to a larger universal aspiration for human

well-being and connection. While there have been arguments that Aurobindo's philosophy is not religiously neutral and therefore an inappropriate theory to apply to other cultural contexts (McIntosh, 2007), in general many see Aurobindo's philosophy as appealing to non-religious readers because of its "[concern] with the limits of reason and not with its rejection" (Chimni, 2006:198). Therefore, a reading of his text within a secular framework attempts to assuage these concerns.

The section will argue that these connections can inform a radically humanistic approach to facilitating and achieving dialogue and community development as part of my concept of communication as development. I make this connection to help illustrate the value of my choice to set the research in Auroville, a city built to embody the theory that will be laid out here, but also to add a layer of complexity to my exploration of communication by introducing the concept of consciousness. In doing so, I lay the foundation for the concept of conscious communication I was able to derive from field work conducted in Auroville.

2.2.1 Towards Human Unity

To start this comparison, we first acknowledge that both Aurobindo and Freire derived their ideas from their experiences navigating personal circumstances defined by oppression and their observation of its negative impacts on human life. For Aurobindo, this experience was in British-ruled India, and for Freire, it was in the desolate economic conditions of mid-century Latin America. As a result, the framework for their philosophies was built first on a recognition of the man-made or socially created circumstances that impacted their lives, and then on an understanding of the reasons behind those circumstances. However, both Aurobindo and Freire assert that despite living in oppressive conditions that one might have little to no control over, it is possible for individuals to "transform" and "liberate" themselves, in Aurobindo and Freire's words respectively, to escape these conditions of oppression and dehumanisation and restore

their humanity, or become more fully human. Becoming more fully human is a foundational concept for each author, as they speak to a more spiritual, abstract perspective of what is means to be human besides simply existing and breathing. Freire positions his "authentic liberation" as a "process of humanization" (1970:79), humanisation being the remedy to dehumanisation, or "an unnatural living death: life which is denied its fullness" (ibid:171). Similarly, Aurobindo focuses on the progress of humanity, including both the individual and the collective, towards a "life of unity, mutuality and harmony" (1948:1092), as "all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony" (ibid:5). While Aurobindo's work has a more explicit spiritual tone than Freire's, it is also grounded in criticism of the dehumanising structure of modern society. He made clear his dissatisfaction with the current state of the world, writing:

> "Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiral and moral capacity ... [a system of] chaos of clashing mental images, urges of individual and collective physical want and need, vital claims and desires, impulses of an ignorant life-push, hungers and calls for life satisfaction of individuals, classes, nations, a rich fungus of political and social and economic nostrums and notions, a hosting medley of slogans and panaceas for which men are ready to oppress and be oppressed, toil and be killed, to impose them somehow or other by the immense and too formidable means placed at his disposal, in the belief that this is his way out to something ideal" (1948: 1090, my emphases).

His words, rich with imagery and emotion, conclude with an important thesis: the current system of civilisation has led humanity to believe that the "way out to something ideal"— whether that ideal be power, money, success, safety, connection and/or security—must be achieved through a willingness to disregard and destroy human life. This aspiration towards dehumanisation is, for Aurobindo, the source of the world's problems. Thus, like Freire, Aurobindo calls for transformational social change, but says this change must start with the individual broadening their perspective and beginning to understand their own self and how they exist in the world. This relationship between the individual and society must be fully

understood and examined critically in order to improve the life of not just the individual but humankind. Shah and Jacoby (2013) summarise Aurobindo's thoughts succinctly:

> "All progress in human life rests on the relationship between the individual and the society in which he or she lives—from the smaller to the larger aggregates like the family, the community, the tribe, the class, the city-state, the nation, the region, and eventually all of humanity. The importance of the development of an individual in a society is sometimes under-rated. But society cannot progress unless the individual progresses" (xix, my emphases).

Aurobindo's philosophy of integral yoga—and in his vision, Auroville—tasks the individual and humankind with the responsibility of self-discovery and personal growth in order to realise his vision of human unity, in which the values of equality, liberty and fraternity are genuinely realised, embodied and, most importantly, shared among humanity. It echoes Freire's call that the pursuit of full humanity can "only [be carried out] in fellowship and solidarity … It cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed" (1970:85). Thus, both Aurobindo and Freire's philosophies are centrally grounded in concern for the well-being and empowerment of the individual and their experience in the world-system. In order to reach one's true potential and become more fully human, they say one must first and foremost develop a critical awareness and understanding of the reasons for why they have not become fully human. For each author, the key to this transformation or liberation is a process of building awareness, or consciousness. The next sub-chapter will develop this concept.

Figure 6: Statue of Sri Aurobindo at Savitri Bhavan in Auroville.
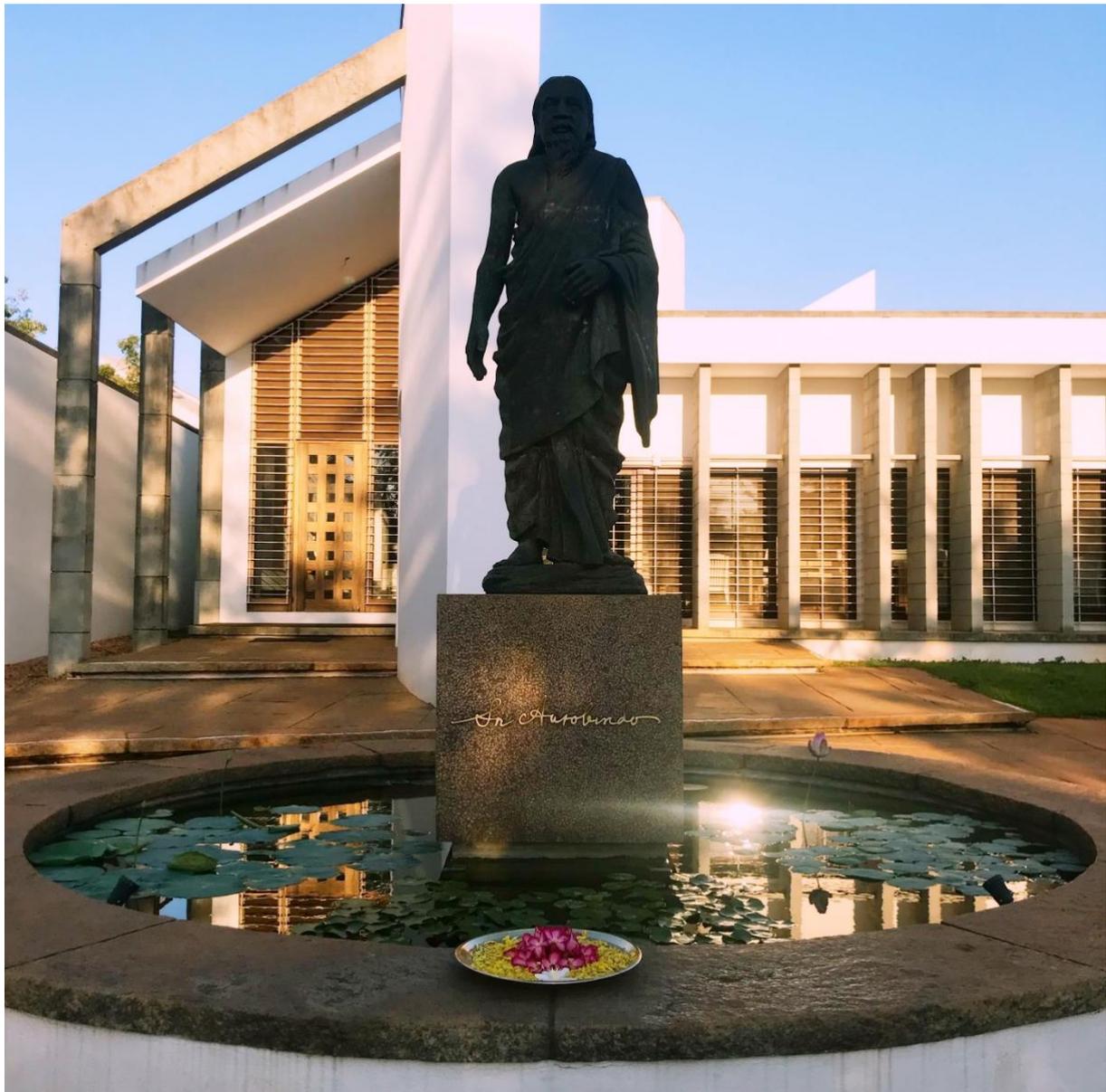
The author.

2.2.2 Defining Consciousness

Consciousness can be difficult to define based on one's personal perspective, but as the field work for this thesis was based in Auroville, which, created in the vision of Sri Aurobindo and his conception of consciousness as it relates to integral yoga, demanded an understanding of Aurobindo's philosophy, my definition finds key inspiration there. Aurobindo's view of

consciousness goes beyond technicalities: in his defining spiritual text, *The Life Divine*, he writes, "Consciousness is usually identified with mind, but mental consciousness is only the human range" (1948:234). His integral yoga says there are several layers of consciousness that humans can evolve to achieve (or not!), ranging hierarchically from subconscious near the bottom (as it exists below or is hidden from mankind's faculty of awareness), to mankind's basic mental consciousness, to higher levels of divine consciousness at the top. Hence, the idea of rising "above" or reaching a "higher" consciousness refers to overcoming the limitations of basic human consciousness. Meanwhile, he offers that a "deeper" consciousness is not necessarily a subconscious, but instead a richer and fuller understanding of the self. The integrality of this yoga does not come from creating the distinctions between these different layers of consciousness. It is not "one thing plus one thing plus one thing plus another thing; it's not one upon another upon another," as a long-time Aurovilian explained to me. "Integral means integrated," they said, meaning that the layers of consciousness are synthesised together as one. Like Freire, who says that consciousness "neither precedes the world nor follows it" (1970:81), Aurobindo says consciousness is "not seen as something produced by the brain or limited to humans, but rather as a fundamental aspect of reality, if not the very essence of it" (Cornelissen, 2004). Reaching higher levels of consciousness happens through an evolution which is often written in Freire and Aurobindo's texts as an "awakening."

This awakening occurs in the same way for both authors. In Freire's terms, to evolve one's consciousness, one realises and owns their "power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (1970:83). Aurobindo writes of "an awakening to the knowledge of the self, the discovery of the self, the manifestation of the self and spirit within us and release of its self-knowledge, self-power, its native self-instrumentation" (1956:187-8). Both of their emphases on knowing the self indicates their shared belief that this awakening starts with personal development. Moreover, as consciousness

evolves, not only does it gain a broader understanding of one's experiences in the world, but it also develops a stronger understanding of itself. Freire tells us this "special characteristic of consciousness" is "being conscious of," or being "turned in upon itself" (79). It is a metaconscious experience wherein we understand "consciousness as consciousness of consciousness," or consciousness being conscious of itself (ibid). Likewise, for Aurobindo this conscious identity is the only "true knowledge—existence, aware of itself" (1919:225).

Thus, consciousness exists simultaneously as two things: it is an immediate awareness of reality and an evolved awareness of how the world works and how one exists within it. It is both an intentional method of "being with the world" and also a "a 'way towards' something apart from itself" (Alvaro Vieira Pinto, as quoted in Freire, 1970:69). The initial awareness of "rational materialism" (Cornelissen, 2004) lays the foundation for this higher consciousness: "the wider we extend and the surer we make our knowledge of the physical world, the wider and surer becomes our foundation for the higher knowledge" (Aurobindo, 1990:11). It is "not only power of awareness of self and things, it is or has also a dynamic and creative energy" (ibid, 2012a:15). Aurobindo says this dynamic energy has the power to bring humanity together, the exact "something apart from itself" Freire draws from Vieira Pinto. For both authors, higher consciousness is key for to reach human unity and collective humanisation. It is "born of a deeper and wider truth of our being" (Aurobindo, 1948:1092), referring to "being" not just the individual but humanity as a whole. For Aurobindo, this "dynamic, ongoing process of consciousness development, [which] at the same time [is] working at the collective level of worldview changes" is what encourages the self and the collective better themselves (Woiwode and Bhati, 2018:39).

The Mother summarised up this concept in simple instructions to disciple: "Shake off all narrowness, selfishness, limitations, and wake up to the consciousness of Human Unity. This is the only way to achieve peace and harmony" (2004, volume 15:59).

2.2.3 Consciousness and Communication as Development

How can we apply these concepts to d/Development its relationship with communication? Of course, Freire's work has been directly drawn to Development, as we can see from the growing momentum of the participatory paradigm and his liberating pedagogy. Aurobindo's philosophy is less well-known in the Development theme, but coupled with Freire's ideas, can further enlighten us. The reading of Aurobindo and Freire together this research presents demonstrates there is a higher perspective on consciousness that is strongly linked to the concept of personal and community development. This next sub-section will argue how we can apply Aurobindo's concepts to Freire's in the field of Development and communication to strengthen the latter's already widely supported philosophy on dialogue and liberation.

We first start with Freire's argument that *conscientização* is the key to liberation. Liberation is needed to exciple the shackles of modern society and the oppression to which we have all fallen victim. Part of this liberation includes liberating consciousness, because, according to Freire, our "oppressive reality absorbs those within it," "[submerging] human beings' consciousness" (1970:51) by "imposing the consciousness of the oppressor onto the oppressed" (47). In short, society prevents true liberation by trapping the disempowered in the consciousness "prescribed" the oppressor, leading them to believe in it and accept it, thereby reinforcing their own experiences of oppression. Thus, he says, the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them" (74) in order to keep the political status quo. This prescription takes away individual agency which therefore dehumanises the individual, causing suffering. As a result, in the process of liberating one's consciousness, *conscientização*, we come to see "the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation" (83), in which one can play an active role. In being not static, of course, the world is open to change.

Aurobindo suggests that one needs to go about this change with intention, which Freire says is the essence of consciousness (1970:79). It must first start with the changed and knowledgeable inner self, which becomes the source of power that can question society's logic (Giri, 1998). This self-reflection must come first because "to hope for a true change of human life without a change in human nature is an irrational and unspiritual proposition" (Aurobindo, 2012a:15). Shah and Jacoby (2013) translate this practically by reading into Aurobindo's critiques of problematic institutions and how he suggests institutional awakening is "not a question of how we can reform the institution[s]" that are flawed, but "how we can change human nature," as the former "would be merely tinkering on the surface [while] leaving the roots untouched" (xiv). Woiwode and Bhati (2018) make the argument that not only is Aurobindo's conception of consciousness key to the evolution of individual people and humanity, but to the "profound cultural paradigm shift that will take us far beyond current notions of sustainable development … on to the pathway of change towards sustainable societies" (37-8). Similarly, Chimni (2006) writes that Aurobindo's philosophy is important for "decolonizing international relations" for three reasons: it is inclusive of the Other, is from a humanity-based perspective, and reconciles humanity's relationship with the spiritual and the material (197). Woiwode and Bhati argue that this shift "begins essentially with a cognitive challenge compromising values, worldviews, attitudes and behaviours" (38)—the same critical reflection in Freire's dialogue. Remember this process of "problem-posing education" as twofold—requiring reflection and action—we see the parallels between the process of dialogue and how Aurobindo says consciousness can develop. Furthermore, in almost the exact same terms as Freire, integral education (developed on the basis of integral yoga and practiced in Auroville) believes "the fundamental goal of dialogical teaching is to create a process of learning and knowing that invariably involves the theorizing about the experiences in the dialogic process" (Ranade, 2007:17). The Mother reflected on this concept:

> "Sri Aurobindo says [in *Thoughts and Glimpses*] that in order to progress one must break up old constructions, buffet, demolish all preconceived ideas. Preconceived ideas are the habitual mental constructions in which one lives, and which are fixed, which become rigid fortresses and cannot progress because they 36 are fixed. Nothing that is fixed can progress. … And this is the true way to give birth to new ideas or to thought—active thought—, thought which is creative" (2004, volume 8:102).

As a result, we see that engaging in critical dialogue and consciousness-building contributes to the broadening of perspectives which can propose new ways of understanding the world, which is both an act of transformation in itself and inspires transformation. Thus, this Aurobindonian-Freirean philosophy supports my argument that communication and dialogue—intentional, authentic and in solidarity with others—are foundational to social change because they are essential processes of learning about the world, the way it is structured, and how it is experienced, which can therefore inspire positive action. For Aurobindo, progress is not about "becoming more saintly or intelligent, but in becoming more conscious" (Satprem, 2003:110). Speaking to the participatory paradigm's emphasis on dialogue, Hamelink (2002) similarly asserts that we do not need more information to solve our problems, but the ability to communicate. Together, the inherent bond between consciousness, dialogue and communication is revealed more clearly.

Thus, I suggest that if we can first see participation as dialogue, as was established in Chapter 1, and from an Aurobindonian-Freirean perspective then see consciousness-building as a critical element of dialogue, as a result we can see the potential to participate in dialogue as an opportunity to transform one's self and the world at large. We can therefore expect to see humanity develop through the evolution of individual and collective consciousnesses. If consciousness is the key to liberation, and unity, being the "largest principle of life," has "freedom [as] its foundation-stone" (1949:539), the unification of humanity as a result of its liberation from oppression can only occur with a development of consciousness. This is the concept that inspired the approach to the fieldwork in Auroville, which examined not just how

communication is practiced but how such practice can embody this consciousness-building. The next sub-chapter will briefly explain the significance of setting the research in Auroville by describing its key qualities.

2.3 The Evolution of Auroville

To understand Auroville and its relevance to the research, it might be helpful to break from a chronological narrative and explain what the city looks like today in order to fully comprehend and appreciate its journey getting there. Normally the opposite would seem most logical, but at risk of losing the reader by burying the lede, and in alignment with Auroville's penchant for the unconventional, this format will suit this thesis best.

Surrounded by rural villages, a man-made "Green Belt," and touching the Coromandel Coast and one of the longest highways in India, Auroville is situated in an environmentally and economically diverse part of the Vanur block of the Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu.[6] The Villupuram district has been described as "quite backward" by government officials—though it does acknowledge the "rays of development have seeped up in an unprecedented manner" (SPCTN, 2017). This area is still quite poor, with nearly half of families under the below-poverty level (GoI, 2011). Auroville's growth has been closely linked with the development of the surrounding region, as its borders often overlap with those of nearby villages and farmland owned by local Tamil people. Besides its connection to Aurobindo, one of Auroville's most well-known features is its lush vegetation, the success of early ambitious reforestation efforts started by the pioneer Aurovilians on the city's barren land when it was purchased in 1965.

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[6] In India, states are divided into districts, which are divided into blocks that include several villages and towns. Blocks encompass several gram panchayats (local self-governing systems) and their respective villages. Blocks primarily serve as administrative structures for the implementation of schemes from the Ministry of Rural Development.

Another is its international population: as of March 2019, Auroville has 3,053 residents from 58 countries.[7]

In brief, Auroville is essentially an experiment in alternative living. In the words of the Mother, "For those who are satisfied with the world as it is, Auroville obviously has no reason to exist" (2004, volume 13:190). Aurobindo had written early on in distinct words that the "scientific, rationalistic, industrial, pseudo-democratic civilisation of the West is now in the process of dissolution and it would be a lunatic absurdity for us at this moment to build blindly on that sinking foundation" (1956:11). The many different ways of living in Auroville reflect Aurovilians' commitments to avoiding such absurdity and to building a diverse society in what the Mother envisioned as a "divine anarchy" (2004:219), unhindered to the constraints of traditional modern society. According to Clarence-Smith (2019), the fact there has been no defined approach to realising Auroville's ideals has been intentional, and indeed "[fosters] a plural and experimental environment, bound beyond differences in its shared commitment to the project of Auroville" (98) and the vision of Aurobindo and the Mother. The American author Margaret Mead supported its development and wrote,

> "Auroville is a community dedicated to working on process in an attempt to develop living forms, both external architectural and environmental forms, and internal styles of human relations, which will transcend our present level of community living which is fraught with such heavy penalties to human beings and to the global environment" (1973).

However, living in Auroville as I did is not so different an experience as one might expect (acknowledging that expectations are bound to be different for everyone). In many ways the lifestyle of the "experimental city" does not look all that radical: Aurovilians build their own homes and rent apartments; they work at various shops, restaurants and businesses; and children (sometimes) go to school and play sports outside. Shops and restaurants form

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[7] The official population of Auroville is primarily Indian (45 percent), French (14 percent) and German (8 percent) (see Auroville Foundation, 2019).

commercial areas, and residents travel on tarred roads cycle paths guided by the occasional streetlamp. In true, small-town fashion, residents go by their first name and live in tight-knit community neighbourhoods. The central Town Hall building is home to the housing service, financial service, radio station, guest registration service and meeting space for the Auroville Council, the head of its self-governance mechanism.

Yet while the list of similarities to any other city can go on, it is the intention behind Auroville, shaping its past, present and future, that makes it truly unique. In Auroville, a balanced desire for free will and human unity guides human behaviour and creates a "soul" of the city. Aurovilians look at Auroville's existence like a living document that is open to being reviewed, edited and changed, and indeed their presence as residents is open to change as well. The fact that there are indeed those who choose to live in Auroville without a strong devotion to integral yoga, but indeed to community, demonstrates how Aurobindo and integral yoga remain essential to the city's story without serving as an oppressive and binding thought-system. In summary, the alternative approaches that Auroville presents to modern political, economic and educational systems, with the intent of creating an egalitarian, just, and inspired community, distinguishes it from other cities as utopian, or the "forerunner of an ideal society" (Hadnagy, undated:3). While these experiments are numerous and indeed interesting, they are only briefly explored in this paper. The remainder of this chapter will resume the narrative of Auroville's founding and evolution from the introduction to Aurobindo and the Mother to conclude the explanation of the value in selecting Auroville for the setting for the research.

2.3.1 From Dream to Reality: 1954 to Present

Though the Mother had been envisioning a type of model city that could embody Aurobindo's integral yoga for decades, after Aurobindo left his body in 1950 she began to

explore the idea more directly. In August 1954, she wrote of her dream for what would one day become Auroville. This text, known as *A Dream*, is now one of the city's founding documents:

> "There should be somewhere on earth a place … where human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world … [where] Education would be given … for enriching faculties and bringing forth new one. … Work … would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group. In brief, it should be a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood" (2004, volume 12: 93).

Time passed and nothing had yet to truly materialise, though the Mother continued to explore the idea of Auroville. In 1964, it was finally decided to build the city. The Mother sent her first message mentioning Auroville by name in September 1965, writing: "Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women from all countries will be able to live in peace and progress harmony above all creeds, all politics, and all nationalities, straining to realize human unity" (2004, volume 6:187). With financial support from private donors, the Government of India and UNESCO, the city started to slowly take shape on a plateau of barren land purchased by the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS), which administered the project from the ashram. The Mother had developed close relationships with many notable spiritual and political leaders, particularly Indira Ghandi, daughter of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, whose friendship with the Mother and closeness to the ashram was vital for Auroville to take its first steps in the 1960s. Early residents of the infant city were disciples from the ashram as well as immigrants from across India and Europe, all of whom had to be approved and welcomed into Auroville by the Mother herself.

Auroville was inaugurated on 28 February 1968 with a symbolic ceremony in which youth from 124 countries gathered to deposit soil from each of their respective homelands in a single urn, representing the international aspirations of the city. The urn still stands in the

gardens of the Unity Park in the centre of the city. During the ceremony, the newly written

Auroville Charter was read; it is another helpful document to use in gaining an understanding

of Auroville and its journey. Hand-written by the Mother, it reads:

> 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.

The Charter remains a foundational document in Auroville and guides its development.

Its connection to the ideals of sustainability is one of the reasons Auroville is considered a

sustainable city or a city that has evolved sustainably (see de Jonge, 2017). Especially important

to the context of this research is the expectation that Aurovilians embody the ideas in the Charter

in their behaviour; this research especially notes the concepts of pursuing "unending education"

and "discoveries from without and within." In another foundational text, *To be a True*

Aurovilian, the Mother explains, "The first thing needed [to be a true Aurovilian] is the inner

discovery, to find out what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary

appearances" (1988, volume 8:55). This echoes Freire and Aurobindo's call for internal and

external reflection on one's experiences of the world.

When the Mother left her body in 1973, Auroville struggled. Her death not only

represented a loss of spiritual guidance for Aurovilians but for the development of Auroville.

By 1980, serious conflict had arisen between Aurovilian residents and the administration at the

SAS over management of Auroville's assets, particularly concerning finances and land

acquisition. As a result, the Government of India passed the Auroville Emergency Provision

Act 1980, which granted control of all of Auroville's assets to the government. This was a significant decision made ultimately by the Supreme Court of India, which notably ruled Auroville's philosophical foundation on the concept of integral yoga made it a non-religious entity and therefore capable of being administered by the government. After a period of government intervention which assuaged the conflict and restored relative order in the city's, the Auroville Foundation Act was passed in 1988, creating the (mostly) self-governing system that encompasses Auroville today.[8]

The return of assets to the hands of Aurovilians inspired the development of the city to continue with a recommitment to the Mother's vision. In 50 years since its inauguration, the image of Auroville has changed dramatically. Most notably, construction of the Matrimandir (meaning Temple of the Mother in Sanskrit) began almost immediately after the inauguration in 1968. The symbolic edifice, consisting of an inner concentration chamber and twelve surrounding petals that embody the powers of the Mother, took 37 years to build and was finally completed in 2008. This "soul of the city" is both an integral part of Aurovilian life and a significant tourist destination, drawing in close to 1 million visitors per year.[9] As aforementioned, unique approaches to the structure of Aurovilian society demonstrate its efforts to offer an alternative to modernity. Of particular note are its approaches to self-governance, economy and education: Auroville aspires to have no private property or money, legal system or police, and is designed for those who live minimalist lifestyles and can dedicate themselves to the success of the community. Co-operative systems form the structure of the economy, supply food from local farms, help Aurovilians find housing, and facilitate a free exchange of goods and services. Its built environment seeks to exist in the most environmentally friendly way possible, notably relying on solar energy, innovative ways to conserve water, and efforts

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[8] This system includes a governance mechanism for Auroville which keeps it under the purview of the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
[9] According to an Aurovilian who works in managing the city's tourism industry.

to reduce polluting forms of transportation. The local languages are Tamil, French, English, Hindi, and whatever other dialect an Aurovilian or passer-by may speak. The Matrimandir sits at the centre of the city, attracting Aurovilians throughout the day for concentration, reflection and silence.

These unique examples offer small insights into how Auroville tries to think outside the box to create a society which does not subscribe to what one assumes to be modern or traditional. In this sense the township positions itself directly in opposition of the modernisation paradigm and its veneration of industrialised Western society: in Auroville, there is no "right" or "wrong" way to live. The result is a fascinating setting both in the physical reality of how it is built and operated, but also the abstract sense of how it is lived, experienced and evolving. The next and final sub-chapter explores this last point.

2.3.2 A City with a Soul

Before delving into the methodology and findings of the research, I would like to leave the reader with some words about the significance of Auroville as the setting for this field work. The first thing to consider about Auroville is when and where its roots are planted. It is important to remember the inspiration of the Mother's *Dream*: in Aurobindo's lifetime he witnessed two World Wars, a long and brutal struggle for Indian independence, and the dawn of a new era of globalisation. Similarly, by the time of the township's inauguration in 1968, the world was struggling with major conflicts on a global level never seen before. It was an incredibly rapidly changing landscape to which Aurobindo and the Mother were not ignorant to but intrigued instead. One vignette paints a small picture of this inspiration: as the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in their Cold War, Auroville, according to the Mother, could provide the warmth to break the ice: "[T]hat's precisely what I want — that these two countries clashing with each other should come here [to Auroville], and each of them have

a pavilion of their own culture and ideal, and that they should be here, face to face, and shake hands" (1988, volume 7:92). Lyndon Johnson and Leonid Brezhnev meeting in a barren plateau in South India for a handshake? Improbable, but not impossible, and certainly a metaphor for the image of peace and cooperation that the Mother envisioned of Auroville. Though the handshake did not materialise, what did was the symbolic ceremony during Auroville's inauguration representing the international community meant to be manifested under the umbrella of human unity. Notably, Auroville seeks to be as a "universal" township rather than "international"—noting that nations and borders are socially constructed, but humanity is universal.

However, Auroville's aspiration for peace should not be mistaken as an aspiration for complacency or sustaining the status quo. After all, Aurobindo himself was a nationalist freedom fighter prior to his transition into yogic philosophy and had in fact come to Pondicherry to escape political retribution. He challenged Ghandi's call for non-violence and was an advocate for revolt; for a radical change of circumstances when an unsatisfactory situation called for it. His integral yoga is also a "fundamentally anarchist spirituality" (Clarence-Smith, 2019). Auroville in itself can be seen as that radical change, a political statement expressing dissatisfaction with the capitalism and modernity. Perhaps Aurobindo's thoughts would have drawn Freire to Auroville, for he too believed in radicalism: "the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it," he writes, and "the pedagogy of the oppressed … is a task for radicals" (1970:39). Perhaps a handshake in Auroville could have cooled tensions between Johnson and Brezhnev—it's radical enough of a concept.

The second point to remember about Auroville is that it is both an intentional and experimental community. To say that Auroville has been developed intentionally (or as Freire would say, consciously) is to say that the visions, decisions and actions taken throughout the

creation of the city and its growth since have been done with a significant amount of thought and care for its purpose. Aurovilians will laugh when asked about community decision-making: everyone knows it takes a long time simply because there are so many alternatives to an argument that makes coming to a conclusion notoriously difficult (assuming they even do!) But the emphasis on intention also speaks to the centrality of Aurobindo's integral yoga within Auroville; by being deeply embodied in the Charter, which plays an important role in shaping the city, integral yoga remains the constant as the city continues to change.

This is exactly what speaks to the other element of Auroville, which is it is an experimental community. It is important to remember that Auroville is neither perfect nor complete; to say it is would in fact be contradictory to its experimental aspirations. The experiment is bound to be especially complex with its aim of realising human unity, a surely messy process which Aurobindo understood to be necessary in the grand scheme of things. "Through our stumbling we are perfected," he wrote, echoing a key belief of Freire's and other participatory thinkers: it is the process which matters, not the product. And one can argue that Auroville, through its stumbling, has bettered itself. The city does have its fair share of critics, many of whom point to the at-times rocky relationship between Auroville and neighbouring villages. One can also simply search for Auroville online and find plenty of articles and videos touting how the city has no money, no religion and no police—and then scroll to the comments to read from anyone who has lived in or visited Auroville and knows that there actually is money, religion and police—just perhaps in different ways than one would expect.

In my time living in Auroville and explaining the township to others, some have suggested Aurovilians are ignorant to the inconsistencies between the ideals of Auroville and its reality. On the contrary! Aurovilians are exceptionally self-aware of Auroville's shortcomings, and especially how their actions and behaviours feed into them (see Meier, 2006). During the course of the research this topic came up frequently, with Aurovilians

expressing frustration knowing that Auroville is often judged for what "outsiders" see as hypocrisies. However, they also expressed a type of peace knowing that those who genuinely come to Auroville to contribute to the evolution of the city are doing so with the same shared intention—in a way which, again, respects process over product. Majumdar (2017), drawing from anecdotes of early Aurovilian pioneers, described the thought-provoking process of choosing to live in Auroville, as also demonstrated in *To Be a True Aurovilian*:

> "For many, the process of learning [to live in Auroville and be a true Aurovilian] began with this process of unlearning of unburdening oneself progressively of social, moral, cultural baggage and prejudice, so much of it unconsciously ingrained, in order to open up a new experience and to different kinds of people" (116).

From this insight, we can see that the challenge of living in Auroville to practice Aurobindo's integral yoga, or simply join a conscious community, is exactly the consciousness-building Aurobindo and Freire describe as personal transformation. It is an arduous and complex process, but a human one nonetheless.

Finally, with its aspiration towards "perfection," it is easy for one to assume that everything Auroville does or tries to do is without flaw. For that reason, Auroville can be misunderstood by the "outside world" for the precise reason it was created. One must not let Auroville's idealistic aspirations and rhetoric lend the impression it is all about "talk" and no "walk." The journey is the essence of the experiment. As an intentional, experimental community, Auroville seeks to liberate itself from the limitations of modernity and instead be conscious of itself, its reality and its effort to realise human unity. It acts through experiments in manifesting this consciousness in the material structure and physical presence of a city. Then it reflects once more on such experiments, acts again, reflects, and so on and so forth. Ultimately Auroville is guided by its aspiration towards human unity—an aspiration it seeks to realise through the construction of a city, the creation of a community, and the development of individual and collective consciousnesses.

METHODOLOGY, CASE STUDIES AND FINDINGS

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Approach to Field Work in Auroville

This chapter will illustrate the methodological process of the research in several parts. First, the chapter will explain steps taken prior to the field work which informed the development of the research questions, the decision to conduct research in Auroville and the development of the reading of Aurobindo and Freire which serves as the theoretical framework for the field work. The chapter will then justify the choice to work with three CBOs in Auroville in particular: the Sustainable Livelihood Institute (SLI), Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG), and EcoFemme.[10] The reader will be introduced to their work and their relationships with India's popular self-help group (SHG) model. Then, the chapter will explain the different methods used to gather data during the case studies and their strengths and limitations. Finally, the chapter will offer personal reflections on the research process.

In general, the methodological process can be described as (auto)ethnographic in that it heavily relied on field work through participant observation and interviews, but also on personal reflection. Ethnographic research can be summarised as qualitative, dependent on participant and non-participant observation, occurring in natural settings, and interested in participant behaviour, and includes case study, field-based and anthropologic research (LeCompte and Goetz, 1972; see Smith, 1979). In the 18 months between my first visit to Auroville and the submission of this thesis, the approach to the research evolved over time, adapting to new information, experiences and interests. A brief summary of this approach helps introduce this dynamic process:

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[10] In Auroville, commercial businesses, services and non-for-profit organisations are all called units and are organised under various trusts of the Auroville Foundation. For details see Auroville Foundation (2019).

Upon establishing an interest in observing communication as it is practiced in the field, Auroville was selected as the setting for the research after two trips to south India. In preparation for the field work, I started to develop the theoretical framework which aspires to understand the relationship between communication, consciousness-building and development, combining my previous knowledge of participatory communication with interest in the unique philosophy of Auroville. The methodological framework for the field work was thus proposed to use ethnography as a means of understanding the experience of communication and development in the field and focus on the lived experiences of participants. In each of the case studies with the three CBOs, informants identified common qualities of communication as profound and significant. In connecting these elements with the Aurobindonian-Freirean theory, I then identified these qualities as the five defining traits of what I conceptualise as "conscious communication," or communication that is defined by its intentionality to be aware of and care for others. As the research reflected, this communication encourages the development of one's consciousness, embodying the Aurobindonian-Freirean approach. In this identification and the subsequent analysis, I was able to confirm my initial proposal that communication is development by observing how communication, as a process of consciousness-building, is an actual experience of personal growth and transformation, a way to exist or be with others, and a facilitator of social change through the development of individual and collective consciousnesses. This chapter will outline how this conclusion was drawn from observing the practice of communication in the field and understanding the impact of intentional communication on both individual and collective lived experiences.

3.1 Previous Experiences in Auroville

After visiting Auroville for the first time in December 2018 with the Sustainable Development Practicum, a course offered at the American University of Paris, which introduced

me to the concept of integral yoga, Auroville's vision, and its many rural development programmes, I developed a strong interest in the city's intentions and its evolution. A second trip to Auroville in March 2019 not only allowed me to continue to explore the city and its culture, build relationships with Aurovilians and other local habitants, and develop a stronger understanding of integral yoga, but also to meet with several units and discuss the opportunity of field work for this thesis. It was then that I agreed to initially work with SLI and explore options for case studies with its many partner units in Auroville, with a particular preference to work with AVAG and EcoFemme.

3.2 Development of Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

Prior to the commencement of field work, I started to develop the research questions and theoretical framework for the research. Informed by previous courses taken at the American University of Paris, in which I took keen interest in sustainable development, development communications and ethnographic research, supported by extensive literature reviews, I had a strong understanding of Development and development communications theories. However, as aforementioned in Chapter 1, I had an even stronger desire to explore communication in development in the field. My personal interest in the process of communication led me to read deeply into Freire's work, his concept of dialogue and the value of engaging with alternative voices in the Development field. In doing so, it became clear that if I wanted to closely examine the relationship between communication and development in practice, field work would be necessary. The decision was therefore made to conduct this field work in Auroville given my familiarity with the city, its background and engagement with sustainability, as well as my curiosity around its experimental and intentional qualities. The choice was a natural one; as a bilingual English-French speaker, I briefly considered conducting fieldwork in Francophone

Africa, but having no other cultural compass to link me to the region, I knew that would be an inappropriate choice.

Importantly, this curiosity around Auroville proved essential for the research process and indeed its overall conclusion. In feeling personally drawn towards Auroville and integral yoga, and in preparation for the field work, I was encouraged to read texts from Aurobindo and the Mother. In Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* particularly, I began to draw significant parallels between his philosophy and Freire's, which encouraged my development of the theory connecting communication, consciousness and development as outlined in the previous chapter of this thesis. Though I had already chosen Auroville as the setting for the research, the development of the Aurobindo-Freirean reading was significant in not only thoroughly understanding the value of this choice but also adding a whole new layer of complexity to the research by introducing in the rich qualities of the setting. The development of this theory opened a completely new scope of inquiry into consciousness and intentionality which added a specific angle to the initial research question.

In Auroville, I continued to develop this theory and my understanding of it through following my own daily habit of concentration at the Matrimandir; spending many hours reading Aurobindo and the Mother's works at the Auroville Library; attending readings, discussions and events about integral yoga and life in Auroville; and having countless conversations with Aurovilians about integral yoga and its application and impact in our daily lives. In doing so, the question of if and how consciousness and communication are related in practice continued to grow during the course of the fieldwork, both confirming the validity of the theoretical hypothesis I proposed in the reading of Aurobindo and Freire, as well as the effectiveness of methodological approach. As the research did not intend to be purely theoretical but instead to ground itself in the realities of development in practice, the interest

taken in the experiences of practitioners, participants and other actors was well-directed and valuable.

3.3 Selection of CBOs for Case Studies

Though a scope of research on communication and development in practice naturally required me to partner with organisations to observe said practice, it was important to first consider the value of CBOs and their role in community development. Community can be defined as a system of individual members and institutions that have distinct shared and interrelated qualities and characteristics (Thompson and Kinne, 1990). For the purpose of this text, CBOs can be broadly defined as voluntary associations of members from the same community that address local needs through the mobilisation of and engagement with their community. As a result, these groups are essential in facilitating and achieving sustained long-term social change in a given community (Colle, 2007). CBOs are also able to reach out to populations that are difficult to engage with, or simply not engaged with, by larger, top-down institutions (Carey and Braunack-Mayer, 2009:45). This is especially true in the case of caste, which is why CBOs are of particular interest to this study as the CBOs are based in India.

Selecting the CBOs for case studies was a relatively simple process. Having been to Auroville twice before the research period started, I had already built relationships with several CBOs in Auroville which allowed me to envision a methodological framework for the research prior to my arrival. These experiences also gave me a rich understanding of the Aurovilian and Tamil lifestyles and cultures, which helped facilitate my process in choosing CBOs by knowing which organisations were facilitating relevant and meaningful work in Auroville and the surrounding villages. The decision to work with more than one CBO was important to be able to observe if the same phenomena could occur in differ settings, therefore increasing the reliability of the data. Three CBOs were thus chosen in order to be able to triangulate data from

three different sources. Triangulating data allows researchers to "formalize the meanings" derived from observation (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982:53) by creating legitimacy through connecting observations with other formal sources; thus, working with three CBOs again increased the reliability of the data collected because the data was derived from multiple sources.

The three Aurovilian CBOs were chosen based on various criteria. These criteria were established to develop common threads between the CBOs and serve as a constant in the research process. The first criterion was that all three CBOs must be engaged in community development work in rural areas. For consistency, organisations were selected that work primarily with women's self-help groups (SHGs; see next sub-chapter), which are essential CBO units in Indian society that support community development. Second, each organisation must participate in a large stakeholder network (which includes SHGs) to demonstrate collaboration with different actors in their fields. Third, each organisation must engage in sustainable development through some type of educational programme, though the definition of "education" was intentionally designed to be broad in order to consider different types of programmes. For example, SLI focuses on skills training and the development of women-led and community-based enterprises; AVAG on participatory community development and social sustainability; and EcoFemme on sustainable menstrual hygiene management (MHM). Finally, each organisation was selected to represent a different type of funding and governance structure: SLI is financed solely through government grants. AVAG receives funds largely through external contributions from other NGOs, donations, and the Auroville Foundation, but also from its community microfinance initiative and its growing social enterprise; and EcoFemme, as a social enterprise, is sustained mainly through the success of its for-profit mechanism.

3.3.1 Working with a Proven Model: Self-Help Groups

An important type of CBO in India is the self-help group (SHG). SHGs are voluntary, mostly single-gender associations created by members of the same village for the primary purpose of creating a community-based savings and loan programme.[11] For women, SHGs have been a powerful community leveraging tool to collectively gain access to bank loans and credit, as they have traditionally been unable to access funds on their own. Given their positive economic impact in disadvantaged communities, especially those of low caste, over time SHGs have developed into larger capacity-building and community development institutions. According to Singh, Ruivenkamp and Jongerden (2011), SHGs are based on a "humanist model of development," and "[t]he self-help movement is said to represent an alternative development strategy, one that involves the process of social economic empowerment and whose long term objective is to rebalance the structure of power in society" (92). Based on Aurobindo and Freire's arguments for reconciling social power dynamics, SHGs are particularly interesting CBOs to examine in this research, besides being a significant driver of community development across India.

In Tamil Nadu, SHGs are officially meant to include 12 to 20 members of similar economic status—usually from below-poverty level (BPL) households—though some groups may be formed with a minimum of five members. In general, given that many villages are segregated based on caste, there will not be many differences in caste within a given SHG. These culturally homogenous groups thus represent hyperlocal expressions of community and reinforce local dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

SHGs are managed at multiple government levels under the national SHG scheme, Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY), and exist in every Indian state. In Tamil Nadu,

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[11] SHGs can also be formed in urban areas, but as the scope of this research covered rural development programmes, this explanation will only include information about rural SHGs.

SHGs are managed under the Mahalir Thittam scheme, a socio-economic women's empowerment programme under the Tamil Nadu state Rural Livelihood Mission's (TNRLM) Tamil Nadu Corporation for the Development of Women (TNCDW). The SHG approach was first launched in Tamil Nadu by an external non-governmental organisation in the Dharmapuri district in 1989; by 1998, the program had secured consistent state government funding and began to be implemented in all districts of Tamil Nadu. As of January 2020, there are approximately 317,000 SHGs in Tamil Nadu with 3.7 million members (MoRD, 2020), representing roughly 10 percent of the female population (GoI, 2011). Among these members, a large minority, over 30 percent, come from scheduled castes or tribes (MoRD, 2020). The SHG structure also extends into higher regional levels by organising each group into federations at the village Panchayat, block and district levels. Panchayats are the basic unit of local governance by connecting several villages together within a block. A panchayat-level federation (PLF) is similarly a group of SHGs connected under a Panchayat. As of January 2020, nearly 13,000 PLFs had been formed in Tamil Nadu (MoRD, 2020).

As SHGs have evolved from primarily a means for women to collectively save money and gain access to credit, they also have become deeply connected within communities by leading development efforts especially through partnerships with various non-profit organisations. In partnership with the TNCDW, large external CBOs help support SHGs by acting as local resources for the capacity-building training programmes in which the TNCDW requires all SHGs participate. SLI, AVAG and EcoFemme are such organisations. This type of support can be incredibly powerful in the growth of smaller CBOs like SHGs, especially in funding and/or developing entrepreneurial ventures, and in encouraging important social learning (Shahidullah and Emdad Haque, 2016). In the case of SHGs, the support of CBOs opens doors to different opportunities for community development and help create an integral network of community stakeholders.

3.3.2 Sustainable Livelihood Institute

The Sustainable Livelihood Institute (SLI) is a unit of the Auroville Foundation under the Samugan Trust. It is a unique centre addressing the rural livelihood crisis in south India through innovative research, consulting and training in a network that connects government, civil society and grassroots stakeholders. Its main day-to-day operations consist of capacity-building training programmes which share the skills, techniques and business models of sustainable enterprises in Auroville with women across Tamil Nadu via SHGs, with the goal of inspiring and supporting them as they develop their own sustainable enterprises. The Institute does this by employing practitioners from 45 Auroville units as faculties for the training programmes, all of which last between two and five days and include a diverse range of classroom sessions, field visits and hands-on activities.

SLI was launched in 2015 as a joint venture between the Auroville Foundation and the Government of Tamil Nadu; mainly the TNRLM, the branch of state government which manages SHG operations. It was conceptualised to continue the previous work done by the Auroville Foundation in partnership with the state government through the SEDAB (Sustainable Enterprise Development in the Auroville Bioregion) programme, which operated from 2012 to 2015. This programme had a similar focus to SLI, but the units were more closely engaged in the development of sustainable livelihoods in villages within Auroville's immediate surroundings. Today, SLI is an independent Auroville unit whose clients are government agencies. Unlike other Auroville units, which can receive financial support from the Auroville Foundation, SLI is entirely financed by the government contracts.

Both SLI and its predecessor SEDAB connect Auroville units primarily with women's SHGs. In the SEDAB project, these SHGs came from villages in the immediate bioregion surrounding Auroville, while for SLI, its connection to the TNRLM allows SHGs from across the state to travel to Auroville to participate in its multi-day trainings, free-of-charge and with

room and board provided by SLI implementation partner, AVAG. Local TNRLM officers facilitate a dialogue between SHGs, PLFs and SLI to identify what skills the SHG members would like to learn and in turn what skills SLI and its Aurovilian facuties can help them develop. After trainings, SLI can conduct follow-up field visits to help any previous participants with the development of their new enterprise, or the transition of an existing enterprise into a more sustainable business model. Since 2015, SLI has trained more than 5,000 women from across Tamil Nadu in more than 150 programmes (SLI, 2020).

3.3.3 Auroville Village Action Group

Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) is a unit of the Auroville Foundation under the Auroville Village Action Trust (AVAT). AVAG's main activities revolve around community co-development through working with SHGs in the Vanur block of the Villupuram district where Auroville is located. AVAG was founded in 1983 with a primary vision for Aurovilians to "give back" to the immediate villages around the township, in the words of an employee. Since its inception, AVAG has evolved from a charitable organisation into a leading facilitator of participatory co-development within the entire Vanur bock. It works with various types of community groups within the district, primarily women-, men-, and youth-based SHGs and PLFs. Currently, AVAG works with 350 village-level SHGs in around 85 settlements within 35 Panchayats (AVAG, 2018).

Primarily, AVAG is known for its successful microfinance programme, as well as its professional skills training and community remediation practices. Through the SHG structure, AVAG leads several programmes for SHG members, including a successful "revolving fund" (microfinance) program which encouraged the savings of approximately Rs. 70.7 million (approximately EUR 908,000) and loan disbursements of approximately Rs. 102 million (approximately EUR 1.3 million) in 2019 (AVAG, 2020). Furthermore, AVAG facilitates

meetings among members of PLFs to help SHGs manage their finances and further develop their financial literacy skills. AVAG's inter-caste exchange programme, wherein two SHGs of different caste meet in the lower-caste village for a day of socialising, is extremely popular. Across India it is still considered taboo for members of different caste to visit each other's homes or eat together, but the exchange programme seeks to break this tradition. Though it has been controversial at times, the 20-year-old programme has become a thriving symbol of community solidarity in the Auroville bioregion. AVAG also hosts various educational training programmes, like English and computer classes, an annual Women's Solidarity Festival, and a popular women's sports league. It was one of the key resource organisations of the SEDAB project and currently a primary partner to SLI, helping implement various outreach activities in the region and hosting a session during SLI's Community-Based Enterprise Promotion program. AVAG has received funding throughout the years from various agencies including USAID, Oxfam International, and World Dignity. Today the organisation is also supported by its social enterprise, Aval, a clothing brand which was developed in 2017. Women who participate in AVAG's tailoring skills training programmes are offered the opportunity to work at Aval, earning a living wage while supporting AVAG's ongoing efforts.

3.3.4 EcoFemme

EcoFemme is a unit of the Auroville Foundation under the Auroville Export Trust. With both a profit and non-for-profit side, EcoFemme is a textbook definition of a social enterprise. EcoFemme mainly produces and sells hand-stitched reusable cotton menstrual pads. Through the profits from these sales, it leads educational sessions on menstruation and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) for women and girls across India. In 2010, members of AVAG were initiating the development of a social enterprise in order to make the organisation more self-sufficient. Through a survey, AVAG discovered that nearly all (95 percent) of village women

surveyed experienced lifestyle restriction due to negative beliefs about menstruation; more than half (57 percent) had no one to talk to about menstruation-related concerns; and there were significant challenges to managing one's menstruation with comfort, dignity, and proper hygiene (AVAG, 2011). A local Aurovilian woman was already stitching her own cloth pads and selling them; combined with her growing business, EcoFemme was created to address these concerns through a more succinct strategy than AVAG could provide.

EcoFemme's financial structure as a social enterprise offers local women a livelihood opportunity through stitching the pads, which are sold at premium prices in India and abroad. These premium prices are elevated to absorb the costs of EcoFemme's non-for-profit activities—Pad For Pad and Pad For Sisters—which offer menstrual education programming for school-age girls and adult women respectively. Through the programs, pads are offered for free to girls and at subsidised prices or for no cost to women. From 2018-19, EcoFemme distributed 41,200 free pads to nearly 10,500 girls in India and almost 30,500 pads at discounted prices to economically disadvantaged women (Auroville Foundation, 2019).

3.4 Data Collection in Auroville

This sub-chapter will outline the methods used for collecting data during the research and the strengths and limitations of such methods.

3.4.1 Overview

Data was collected through field work with SLI, AVAG and EcoFemme from September 2019 to March 2020. The methodology for the field work was designed to be ethnographic as the research focused on communication, which, as a human experience of sharing information and creating meaning, is therefore a largely subjective process (Corey, 2019). Furthermore, the approach to field work was informed by the reading of Aurobindo and

Freire, which places particular significance on the lived experiences of individuals and communities. As a result, the methodology was developed to rely heavily on participant observation and input from key informants through formal and informal interviews. Informed by previous knowledge of the development communications field, elements of participatory communication and the reading of Aurobindo and Freire, the observations and interviews took specific interest in the communication process, particularly opportunities for learning, dialogue and perspective-building. The data collected from such observations and conversations was then triangulated with literature from the theoretical proposal and the review of approaches to communication(s) and development. Additional supportive materials included other sources from each organisation such as internal reports and research, input from key informants and my own experiences as a researcher. This triangulation served as an "audit" to "ensure that interpretation of mundane phenomena are examined rather than assumed" (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982:53). In other words, by analysing my data through comparing it to other supporting sources, including literature and theory, I confirmed that the meaning I derived from the data was not just legitimate from my own perspective but from that of others.

Participant observation was formally conducted in several programmes at each CBO. Through this method, I was able to attend the sessions not just as a silent observer but actively experience the programmes like the participants did and therefore start to view them from their perspectives. However, in the dual participant-observer role, I was also able to observe and analyse the programmes from a more critical lens. These programmes were three multi-day trainings at SLI, a PLF meeting and an inter-caste exchange programme at AVAG, and two menstrual hygiene educational sessions at EcoFemme. The research started with SLI given its connection to multiple Auroville units through its trainings. The separate case studies at AVAG and EcoFemme took place after attending the three trainings at SLI which included courses taught by AVAG and EcoFemme and introductions to faculties from the respective

organisations were made. Handwritten notes were taken during the participant observation, both during the selected programmes as well as when observing how each organisation operates while working in the offices and interacting with the teams. These written notes covered the content of each programme, the discussions held therein and my reflections on observations.

Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants. From the participant observation, data was collected by observing the structure of the programmes, group dynamics and individual behaviour. Interviews with staff, participants and others introduced more data but also helped derive the meaning of the observations. All formal interviewees signed consent forms, written in Tamil and English,[12] or offered verbal consent if the paper forms were not available, after being informed of the research subject, methodology and intent. Thirteen programme facilitators and staff members from the three organisations and two long-time Aurovilians with a strong understanding of the township's spiritual background were interviewed. Interviews were initially structured through a set of questions and offered space for the conversation to develop naturally. These interviews were conducted in English or in Tamil, with bilingual colleagues serving as translators, and recorded and transcribed. Countless additional conversations were held with other staff members and Aurovilians which helped inform the research.

Additionally, an important part of the research was interacting with participants of the programmes. In total, 59 women attended the three SLI trainings, 72 attended the two AVAG programmes, and 33 girls attended the EcoFemme sessions. While I interacted with all of the participants, interviewing a portion of them in more depth was important in gaining a more personal understanding of how the programmes were experienced. In most cases participants were interviewed after a programme or session was completed and chosen to explain their behaviour during the session and their opinion of it, again helping me understand the meaning

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[12]The consent forms were written in Tamil and English with the help of a native Tamil speaker from SLI.

of the data collected in the participant observation. Twenty-one participants from SLI and AVAG participated in these longer interviews and detailed notes were taken.[13] Informal conversations were also held with countless participants, who understood my role as a researcher and provided informed consent. While I was able to have my own conversations in Tamil and English with participants, native Tamil-speaking staff from each organisation helped provide seamless translation with appropriate vocabularies. Additionally, sometimes English-speaking participant would help with translation, particularly during casual conversations during the sessions.

Primary and secondary sources such as video testimonies, internal monthly reports, annual reports and research studies were gathered directly from the three organisations. The Auroville Library and the Auroville Archives provided documents relating to Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and the evolution of Auroville. Methodological support was offered by the Auroville Research team and several post-doctoral researchers living and working in Auroville, staff members from the three organisations, as well as advisors from the American University of Paris.

3.4.2 Details of Participant Observation

This sub-section will briefly explain the events in which participant observation took place. At SLI, three capacity-building training programmes were attended.[14] Each training lasted between three to five days, each day from approximately 9:00 to 17:00, and participant observation was conducted for the entire duration of each programme. The trainings are developed in a multidisciplinary manner to include lecture, hands-on and field visit education.

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[13] The school-age girls in the two EcoFemme sessions were not interviewed on their own due to them being too young to consent to individual interviews. Informed verbal consent was obtained to observe their session as a university researcher. No names or other identifying information was collected from the girls.

[14] Sessions from two other trainings were observed at SLI but not in the role as participant observer and are therefore not reviewed in this text.

The three trainings were Introduction to Sustainable Agriculture: Integrated Farming, Wellness Consultant in the Village, and Community-Based Enterprise Promotion.

Figure 7: Sessions Offered During SLI Training Programmes

Introduction to Sustainable Agriculture: Integrated Farming (4-day programme)	Wellness Consultant in the Village (5-day programme)	Community-Based Enterprise Promotion (3-day programme)
Classroom Sessions: Introduction to sustainable agriculture; soil enhancement; plant growth; business management	Classroom Sessions: Ayurvedic health and medicine; female anatomy; menstrual hygiene management; herbal beauty treatments; business management	Classroom Sessions: Introduction to communitybased enterprise models; packaging, branding and marketing; breaking-even and profit maximisation; case study evaluation
Hands-on Activities: Working in the gardens during field visits	Hands-on Activities: Beautician services (manicure, pedicure, traditional Indian henna, sari wrappings, creating herbal beauty recipes)	Hands-on Activities: Business model mapping; strengths and weakness identification
Field Visits: Visit to Auro Orchard (a farm in Auroville); visit to Jaya integrated farm in Villupuram	N/A (For this training, the beautician training was set up at the SLI campus)	Field Visits: Visit to a social enterprise in Auroville called WELL Paper; visit to AVAG social enterprise called Aval

At AVAG, two separate programmes were attended. The first was a PLF meeting. The PLF meeting is an all-day monthly event, lasting from approximately 10:00 to 16:00, between representatives from each SHG within a PLF, facilitated by AVAG staff at the AVAG campus. Forty women represented their respective SHG. The PLF meeting is mainly an opportunity for the PLF members to review the financial accounts of each SHG and ensure they are all saving for loans and making payments correctly. Representatives have the chance to report progress and concerns, ask for feedback and brainstorm with other attendees about problem-solving. The AVAG staff also provides a management training element in each PLF meeting, whether that

be about accounting, group management, professional development or the like. In the programme I attended, after reviewing the financial accounts of each SHG in the PLF, the group discussed how to handle situations in which an individual or a group is behind on payments or not fulfilling their commitments. One participant who lived in a village next to Auroville and worked in an Auroville unit spoke fluent English and acted as my translator for the day.

The second programme was an inter-caste exchange programme, wherein an SHG from a high-caste village and a SHG from a low-caste (Dalit) village spent the day together in the low-caste village. The exchange programme I attended took place in one of the immediate villages outside Auroville. The visiting SHG came from a village some 30 minutes away. After introducing themselves to each other, each SHG member was assigned a "sister" from the other SHG. Each woman from the host village then hosted her "sister" at her home for tea and conversation. In my case, I joined the same participant who served as my translator in the PLF meeting for the home visit, which was helpful not just for translation, but to build on an existing relationship from a previous AVAG event. Afterwards, the two SHGs regrouped and each pair of "sisters" introduced themselves to the group. Afterwards, both groups shared lunch and tea together. Finally, the groups visited Matrimandir. The entire day lasted from approximately 9:00 to 16:00.

At EcoFemme, two Pad for Pad trainings were attended at local schools near Auroville with girls between 6th and 8th standards (grades). The EcoFemme educational trainings are split into two, three-hour sessions. The first session focuses on female anatomy and MHM education. At the end, the participants are introduced to the EcoFemme reusable cloth pad and are offered a free set if they would like one. At the second session, the EcoFemme team conducts a follow-up focus group with menstruating girls to hear about their experiences with menstruation and the cloth pad. The focus group is conducted by giving the girls a survey; after the survey is completed, the facilitator leads a discussion to explore the girls' responses to each

question. In both, the EcoFemme facilitator spoke both in English and Tamil, mainly because she used words which the girls were more familiar with in English (like anatomy), but also to help with translating for me. The girls are able to be excused from class to participate in both sessions and while all girls are able to participate in the first educational session, only menstruating girls who accepted the cloth pads in the first session are included in the focus group.

In addition to the participant observation conducted at the seven events listed above, I also conducted participant observation while visiting organisation and working in their offices. By spending significant time with the staff at each organisation, eating meals and drinking tea with them, going on field visits and participating in meetings, I was able to obtain an insider's view of how each organisation operates and the team dynamics.

3.4.3 Strengths and Limitations to the Methodology

This sub-chapter will describe the strengths and limitations to the methodology. First, surprisingly, language was not as much of a limitation to the research as expected. A ten-week Tamil course taken at the start of the research period in Auroville was very informative and by mid-October, had provided me with essential conversational skills to use by the first SLI programme in which I collected data. In fact, I found that my efforts to speak Tamil were the most effective means for breaking the ice with participants, who were incredibly enthusiastic about helping me learn new vocabulary, especially local terms and phrases from their individual villages. In general, most participants were able to understand English though were not able to respond as fluently. In turn, they also wanted to learn English vocabulary from me. While having native language skills is important and can help make a researcher less of an outsider among key informants, I also found that having the help of programme assistants from each organisation and English-speaking participants as translators was quite beneficial in creating a

familiar and relaxed atmosphere with interviewees. The programme assistants were all native Tamil speakers and developed an easy rapport with participants early on in each programme, making their presence during interviews not only essential for translation, but wholly welcomed. All the translators were female, except for one at SLI, and none of the participants objected to his presence. However, this male assistant did not participate in the SLI Wellness Consultant training out of respect for the sensitive topics discussed therein. Additionally, when interviewing participants with the help of an English-speaking participant, the presence of a third facilitating individual also created a relaxed environment. In fact, the idea of being interviewed with a fellow participant present to translate created excitement and encouraged more participants to want to be interviewed. Finally, when speaking with the young girls during the EcoFemme trainings, having the older EcoFemme facilitator, whom the girls referred to as *akka* (older sister), available to translate helped assuage any shyness associated with talking to a stranger.

The methodology was significantly limited due to *force majeure* political issues at SLI, where the research started and my activities as a researcher and volunteer were based. SLI was not able to operate its training programmes or conduct field studies from 6 December 2019 to 22 January 2020 due to the Model Code of Conduct imposed prior to the state elections.[15] This was not explained to me when the agreement was made between myself and SLI in March to conduct the research during the proposed period. In fact, the only possible challenge discussed were festivals, which actually did not pose a problem to the research at all but rather aided it in offering cultural context. Furthermore, several programmes planned prior to the Code of Conduct period were also cancelled due to lack of participants, late release of funds from

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[15] The Model Code of Conduct is a voluntary electoral code Indian states can adopt prior to elections to ensure peaceful and orderly campaigns and polling procedures. It namely prohibits a number of activities that can inappropriately influence a vote, such as campaigning too closely to polling stations. It also prohibits the operation of certain government schemes that can be seen as influencing a vote by providing free services. As SLI's programmes are offered for free to participants, it is therefore seen as an operation which can create positive sentiment towards incumbent government.

government agencies, and holidays. The case studies with AVAG and EcoFemme, which were loosely planned for spring 2020, took on an even greater purpose due to the insecurity of funds and a programming schedule with SLI after the Code of Conduct ended. While attending more trainings at SLI would have been beneficial to the research, the timing also presented an opportunity to devote more time studying AVAG and EcoFemme as well as interviewing other informants and gathering more information about Auroville and continue developing my understanding of integral yoga.

Institutional disorganisation within SLI also contributed to methodological concerns during the case study. Interrupted programme schedules, lack of proper archiving and document retrieval systems, unavailability of resource persons and concerns about gender and caste dynamics among the staff limited my ability to gather data as planned, resulting in delays and missed opportunities. While some of these concerns can be attributed to simple things such as a session running longer than anticipated, impacting the schedule afterwards, others were due to structural discrepancies within the organisation that I as a researcher could not control. My work as a communications and outreach volunteer did help assuage some of these issues, for example through introducing a new inter-team messaging and file-sharing system which allowed the team to communicate more effectively. However, at the time of my departure from Auroville in March 2020, there were still several unresolved concerns. The case studies at AVAG and EcoFemme were conducted much more smoothly, though this can be largely attributed to stronger organisational structure. While two AVAG events I attended were initially cancelled due to staff illness and a family passing, they were quickly rescheduled, and the data collection was able to take place as planned. There were no discrepancies in the data collection with EcoFemme. Both organisations had excellent archiving systems which made data retrieval very simple.

Finally, more background quantitative data was not gathered from all participants in the SLI, AVAG and EcoFemme programmes, which makes understanding some of the specific variable factors for participants' responses more difficult. Initially, during the first case study of an SLI training programme, two surveys were given to participants, one at the beginning of the programme and one at the end, to establish demographic information and a pre- and post-evaluation of the programme. The participants' immediate feedback was dissatisfaction with the surveys as they already were tasked with completing four other questionnaires for SLI staff. The addition of the two surveys for this research contributed to what one SLI staff member called "survey burn out," explaining to me that rural people have been asked to do so many questionnaires and surveys, particularly for participatory rural appraisal, that the legitimacy of the response for the surveys can be questioned since some respondents might not take them seriously out of disinterest. Given that AVAG and EcoFemme also conduct surveys during their programmes, I discarded the initial SLI survey responses, did not issue surveys again and instead only recorded data through participant observation and interviews, to which participants responded with much more enthusiasm. Their positive response to my more individualised and personalised approach to data collection was also a positive affirmation of my hypothesis that development, as an experience, is highly subjective and difficult to understand through impersonal statistics and data.

3.4.4 Reliability and Validity of the Methodology

As the methodology of the research was three-pronged—starting with the development of the research questions and theoretical framework through the reading of Aurobindo and Freire, moving into the collection of data through field work, and ending the analysis of such data through triangulations with the theory and other literature—arriving at the definition of conscious communication demonstrated in Chapter 4 and its role in centralising communication

as development was a dynamic and interrelated process. This sub-chapter explains how this dynamic process strengthened the legitimacy of the methodology.

First, working with three different CBOs helped strengthen the reliability of the data that was collected through participant observation and interviews in each case study. The reliability of data is dependent on whether the same data would be collected under different circumstances or by a different researcher (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). Throughout the field work, facilitators and participants identified certain qualities of communication as important and impactful. After all of the three case studies had concluded, categorisation of the data from the participant observation and interviews led me to notice that facilitators and participants had identified the same five qualities throughout the different programmes. Thus, it was safe to conclude that these qualities were indeed valuable and should be understood further; analysis of these qualities therefore allowed me to define the five qualities of conscious communication that are explored in the next chapter. In drawing this connection between the three case studies, the data proved to be reliable.

The validity of the data was thus confirmed through analysis, the key points of which are illustrated in Chapter 4. The validity of data concerns the accuracy of data and "the extent to which conclusions effectively represent empirical reality and assessing whether constructs devised by researchers represent or measure the categories of human experience that occur" (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982:32). Throughout the research process, I was able to confirm the data I was collecting about the existence, value and impact of the qualities was valid and meaningful by triangulating it with references to literature. Particularly noteworthy authors include Hemer and Tufte (2017), Mefalopulos (2008), Mefalopulos and Tufte (2009), Quarry and Ramirez (2009), Rogers (1976), Servaes (2007), Taachi (2017) and Tuhawi Smith (2005), all of whom informed my definitions and supported my analysis of listening, voice, knowledge, dialogue and solidarity.

Furthermore, the analysis of why these qualities are important and their role in conscious communication was validated through input from key informants. While Chapter 4 will explain my concept of conscious communication in more detail by offering examples of how its qualities were demonstrated and experienced, one important detail to note beforehand is that many key informants were already aware of the value of conscious communication as it was being practiced, though perhaps not in those same words as I express in this text. Many participants in the sessions simply stated their intention for attending programmes was just to learn and broaden their perspectives; doing so brought them a sense of fulfilment, inspiration and motivation, as well as simply an opportunity to connect with themselves and other women. Facilitators offered similar sentiments: one SLI facilitator said that the success of the SLI programmes can be seen in a "change in how [the participants] think," especially when they learn new ways to approach problems and find inspiration to make positive changes in their lives. Similarly, AVAG facilitator expressed that the biggest takeaway AVAG hopes to inspire in participants is the ability to critically think about and analyse their own lives. Finally, willingness to learn and be open with others, both on the participant and facilitator side, is what an EcoFemme facilitator considered to be the mark of a "successful" session—noting that it had nothing to do with whether or not a girl chose to accept EcoFemme's cloth pad, but rather her level of curiosity and interest in understanding MHM.

Moreover, reflecting on my own role as a participant observer, I noticed that my ability to connect with others and understand their experiences better occurred when I engaged with others more consciously, with the intention of keeping an open mind. This was an important point to realise as a researcher to see how observing my own behaviour was part of the research process, which importantly helped me realise the universality of my concept of conscious communication. In noticing the data that I collected about others also reflected elements of my reality, I started to understand how conscious communication can reflect Aurobindo's

philosophy of reaching "unity in diversity"—finding sameness and connection while still honouring difference and individual experience.

However, I remain conscious that this thesis does not capture the entirety of my experiences from the field work. This can simply be attributed to while the range of possible human experiences is limitless, the capacity of this paper is not. Indeed, through the participant observation and interviews I gathered pages of handwritten notes, filled with details, reflections and questions about the experiences of key informants and myself as a participant observer. However, in presenting my concept of conscious communication, Chapter 4 offers only a snapshot of these observations and analyses. The analysis in Chapter 4 therefore presents a limited yet rich illustration of conscious communication through some of the most relevant and significant data that was collected during the case studies, highlighting notable anecdotes and insights from conversations. Thus, while not all of the data collected is present in the final text of this research, the paper still seeks to present this data in the most valuable, poignant and impactful way.

3.4.5 Personal Reflections

As the methodology was largely ethnographic, I also took note of my own experiences during the research and paid particular attention to the presence of emotion. Informed by my previously held belief that both Development and anthropology are deeply embedded in subjective experiences and emotion (see Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2012; Hardy, 2012; Wright, 2012) which makes giving attention to emotion in the research process important, I treated my emotions as a valuable source of information about the research process and topic. A previous graduate-level research project on the role of emotion in ethnography and working to develop my own emotional literacy (see Goleman, 1997) helped inform this approach. It also helped me treat others' emotions as information with care and respect. In many of my observations I took

note of visible signs of emotion from key informants, and when I asked interviewees to share deeper insight about their emotional experiences, they responded positively when I expressed empathy or sympathy (or both) in a way to signal connection and validation. Hearing about what brought informants joy, sadness, frustration and hope helped me understand their perspectives through a more "fully human" lens, to use the words of Freire, by understanding their experiences more personally. Moreover, it also helped me reflect on my own experience as a researcher, which was, more often than not, an emotionally charged one.

In summary, I confirmed the argument of many anthropologists who point out how incorporating emotion into the methodology can help us understand our lived experiences and those of the people around us (Davies, 2010). Here I offer insight into some of the emotional highs and lows I experienced during the field work:

Difference was a large source of emotional reactivity. In being both non-Tamil and non-Aurovilian, I felt very aware of my status as an outsider both in my experiences at the CBOs and generally within Auroville. Though dressing in traditional Tamil clothing and picking up Tamil language skills were enormously helpful in building relationships with both programme staff, participants and local people in and around the Auroville area, they by no means made me a local or on "the." Starting the fieldwork, I knew this would both challenge and aid my research, since on the one hand I would not gain access to experiences like a native speaker could, while on the other, I had a fresh, independent set of eyes with which I could observe my surroundings more critically.

I felt extremely conscious, sometimes with great emotion, of these differences in personal background between myself and my key informants. On my first day at SLI, I observed an herbal beauty session and asked if the facilitator could give me a recipe to help my acne-prone skin. One participant with whom I had been casually speaking throughout the morning then told me she loved my skin. I said it was a source of embarrassment for me, and she said

that didn't make sense to her because they (the participants) all hated their own skin for being too dark. In turn, they loved my skin for being so white. This comment left me somewhat speechless; of course, I knew about the tradition of colourism and skin lightening in India, but did not expect to be put in such direct conversation with it. I answered with the first words that came to me and said her comment made me sad because I think Tamil women are beautiful, especially with their dark skin and dark hair. Her response, a surprised "Really?", was difficult to hear and indeed stuck with me throughout the field work as I continued to navigate the presence of race and its indications during the study.

My skin colour was always obvious point of difference throughout the entire research process and an ongoing challenge I faced was working up the courage to ask participants not to take photos of me without permission. An SLI programme facilitator explained to me that the participants were just excited to see a foreigner express so much interest in their lives, culture, and language, which I appreciated, but the same facilitator assured me I was allowed to say no and worked with me to explain to participants that if I was not going to take photos of them without their permission, they should do the same for me. Most of them agreed, though I did catch several sneaking photographs from less-than-clandestine distances.

This is just one example of the differences that shaped the research process. Importantly, I tried my best to not view these differences as challenges or obstacles but instead important information about differences in experiences and identity. This is not to say some situations were not challenging, but instead to point out that in keeping an open mind about uncomfortable situations, I was able to learn more about my surroundings and the research process. As the research continued, I realised this mindset is a perfect embodiment of what I would come to define as conscious communication; by experiencing my own hypothesis, I was able to strengthen my research and argument.

Still, given my previous experiences in Auroville, I felt much more comfortable stepping into the role as participant observer since I was already familiar with the context in which I would be conducting my research. Additionally, as a follower of Aurobindo's integral yoga myself, I found the research process to be incredibly exciting and insightful because I was creating connections with what I already understood and what I was personally experiencing. This also was significantly helpful in helping me assimilate into the Aurovilian environment, not only as a way to meet new people and make friends, but I also found that Aurovilians were more willing to talk with me because they knew I had a genuine interest in the vision of Auroville. In one discussion with an Aurovilian, I expressed confusion over whether to accept a certain social norm in Auroville because it was part of such a different lifestyle from that of my hometown in California. On the one hand, I felt totally comfortable with it having been living in Auroville, and on the other hand, I felt like I couldn't participate because I wasn't from there. Her quick response—"But you are from here"—made me pause, and then it made me cry. Maybe I wasn't so much of an outsider after all.

Chapter 4: Defining Conscious Communication

While initially the scope of the research intended to observe participatory communication used in Development programmes, what became especially interesting over the course of study was not the method or process of communication used in practice, but instead its intention. Informants started to express repeated appreciation for certain qualities of communication that they considered to have profound significance in their relationships with themselves and with others. I myself started to notice these qualities and also felt impacted by them. Upon further exploration of these qualities and their impacts, framed in the setting of Auroville as an intentional community, the intentionality—or purpose—of five qualities revealed itself to be the key ingredient to actors' positive experiences in what I define as

communication as development. Exploring this intentionality, which Freire says is the essence of consciousness, resulted in my conception of conscious communication. This concept will be explained in three parts, first through proposing a definition of conscious communication through the Aurobindonian-Freirean lens, then by contextualising it, and finally by exploring its demonstrated qualities. During the field work, these qualities were repeatedly identified by key informants as valuable and meaningful. Drawing on literature which also notes the significance of these qualities, I then created my concept of conscious communication through analysing the intent and impact of these demonstrated qualities.

4.1 What is Conscious Communication?

As previously reviewed in Chapter 2, Aurobindo's idea of developing consciousness to realise human unity is remarkably similar to Freire's pursuit of psychosocial liberation for collective humanisation. Furthermore, Freire's concepts of consciousness and how to develop it through *conscientização* aligns well with Aurobindo's and helps translate the significance of Aurobindo's integral yoga into the language of communication as development.

First, remembering Freire's definition of consciousness-building as an awakening to the reality of experience through problem-posing education, and adding in Aurobindo's thoughts about layers of consciousness, two sides emerge framing a common definition of consciousness: it is both a mental faculty of awareness and can also evolve to reach beyond that faculty by reflecting critically on what one is aware of and, more importantly, how. Those who have a higher or more developed consciousness thus are more primally aware of themselves and the world around them, and also have a stronger understanding of their awareness by reflecting on it critically.

Dialogue therefore is strongly related to consciousness because the process of dialogue, which we already know to be awareness-building exercise, encourages a "creative discovery of

the world" as a "liberating education" that transforms one's understanding beyond the beliefs and limits imposed by social norms and circumstances (Waisbord, 2001:19). In this regard, dialogue also helps develop consciousness by expanding one's capability of critical thinking and connecting with the circumstances of their existence. Dialogue "requires the capacity to listen, to be silent, to suspend judgement, to critically investigate one's own assumptions, to ask reflexive question and to be open to change" (Hamelink, 2002:8)—all capacities that help evolve consciousness, and all capacities that those with higher consciousness are able to use.

Conscious communication therefore uses the concepts of participation and dialogue as a foundation but evolves both into a simultaneously more universal yet personal phenomenon by centring itself in the essence of consciousness—intentionality. This intentionality requires deep empathy for others, and indeed, Freire's pedagogy and Aurobindo's integral yoga are based on compassion for others and humankind. However, when it comes to communication, participation does embody many of their ideas, but does not always reflect them fully. We must be reminded of Servaes' (2008a; 2008b) and Mefalopulos' (2009) observations that participation itself is a highly complex term and can present itself in many different forms ranging from passive to empowering. Passive participation, for example, falls into the buzzword trap by using the word "participation" but not embodying the values of what participation truly means. It does not share the interest in participants as active or empowering participation. Conscious communication offers a solution by emphasising the intention of being aware of self and others *in the process of* communication. This intention is really one towards subjectivity: in a radical departure from how the modernisation paradigm offers linear solutions to complex problems, conscious communication centres itself in subjective experience, for "to deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people" (Freire, 1970:50).

As a result, a large part of this intentionality involves empathy and authenticity, two qualities which also define a similar concept in communication called Non-Violent Communication (NVC), or compassionate communication (Rosenberg, 1999). However, again looking at the case studies through the Aurobindonian-Freirean lens and in the Aurovilian context, consciousness is a much more integral element to this type of evolved communication than non-violence or compassion. In fact, it was clear that the idea of integral consciousness added a higher level of awareness and deeper level of understanding to the communication, while still building on the tenets of compassionate communication. Figure 8 demonstrates this integrality. We see that with integral consciousness, we employ a higher awareness of the greater, perhaps more abstract structures that create the very real conditions of our being, while simultaneously developing a deeper understanding of ourselves and who we are as people. It embodies consciousness of and the critical dialogue with the way we exist and why.

Figure 9 makes the connection between these layers and with the different layers of communication. The different layers of consciousness envisioned in the Aurobindonian-Freirean lens mirrors my proposed different layers of communication. At the bottom, basic faculties of sensory awareness create the human level of consciousness that Aurobindo says is purely mental. Similarly, participation can be seen as the foundation for more valuable dialogue by introducing the basic concept of two-way communication and ensuring its implementation. Compassionate communication, or NVC, enriches this type of communication by teaching how to be better listeners and to express oneself peacefully, and strongly encourages empathy which begins the process of interpersonal relating. Meanwhile, in beginning to reach a critical consciousness, we follow the first step of Freire's *conscientização* by starting to "tune into" the voices of the socially silenced as they reclaim their power of voice and self-expression. Finally, at the top, with an integral consciousness, one is not only aware of the circumstances of their being, but they are actively relating one's experience with those circumstances; through the

integrated consciousness they develop between the different layers of Aurobindo's consciousness. The pursuit of integral consciousness can remind us of the Johari Window as explained in Chapter 1 in that there are things that we know we are aware of, things we know others are aware of, things we know we are not aware of, and things we do not even know that we are not aware of. The last window evokes reference to Aurobindo's concept that humans are unaware of their sub-conscious because it exists below their mental capacity; however, that does not mean humans are unaware that the subconscious exists. Thus, in seeing how the layers of consciousness are integrated, we also see how these windows in the process of communication and learning are also integrated.

Figure 8: Integral Consciousness

The Individual	Higher consciousness	Awareness beyond limitations of human faculties and social constructs of one's relationship to the world and how the world works	Awareness of all three consciousnesses integrated together is **integral consciousness**
	Reality	Physical lived experience	
	Deeper understanding	Internal awareness of the self and how the self experiences the world	

Figure 9: Relating Consciousness and Communication

	Consciousness	Communication
	Integral consciousness	**Conscious communication**
We are relating	Integrated awareness of different levels of consciousness—allowing for both a higher and deeper understanding—in which one relates their experiences to that of others and the world system; encourages human unity through a	Intentional communication that seeks to be aware (conscious) of their immediate and greater realities; they begin to relate what they learn from communicating with others to the higher level of awareness

	stronger consciousness of the lived experiences of others	
We are connecting	**Critical Consciousness**	**Compassionate communication**
	Consciousness-building (*conscientização*) through learning about the experiences of the self, others and the world; reconciling the oppressed and the oppressors	Through dialogue, practicing active listening and expressing one's voice with compassion helps creates positive connection with others
We are communicating	**Human consciousness**	**Participation**
	Basic mental faculty that is cognitively aware of reality through the senses	Basic concept of two-way communication

Conscious communication therefore follows in the footsteps of compassionate communication through continuing to communicate inclusively and compassionately, but also creates a deeper impact by relating critically. Aurobindo himself discusses this conscious communication:

> "There must be an inner and direct mutual knowledge based upon a consciousness of oneness and identity, a consciousness of each other's being, thought, feeling, inner and outer movements; a conscious communication of mind with mind, heart with heart, a conscious impact of life upon a life" (1948:1077, my emphases).

The absence of these "powers" means there could be no "real or complete unity or a real and complete natural fitting of each individual's being" (ibid). As a result, we see that,

> "A spiritual approach to self-reflection, for instance, such as that of Yoga, proceeds with a different relationship between knowledge and human interest … the aim of knowledge — whether or self or other, or of both — is not to have power over the other but to become an instrument of service and communicative action" (Giri, 1998).

It should also be emphasised here that this definition of conscious communication is not meant to be viewed as a technique or a tool. From the fieldwork, it was clear the intention of the communication and the ideals achieved through the communication revealed the communication itself was the goal of the programmes observed. Communication was not a tool used to achieve a different goal. This is important to reiterate to support my argument that communication is not a tool for development but rather actually is development.

The next chapter and its five subchapters will explain the five common qualities which are embodied in conscious communication as was explored in the case studies. These common traits are active listening, authentic voice, (re)creating knowledge, community solidarity and creating space. Together, these traits support each other and when they are all realised, create an environment that truly encourages the type of dialogic consciousness-building Aurobindo and Freire can see as development.

4.2 Contextualising Conscious Communication

First, a definition of conscious communication would not be complete without looking at the environment in which this communication takes place. Communication does not take place in a vacuum, but it is influenced by the context in which it takes place—and the essence of conscious communication is founded on the essence of being aware of one's surroundings! Hence this chapter is just as essential to defining conscious communication as the next one.

Often discussed in the field of communication is the concept of environment, which does not refer to natural spaces but instead to the context of reality. First, environment is known not as "passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes which are invisible" and create the "ground rules, pervasive structure, and over all patterns" of the conditions in which we live (McLuhan and Fiore,1967:68). Deepening this definition, communication studies also consider what is called an "enabling environment," or the multi-layered external context in which the self exists and, in turn, influences, or enables, the self and its actions. It can be "the education system, policy and legislation, cultural factors, service provision, religion, socio-political factors, physical environment and organizational environment" (Servaes 2008a: 210). In that sense, context and environment can be understood as the macro-level conditions which shape the context of one's lived experiences.

When Freire and Aurobindo discuss consciousness, a primary reason for why they argue one should work on evolving their consciousness is because the world of oppression we live in seeks to suppress the consciousness of the individual and the masses to keep people satisfied with the status quo—the status quo being a world system built on dehumanisation and suffering—and to keep those in power, powerful. In practicing conscious communication, one must tune into their own lived experiences and begin to understand the context of those experiences so that they can liberate themselves from the conditions of their oppression. Aurobindo says "a free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development" (2003:92), but there are conditions which limit this free growth. In the case studies, it was very clear which external contextual factors had the biggest impacts on key informants. These factors were explained to me in the countless conversations I had with participants, programme facilitators and Aurovilians. These factors included gender dynamics, misogyny and sexism; India's caste system; colourism; economic hardships, including the prevalence of predatory loan shark schemes, high interest rates on loans, and inability to access bank credit; the changing economic landscape of India and Tamil Nadu which threatens rural livelihoods; climate change; the quickly growing tourism industry in the Auroville bioregion; taboos about menstruation; and access to education. Understanding these problems can be challenging, energy-consuming and emotionally difficult. But this is the exact *raison d'être* of conscious communication, according to one AVAG facilitator. "The society is responsible" for our problems, she said, "so let us try to analyse it … and whenever possible we try to challenge it." In essence, she tries to look at the larger picture, asking critically why things the way they are, which then can lead to reflection and transformative action. This process of inquiry is exactly the intention of the liberating pedagogy, the basis of conscious communication.

4.3 Five Qualities of Conscious Communication

This chapter will describe the five qualities of conscious communication that were demonstrated, observed and identified during the research. Small vignettes from the participant observation and interviews are only small glimpses of the many examples I gathered in my case studies. Yet supported by references to literature on communication, they offer insight into how these qualities were manifested and their significance in the communication process. Ties to the Aurobindonian-Freirean view on consciousness will also demonstrate their significance in developing individual and collective consciousness that the two authors argue encourage human unity. These qualities are closely intertwined, and indeed the small examples presented for each can often apply to another. The first two qualities, active listening and authentic voice, are especially interrelated and are explored first because they are the two qualities of compassionate communication that elevate it above basic participatory communication. However, based on feedback from informants, listening is a more highly valued trait than voice, which is why it is explored first among the five qualities.

4.3.1 Active Listening

When we think of communication, listening naturally plays an essential role. In monologues however, only the audience is meant to listen to the speaker, while in dialogue, the roles of speaker and audience are interchangeable. Similarly, according to Freire, the modern education model relies on the assumed binary between the roles of teacher and student—the one who knows and the one who does not—while liberating education interchanges the roles of teacher-student. Importantly, in the latter traditional teachers and students participate in "co-intentional education" where,

> "through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely

the-one-who-teaches, but one who himself is taught in dialogue
with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (69).

However, in the context of conscious communication, listening can be expanded both externally and individually. In doing so, the simple act of listening takes on a whole new meaning. For those who are have been discouraged to express themselves as a result of living in what Freire calls the "culture of silence," the experience of being listened to by others is a meaningful and valuable one. Active listening, which is part of NVC, takes this experience to a more significant level. It is considered "active" because the listener, in addition to taking in the information shared, feels emotionally impacted by that information and physically signals to the speaker, verbally or non-verbally; that the message has been received (Rosenberg, 1999). Together, these responses factors help the speaker feel validated and heard.

With conscious communication, we add another layer of significance by incorporating reflection and action into the listening process. These are the two steps of dialogue that Freire says facilitate critical awareness-building. While NVC offers how to express oneself and listen empathetically, signalling social safety and supporting existing relationships, conscious communication uses listening to facilitate a process of relating one's experiences with those of others. In the case studies, active listening in conscious communication had three impacts—to signal and receive validation, to introduce new ways of understanding, and to encourage bonding—all of which happened through the process of reflection and relating. The case studies made clear that being truly listened to is a deeply profound experience which signals trust, care and non-judgement, all of which contributed to forming an environment in which participants feel comfortable and engaged. Through active listening, both participants and facilitators were able to engage with the experiences of others, question some of their own perspectives and learn more about the world in exactly the critically conscious dialogue Aurobindo and Freire describe.

First and foremost, the fieldwork demonstrated the importance of listening to signal and receive validation. One participant at SLI's Wellness Consultant training expressed her favouritism toward a session with a female Siddha doctor, wherein the doctor briefly explained main elements of physical and mental health and then left the rest of the two-hour session open to questions from the participants. The participant said that this session was her favourite because she and others were able to ask questions; most importantly, the doctor "just listened" to her and responded to her questions patiently and without judgement. I was initially surprised by this response, having assumed that the sessions in which the participants practiced beauty techniques on each other would be their favourites, since those seemed to be the most fun. Instead, this participant told me that learning about her body and her health in a non-judgemental, open space was far more valuable and meaningful. This small example embodies the deeper meaning of conscious communication compared to compassionate communication: it was not just the listening, but the active engagement, on the part of facilitator that had a lasting impact on the participant.

On the facilitator side, an AVAG employee similarly stressed that keeping a non-judgemental attitude while listening to participants is key to building trust in the group and signalling to participants that they are in a safe environment to share openly. It also encourages perspective-building on the part of the facilitator as well. She said to encourage the participants to speak openly, facilitators need to listen and validate what is said without offering their own opinions. Showing judgement, she said, makes the conversation more about what the facilitator thinks than what the participants think. Instead, in her experience she can leave space for the participants to explore ideas by themselves by asking them to reflect on their own words. For example, her approach when discussing menstruation taboos is not to say that some practice is right while another practice is wrong. "I simply ask, 'What do you think of that?'" she said. In this way, the facilitator encourages the participants to engage in a sort of self-exploration to

begin to think more critically about their lives. In the case of menstruation, this reflection is an important dialogue for the participants to have because in Tamil culture, menstruation is considered a dirty and immoral subject, which can encourage physical and emotional harm for women when they are menstruating.

Among peers, listening with the intention of keeping an open mind also helps encourage shared understanding and bonding. AVAG's caste exchange programme asks participants to keep a non-judgemental attitude when they meet with women of a different caste. As a result, they can instead keep an open mind to the experiences of other women and in turn validate the many ways they are similar, rather than the few ways in which they are different. An AVAG facilitator described this as a way for participants from either caste to say, "we are all similar because we are women," which in turn helps them look beyond the divisive structure of caste and instead at the common bond of womanhood. In the context of the case studies, working with the concept of caste to break down both the ideological and material impacts of the system was a priority for the organisations surveyed.

Listening is also what helps open new windows for perception and understanding. SLI's training programmes are branded as perspective-building because one of the main goals of the programmes is to encourage women to start their own businesses, especially if they have been discouraged (by family members, their community, and/or society at large) to think they cannot. Hearing other women's stories of success was inspiring for the participants. In every training programme there is at least one field visit to a successful community-based enterprise in Auroville where the primary employees are village women, many of whom (if not all in some cases) were introduced to the enterprise through their SHG. At one enterprise, one of these women explained that she too had once been in a similar situation as the SLI participants, and 15 years later, she wanted to inspire other women to do the same by sharing her story as an example. (The participants responded to this with a big round of applause.)

Another important part of the SLI model is that participants are brought together from different parts of Tamil Nadu and given the opportunity to socialise, an important and empowering opportunity for many women who have not been able to leave their villages and/or travel without their families. Though they speak one language and follow the same religion, the participants from a single training programme can come from more than five different districts, all of which can have completely different cultural traditions. A conversation on common menstruation taboos facilitated by EcoFemme allowed the participants to relate to each other: when women would share beliefs about menstruation common to their village, a chorus of *amma* (yes) or *illa* (no), followed by an explanation ("No, in my village we believe…"), sparked a deeper dialogue about different ways of interpreting menstruation in Tamil culture. That point, the facilitator pointed out, highlighted that not all the participants' steadfast beliefs about menstruation are true. Again, what was seen here was not just an expression of one's perspectives and the opportunity for others to listen, but a critical examination of experience that encouraged the unlearning of some personal beliefs and the learning of others while a broadening of perspective to include the experiences of others.

EcoFemme also seeks to expand girls' perceptions of menstruation and normalise it by deciphering some of the myths and taboos associated with it. Facilitators are not exempt from this experience, and as the observation made clear, an effective facilitator is one who is willing to listen to participants and learn from them to shape their own awareness of menstruation. It can be incredibly valuable for facilitators to engage in active listening to better inform their approach and create bonds with their participants. It also contributes to the facilitator's own perspective-building. One EcoFemme facilitator said she had been initially taken aback when participants did not immediately choose to adopt the organisation's reusable cloth pads for whatever reason. The facilitator's response, both personally and within the group, is an example of what Rogers (1992; 1996) calls "a critical reflection on experience," wherein the role of

"expert" is fundamentally challenged by the local people, who rely more on their previous experience and knowledge in decision-making than blindly following an "authority" figure. This can be applied to the participatory context which challenges the idea of expertise, which will be explored in more detail in the following sub-chapters.

Finally, listening can also encourage the same critical reflection on personal experience. It can be, understandably, difficult to listen to others' stories, particularly when discussing emotional subjects like misogyny, domestic violence and abuse as they do at AVAG. An AVAG facilitator said she can be very disheartened by some of what she hears from participants and it takes a personal toll on her. Another said, after the caste exchange programme, that sometimes what the SHG members express during the discussion can be deeply emotional and speak to the complexities of their hardships, which also is difficult for her to hear. Indeed, during the caste exchange programme, when each pair was tasked with presenting her "sister" to the crowd, one woman started crying as she explained her "sister's" husband had died last year and that she was still grieving her loss. The woman explained how she was moved by her "sister's" story because she too lost her husband. With the status of widow being a taboo in Tamil culture their grief was layered between the loss of a loved one and the loss of a social status, and several other women in the audience were crying as well in understanding.

These examples demonstrate the essential value of listening in conscious communication. Listening becomes not just an action of ingesting information or receiving it, but a layered experience that empowers individuals and encourages relating, connection and understanding. In these examples, active listening was key in broadening one's perspective—whether that be one's opinion of themselves and others, or of larger concepts like culture. This action and reflection both demonstrate how when in engaging in dialogue, one has to "re-examine" themselves constantly (Freire, 1970:60). Traditional approaches to development communications have been slow to realise the value in listening, at least from a top-down

approach, but many now strive to adopt a "listen-not-tell" approach, paraphrasing Rao and Walton (2004). The participatory paradigm of course values listening as part of dialogic communication, but with these examples of active listening guided by the intention of broadening perspective, we see a stronger development of trust and connection between different people.

4.3.2 Authentic Voice

Voice can be defined, in the simplest of terms, as human beings' "account[s] of themselves and of their place[s] in the world" (Couldry, 2010:1). It is essentially a fundamental expression of experience and verbal communication is just one way to express that experience. A widely quoted piece of Freire's work is his idea that voice is our ability "to name the world" or to name our experiences (1970:88). In essence, voice can be seen as our way of making sense of our experiences in the world and sharing with others.

In the Development context, the concept of voice is often coupled with the concept of voicelessness, most often seen in efforts to "give a voice to the voiceless" or something to that effect, as part of a mission to empower the poor. The intention to use voice as a tool for empowerment is not unfounded. Many marginalised people recognise the concept of voice as one deeply impacted by power and equate an absence of voice with an absence of agency (see Narayan et al., 2000). An AVAG study interestingly demonstrated the perceived value of voice in women's lived experiences. Based on responses from 150 village women participants, AVAG found five common factors that indicated a self-perception of empowerment. These were having individual self-respect, respect by others, control over income, decision-making power and positive future expectations about social factors (AVAG, 2010). Importantly, a significant number of details for each relates to voice: capacity to ask for help, capacity to give an opinion, capacity to make a choice, capacity to address a problem in the community, capacity

to approach authority and figureheads, freedom to give opinions in the club, freedom to give opinions to husband, freedom to give opinions to husband's family, ability to make decisions in the club, in the home, about their own money, about mobility, and about their clothes (AVAG, 2010). Clearly, we can see the connection between having a voice and empowerment.

Still, many also recognise the problematic definition of "voicelessness." In accepting the 2004 Sydney Peace Prize, writer Arundhati Roy remarked, "We know of course there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.'" For Roy, voice is fundamentally inherent in each individual. Everyone has a story, and everyone has the right and ability to tell it in their own way. In this sense, "having voice" and "being voiceless" are entirely relative terms, for designating who has a voice and who is voiceless is equally tied to designating who is able to speak and who is not, who is listening and who is not, who is important and who is not. Being "voiceless" is akin to being excluded, and since "social exclusion is relative" and depends "on the point of reference for inclusion" (Silver and Miller, 2003:9), what it means to be "voiceless" can indeed shift and change depending on context and culture. Yet regardless of context, it is this exact exclusion Freire says causes dehumanisation. As Couldry (2010) writes, "Treating people as if they lack that capacity [to speak] is to treat them as if they were not human" (1). This dynamic does not encourage the uniting of humanity but indeed its division, discrediting entire cultures of thought, knowledge and tradition, isolating power, and creating intellectual hegemony among dominant power (Tuhawai Smith, 2005).

In conscious communication, the expression of authentic voice is encouraged to address the two problems created by these politics of exclusion. Participatory communication emphasises the power of voice first to break the barriers of exclusion, while compassionate communication teaches how to express voice clearly. Finally, conscious communication adds a layer of significance by encouraging the expression of authentic voice. One's authentic voice is aware of the complexity of one's experiences and, perhaps most importantly, the complexity

of voluntarily sharing one's experiences. Self-expression is not always easy, and conscious communication is aware of potential difficulties not just for speakers but for listeners as well.

A unique method observed at all three CBOs was encouragement for participants to build self-confidence through speaking or performing other forms of self-expression in front of others. At the AVAG PLF meeting and the inter-caste exchange programme, the facilitators asked if anyone wanted to share the traditional song of their village. Tamil village folk songs are a significant part of local culture and are often sung while working in the fields. In both events, the facilitators urged the participants to sing, especially those who seemed nervous to do so. By the time many women had finished their songs, they had started to cry. I noticed one woman in particular wipe these tears from her face with big smile, as one of the translators leaned over to tell me how the other participants were saying how proud they were of her beautiful singing voice. Similarly, in one of the intimate menstrual education sessions I observed with EcoFemme, the girls were asked by the facilitator to say the names of each reproductive organ and MHM product as they were presented to them. The responses would be unsure at first but grew more confident with the facilitator's insistence. I wrote down this interaction in my notes:

> *What is this?* The facilitator asks, pointing to the vagina on an illustration. Some silence follows.
> *Va... vagina?* One girl offers.
> *Vagina!* The facilitator affirms positively.
> *Vagina.* The girls say in quiet unison.
> *Vagina!* The facilitator says with force.
> *Vagina!* They repeat more loudly.
> *Vagina!* The facilitator offers a big smile.
> *Vagina!* The girls return it. The facilitator moves on to the next organ, doing the same in both English and Tamil. By the time they cover the entire illustration, each word only needs to be repeated once.

This moment with the schoolgirls demonstrated a growing momentum of confidence through saying the foreign words clearly, loudly and as a group. It was especially touching to see the girls enthusiastically repeat a pledge at the end of the session. One of the lines was: "I promise

to speak out about menstruation and share what I have learned with at least one other person." Not only did the girls practice strengthening their own voice in the session, but they also felt motivated to share their voice with others and help others learn as they had.

The strengthening of one's voice was not limited to participants either. An AVAG facilitator described how she was extremely shy when she started as a social worker more than two decades ago. This was surprising for me to hear considering I saw her as confident and outgoing during the caste exchange programme I attended and was impressed with her ability to keep the discussion on track among the group of loud, excited women. Yet over time, she said, learning to exercise her voice was an education in owning her authority as a staff member and facilitator. Similarly, participants at AVAG's events shared that a major takeaway from their involvement with AVAG is they learned to speak more confidently, both in public and in private. Their descriptions of "having confidence" was similar to those described in the AVAG report on empowerment.

Finally, as a participant in the programmes I too observed the effects of authentically expressing myself. At SLI, dancing in between sessions and on long bus rides to and from field visits is one of the most fun parts of the day. A facilitator also told me that during multi-day trainings, when the participants stay in a guest house together, their evenings are spent eating, dancing and singing—a bonding process she says builds friendships almost instantly. I noticed a growth in my own self-confidence in this regard. On my first field visit with SLI, the participants were delighted to learn I have a favourite Tamil song ("*Marana Mass*") and begged me to dance with them. Shy and embarrassed, I vehemently said no. Aware that my shyness was limiting me from fully enjoying the experience with the participants, on the third day I worked up the courage to dance with them. The result was a huge relief—the dynamic between me and the group completely changed from polite and distanced to relaxed and sociable. In turn

I felt much less like an outsider and felt more confident participating in the training as a more accepted member of the group.

4.3.3 "Re-Creating" Knowledge

An important element of conscious communication is understanding the substance of communication. If communication is the human exchange of information to create knowledge, knowing what information is being exchanged is also important to understand how knowledge is created. This is particularly sensitive subject in Development, for the influence of modernisation is particularly strong in this regard, as the what one should know in development communications is often strongly influenced by the dominant understanding of what knowing actually is. In my opinion this is the strongest example of how Development as an institution today is still influenced by the modernisation paradigm and is rooted in imperial, colonial and post-colonial beliefs which consider Western knowledge, logic and reason as "good" or "right." In contrast, non-Western, local and indigenous knowledge, usually the product of long and rich histories of tradition and culture, is then seen as "bad" or "wrong." Ironically, Waisbord (2001) tells us the tradition of Development is to view tradition as backwards and an obstacle to progress. McKee (1992) describes how this tradition asks people to adopt completely new forms of supposedly "true" knowledge that is dismissive of their own age-old practices and beliefs. There are extreme and terrible examples of this "ask" not being an ask at all but rather a demand for indoctrination enforced by physical and emotional harm (Tuhawai Smith, 2005). And today still, social and behavioural change programmes are often based on theoretical or practical models that are not appropriate and do not translate into different countries (Waisbord, 2001). The result is a constant reinforcement of the supposed superiority of Western knowledge and the erasure of important cultural knowledge. The participatory paradigm, rising out of rebellion against this phenomenon, not only directly criticises and positions itself in opposition to this

modern conception of "knowing," but it actively seeks to un-do the harmful indoctrination of modernisation by validating and celebrating traditional knowledge. As aforementioned, participatory communication is often manifested in culturally relevant media. However, these media are sometimes also used as an end—sometimes the goal is to revive these traditions and celebrate practices that have been pushed aside by globalisation and by extension Development. Finally, participation and its emphasis on the voices—the experiences—of participants also challenges the dominant dynamic that assumes highly-educated experts are the ones with knowledge and "normal" people are not.

As the *Pedagogy* of the Oppressed, Freire's philosophy strongly critiques this modern concept of knowledge and education as merely an opportunity to deposit information into the minds of the students, indoctrinating them into a pre-determined mindset, which contributes to their dehumanisation. Alternatively, his concept of knowledge as a "process of inquiry" (1970:85) is a process in which the "learner is the active agent in creating knowledge" which makes capacity-building education significantly different from didactic education (McKee et al., 2007). In this co-intentional education, "no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught" (Freire, 1970:80), and instead knowledge is developed through their experiences of the world and interactions with each other. Similarly, Aurobindo writes that "the first principle of true teaching is nothing can be taught" (2003:384), again noting that we only learn through experience. Understanding intentionality as the essence of consciousness, we can also read "cointentional education" as "co-conscious education," meaning that both teachers and students develop their consciousnesses together through their relationship. For Aurobindo, this is an essential part of realising human unity because humanity has to first realise a collective consciousness in which our individual consciousness "comes to embrace the whole world and all other beings in a sort of conscious extension of itself and to perceive itself as one with the world-being" (2005:383).

These three ideas—breaking down the traditional teacher/student dynamic, exploring ideas together and developing a collective knowledge—as part of conscious communication were highly evident in the three case studies, despite some aspects being structured in the more traditional teacher-student educational model. Most interestingly, at SLI, the first requirement in its curriculum is that all faculty are active practitioners in their respective fields. These faculty then speak from their own experiences and explain to participants what they themselves has learned from these experiences. This is what I started to call the "experience as expertise" model. Despite having some lecture-style sessions, the decision to have practitioners as faculties makes the SLI model significantly more participatory/organic than diffusion/mechanistic because it confronts the traditional roles Development assigns between expert and non-expert. In a classroom where one practitioner meets with other practitioners (or aspiring ones), Servaes and Arnst (1992) explain the "knowledge gap" between "'experts'" and local people is wrong, unless the "'experts,' through cooperation and learning from local people, can apply their knowledge in the context and to the benefit of local 'expertise'" (18, my emphasis). The SLI classroom witnessed the same effect. One faculty member explained this to me as, first, he only knew what he knew from his own experiences as a practitioner. When asked whether or not the ideas he presented in his introductory class on organic farming were ever new or foreign to the participants, he said no. Everyone is already aware of the subject, he said, and the problem is not a question of awareness or knowing, but a problem of implementation, which is where he finds he can help participants the most. He said "just sitting with them is a learning opportunity" because he only knows what he knows from his personal experiences. Hearing from the participants thus educates him about other possible experiences too. His comments reminded me of the Johari Window as explained in Chapter 1. His "blind spot" is the realities of the participants and theirs is his. Together, their collective blind spot is the solution to the problem

of implementation, which therefore became the focus of the training session to brainstorm collectively.

EcoFemme is guided by a similar idea of "informed choice." Even though it sells reusable cloth pads as a social enterprise, facilitators do not force the women and girls who attend their sessions to use accept the cloth pads or use them. Said one facilitator, "Many people ask us, 'Why aren't you pushing the cloth pads?' … We believe women, given the right information, have the agency to make [their own] choice." EcoFemme's sessions are thus built on a similar "experience as expertise" model where facilitators encourage women and girls to own their responsibility as experts of their own bodies and make decisions based on their own self-knowledge. In the EcoFemme sessions, the facilitator leads a product analysis of MHM products in which participants can explain why or why not they would choose to use a certain product. This process of facilitating dialogue among the participants—challenging the social norms on disposable products and reusable ones—thus starts to encourage a new understanding of how they want to take care of their body during menstruation.

4.3.4 Community Solidarity

An essential element of conscious communication has to be community solidarity, not just because consciousness is essentially an understanding of others, but because conscious communication is part of Aurobindo and Freire's pursuit of a united humanity. Freire writes that "Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people" (1970:89). In the spirit of community solidarity, or fraternity in Aurobindo's words, conscious communication looks at problems, not people, and encourages individuals to reflect on social systems that cause community problems.

Among the three case studies, AVAG has done the most work with community solidarity. AVAG's approach to "co-development" strongly values solidarity, which is one

reason why its work has been effective and, in many ways, ground-breaking. First, the emphasis on working together, including across social barriers like caste and gender, to address community-wide problems is a way to include everyone under a shared mission. In the AVAG study on empowerment, more women said they felt more respected in a group than as individuals. Their responses show a positive correlation between the group's level of respect for itself, and the development of self-esteem among individual members. The reported noted "Most of the women notice a change in their capacity to communicate, to make decisions, [and] to be more self-confident. They felt more courageous, more confident, and more useful" (AVAG, 2010:14).

Second, the AVAG approach finds that it is easier to find shared problems among different people to remind them of their similarities. Caste, for example, is a problem that a facilitator said everyone wants to solve. While some other organisations may work to address caste as a human rights activity, this facilitator explained that the label of human rights, rather than solidarity, has actually caused more problems of division:

> "If I take up this caste initiative as a human rights activity then there will be people [who] support this caste, people [who] support that caste. … They would say, 'Oh you are called the Dalit groups, you are oppressed by the upper caste.' So, then the upper caste people will try all possible things to defend themselves. … But if I say this is a solidarity activity, it covers everyone."

Thus, not only does AVAG find it possible to address social injustice through the strength of community solidarity, but it finds it easier to build such solidarity by simply making such solidarity the purpose of addressing social injustice!

Moreover, when solidarity was expressed during the participant observation, there was an immediate reaction to it that facilitated bonding in the given context. When Freire writes that "Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture" (49), he truly means one must subject one's self into the experiences of others

to understand how they experience the world. This theme came up frequently with the concept of practitioners facilitating sessions at SLI. For example, one SLI practitioner shared that she decided to become a facilitator because she had once been in the same position as the participants. She wanted to become an entrepreneur but lacked the skills and know-how. After being trained through her SHG at a centre like SLI, she established her business and now wanted to help other women do the same. This facilitator in particular was thus able to give extra specific insight to the participants about starting a business as a woman because she had been int heir situation before.

Finally, I noticed that these acts of solidarity do not need to be grand gestures, but even the smallest of actions can help facilitate awareness-building and connection. For example, when observing the first Pad4Pad session with EcoFemme, the girls largely ignored me until the facilitator introduced the subject of MHM and the cloth pad. Pulling out my own EcoFemme cloth pad from by bag, I shared with the girls that I was currently menstruating and enjoyed using the reusable pad. This cracked the surface with some of the them, who offered a few smiles, but I still did not feel connected with them. That changed when the facilitator started explaining some aspects of the female reproductive system that I myself did not quite understand. I started writing down my own notes and when the girls noticed, they were shocked. I told them this was new information for me too and I was learning with them, and just like when I finally worked up the courage to dance on the SLI bus, our relationship as a group softened and I felt the girls warm up to me. They started asking me questions about myself and wanting to show me things. By demonstrating a shared trait between us—that I too needed to learn about my body—I transformed from a stranger to a peer, and perhaps only just for an afternoon, a friend.

4.3.5 Creating Space

Finally, as consciousness involves awareness of and critical thinking about one's environment, conscious communication cares for and lends attention to the physical, mental and emotional space available for actors to engage with each other. Physically, this can look like excluding men from conversations about sensitive topics for women, like menstruation; for example, at SLI, the room in which class sessions take place is generally left open for anyone to pass by or enter. Staff members and guests—mostly male—often stop by to listen. During some sessions of the Wellness Consultant training, however, including the EcoFemme session on menstruation and the beautician's session on sari styling, which requires participants who volunteer to get undressed and have their saris re-wrapped in different ways, the door stays shut and locked. This is a simple and straightforward example of creating a safe environment for women to discuss more sensitive topics and respect their privacy.

Interestingly, the physical set-up of some sessions demonstrated the "grey area" that Quarry and Ramirez (2009) describe, which explained why even though the three CBOs studied had highly participatory programming, they also engaged in the more monologic style of education that Freire critiques. In two straightforward examples, part of the SLI trainings and the first half of the EcoFemme programmes are designed to be a more traditional lecture in which the facilitator explains a concept to the group. This more formal setting was most fitting during the EcoFemme sessions, as the target group was young girls and it took place during the school day in the school courtyard. Mirroring the classroom dynamic was helpful in setting the tone of the session as an educational one and also presenting the information to the girls, which was new to many. In the SLI trainings, the lecture sessions were reserved for informative sessions where hands-on or field work activities would not be appropriate. These included, for example, a women's anatomy class, a fundamentals of sustainable agriculture class and a profit-maximisation class. In these settings the role of listening is fundamental, in that the speaker has

information the audience needs to hear to digest and learn. Thus, this physical setup itself not only facilitated the learning, but contributed to the dialogue that happened therein.

Mental space is inherent in the concept of conscious communication because we are required to think critically about the context in which we communicate with others. Tuning into others and "reading the room" is critical: Quarry and Ramirez tell us "Listening to the context is about appraising, learning, recognising and appreciating all those dimensions [of what is happening around us] so that we can make well informed decisions" (2009:113-4). This is an especially important part of facilitating dialogues that are particularly emotional or sensitive for participants, particularly those coming from an already vulnerable place or who look to facilitators for guidance and support. EcoFemme, in working with young girls, took this point very seriously and stressed in its training manual several times that "We [facilitators] need to recognise that the way we hold our presence in the group we are interacting with has a major impact on the girl's experience" (EcoFemme, 2017:9). A facilitator also told me that she takes extra time to prepare herself before a session so that she is able to come to the session as open-minded, relaxed and positive as possible, which then makes "listening to the context" easier for her. Her approach demonstrates a Freire's metacognitive definition of consciousness—she turns her awareness onto herself and her experience in order to better be aware of the experiences of others. Another facilitator simply told me that "It's easy to have a cookie cutter approach," but the real reward comes from putting in the effort to tailor dialogues to participants' needs and preferences.

Finally, creating emotional space is the essential element of conscious communication that elevates it beyond both participatory and compassionate communication and towards the even more humanistic approach envisioned in the Aurobindonian-Freirean paradigm. Emotional space and support are created through the realisation of other qualities already aforementioned, such as developing trust through listening, empowerment through voice, bond

through community, power through knowledge and comfort through space. All of these elements together can create the emotional space—the emotional opportunity—for people to be authentic and express themselves. For example, the same SLI participant who said she enjoyed the Siddha session also explained to me that she struggles with infertility, and the only opportunity she previously had to discuss her reproductive health was with her male doctor during consultations at the hospital, an experience she described as cold, quick, and with limited face-to-face interaction. She said she never truly had her body's anatomy explained to her and this left her feeling discouraged and confused. In contrast, the opportunity to speak with a female doctor in a relaxed environment with other women was a significantly more positive, welcoming and informative experience. The two juxtaposing conversations she described—one with a man in a sterile hospital without care, and the other with a group of women in a relaxed, friendly space—create a clear example of what emotionally available communication looks like.

Another interesting approach to emotion in the case studies is how EcoFemme used emotion as a type of compass for critical dialogue: an introduction to its programme reads, "If following a particular belief or practice makes us happy, that is our business, and it okay. What we may want to question are beliefs and practices that have a negative impact on our lives" (EcoFemme, 2017: 34). Thus, for EcoFemme, the point of departure for critical dialogue is the point where the individual feels negatively impacted by an external concept (Freire would agree with this approach, since his whole philosophy is built on trying remedy the dehumanisation.) It is incredibly important to be conscious of emotions in Development practice because Development, in looking at how to improve the lives of human beings, is therefore an inherently emotional subject: it is "a powerfully affective world that touches us all" (Crew and Axelby, 2013:1) in which we can "find emotion both in its proponents and opponents, in those that receive development aid, those called upon to donate, those doing development and those

impacted upon by it" (Wright, 2012:1114). Conscious communication would therefore neither be conscious or communication if it did not bring awareness to the emotional experiences of actors or how they impact, inform or inspire the process of communication.

Altogether, organisations and facilitators have a large role to play in creating this space, both physically, mentally and emotionally, for the people whom they are tasked to serve. Reflecting on the great "work" for which AVAG receives quite a bit of praise, a staff member put it simply: "We don't do the work. We create the space for them [the participants] to do the work." Speaking directly to the participatory paradigm's recognition of stakeholders as active subjects in a dynamic environment rather than passive objects, the organisation recognises its own role as the creator of space rather than the cause of action.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The many examples presented in the previous chapter are just some of the ways communication, elevated by the intentionality of consciousness, represented opportunities for personal and collective growth and bonding. While consciousness may be a foreign concept to some, in reality it is something that we are all experience and are aware of to various extents. During the case studies, it was truly clear how important the idea of consciousness-building is to encouraging personal transformation, which can contribute to greater, collective social change. The dialogues that took place were ones of learning, unlearning, connection and relation, all of which had positive impacts on the key informants. At the end of the research period I compiled these findings into a list of best communication and facilitation practices for the CBOs. (For the most part, it said, "Keep up the great work.")

To conclude, the examples I illustrate here of a communication that is deeply meaningful and valuable in the lives of some 80 or so individuals, are indeed small, and are likely to go unnoticed in the grand scheme of things, especially with Development still being

so focused on quantitative efficiency, meeting quotas and achieving goals. Still, it reminds me of a comment from the Mother in her 1956 New Year's message. She said, "The greatest victories are the least noisy. The manifestation of a new world is not proclaimed by the beat of the drums" (2004, volume 17:171). Tufte (2017) makes a similar comment, that it is often the more "silent" community work of civil society organisations, often in rural areas, that has contributed more to social change than the "noisiness" of large-scale protests and media campaigns. Thus, I conclude with offering that these small intentional acts of listening to one another, expressing one's authentic voice, creating knowledge together, supporting each other, and creating space for experience, have a much louder impact than one might be able to recognise at the moment.

This new type of communicating with each other with intention and care is something quite radical in the Development field and indeed, development communications or even communication for development. "We realize we are just learning how to teach this language" Quarry and Ramirez (2009:123) write, which makes complete sense coupled with Aurobindo's argument that what we are conscious of as simply humans is rather limited, and it is only with time and a great deal of effort we can expand that consciousness and enter into a new phase of knowing. There are plenty of opportunities to bring the understanding of consciousness developed in this thesis to not just Development practice moving forwards, but also in the way we interact with others on a regular basis. I conclude with a quote from Aurobindo, who looked to the future with the same hope and optimism, and of course, with intention: "We of the coming day stand at the head of a new age of development ... we do not belong to the past dawns but to the noon of the future" (1997:10).

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