

Auroville press sheet

Auroville is a planned town for up to 50,000 people from around the world which is now under development in south-east India. Located mostly in the State of Tamil Nadu, close to the Coromandel Coast and some 10 km north of Pondicherry and 150 km south of Chennai, it is a place for research and experimentation, with the purpose of realising – for the first time on Planet Earth – an actual human unity in diversity on behalf of humanity as a whole.

History

The concept of an international-universal town devoted to an experiment in human unity originally sprang from the writings of India's great philosopher-yogi Sri Aurobindo. It was his French-born spiritual collaborator and co-worker Mirra Alfassa, known as The Mother, who first gave it more concrete form by naming it 'Auroville' and stating:

"Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity."

This was the first public statement on Auroville, given out in 1965. Next, in 1966, the concept of Auroville was put before the General Assembly of UNESCO by the Govt. of India (GOI), and was unanimously endorsed. Two years later, on 28th February 1968, youth representing 124 nations and all the Indian States came together to inaugurate the township and receive its Charter from The Mother, which reads as follows:

1. 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.
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.

At the same time UNESCO repeated its unanimous endorsement of the project, and did so again in 1970 and 1983, with an Executive Board resolution in 2007/8. In 1988 the project was given special status by the GOI, when the 'Auroville Foundation' was created by Act of Parliament.

The site chosen for Auroville was a severely eroded plateau extending eastwards to the sea. An early priority for the project was the environmental regeneration and reforestation of the land. To date over 2 million trees have been planted, with the result that the area now has a green and widely forested landscape. Alongside this work, emphasis has always been placed on development of the town and its immediate surrounding area using - as much as possible - non-polluting appropriate technology and sustainable energy generating systems.

Auroville today

The Master Plan for the town is based on a spiral galaxy shape and incorporates four sectors (the International, Cultural, Industrial and Residential Zones) plus a surrounding Green Belt. The four Zones have as their focus a huge globe-shaped structure called the Matrimandir, the 'soul of Auroville', a place for silent concentration. The Matrimandir will be surrounded by beautiful gardens, and eventually a lake.

Auroville today numbers over 3,200 inhabitants from nearly 60 countries, including India, living in some 120 settlements of varying size and character spread over a total area of 20 sq.km. In their day-to-day life they are engaged in the fields of agriculture & green work, renewable energy, education, health care, village outreach, construction, electronics, commerce, the arts and administration. All are volunteers who either receive a monthly basic 'maintenance' in local rupees, or pay for themselves partly or entirely from their own private resources as a contribution to the project.

General financing for Auroville comes from five sources – the GOI and NGOs within India and abroad; Auroville International Centres and Liaison Offices in 35 countries; a percentage of the profits of Auroville's many commercial / business units; individual supporters of Auroville worldwide who understand the global importance of what is being attempted through this unique experiment; and, substantially, from the Aurovillians themselves.

Auroville's significance and outreach

Auroville's work is not confined only to meeting the needs of the emerging town, nor to just those of the wider bio-region. Auroville sees itself as a place of research and experimentation for humanity as a whole, with emphasis not only on sustainable practices but more importantly on the establishment of a society based on a practical human unity that can eventually be replicated by all peoples and all nations. Auroville has already gained national and international acclaim for its environmental work. Many hundreds of acres of forest cover have been created; indigenous flora and fauna have been re-introduced or have returned naturally; botanical gardens, tree seedling nurseries and seed banks have been established; and comprehensive soil and water conservation practices have been introduced. The development of ecologically-sound agriculture without the use of pesticides and detrimental chemicals, plus the application of up-to-date agro-forestry techniques, is also being actively pursued.

Further to the above, Auroville is also involved in raising awareness of the dangers of salt water intrusion in the immediate coastal zone caused by over-pumping of ground water; is working with farmers' associations to identify and introduce less water-dependent agricultural practices; and is promoting the use of effective micro-organism (EM) technology.

The Centre for Scientific Research (CSR), recognized by the GOI since 1984 for its development work in appropriate technology, is a focal point for future-oriented activities, together with the Auroville Earth Institute (AEI). The latter provides regular training programmes, offers consultancy, designs buildings, supervises construction incorporating its own compressed earth brick technology, and is headed by the representative for India & South Asia to the UNESCO Chair of Earthen Architecture. The Auroville Institute of Applied Technology (AIAT) is a non-profit training school serving students from the local villages.

Other major outreach work undertaken by Aurovilians has included overseeing the transformation of Pondicherry's Bharati Park, restoration of historical buildings in Tranquebar, and the restoration and transformation of Adyar Creek in Chennai into a healthy and environmentally sustainable nature reserve.

Education

Auroville's multi-cultural educational system endeavours via its ten schools to help each child discover the inner self and realize her/his highest potential. It is increasingly based on a free choice system, which allows the children / students to choose their own subjects for study. Sports and physical education are strongly encouraged for the balanced and healthy growth of the child, and artistic training is given to develop aesthetic faculties. Most of the Auroville and Outreach schools are under the umbrella of SAIER (Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research). Special care is given to volunteering students from India and abroad, who are given meaningful activities and study projects guided and monitored by the town.

In addition to the above, some 700 children from the surrounding villages benefit from Auroville's educational programmes via another half dozen day or night schools and educational centres established and overseen by Auroville's Village Action teams.

Arts and culture

In addition to hosting a biannual Film Festival, there are also regular film shows in Auroville, plus occasional theatre, music, dance and choir performances, poetry readings, exhibitions, powerpoint presentations, lectures, etc, all normally free to residents and guests alike. The creative energy field in the town is highly conducive to various forms of artistic expression, though Auroville Art festivals and exhibitions are also hosted in various places around India.

Health

Together with allopathy and dentistry provided for both Aurovilian and village patients, many systems of alternative primary health care are in use, including homeopathy, Ayurveda, physiotherapy, naturopathy, acupuncture, massage and other therapies via various centres in the town area.

In addition to a new Institute for Integral Health near the town centre, available to Aurovilians and guests, there is also the original Auroville Health Centre located near Kuilapalayam village equipped with basic medical facilities to meet the needs of the Auroville community and around 200 local patients daily via its main building and 6 village-located sub-centres. More than 14 local women health workers, trained by Auroville, are active in 17 nearby villages, giving first-aid, advising on home cures, providing basic health education, and encouraging better nutrition by way of small family vegetable gardens in the villages.

Social enterprises

Some 180 commercial / business units and 70 service units operate in Auroville. The activities of the former include handicrafts, graphic design and printing, food processing, electronics and engineering, metalworking, windmill production, clothing and fashion, computer services, building construction and architecture. They contribute a third or more of their profits toward the ongoing development of the town and maintenance of its basic services and infrastructure, while also providing employment and training opportunities for large numbers of local people, some 5,000 of whom are employed in Auroville.

Organization

There are three separate but interacting bodies which make up the Auroville Foundation – a Governing Board with Secretary who is resident in Auroville, an International Advisory Council, and a Residents Assembly, the latter comprising all Aurovilians on the Master List of residents aged 18 or over. Bodies like the 'Auroville Council' and 'Auroville Working Committee' are elected by the residents every few years from volunteering Aurovilians willing to dedicate themselves to handling the basic administrative needs of the town. Most major decisions, especially those of a controversial nature, are taken at General Meetings or, in case of more official matters at a Residents Assembly.

Visitors Centre

Auroville has a number of guest houses of different styles and standards. Day visitors can obtain comprehensive information on the aims of the town and all that it is attempting to achieve in the Visitors' Centre via its Info Desk, various exhibitions and video showings, while also enjoying 3 boutiques, 2 restaurants, a Coffee Shop and other facilities.

For further information on Auroville, please access the website www.auroville.org or contact: OutreachMedia, Archives Building, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, INDIA; e-mail: outreachmedia@auroville.org.in (June 2020)