

*Integral Yoga:
The spiritual ideals of Auroville*

Auroville 2004

For thousands of years we have been developing outer means, outer instruments, outer techniques for living - and in the end those means and techniques are crushing us. The sign of the new humanity is a reversal of outlook and the understanding that inner means, inner knowledge and inner techniques can change the world and master it without crushing it.

Auroville is the place where this new way of living is being worked out; it is a centre of accelerated evolution where man must begin to change his world by means of the power of the inner spirit.

The Mother

Throughout the text, masculine nouns and pronouns are used to represent both genders.

*The author gratefully acknowledges the support of
Stichting de Zaaier and Auroville International for
the preparation and publication of this monograph.*

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Author: Bindu Mohanty

Design: Prisma

Cover photos: Ireno Guerci

Printed at: All India Press, Pondicherry, 2004

Published by: Auroville International Association
www.auroville-international.org

Distributed by: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605 101, India
Email: avtoday@auroville.org.in

For further information on Auroville: www.auroville.org

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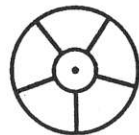
Auroville Charter

Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the divine consciousness.

Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

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 realizations.

Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.



1

Auroville and its founding vision

On 28 February 1968, youth representing 121 nations and all States of India placed a handful of earth in a lotus - shaped urn, symbolizing the creation of Auroville - a city of peace and human unity. Supported since its inception by UNESCO and the Government of India, Auroville at present comprises 1,600 people from India and thirty - four other countries. Located in Tamil Nadu, south India, thirteen villages in Auroville's immediate vicinity with a population of approximately 40,000 people directly or indirectly participate in the Auroville experiment.

“Auroville wants to be the first realization of human unity based on the teaching of Sri Aurobindo, where people of all countries would be at home.”

Auroville has created a basic infrastructure with accommodation for its residents in about 100 settlements. Municipal services for food, renewable energy and appropriate building technology, ecological agriculture, alternative production, purchase and distribution, electricity and water supply, communication, waste management, education, health care, financial transactions and town planning have been established. Auroville has also made commendable efforts towards promoting environmental regeneration, health care, educational research, handicrafts and small - scale industries, and rural development.

Underlying this multifaceted growth of Auroville is a spiritual aim, for Auroville draws its inspiration from the work of the visionary sage, Sri Aurobindo. As the Mother (née Mirra Alfassa), the founder of Auroville and the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo, declared, "Auroville wants to be the first realization of human unity based on the teaching of Sri Aurobindo, where people of all countries would be at home."¹ While Auroville welcomes all people who are drawn to the ideal of human unity, the deeper spiritual significance of Auroville can only be understood in the context of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. This paper presents some key concepts of Sri Aurobindo's teachings and details certain ideals of Auroville, particularly those pertaining to education, economy and organization.

Sri Aurobindo, regarded as one of India's greatest philosopher - sages, formulated a scientific and spiritual vision of evolution that envisages a complete transformation of the world and the birth of a new, spiritualized race. The scope and uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's work is mirrored in his unusual life experience. Sri Aurobindo was sent to study in England at the age of seven and, according to his father's wishes, he received an entirely occidental education without any contact with Indian languages or culture. A brilliant scholar in Greek and Latin, Sri Aurobindo was also well - versed in French, German and Italian. When he graduated from Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo was steeped in the

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European culture. Upon returning to India at the age of twenty - one, Sri Aurobindo took it upon himself to learn Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, thereby assimilating the spirit of

Indian culture and civilization. Sri Aurobindo thus represents a remarkable synthesis of Indian and Western traditions and accordingly his writings appeal to people from both East and the West.

Sri Aurobindo's vision of life, detailed in over thirty volumes, traces the evolution of the human species through anthropology, sociology, politics, psychology, culture and religion. Most of his major works, namely *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret*

of the Veda, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle* were written simultaneously in the period 1914 - 1920 and published in serialized form in a contemporaneous monthly philosophical review, *The Arya*. The genius of Sri Aurobindo lies in the fact that he successfully reworks esoteric Indian spiritual thought in terms accessible to the modern, scientific thinker. In a tribute to Sri Aurobindo, noted transpersonal thinker Ken Wilber states:

Aurobindo's genius was not merely that he captured the profundity of India's extraordinary spiritual heritage. He was the first great philosopher - sage to deeply grasp the nature and meaning of the modern idea of evolution. And thus, in Aurobindo, we have the first grand statement of an evolutionary spirituality that is an integration of the best of ancient wisdom and the brightest of modern knowledge ... nobody combined both philosophical brilliance and a profoundly enlightened consciousness the way Aurobindo did. His enlightenment informed his philosophy; his philosophy gave substance to his enlightenment; and that combination has been rarely equaled, in this or any time.²

One can draw parallels between the writings of Sri Aurobindo and other modern philosophers such as Hegel, Bergson, Teilhard de Chardin and Jean Gebser. Sri Aurobindo has also directly and indirectly influenced the growing disciplines of developmental and transpersonal psychology. What differentiates Sri Aurobindo from these thinkers, however, is that he did not see himself as a philosopher but maintained that his writing had a direct co - relation to his spiritual experience, and he always sought to find a practical application of his knowledge. As Satprem, one of his disciples, writes, "Sri Aurobindo said that the only utility of books and philosophies was not truly to enlighten the mind but to bring it to silence so that, calmed, it could pass to the experience and receive the direct inspiration."³ After 1920, and apart from his magnum opus, the epic *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo's writing mainly finds expression in thousands of letters individually addressed to his disciples guiding them in their practice of Integral Yoga, the new spiritual discipline advocated by him and the Mother.

While many contemporary scholars, particularly from the West, overlook the contribution of the Mother in the development of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, Sri Aurobindo himself acknowledged her as his

"The task of giving a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's vision was entrusted to the Mother."

spiritual equal and collaborator. She was the moving force behind the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, founded in Pondicherry in

1926. Much later, in 1969, she described her role thus:

The task of giving a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's vision was entrusted to the Mother. The creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. ... The Ashram founded and built by the Mother was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind.⁴

It needs to be emphasized here that the "new world" Sri Aurobindo and the Mother envisioned is not based on the creation of a new religion or a new sect.

They worked to transform the world and effect the next stage in the evolution of humankind by bringing down to Earth the power of a higher consciousness that they termed the

Supermind. Their spiritual vision thus encompasses all humanity, and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville are regarded as experiments in collective living that can perhaps help humankind in its evolutionary march.

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The epistemology of Indian spiritual traditions

As Sri Aurobindo places himself in the millennia - old Vedic spiritual tradition of India, it is necessary to distinguish the epistemology of Indian philosophy from that of the West. To begin with, strictly speaking, there is no Indian equivalent for the word "philosophy", which literally means "love of wisdom". The corresponding word in Sanskrit for metaphysical or spiritual knowledge is *darshana*, which connotes "revealed wisdom". The Vedas themselves, the fount of almost all Indian spiritual traditions, are referred to as *shruti* literature, which again connotes knowledge that is revealed. Indian sages and mystics believe that beyond the sensorial world there is a transcendental reality that can be grasped only by intuition and not by the rationality of the intellect. Thus, unlike Western metaphysics, which is mostly based on the dialectic logic of the intellect,

Indian metaphysics is based on what Sri Aurobindo calls "the logic of the Infinite".

Indian metaphysics, especially in the early Vedantic age, is based on spiritual experiences, or what Sri Aurobindo calls "the logic of the Infinite".⁵ The belief in intuitive knowledge, gained by direct experience and unmediated by social and cultural constructs, is accepted in all Indian spiritual traditions. Mystics claim that knowledge of a transcendental reality cannot be interpreted by the rational mind but can be known and verified by following a requisite spiritual discipline.

While the transpersonal movement in the West acknowledges a transcendent or suprarational dimension to human knowledge, the truth - claims made by Indian or Eastern mystics have led to epistemological problems for social scientists, especially as the nature of the transcendent reality is described differently in different traditions. As Peter Heehs points out in his book *Indian Religions*: "Are mystics right in thinking that what they feel themselves to be in contact with is a (or the) reality? Do their private experiences put them in a position to make claims about the nature of life and the world? If these truth - claims disagree with one another, are some or all of them refuted? Is there one Truth or many truths, or is 'truth' a human construction determined by social and political forces ... ?"⁶ While much of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's worldview can be subject to such questions, it is beyond the

scope of this paper to deal with such epistemological problems. The tenets of Integral Yoga presented here, especially those that deal with the nature of transcendental reality, can either be accepted on faith or considered as truth - claims. It needs to be pointed out however that throughout his voluminous writings, Sri Aurobindo expresses a worldview that is comprehensive, consistent, and a convincing explanation of manifest reality. In this regard Sri Aurobindo is unparalleled by any philosopher in the East or West.

The metaphysics of Sri Aurobindo's vision

Sri Aurobindo's teaching starts with the ancient Vedantic premise of Brahman, or the One Self, as the ultimate creator - omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent - who is all that is created and is yet beyond creation. This One Self expresses itself in creation through myriad forms and, through the process of evolution, these myriad forms seek to recover their essential unity in the One Self. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, "All evolution is the progressive self - revelation of the One to himself."⁷

Essentially, the One Self, or Brahman, is described in the Vedanta as *Sachchidananda*, having the triune attributes of Sat (absolute existence), Chit - Tapas (absolute consciousness and force), and Ananda (absolute

**"Evolution of Life in matter
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bliss). Both Eastern and Western philosophers recognize that all of creation essentially consists of an exterior form which is animated by an inner force or consciousness. Indian philosophy holds that it is the attribute of Sat which determines the exterior form, while that of Chit - Tapas determines the force or consciousness contained within the form. Everything in this creation exhibits these two essential attributes of Sat and Chit - Tapas as form and consciousness - force. According to ancient Indian scriptures,

and re - affirmed by Sri Aurobindo, creation is seen as a divine "lila" or play, the *raison d'être* of which is Ananda or bliss: "From Ananda," says the Upanishad, "all existences are born, by Ananda they remain in being and increase, to Ananda they depart."⁸

Like Hegel before him, Sri Aurobindo posits that in order for evolution to take place, there must have been an involution of the Self in matter: "Evolution of Life in matter supposes a previous involution of it there, unless we suppose it to be a new creation magically and unaccountably introduced into Nature."⁹ Elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo describes this process of involution and evolution thus:

This One Being and Consciousness [Sachchidananda] is involved here in Matter. Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self - impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. The next step of the evolution must be towards the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. For only then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it become possible for life to manifest perfection.¹⁰

In short, matter, life (also referred to as the vital by Sri Aurobindo) and mind form the basis of our earthly existence. This much is verified by science and accepted by all modern evolutionary theorists, from Teilhard de Chardin to Ervin Laszlo. Sri Aurobindo however further postulates that as mind is still limited in its power and knowledge and has a divisive consciousness, there is a fourth principle, the principle of Supermind, endowed with divine attributes of infinite power and integral knowledge, which, through the process of evolution, will one day be fully manifested on Earth.

In *The Life Divine*, which is an exposition of his metaphysical vision of evolution, Sri Aurobindo explains at length that if Brahman, the One Self, is involved in matter, then its attributes of Sat, Chit and Ananda are involved or hidden in matter. Each higher level of evolution progressively reveals the nature of Brahman; that is to say, each evolutionary level – from matter to plants to animals to human

At every significant evolutionary stage, new forms with an increasingly complex expression of consciousness are produced.

beings and ultimately to supramental being – expresses more and more the qualities of Sat and Chit and Ananda. As one proceeds upwards on the evolutionary scale from matter to life to mind, one observes that the material density or rigidity of the form decreases and the consciousness of the form increases. At every significant evolutionary stage, new forms with an increasingly complex expression of consciousness are produced. In other words, out of hard, inanimate rocks, plants capable of showing response arose, out of plants, animals capable of instinctive reaction arose, and out of animals, human beings with a rational will arose. Sri Aurobindo explains that the third principle of Ananda or Bliss manifests itself as a secret desire towards recovering the essential unity of Sachchidananda. Thus, in the evolutionary scale, Ananda expresses itself as the force of attraction in matter, hunger in the physical - vital domain, desire in the vital, and love in the mental domain of human beings.¹¹ As, “evolution is not finished ... nor the reasoning animal the supreme figure of Nature”¹², it follows out of logical necessity that at the supramental level, a stage of consciousness much higher than the mind, a new form or the supramental species will be manifested on Earth. Says Sri Aurobindo, “as man emerged out of the animal, so out of man, the superman emerges.”¹³ Sri Aurobindo describes this superman or the supramental race as possessing all the divine qualities of Sachchidananda, namely immortality, absolute consciousness, omnipotence and unity.

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The influence of typal planes

Hegel believed that the Spirit (or Self) seeks to become infinite by its struggle to overcome the finite. Sri Aurobindo however posits that the Self or Sachchidananda, never loses its infinity or omnipotence. This hypothesis leads to some important ramifications. To begin with, the Self, being infinite and omnipotent does not have any limitations other than what it chooses to impose upon itself. It is free to express itself not just through the process of evolution but in various other ways. On this premise, Sri Aurobindo posits that during the process of involution seven subtle, “typal” worlds were created that expressed an essential quality of the Self or Sachchidananda: “All that manifested from the Eternal has already been arranged in worlds or planes of its own nature, planes of subtle Matter, planes of Life, planes of Mind, planes of Supermind, planes of the triune luminous Infinite [i.e. the three planes of Sat, Chit and Ananda, which together comprise Sachchidananda]. But these worlds or planes are not evolutionary but typal. A typal world is one in which some ruling principle manifests

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itself in its free and full capacity.”¹⁴ To the modern evolutionary theorist, belief in such intangible and occult worlds would be inadmissible given the lack of objective proof. But Sri Aurobindo, citing his own spiritual experience as evidence, and scathingly dismissing the limitations of sensorial - experience, states: “Not having bound ourselves down, like so much of modern thought, to the dogma that ... the analysis of physical experience by the reason alone [is] verifiable ... and anything beyond this an error, self - delusion and hallucination, we are free to accept this evidence and to admit the reality of these planes.”¹⁵ It could be mentioned in passing that Sri Aurobindo’s description of the typal planes is in keeping with that of the ancient Vedantic seers who spoke of the “sevenfold chord of Existence”, or the existence of seven occult planes beyond the material world.

For Sri Aurobindo, the existence of typal planes is fundamental to understanding the complex process of evolution: “The development of Life, Mind and Spirit in the physical being presupposes their existence [that of typal planes]; for these powers are developed here

by two co - operating forces, an upward - tending force from below, an upward - drawing and downward - pressing force from above."¹⁶ He explains that without the influence of tygal planes from above, the Spirit could have remained forever imprisoned in Matter, for there is no justification as to why Matter, on its own accord, should evolve to liberate the Spirit involved within it. Conception is a useful analogy to understand these ascending and descending forces of the evolutionary process. Conception takes place only when the womb is ready for impregnation. At each level of evolution, when the Earth (the material womb) was ready to take an evolutionary leap upwards, there was a descent of the corresponding tygal plane onto Earth. That is to say, the principle of the Mind descended onto Earth from the Mental Plane, long before human beings possessing the instrument of mind were born. Similarly, the spiritual consciousness of the Supermind is believed to now be active on Earth, having descended from the supramental plane from above. As Sri Aurobindo says, "a secret continuous action of the higher powers and principles from their own planes upon terrestrial being and nature ... must have an effect and a significance. Its first effect has been the liberation of Life and Mind out of Matter; its last effect has been to assist the emergence of a spiritual consciousness."¹⁷ According to the Mother, the supramental manifestation upon earth took place in 1956, and in 300 years or more, depending upon the capacity of human beings for progress, the Earth will witness the birth of a new species, the supramental race. Considering that it took at least 200,000 years from the emergence of the *homo sapiens* to the full flowering of powers of the mind as evidenced today, 300 years is a mere blink of the eye on the evolutionary timescale. For Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the advent of a supramental age was a certitude. As the Mother, in a decisive message in 1956 said, "The manifestation of the supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality. It is at work here, and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognize it."¹⁸ It is to be noted however that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother discouraged unnecessary speculation amongst their disciples about the effects that the supramental consciousness would have on the world, believing that this omnipotent divine power would work things out in its own way and at its own pace.

The principle of descent

The idea of a descent of a divine power from higher planes is not widely accepted in Western theology or spiritual metaphysics, though there are references to it in the writings of certain Greek philosophers, namely, Heraclitus, Plato and Plotinus. Modern thinkers, such as Arthur Lovejoy and Ken Wilber, have more recently developed this topic, but the concept of a "divine descent" is elaborated to its fullness only in the Hindu tradition. Sri Aurobindo's description of the various kinds of "descent" of the omnipotent Self includes and goes beyond Wilber's concept of descent or *Agape* (the higher reaching down and embracing the lower).¹⁹ In the Indian tradition, one important form of descent is the *avatar*, which "is a direct incarnation of the Divine in his manifestation to make the next higher step in evolution possible; for the topmost established level of evolution, though driven to develop by the inherent evolutionary impulse, is unable to pierce the existing ceiling of progress."²⁰ While Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not refer to themselves as avatars, they regarded themselves as evolutionary pathfinders who played a crucial role in bringing down the principle of the Supermind or the supramental consciousness onto Earth. At first glance, the idea that an individual can decisively help in the evolutionary process of the human species seems unwarranted. But psychologist Allan Combs, accepting the possibility that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could well have broken new "evolutionary ground for the entire human species", points out: "Two Western scientific theorists ... have advanced carefully considered hypotheses which support the idea that a few persons, or even a single individual, could conceivably alter the entire future of the human potential. These hypotheses are of such enormous potential importance to the whole topic of evolution."²¹

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The yoga of the Mother

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother regarded themselves as being of a single consciousness embodied in two different bodies. After Sri Aurobindo passed away in 1950, the Mother continued the work of “making available ... transformative energies of the highest realms of the Divine available to human beings.”²² The Mother herself claimed that even after Sri Aurobindo’s physical demise, she was guided in an occult way by “the Sri Aurobindo whom I know and with whom I lived physically for thirty years, and who has not left me, not for a moment – for he is still with me, day and night, thinking through my brain, writing through my pen, speaking through my mouth and acting through my organizing power.”²³

Georges Van Vrekhem, a contemporary interpreter of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s work, states that Sri Aurobindo consciously chose to leave his physical body in order to help in the spiritual transformation of life from an occult plane. On earth, after Sri Aurobindo’s departure, the Mother immediately resumed the task of transforming matter and her own physical body from the point Sri Aurobindo had reached. Her first step was to realize that in order to build an immortal body, the consciousness of the cells of the body needs to be divinized. At a later stage she worked to transform the subconscious and the inconscient realms, which, in the context of Sri Aurobindo’s cosmology, are regarded as the foundation of the plane of matter. A singular achievement was the supramental manifestation in 1956 during which, as the Mother explained, the evolutionary and transformative principle of the Supermind descended onto the earth on a universal scale, thereby changing and hastening the process of earthly evolution. From 1956, the year of the supramental manifestation, until the time of her own passing in 1973, the Mother worked to form a prototype supramental body by changing the cellular consciousness of her own body cells. Many, notably Georges Van Vrekhem, hold that the Mother succeeded in this work, and that this prototype of an immortal and supramental body exists on an occult plane and will one day be physically manifested on earth. Her psychological and spiritual experiences during this period are recorded as transcripts of conversations in French and posthumously published by the Institute of Evolutionary Research in thirteen volumes as *The Mother’s Agenda*.

2

Integral Yoga

While the evolutionary progress from the mind to the Supermind is an inevitable natural process and does not depend on the human will, human beings can consciously choose to participate in the process and hasten the birth of the new species. “The former steps in evolution,” Sri Aurobindo explains, “were taken by Nature without a conscious will in the plant and animal life; in man Nature becomes able to evolve by a conscious will in the instrument.”²⁴ It is not so easy however for individuals to exercise their conscious will, as human beings are a complex amalgam of different desires arising from different parts of their being.

Human beings can consciously choose to participate in the process and hasten the birth of the new species.

The fact that man is made up of various interrelated parts of being is accepted by almost all spiritual traditions of the world. Perennial philosophy refers to it as the “Great Nest of Being” and points out that the human being comprises “various levels of existence ... ranging from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit.”²⁵ Sri Aurobindo explains that in the course of evolution from matter to life to mind, the human being has acquired a physical body, a vital (emotional) body and a mental body. But, in Sri Aurobindo’s classification, these three planes

- the physical, the vital and the mental - merely represent the tip of the iceberg of an individual's consciousness. These three planes form the outer nature or the ego personality of the individual, which governs his waking consciousness. Sri Aurobindo further classifies in detail almost a dozen planes of being that lie above, below and within this outer nature, respectively termed the supraconscious, the subconscious and the subliminal. In Sri Aurobindo's vision, the micro - cosmos of the individual nature corresponds to and connects with the macro - cosmos of the typical worlds of the universe. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo holds that, both in the micro - cosmos and the macro - cosmos, each

Human beings are a complex amalgam of different desires arising from different parts of their being . . . The physical, the vital and the mental merely represent the tip of the iceberg of an individual's consciousness.

plane of being is governed by its own laws and its own unique consciousness. For instance, in the micro - cosmos, the physical body has a body - consciousness that is prone to inertia and mechanical or habitual responses to stimuli. The part of the mind that Sri Aurobindo terms the physical mind is associated with the body - consciousness. Similarly ruling the emotional body of the human being is a vital consciousness and a vital mind that is driven by desires, reactions and impulses. Mind proper, or the mental consciousness, has the capability of self - reflection and rationalization. The human being is usually not able to differentiate between these three different minds arising from different planes for, as Sri Aurobindo says, "in our waking experience, they are all confused together."²⁶ * And as the different planes of being, both in the micro - cosmos and the macro

*Sri Aurobindo's description of the three different minds is corroborated by modern physiological findings of the brain, which is a triune organ that the human being has inherited in the course of evolution from reptiles to mammals to primates. Each part of the triune brain has its own responses. As scientist Paul MacLean points out, quoting Wilber, "In its evolution, the brain [of humans] retains the hierarchical organization of the three basic types which can be conveniently labelled as reptilian, paleo-mammalian and neo-mammalian.... The same may be said of the other two basic types. And there is ample evidence that all three types have their own special subjective, cognitive (problem-solving) memory and other parallel functions."²⁷ A cursory comparison of Sri Aurobindo's descriptions with the scientific findings suggests that the reptilian brain corresponds to the physical mind, the mammalian brain to the vital mind and the neo-mammalian brain to the mind proper.

- cosmos, tend to exert their laws or ways of working on the individual, it becomes extremely difficult for the individual to escape from these influences and consciously participate in the evolutionary process.

The supraconscious realm (the realm above the rational consciousness of the mind), according to Sri Aurobindo, consists of five hierarchical levels of consciousness that connect the ordinary mind

The psychic being is one's true individual personality as opposed to the ego personality.

of the individual to the universal Supermind. At each higher level of consciousness, the individual experiences manifest reality differently and in an increasingly more integral manner.*

A unique feature of Sri Aurobindo's description of human psychology is the concept of an individualized soul or psychic being. This psychic being, an unalloyed part of the Divine, is the innermost centre in the human being, hidden from the surface consciousness by all the other planes of being that envelop it. While the concept of a soul is common to almost all spiritual traditions, what is unique to Sri Aurobindo's vision is that he sees the psychic being as one's true individual personality (as opposed to the ego personality) that one needs to express in order to manifest a divine life on earth. As he explains:

The soul is something of the Divine that descends into the evolution as a Divine Principle within it to support the evolution of the individual out of the Ignorance into the Light. It develops in the course of the evolution a psychic individual or soul individuality which grows from life to life, using the evolving mind, vital and body as its instruments. It is the soul that is immortal while the rest disintegrates; it passes from life to life carrying its experiences in essence and the continuity of the evolution of the individual.²⁸

* Findings in modern development psychology, namely spiral dynamics, parallel Sri Aurobindo's thought in that the higher developmental lines of the mind are seen as being increasingly integrative and holistic in their nature, and in that the individual experiences the world differently at different levels.

While the presence of the psychic being is rarely felt in our ordinary consciousness, through a conscious spiritual discipline or through successive reincarnations, the psychic being progressively manifests itself by bringing the outer nature under its direct control. This process of discovering the psychic being and allowing it to integrate and govern the different planes of one's being is termed by Sri Aurobindo the psychic transformation. An individual's conscious participation in the evolutionary process begins only with this first step of a psychic transformation.

An individual's conscious participation in the evolutionary process begins with psychic transformation.

Integral transformation

To help individuals to consciously participate in the evolutionary process, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother formulated a spiritual discipline they termed Integral Yoga.

The Sanskrit word "yoga" connotes union with the Divine. And, "Integral Yoga is so called because it aims at a harmonised totality of spiritual realisation and experience. Its aim is integral experience of the divine reality. ... Its method is an integral opening of the whole consciousness, mind, heart, life, will, body to that reality, to the divine existence, consciousness, beatitude, to its being and its integral transformation of the whole nature."²⁹

Sri Aurobindo spells out three steps of progressive self-achievement that lead to the integral transformation. The first is the psychic transformation in which the individual acts from the guidance of the psychic being rather than the ego. The next step, often concurrent with the first is to become aware of the universal self that is one in all. The third step is the supramental transformation by which the power of the Supermind acts on the individual and transforms him into a supramental being.

Integral Yoga is a spiritual discipline that helps individuals to consciously participate in the evolutionary process.

In India, for thousands of years, different spiritual traditions have advocated different spiritual disciplines leading to liberation from the determinisms of the world. Comparing his path to other disciplines, Sri Aurobindo states:

In the past, it [realization of the Spirit] has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit. Sri Aurobindo teaches that a descent of the higher principle is possible which will not merely release the spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world ... and make it possible for the human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his still animal humanity into a diviner race. The psychological discipline of Yoga can be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle.³⁰

In short, Integral Yoga seeks not a renunciation of life and liberation from the world but a transformation of life and the world, not a rejection of the different egoistic parts of one's being but a transformation and integration of those parts into a divine nature.

"This, however," Sri Aurobindo warns, "cannot be done at once or in a short time or by any rapid or miraculous transformation. ... For there are several ranges of consciousness between the ordinary human mind and the supramental truth - consciousness. ... [that] have to be opened up and their power brought down into the mind, life and body."³¹ To help in this laborious process of a spiritual

transformation through yoga, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the need for a constant aspiration for the Divine, for a total rejection of one's egoistic desires and a complete surrender to the divine supramental force. Surrender is an important aspect in Sri Aurobindo's yoga for it is believed that the

Integral Yoga seeks not a renunciation of life and liberation from the world, but a transformation of life and the world.

individual with his limited consciousness cannot achieve the supramental consciousness on his own. It is only by the descent of the divine power from the supramental plane that the supramental transformation of the individual can be accomplished. Besides, as was mentioned earlier, in Sri Aurobindo's perception, the power of the individual is limited, while that of the Supermind is infinite. And thus, the easiest way for the individual to progress on the spiritual path and to transform himself is to surrender to the working of the Supermind – the highest power of the Divine. Disciples of Sri Aurobindo see the Mother as a personification of the divine force to whom they make their surrender, and they refer to the Mother's force as the supramental force acting in the world.*

At the same time, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, unlike any other spiritual discipline, gives immense freedom to the individual to pursue his inner self - development according to his nature. This tenet of

By engaging with the material world consciously through work and activities one can effect a change in matter.

Mother once said that the best way to collaborate in the supramental transformation is "to realize one's being under no matter what form, by no matter what road ... Each individual carries in himself a truth and it is with this truth that he must unite himself, it is this truth he must live; and in this way the road he follows to realize this truth becomes also the road which will bring him the nearest possible to the transformation."³²

As Integral Yoga seeks to bring about a spiritual transformation of life in the material conditions of the earth, utmost importance is given to one's dealing with the material world. This takes many forms: from seeking the perfection of the body through physical exercise to taking conscious care of the material things one uses from engaging in

* It could be mentioned here that, in India, people recognize and adore the creative, dynamic principle of the universe as a feminine force.

"Each individual carries in himself a truth and it is with this truth that he must unite himself, it is this truth he must live."

Integral Yoga stems from the belief that each human being embodies a true individual nature in his psychic that he needs to express in the world. The

regular physical work to cultivating an appreciation for beauty and aesthetics. According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, matter, despite its inertia and unconsciousness, embodies the divine consciousness, and thus commands utmost respect. They taught that by engaging with the material world consciously, through one's work and activities, one can effect a change in matter. As the Mother explained, "Work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not put his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. ... To establish order around oneself helps to bring order within oneself."³³

Similarly, the body, the material basis of existence, is regarded as an instrument of the Divine that has to be perfected through disciplined physical education so that it

can embody a higher consciousness. The cultivation of beauty in one's physical surroundings stems from the fact that "in the physical world, of all things it is beauty that best expresses the Divine

"In the physical world, of all things it is beauty that best expresses the Divine ... Beauty interprets, expresses, manifests the Eternal."

... Beauty interprets, expresses, manifests the Eternal."³⁴

A collective yoga

As has been mentioned earlier, Integral Yoga does not stop at the individual realization but seeks a transformation of earthly nature:

For this transformation to succeed, all human beings – even all living beings as well as their material environment – must be transformed. Otherwise things will remain as they are: an individual experience cannot change terrestrial life. ... Not only an individual or a group of individuals, or even all individuals, but life ... has to be transformed. Without such a transformation we shall continue having the same misery, the same calamities and the same atrocities in the world. A few individuals will escape from it by their psychic development, but the general mass will remain in the same state of misery.³⁵

It is believed that each individual who takes up the yoga represents a certain universal psychological difficulty that needs to be transformed, and if the transformation is achieved in one individual, then that has an effect on the whole of humanity. Supporting such a belief, the evolutionary scientist, Rupert Sheldrake postulates that “if one member

“The supramental transformation is a collective ideal that calls for a collective effort so that it may be realized in the terms of an integral human perfection.”

of a biological species learns a new behavior, the morphogenic field for the species changes, even if very slightly. If the behavior is repeated long enough, its morphic resonance builds up and begins to affect the entire species.”³⁶ A corollary to this belief is the fact that the transformation cannot be carried out by a single individual, for he represents only one particular type of personality. In order to achieve a complete transformation of human nature, all personality-types need to be represented in this collective yoga for humanity. States the Mother, “by the very nature of things, it [the supramental transformation] is a collective ideal that calls for a collective effort so that it may be realized in the terms of an integral human perfection”.³⁷

For the individual practitioner of Integral Yoga, there comes a point at which one no longer does the yoga for oneself, but automatically for everybody. Calling his yoga “yoga for the earth - consciousness”, Sri Aurobindo says:

Accepting life, he (the seeker of the Integral Yoga) has to bear not only his own burden, but a great part of the world’s burden too along with it, as a continuation of his own sufficiently heavy load. Therefore his Yoga has much more the nature of a battle than others’; but this is not only an individual battle, it is a collective war waged over a considerable country. He has not only to conquer in himself the forces of egoistic falsehood and disorder, but to conquer them as representatives of the same adverse and inexhaustible forces in the world.³⁸

This collective aspect of Integral Yoga needs to be differentiated from the contemporary enchantment with community living by many Western spiritual seekers. A collective yoga, or even a collective effort for transformation, does not necessarily imply that the practitioners of Integral Yoga have to do things together in their

“A true community can be based only on the inner realization of each one of its members.”

outer, daily life. Visitors to Auroville are thus often dismayed by the seeming lack of community in Auroville – that there are no shared spiritual practices and few community rituals or celebrations. Elaborating on the idea of true community, the Mother says, “one of the most common types of human collectivity [is] to group together ... around a common ideal ... but in an artificial way. In contrast to this ... a true community can be based only on the inner realization of each one of its members.”³⁹ The individual’s inner growth expresses itself naturally through the collective.

Human unity

Complementary to the idea of collective yoga is Sri Aurobindo’s ideal for an actual human unity. For Sri Aurobindo, the ideal of human unity stems from the fact that underlying all appearances, “there is a

The ideal of human unity stems from the fact that underlying all appearances, “there is a secret spirit, a divine reality ... A mere intellectual belief in human unity is doomed to failure”.

secret spirit, a divine reality [the One Self, or Sachchidananda], in which we are all one.”⁴⁰ Says he, if one were to start from this spiritual premise of unity, then there would be “free room for the realization of the highest human dreams, for the perfectibility of the race, a perfect society, a higher upward evolution of the human soul and human nature.”⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo holds that a mere intellectual belief in human unity is doomed to failure, for actual human unity can only be achieved by the progressive spiritual realization of the oneness of the whole universe. The spiritual ideal of human unity

does not mean a homogenization or outward uniformity, but rather a unity that celebrates the essential diversity of all creation. For Sri Aurobindo, each individual, in his psychic being, represents a unique aspect of the infinite diversity of the Divine, and Integral Yoga is a process by which an individual manifests the unique divine personality within him, and by doing so finds his place in the ordered harmony of the supramental creation. An "actual human unity", as envisioned for Auroville, essentially implies a spiritual society where individuals manifest their psychic beings. Elaborating on his ideas of "a perfect society", Sri Aurobindo says:

A spiritualized society would treat in its sociology the individual, from the saint to the criminal, not as units of a social problem to be passed through some skilfully devised machinery and either flattened into the social mould or crushed out of it, but as souls suffering and entangled in a net and to be rescued, souls growing and to be encouraged to grow, souls grown and from whom help and power can be drawn by the lesser spirits who are not yet adult.⁴²

Sri Aurobindo also believed that if this spiritual ideal of human unity was not taken up in one form or the other, then there could be disastrous consequences for the whole race. Reportedly communicating to the Mother from an occult plane, Sri Aurobindo said that the manifestation of Auroville would be "a practical means creating a human unity that would be strong enough to fight against war."⁴³

3

Integral Yoga in Auroville

Auroville is intended to hasten the advent of the supramental reality upon earth.

The Mother

In innumerable ways, perhaps even unknown to its residents, Auroville is an experimental field for Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's work towards a spiritual transformation of the world. Auroville, envisaged as a township for 50,000 people, can be seen as a step towards establishing a spiritualized society. While in some messages, especially the early ones, the Mother seems to indicate that having goodwill is a sufficient quality to become an Aurovilian, from many other recorded conversations it is clear that she expected Aurovilians to "belong to the enlightened portion of humanity"⁴⁴ and to be open to the "discovery and practice of the divine consciousness that is seeking to manifest itself."⁴⁵ The Auroville Charter explicitly states, "to live in Auroville, one must be the willing servitor of the divine consciousness."⁴⁶ During her lifetime, through a selective process, the Mother hand-picked those she deemed worthy of becoming Aurovilians.

Whether the residents of Auroville consciously practise the Integral Yoga or not, it is believed that each individual has a role to play in the collective transformation of humanity. As Sri Aurobindo explains:

For a spiritual and supramental yoga, humanity should be variously represented. For the problem

of transformation has to deal with all sorts of elements favourable and unfavourable. The same man indeed carries in him a mixture of these two things. If only sattvic (virtuous) and cultured men come for yoga, men without very much of the vital difficulty in them, then, because the difficulty of the vital element in terrestrial nature has not been faced and overcome, it might well be that the endeavour would fail.⁴⁷

As Integral Yoga allows for a free self - development of the individual and the progressive manifestation of his unique psychic being, Aurovilians are allowed utmost freedom in their spiritual practice and way of life. But freedom does not imply that people should give free rein to their desires. The Mother reminds Aurovilians that "the only true freedom is the one obtained by union with the Divine. One can unite with the Divine only by mastering one's ego."⁴⁸

Termed by the Mother "the city the Earth needs", Auroville is seen as a micro - cosmic representation of the world that would have a transformative effect on the larger macro - cosmos of the world. The Mother envisioned it as "a center of transformation, a small

As Integral Yoga allows for a free self-development of the individual, Aurovilians are allowed utmost freedom in their spiritual practice and way of life.

nucleus of men who are transforming themselves and setting an example for the world."⁴⁹ And, even though the Mother categorically states that "as long as egoism and bad will

exist in the world, a general transformation is impossible"⁵⁰, there are certain symbolisms inherent in its very conception that seem to indicate ways in which Auroville can have an effect on the larger world.

To begin with, a city - as opposed to a village or community - is perhaps the smallest collective unit that encompasses all the activities that human beings can engage in. If these activities are undertaken not from the basis of personal desire, but in the spirit of yoga, then it is feasible that a spiritual transformation of human life can take place. Yet another symbolism lies in the fact that the Mother purposely situated Auroville in India, for as she stated, "India is the representation

of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that there will be ... the cure. And it is for that - it is FOR THAT that I had to create Auroville [emphasis in original]."⁵¹ It is perhaps not a mere coincidence that Auroville was founded on an environmentally degraded wasteland in impoverished rural southern India. The land was so badly eroded that a District Forest Officer visiting the area in 1976 noted: "The entire area is exposed to wind

Matrimandir is considered to be the "soul of Auroville".

and water erosion. If this is allowed to continue, then ... the people will be forced to vacate the land in the not too distant future."⁵² It is to the credit of Aurovilians that through massive environmental regeneration efforts, this bleak situation has been successfully countered and today the rural bioregion of Auroville thrives.

The layout of Auroville is symbolic as well. At the very centre of the city is Matrimandir, a sacred edifice, which is considered to be the "soul of Auroville".⁵³ It is seen as "the symbol of the Universal Mother according to Sri Aurobindo's teaching."⁵⁴ For Sri Aurobindo, the Universal Mother represents the supramental consciousness, or the conscious evolutionary divine power that seeks to help humanity move beyond its present limitations into the next step of its evolutionary adventure. By its very form of a gold - plated sphere that seems to break out from earthly matter, the Matrimandir is "a symbol of the Divine's answer to man's aspiration for perfection."⁵⁵ For most Aurovilians, the Matrimandir, as envisaged by the Mother, is "the central cohesive force"⁵⁶ in the multi - faceted growth of Auroville.

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ideal of human unity is represented in Auroville not only by the diversity of its residents who currently hail from thirty - five different countries, but also by its "International Zone". In the town plan of Auroville, the Mother envisaged a sector of the city area to be the International Zone where all countries with a developed culture would be invited to establish a pavilion. Elaborating on the symbolism of the International Zone, the Mother said, "the most important idea is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither by uniformity nor by domination and subjection. Only a synthetic organization of all nations, each one occupying its true place

according to its own genius and the part it has to play in the whole, can bring about a comprehensive unification which has any chance of enduring.”⁵⁷ Thus, more than any other sector of Auroville, the International Zone represents a miniature world - union. In his political writings, Sri Aurobindo posits that, like the individual, each nation has a specific role to play in the world and a soul that it seeks to manifest. The proposed pavilions of the International Zone, by presenting the living and vibrant exhibits of their respective cultures, would be an embodiment of their respective nation - souls. The Mother wished for nations to actively participate in the building of the International Zone, stating that such conscious collaboration will act “against the catastrophic consequences of the error of armament.”⁵⁸

“Only a synthetic organization of all nations, each one occupying its true place ... can bring about a comprehensive unification which has any chance of enduring.”

“Divine anarchy” Political organization of Auroville

Organization is a discipline of action, but for Auroville we aspire to go beyond organizations, which are arbitrary and artificial. We want an organization that is the expression of a higher consciousness working for the manifestation of the truth of the future.

The Mother

In order to allow the divine force to freely express itself in the manifestation of Auroville, the Mother was always extremely reluctant to give a definitive shape to Auroville’s governing organizations. She sought “to replace the mental government of intelligence by the government of a spiritualized consciousness”,⁵⁹ stating that “it’s the highest consciousness that sees the most clearly – the most clearly and the most truly – what the needs of the most material thing should be.”⁶⁰ The mental consciousness is radically different from that of a spiritual or a supramental consciousness.

The mind formulates and organizes things to the best of its capability, but, as the Mother explains, the formulations of the mind tend to get fossilized and outdated. A spiritual consciousness, on the other hand, is flexible and progressively adapts itself to changing needs. Thus in the early years, the Mother specifically stated, “no rules or laws are being framed. Things will get formulated as the underlying truth of the township emerges and takes shape progressively.”⁶¹

Terming the ideal political organization of Auroville “divine anarchy,” the Mother explains that “the anarchic state is the self - government of each individual, and it will be the perfect government only when each one becomes conscious of the inner Divine and will obey only him and him alone.”⁶² The inner divine to which the Mother refers is the psychic being and, when people are conscious of it, they can “organize themselves spontaneously, without fixed rules and laws.”⁶³ Such an ideal organization, where people are conscious of their psychic beings and live according to the supramental truth, would automatically lead to a natural hierarchical harmony where everyone would find their place. It would result in an integral

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unity where individuality and diversity are not compromised. However, recognizing that manifesting such a spiritual organization in Auroville was a difficult task, the Mother time and again expressed her faith in the spiritual consciousness to work out things in its own way. She envisaged a small group with “intuitive intelligence” (people with “an intuition that manifests intellectually”)⁶⁴ governing Auroville, to be

representative of the spiritual consciousness. The idea of a “hierarchical organization grouped around the most enlightened centre and submitting itself to a collective discipline”⁶⁵ is elaborated in a text entitled “A Dream” adopted by Aurovilians in which the Mother says, “in the general organization intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and the powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities.”⁶⁶

The present - day reality of Auroville seems far away from the spiritual organization envisioned by the Mother with none of the

“In the general organization intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and the powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities.”

Aurovilians yet having this greater spiritual authority of which the Mother speaks. Besides, as of 1988, Auroville has been subject to an Act of the Indian Parliament that requires it to have a three - tier governing body

called the Auroville Foundation. The Auroville Foundation liaises with the Residents’ Assembly of Auroville (comprising Aurovilians above the age of eighteen) through the latter’s elected body, the Working Committee.

For all practical purposes, the Residents’ Assembly is given full freedom to organize its governance in any way it chooses and, at present, Auroville is governed by a number of different working groups that, more or less, have the support of the community. Governance depends on the goodwill and cooperation of the residents, for there are practically no collective structures by which to enforce decisions. Decision - making often is a lengthy and cumbersome process and, as of yet, there are no commonly accepted decision - making procedures. Needless to say, it is quite a challenge to govern an ever - growing and changing township. The residents of Auroville periodically experiment with different forms of organization in an attempt to manifest more closely the vision of the Mother.

The ideal economy

The aim of its [that of a spiritual society] economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the co - operative kind, but to give to men – not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure – the joy of work according to their own nature, and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simply rich and beautiful life for all.

Sri Aurobindo

In the perfect spiritual society envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, economics—the means of production of wealth and its distribution—is also viewed in terms of spiritual values rather than material necessities. Foreseeing the end of both communism and capitalism, they stated that money was a power of the Divine.

Individuals in possession of wealth were to ideally regard themselves as custodians entrusted with the task of using money for divine purposes. The

“Money is not meant to make money ... Money is meant to prepare the earth to manifest the new creation.”

Mother spoke against both inheritance rights and accrual of interest on capital asserting that “money is not meant to make money. ... Money is meant to prepare the earth to manifest the new creation.”⁶⁷

For Auroville, the Mother desired that money be a medium of exchange only with the outside world. Within Auroville, instead of monetary exchanges, she wished to have a flexible system in which residents would not be taxed but voluntarily “contribute to the collective welfare in work, kind or money”⁶⁸ and, in turn, would have their basic needs met by the community. The Mother distinguished between basic needs and desires explaining that a spiritual seeker should not act from his ego and its desires, and that material needs decrease with the growth of the spiritual consciousness. In “A Dream” the Mother elaborates on the ideal economy thus:

In this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far

greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action. In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.⁶⁹

From the very beginning, the Mother set up a collective distribution system, similar to the one she had established earlier in the Ashram that distributed basic necessities in kind to the Aurovilians. She also specified that all Aurovilians work five hours daily for the common

Work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself while being of service to the community.

good. Ideally, work in Auroville is done in the spirit of Karma Yoga*, that is, as an offering to the Divine. The Mother emphasized Karma Yoga in Auroville, as it is only by a conscious engagement with the material world that one can transform it. In the three decades of its existence, Auroville has experimented and continues to experiment with a number of different economic models. It encourages both individual enterprise and sharing. Commercial units are enjoined to donate one-third of their profits to a common fund. The common fund subsidizes or completely provides for many basic services, including education. And yet, the situation is far from ideal. For instance, despite Mother's injunctions to the contrary, hired labour has become the norm rather than the exception. And, as Auroville is not yet the self-supporting township the Mother hoped it to be, its economic base is inextricably linked to the regional, national and global economy.

* Karma Yoga or the yoga of works: One of the three main ways of uniting with the Divine as recognized in India. The other two being Bhakti Yoga (yoga of devotion) and Jnana Yoga (yoga of knowledge).

Unending education

In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given ... to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones.

The Mother

Auroville's charter envisions Auroville as a place of "unending education". As such, life in Auroville is a constant learning experience for the young and old alike. The Mother did not believe in formal educational systems geared towards passing examinations and getting certificates. As in the school that she started in the

Life in Auroville is a constant learning experience for the young and old alike.

Ashram, for Auroville she wanted a "free progress" educational system, which she defined as "a progress guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions or preconceived ideas."⁷⁰ The rationale behind such an educational system stems from the belief that "nothing can be taught to the mind which is not already concealed as potential knowledge in the unfolding soul of the creature."⁷¹ Hoping to bring up children who would develop and sustain a conscious contact with their souls, the Mother allowed the students of the Ashram school immense freedom in choosing

"Nothing can be taught to the mind which is not already concealed as potential knowledge in the unfolding soul of the creature."

their curriculum. Advising the teachers of the Ashram school, the Mother said "one must help the student to become, as much as possible, what he can and wants to be - for if his soul has more or less chosen his

life's destiny, yet what he shall make out of it is in no way determined. The child is not only a mind to be trained, but a consciousness that must be helped to grow and widen itself."⁷²

An integral education, which fosters the physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual development of the human personality, is imparted to the students of the Ashram school. And while freedom is given to the students in choosing the subjects of their study, discipline

in following their chosen subjects is insisted upon. Rather than emphasizing acquired mental knowledge, focus is given on perfecting the body, refining the senses through the arts, developing the will and training the mind for greater concentration.

The principles of education that the Mother established for the Ashram school have served as general guidelines in Auroville. In its brief but chequered history, education in Auroville has seen various forms, from the complete banning of schools to formal and non-formal systems. Today, while most schools in Auroville tend to have a formalized approach with established classes or grades, there is flexibility within the system and individual attention is given to each student.

Auroville as an experiment

Auroville is an experiment in collective realization.

The Mother

The Mother often refers to Auroville in transcendental terms, stating that the founding of this city was undertaken by a divine decree and that

Auroville is an experiment that may act as a catalyst to hasten the earthly evolution.

the city already exists on an occult plane. She speaks of the divine force specially aiding Auroville by exerting a continual pressure on its citizens and asserts that the ideal Auroville, even if it takes hundreds or even a thousand years, will one day be manifested on Earth. In one recorded conversation, she completely dismisses human agency saying, "it [the city] will be built by what is invisible to you. The men who have to act as instruments will do so despite themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger forces. Nothing depends on human beings – neither the planning nor the execution – nothing!"⁷³ Elsewhere, however, she admits that "in the details of the execution the human consciousness intervenes."⁷⁴ Perhaps above all, one has to bear in mind that, in numerous conversations documented in several volumes, the Mother speaks of Auroville as an experiment that may act as a catalyst to hasten the earthly evolution from mind to Supermind.

It is a matter of conjecture as to how much the present-day reality of Auroville embodies Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's far-reaching vision of human unity and world transformation. If we were to accept a transpersonal view of reality, it would be impossible for our limited rational minds to determine the veracity of Sri Aurobindo's vision or to gauge how far Auroville manifests that vision. On the one hand, Auroville with its amazing diversity is the biggest and indeed the only experiment of its kind in the world.

On the other hand, certain developments in present-day Auroville are in direct contradiction to Mother's wishes as stated over thirty years ago. For instance the presence of the Indian Government in Auroville, however much appreciated, and Auroville's overwhelming dependence on a 4,000-strong hired labour force are not in keeping with the Mother's ideals. The city has also become a tourist destination. In the salubrious winter months, almost one-third of the residents of Auroville comprise visitors. Such developments are to be considered as adverse since the Mother's explicitly warns against Auroville having too much contact with the outside world. She speaks of the immense need for a divine protection to prevent "infiltration or admixture" that could keep the "nucleus [of the city] from falling back into an inferior creation."⁷⁵

In this context, one should bear in mind that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother repeatedly said that the supramental force works out things in its own manner in ways that they could not entirely predict. Conditions on earth have definitely changed since the inception of Auroville.

The spirit of Auroville now seems to be expressed in different forms and in different places all over the world.

The last three decades have witnessed the collapse of communism almost throughout the world, the end of the Cold War, forces of globalization and new information technologies reshaping the world, and an increasing interest in the West in Eastern spirituality. The spirit of Auroville now seems to be expressed in different forms and in different places all over the world.

While the vision of Auroville and its dynamic spirit continue to attract many, one may ask if the present - day reality of Auroville actually represents a unique evolutionary edge. Aurovilians are keenly aware of the hiatus between the vision and the reality. In an effort towards bridging this gap, they continuously experiment with different collective structures. Most of them simultaneously engage in an inner spiritual quest in the belief that the inner consciousness shapes the outer manifestation of the city. Perhaps this is where the challenge and the promise of Auroville lies: the city is built from within.

Given the Mother's statement that it could take as long as a thousand years for the manifestation of ideal Auroville, it is perhaps too early to gauge the success of Auroville in terms of its evolutionary impetus. Besides, Auroville's development is interlinked with the evolutionary momentum of the planet. As Sri Aurobindo states:

With the present morality of the human race a sound and durable human unity is not yet possible; but there is no reason why a temporary approximation to it should not be the reward of strenuous aspiration and untiring effort. By constant approximations and by partial realizations and temporary successes Nature advances.⁷⁶

These words encourage Aurovilians to persevere in this experiment in human unity, despite all the inner and outer challenges that they face. For most Aurovilians, Integral Yoga gives meaning to their human endeavour, casting personal and collective life in a new and purposeful perspective. And in turn, the living reality of Auroville as an embodiment of the universal vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother continues to inspire many individuals and groups all over the world.

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62. MA Vol. 11: 76.
63. CWM Vol. 13: 224.
64. MA Vol. 9: 101.
65. CWM Vol. 13: 204.
66. CWM Vol. 12: 94.
67. MA Vol. 10: 331.
68. MA Vol. 8: 450.
69. CWM Vol. 12: 94.
70. *ibid.*: 170.
71. SY: 54.
72. CWM Vol. 12: 117.
73. MoA: 13.
74. CWM Vol. 12: 248.
75. MA Vol. 2: 270.
76. EDH: 467.

Auroville at a glance

Auroville is a city-in-the-making. Located in rural south India, Auroville is spread over twenty square kilometers and its hundred odd settlements are interspersed with village land. Once a barren, deserted plateau, the site of Auroville has now been transformed into lush, green environs. In over three decades, since its existence, about 1,600 people from different cultures and countries have made Auroville their home, and in doing so, have created a vibrant township that bustles with multifarious activities. Auroville has been widely acclaimed for its environmental regeneration and its rural development work. It actively engages in and experiments with innovative forms of economic sharing, healing therapies, education and governance. With its intermingling of cultures and unbridled idealism, Auroville inspires artistic expression in all its forms. A range of beautiful, hand-crafted products testify to Auroville's creativity and entrepreneurship.

An egalitarian society, the assets of Auroville, though largely built with personal money, are collectively held by the community of Auroville as legally represented by the Auroville Foundation. The Auroville Foundation was created by the Government of India to

safeguard the proper development of Auroville according to its founding vision. UNESCO endorses Auroville as an important experiment in human unity.

Auroville is a dream. Its far-reaching ideals and evolutionary mission, as envisioned in its charter, touch the hearts of many all over the world. In essence, Auroville embodies the deepest aspiration of humankind for a spiritualized world where material needs and conditions are transformed by the inner, spiritual consciousness of the individual.

Auroville is supported in its manifestation by the Government of India, acclaimed international bodies such as the UNESCO, and the Auroville International Association – a network of friends of Auroville worldwide.

For further information on Auroville, please access the
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