The Constructive Role of Conflict in an Intentional Community:

Auroville as a Case Study

A Thesis submitted to College of Professional Studies,
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for obtaining the degree of
Masters of Science in Global Studies and International Relations
Northeastern University

Chaitanya Datla
GST7990 80646 Thesis
August 25, 2014
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Peter Richardson
Contents

Acknowledgements iv

Executive Summary v

Chapter 1 - Introduction 1

Chapter 2 - Methodology 3
  Research Question, Hypothesis and Objectives 3
  Case Study 3
  Research Methodology 4
  Research Outline 5

Chapter 3 - Literature Review: Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Auroville Koodam and Intentional Communities 5
  Conflict 6
  Neorealism, Neoliberalism and Constructivism 7
  Psychological and Economic Causes of Conflict 10
  Three Images of Conflict: Man, the State and War 12
  Conflict Resolution 15
  Auroville Koodam: A Space for Constructive Communication 19
  Utopia and Intentional Communities – Idea and Ideals 20

Chapter 4 - Auroville a Case Study in the Socially Constructive Role of Conflict 22
  The Philosophical Foundation 22
  Genesis 23
  Matrimandir and the City Development 24
  Auroville Organization and Governance 27
  The Gap Between the Ideal and Real – The Role of Conflict 29
  Conflict Resolution and Building Peace 31

Chapter 5 - Data Analysis, Findings & Discussion 33
  Part I - Interview Analysis and Findings 34
  What Factors Motivated Members to Join Auroville? 34
  Human Unity 34
Acknowledgments

This thesis is the result of many conversations and discussions that took place over approximately one year. I have been very fortunate in having a wonderful and brilliant thesis advisor, Dr. Peter Richardson, whose guidance has been invaluable. I would like to thank him for his insightful suggestions and incredible support throughout my research and writing processes. I additionally appreciate the early encouragement from Dr. Milica Golubovic to write a proposal that eventually became the basis for this thesis. Her initial inputs played a formative role in this study.

This work also would not have been possible without the immense support of the Auroville community. Initial guidance and assistance from Wim Van Megen and Mauna in introducing me to proper contacts in Auroville proved immensely helpful. It was also wonderful to have the opportunity to work with Elvira Klein, Auroville Koodam facilitator, for this study. I would like to specially thank her for her generous support. Of particular importance were Auroville community interviewees; their responses to the questionnaires and additional thought-provoking commentary (in one-on-one discussions) left me with awe. I am grateful to them for their time and openness to share their opinions and experiences relevant to my research. Merci beaucoup to my friends Mandakini, Srijita and Alok for making my stay in Auroville an enriching personal and academic experience. Finally, I am profoundly grateful to my parents, my sister, Deepu and my husband, Harsh, for their constant support and encouragement throughout the duration of this project.
Executive Summary

This thesis explores the psychological determinants and constructive and destructive roles of conflict in Auroville – a unique intentional community, emerging international township and experiment in human unity in South India. It also attempts to understand how conflicts are resolved and peace restored in such a complex social environment. The population of Auroville currently represents forty-four countries, of all age groups, and persons from multiple socio-economic and cultural backgrounds; as such, it presents a microcosm of the international community. Although Auroville ultimately aims to achieve human unity, it faces challenges and tensions at individual, group and system levels. Kenneth Waltz’s levels-of-analysis thesis serves as a particularly effective and appropriate theoretical framework to study the role of social conflict in Auroville from a social-psychological perspective. To gain greater understanding of the dynamics of conflict and peace in Auroville’s multicultural environment, twenty-five structured interviews were conducted by way of field-study research. Participants comprise Aurovillians from ten different nationalities and regions in the international community. Research findings emphasize the constructive role conflict plays in Auroville and the need to reconcile diverging positions for the purpose of realizing the community’s vision of human unity. In that connection, the study identifies the community’s underlying belief of ‘unity’ – oneness of all beings – as a crucial factor in building peace beyond existing conflict resolution practices in Auroville. Finally, this research can be applied to international institutions or non-conventional intentional communities, such as the United Nations, European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations and African Union, to examine and identify the constructive role of conflict in them.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

The fundamental nature of the world, how it works and the problems that govern it seem universal regardless of geographic location. Despite the remarkable progress in the twentieth century in economic and technological advancement, as well as democratic and participatory governance as a predominant system of political organization, the world is still filled with oppression, conflict, injustice and inequality. Simultaneously, the quest for a better, if not ideal society in material, social and spiritual senses continues, building over the imperfections of humankind. Over the years many thinkers and philosophers have attempted to define and construct the laws and mechanisms of such a society. As a result several political systems in the form of monarchy, autocracy, authoritarian oligarchy, communism, socialism and democracy have evolved in the pursuit of better forms of government and just and equal societies. However, the chaotic and disparate dynamics at economic, political, environmental and security levels, in the world are an indication of how distant humankind is from an ideal government and society.

Nevertheless, for centuries several philosophers have conceived of an ideal city or a utopian community as a model for a harmonious and just collective coexistence. A common definition of utopia is “a place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of laws, customs and conditions’ or ‘an impossibly ideal scheme, especially for social improvement.”¹ The concept of utopia can be traced back two thousand three hundred years ago to Plato’s Republic. The central aim of the Republic is to establish a harmonious city. Later the word “utopia” was coined by Thomas More in the early sixteenth century for his book Utopia, describing a fictional utopian island in the Atlantic Ocean.² The fictional utopia portrayed in literature is used as a model for an ideal society and subsequently several intentional communities were created in an attempt to establish that perfection in reality. “Intentional communities are formed when people choose to live with or near enough to each other to carry out a shared lifestyle, within a shared culture and with a common purpose.”³ The members of such associations are bonded by a common social, political, religious or spiritual vision.

¹ Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 2444.
² Levitas, 2.
³ Christian, xviii.
This research examines Auroville, which is a unique intentional community devoted to an experiment in human unity. It focuses on Auroville in particular because it is recognized as “the first and only internationally endorsed ongoing experiment in human unity.” Auroville is located in South India, five miles north of the town of Pondicherry. The concept of Auroville was initiated by Mirra Alfassa (1878 – 1973) a French woman, also known as ‘The Mother’, who later became the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo (1872 – 1950), a twentieth-century Indian philosopher-mystic. In 1966, Auroville was endorsed by UNESCO, which commended it as a project of importance to humanity; it also received full support of the Government of India, as partners in progress, as facilitators rather than as administrators. Thereafter in 1968, Auroville was founded as a social laboratory where people of different nationality could live together and work toward human unity. The Mother writes, “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.”

Currently, Auroville is an emerging international township, representing forty-nine countries from all age groups, social classes, backgrounds and cultures representing humanity as a whole.

Auroville is a microcosm of the world. It therefore offers unique opportunities to study the fundamental problems of the world (such as conflict, inequality or social injustice) that international relations (IR) attempts to understand on a small scale. Though Auroville is based on a noble ideal, it faces challenges and tensions at different levels – individual, group or sub-community and system. This research aims to study primarily the psychological determinants of conflict from individual, group and system level; and then, look into the methods of conflict resolution and how the community builds peace. In doing so, it seeks to understand the underlying causes of social conflict and also the constructive and destructive roles of conflict in a multicultural environment like Auroville. This study eventually can help determine the dynamics of conflict and peace from the individual level to larger aggregates including the nation-state and international system.

---

4 Auroville in a Nutshell, 1.
5 Auroville Website, Statements of support from Government of India.
6 The Mother, Vol. 3, 188.
7 Auroville Website, Auroville in brief.
This study intends to help Auroville community (especially the conflict resolution practitioners and mediators), scholars of conflict resolution and practitioners in general. Furthermore, it is not primarily intended for policymakers and international organizations, but aimed at public discussion, to delve deeper into the causes of conflict and make it a constructive medium rather than destructive force.


Chapter 2 - Methodology

Research Question, Hypothesis and Objectives

The main question this thesis seeks to answers is: What roles do conflict and conflict resolution play in an intentional community like Auroville? The secondary question is: How does Auroville create and sustain peace in a multicultural environment? The primary hypothesis is that conflict plays predominantly a constructive, rather than a destructive role in Auroville. The secondary hypothesis contends that restoring and sustaining peace is largely dependent on the community’s belief in its philosophical foundation, and its continuous efforts in realizing it. The objectives of this research are threefold: (1) to study the underlying principles of conflict in Auroville, (2) to determine how conflicts are resolved and (3) to understand how peace is created and sustained in a multicultural community.

Case Study

This research is a case-study, analyzing conflict, conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Auroville, since its inception in 1968. It employs Kenneth Waltz’s three images (or three levels-of-analysis, a contemporary IR theory), as a theoretical framework to study the role of conflict. Waltz classifies the causes of conflict or war in three categories: individual, state and system. The first level argues that “the locus of the important causes of war is found in the nature and behavior of man.”

8 Waltz, 16.
9 The members of Auroville are referred to as Aurovillians in the community.
tural environment of Auroville provides a unique opportunity to analyze conflict through the first image. The second level explains how the internal organization of states is “the key to understanding war and peace.”^10^ The state level is only partially applicable to Auroville and it will be viewed from the perspective of different groups (such as identity groups and interest groups). The third level contends that the anarchic structure of the international system is the origin of conflict. Auroville’s anarchic governing structure makes it a suitable case to inspect the core reasons for conflict at this level. These three levels-of-analysis will be employed in the context of Auroville to study the root causes of conflict and assess measures to overcome them in a multicultural community. It is important to note here that conflict is analyzed purely from the point of view of social conflict. For the purpose of this study, social conflict is defined as a process in which people disagree about different or differently perceived positions, interests, values or needs.

**Research Methodology**

The research design is mainly a descriptive and explanatory analysis. It is primarily an ethnographic study and utilizes both qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection. The primary sources include interviews of Aurovillians and document analysis, and secondary sources consist of observations and interpretations presented in peer-reviewed articles, scholarly literature on Auroville, dissertations and books. The dependent variable of this study is level of conflict and independent variables are the sources of conflict and the measures of resolving conflict. To analyze the sources of conflict, the research limits itself to mainly four factors: human insecurities, economic disparity, nationality differences and power struggle. As for measures of resolving conflict, the focus will be on the conflict resolution facilities and resources such as mediation, nonviolent communication and restorative circles provided by Auroville Koodam^11^.

To acquire a better understanding of peace and conflict in Auroville, a field research was carried out. Twenty-five structured interviews were conducted, participants span over ten differ-

---

^10^ Waltz, 81.

^11^ Auroville Koodam is a centre that serves individuals and groups who need support with: communication, facilitation and conflict resolution. (Koodam document, Auroville)
ent nationalities/regions\textsuperscript{12}, coming from different age groups, experiences, social classes, backgrounds, idiosyncrasies\textsuperscript{13} and cultures. The interviews were covered from the perspective of individual, group and system levels and based on the participant’s role and experience in the community. (In data analysis and findings section (chapter 5) some thoughts of the participants are quoted as formulated by the interviewees, however, their names are not disclosed for confidentiality purpose.) In addition to the interviews, during my stay in Auroville, I interacted with several people in an informal way. These interactions are not taken as interviews, but some of the information obtained from them are considered part of the observation analysis.

\textit{Research Outline}

The introduction and methodology precede the literature review (chapter three) which covers the developing concepts, theories and framework relevant to the research. It further discusses dominant IR theories on conflict, the means of resolving conflict and peace building. Then it briefly reviews the concepts and ideals of intentional communities. Thereafter, it delves into scholarly literature on Auroville. Chapter four provides the case-study of Auroville. It provides a historical background of Auroville and its philosophical foundation. It also analyzes conflict in Auroville with Waltz’s three images. Chapter five presents the data analysis, findings and discussion of the study. Chapter six comprises of the concluding summary, research limitations and discusses areas for further research.

\textbf{Chapter 3 - Literature Review: Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Auroville Koodam and Intentional Communities}

This sections provides a theoretical and analytical foundation for the development of the succeeding chapters. It begins with a discussion of prominent and contemporary IR theories on conflict and conflict resolution(CR), then reviews scholarly literature on Auroville and its CR

\textsuperscript{12} Different nationalities/regions consisted of British, Dutch, French, German, American, Swedish, Italian, Chinese, North Indian, South Indian.

\textsuperscript{13} Idiosyncrasies refer to distinct peculiarities or mannerisms of the various cultures.
practices, and finally concludes by examining the concept and characteristics of utopia and intentional communities.

Conflict

In its broadest sense conflict comprises everything “from war to choices between ice-cream sodas.”\(^{14}\) It is used most often as a malleable concept, stretched and molded to suit the situation and context. Broadly defined, conflict is a “perception of incompatibility between two or more actors and the range of behavior associated with such perceptions.”\(^{15}\) Mack and Snyder suggest that conflict can be identified and characterized predominantly by four conditions: the existence of at least two or more parties, a situation of “position” or “resource” scarcity, presence of conflictual behavior that is designed to injure, thwart or gain control of another party or parties, and mutually opposed goals.\(^{16}\) These empirical conditions provide a comprehensive understanding of conflict. In other words, these conditions or properties may exist within an individual and among individuals, groups or states. Consequently, these properties also clarify that conflicts may occur in any system of interaction – interpersonal, intergroup or international.\(^{17}\) Social conflict is defined as a process in which people disagree about different or differently perceived positions, interests, values or needs, for the purpose of this thesis.

Conflicts and wars have been studied in various fields such as history, political science, law and social psychology.\(^{18}\) In the interest of this thesis, the concept of conflict is examined from the point of view of international relations. Relations among individuals, human groups or nations are considerably similar. In the case of individuals a variety of patterns can emerge; at one extreme they can be a relationship based on pure love, as bestowed by the mother upon her child, and at the other, upon sheer insecurity, fear and hatred, as felt by the cavemen when confronted by a stranger.\(^{19}\) In regard to human groups or states such relations are not based on pure

\(^{14}\) Mack et al., 212.
\(^{15}\) Bercovitch et al., 20.
\(^{16}\) Mack et al., 218.
\(^{17}\) Bercovitch et al., 20.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 1.
\(^{19}\) Frankel, 90.
love but in most cases on insecurities and some extreme cases hatred. In other words, “The two extremes types of group relations are often called cooperation, where there is no conflict, and fight, where the conflict is so acute that it makes accommodation unthinkable and the elimination of the opponent the only worthwhile objective.”

Regarding interaction between states or groups, it is important to distinguish cooperation and competition from conflict. A simple definition of cooperation is often seen as the absence of conflict; however, it must be noted that “cooperation is not equivalent to harmony” and hence “not necessarily good from a moral point of view.” According to Frankel, the majority of situations fall between conflict and cooperation and may be called competition. It is a combination of conflicting and complementary interests. Competition may be regarded as a source of conflict but not conflict in and of itself. In relation to competition, conflict also may exist but it is not absolute, “because it is tempered by some community of interest, and often ends in compromise.”

This distinction and clarification of some key terms related to conflict allows further examination of leading IR theories.

**Neorealism, Neoliberalism and Constructivism**

The most prevalent IR theories are neorealism, neoliberalism, and partly constructivism – the latter of which is becoming more mainstream in contemporary IR theory. Although realists trace their intellectual roots to Thucydides historical classic of the Peloponnesian War in the fifth-century B.C, realism (later neorealism) came to prominence in mid-twentieth century and continues to dominate IR field. Both realism and neorealism evolve out of the Hobbesian thought that the state of nature is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” and therefore men will be led to a perpetual state of war against each other. Classical realists (such as Thomas Hobbes, Hans Morganthau) attributed “egoism and power politics primarily to human nature.” Morganthau,

---

20 Frankel, 90.
21 Axelrod et al., 226.
22 Ibid.
23 Frankel, 90.
24 Curtis, 334.
25 Wendt, 395.
the most influential scholar of modern realism, explains that the struggle for power is the immediate or ultimate aim of domestic and international politics. He argues that all political phenomena can be reduced to one of the three basic patterns – a political policy that seeks to either keep, increase or demonstrate power.\textsuperscript{26}

Realists believe that states are unitary and primary actors in the international system.\textsuperscript{27} Therefore, states are preoccupied with power and their actions are driven by self-interest. Realism also believes in balance-of-power, unlike the neoliberal view of hegemony or a single sovereign power. Neorealism or structural realism was developed based on some fundamental ideas of realism, by theorists such as Kenneth Waltz. This school of thought contends that security is the core interest of all states. It emphasizes that the international system is one of international anarchy, without central authority or common government to control world affairs, which fosters “competition and conflict among states.”\textsuperscript{28} This insecurity promotes competition and conflict among states, and inhibits cooperation “even when they share common interests.”\textsuperscript{29} It rather encourages them to fear that “today's friend may be tomorrow's enemy in war.”\textsuperscript{30} Consequently, neorealists question the capabilities of international institutions and assume that they are weak.

In contrast to the neorealist paradigm, neoliberalism (formally idealism then liberal institutionalism) believes in the possibility of international cooperation. The fundamental belief of neoliberalism emerges from the Rousseauian thought that humans are perfectible. Unlike Hobbes’ premise concerning the state of nature leading to a state of war, Rousseau describes the state of nature as “generally peaceful.”\textsuperscript{31} To some extent, neoliberalism is a critique of neorealism. It embraces some of the core neorealist propositions, including the contention that the international system is inherently anarchic. However, it defines international anarchy as a decentralized form of government and further clarifies that lack of a common government in the global arena is neither an indication that the international society does not exist, nor that the international system

\textsuperscript{26} Morgenthau, 52.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 492.
\textsuperscript{28} Grieco, 485.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 485.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 487.
\textsuperscript{31} Rousseau, xxxv.
lacks organization. Neoliberalism also acknowledges the neorealist perspective of states as dominant actors; but does not accept them as the sole dominant powers. According to neoliberalism, the main goal of states is survival and therefore they seek to maximize their absolute gains or national interests, and “are indifferent to gains achieved by the others.” However, it rejects the overall pessimistic neorealist conception of world politics and instead contests that states can work together and “international institutions can help states cooperate.” To neoliberals, international institutions provide useful means to resolve conflict.

Contrary to neorealist and neoliberal understandings, constructivist interpret international anarchy differently. They assert, in the words of Alexander Wendt, that “anarchy is what states make of it.” Constructivism begins with the premise that anarchy and security-based competition are not inherent to the international system, but rather constructs of state behavior therein. Furthermore, it claims that “significant aspects of international relations are socially constructed,” rather than unavoidable consequences of human nature and other characteristics of international politics. The constructivist theory suggests that states behave in a certain way based on the perception other states have of them. It also indicates that the international system does not necessarily have to be competitive or insecure, but instead that it becomes that way through a “process” of interactions or learned behavior. If competitiveness is a learned behavior, then states either will continue as such until a predator state is destroyed or transformed from within. Similarly, constructivists hold that the notion of security as a competitive concept is also a learned behavior and therefore transformable for the purpose of cooperation.

Though neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism are discussed predominantly from the perspective of international conflict, they can serve as relevant theories for analyzing social conflict from a psychological point of view as well. Likewise, these theories can help to study

---

32 Axelrod et al., 226.
33 Grieco, 487.
34 Ibid., 486.
35 Wendt, 395.
36 Jackson et al., 81.
37 Wendt, 391.
38 Ibid., 409.
39 Ibid.
deeper the causes of social conflict in the context of Auroville. Moreover, some of the tenets of these theories relate either to the vision of Auroville or the challenges it encounters in the system while attempting to realize its ideal in practice. For example, the anarchic structure of Auroville community offers a unique model to assess the extent to which conflict occurs as a consequence of lack of governance. It demonstrates the challenges of organizing a collective life without an authoritarian structure. In connection to neoliberalism, the vision of human unity is fundamentally based on principles of idealism, that man is perfectible (and he can overcome his imperfections of human nature and behavior). Considering the Auroville community has such an extraordinary goal (of human unity) to achieve, it would be interesting to research the role of security and cooperation (based on the neoliberalist and constructivist theories) in reality.

**Psychological and Economic Causes of Conflict**

Beyond the neorealist-neoliberal debate, reviewing conflict from a psychological perspective provides greater insight into individual and state behavior. Perceptions and misperceptions play a crucial role in IR, especially in respect to cooperation, competition and conflict between states. Conflict may occur as a result of one state’s misjudgment of another’s intentions.\(^\text{40}\) The influence of perception and misperception on state behavior and judgment is equally applicable to individuals and human groups. State biases or errors often can be traced to individual (state leaders) misinterpretations or miscalculations. Additionally, overestimation or underestimation of hostility have resulted in conflict or war in the past, and much current debate about policy toward different states deliberates on human perception.\(^\text{41}\) In other words, it implies that the formulation of one state’s foreign policy towards another involves considerable human biases, opinions, experiences, interests and interaction between the states. One fundamental reason for bias is misperception of threat.\(^\text{42}\) Political psychologists have proposed theories (of estimation and judgement) to record the impact of cognitive biases on the perception of threat.\(^\text{43}\)

\(^{40}\) Jervis, 675.
\(^{41}\) Jervis, 675.
\(^{42}\) Stein, 245.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
ous actions. Misperception also results from ‘egocentric’ bias, where people view themselves as the “central point of reference when they explain the actions of others,” discounting the importance of other factors (e.g. opponents’ views).

When discussing perception and misperception it is also important to understand the notion of ‘identity’, especially in terms of differences and affiliations. National identity also is linked intricately to individual perceptions and can play a substantial role in conflict. In their study on psychological boundaries and ethnic conflict, Kriedie and Monroe argue that identity constrain choice. They deduce that “identity,” “categorization,” “the perceived threat to each group’s identity,” and “the importance of protecting one’s perceived psychological boundaries” are core reasons driving ethnic conflict.

Psychological factors such as misperception and identity do not pertain necessarily to IR alone; they are equally relevant to individuals, human groups or communities. Similarly these factors apply to the Auroville community as well. With diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds from forty-nine different countries, Aurovillians come with their distinctive traits and characteristics. Although the community strives to create an ideal place where people can live without conflict and rivalries of nations, religions and politics, misperceptions and group identity continue to surface in Auroville. They can be seen in individual or group inclinations toward national/regional affiliations and their socio-psychological perceptions, which are some of the main causes of misunderstandings and tensions in the community.

In addition to psychological causes, conflicts often have economic and political bases. Scholars of conflict studies recognize “underdevelopment” as a major economic cause of conflict. According to Stewart and Brown, four explanations have dominated recent IR studies on the motivations for conflict. The first explanation discusses how political conflicts arise as a result of various “group motives and inequalities” – where some groups fight to gain independence, take over the state, or preserve the territorial integrity of the nation. Conflict also can

---

44 Stein, 253.
45 Kriedie et al., 5.
46 Ibid., 31.
47 Stewart et al., 219.
48 Ibid.
emerge where there exist concrete underlying injustice in access to economic or political resources. Groups usually are tied together by a common purpose, like similar ethnic or religious identity. The second explanation highlights how “individual gains from a conflict” or “private motivation” can be a fundamental source of conflict. The third reason for conflict is failed social contract. In that connections Stewart et al. assert that, “social stability is implicitly premised on a social contract between the people and the government.” Consequently, people accept state authority as long as it provides and maintains reasonable economic conditions and services. However, in a situation of economic stagnation or decline the social contract typically breaks down and results in conflict. Conversely, those states capable of addressing socioeconomic dissatisfaction are less susceptible to conflict. The fourth explanation, “environmental pressures,” identifies depletion of natural resources as a serious threat and major cause of conflict globally. These four explanations highlight some of the key individual and group motives for conflict.

Group motives and economic inequalities also arise in the Auroville community. Despite its noble vision, interest groups exist within Auroville and do attempt to gain control over various activities (such as administrative and economic), while others resist and strive to preserve the integrity of the community. Conflict also arises from economic differences and disparities in standards of living within the community, as well as between the community and ingenuous populations of surrounding Tamil villages that surround Auroville.

Three Images of Conflict: Man, the State and War

The preceding overview of major IR theories (realism, liberalism and constructivism) and some sources of conflict (psychological and economic) enable further analysis of conflict from the perspective of Waltz’s three images. A leading contemporary scholar in the field of IR, Waltz discusses the causes of war through three images or ‘levels-of-analysis’. He argues that causes of war or conflict can be found “within man, within the structure of separate states, within the state

49 Stewart et al. refer to these differences as “horizontal inequalities” (HI); they could involve access to employment or assets (e.g. land, credit and education), or political power (e.g. presidency, cabinet), 222-223.
50 Stewart et al., 224.
51 Ibid., 226.
52 Ibid.
Describing the international system through the lens of these images provides a clearer understanding of war and conflict from different perspectives.

According to Waltz’s first image, the root causes of war reside in human nature and behavior. Essentially, conflict arises from human selfishness, misdirected aggressive impulses and stupidity; other causes are not as significant and can be understood in respect to primary factors (i.e. selfishness, misdirected impulses). A common notion is “to achieve a more peaceful world men must be changed, whether in their moral-intellectual outlook or in their psycho-social behavior.” He also identifies differing views within each image as ‘optimist’ and ‘pessimist’. Optimists believe in the possibility of changing the wicked into good, and pessimists see little possibility of man “righting” himself. On one hand, Waltz criticizes optimists for overlooking potential evil in human acts, and notes that optimists “have assumed that progress moves in a straight line, ever upward, whereas in fact each advance in knowledge, each innovation in technique, contains within itself the potentiality of evil as well as good.” On the other, pessimists view peace as a utopian dream. In summary, the first image reveals that “the evilness of men, or their improper behavior, leads to war; individual goodness, if it could be universalized would mean peace.”

The main idea of Waltz’s second image is that “the internal organization of states is the key to understanding war and peace.” According to the state level-of-analysis, conflict tends to promote internal unity of states. In his analysis of state’s internal situations and politics, Waltz speculates that “geographic or economic deprivations” and the “idea that defects in states” may result in war. This begs the following questions: (1) If the causes of wars or conflicts can be explained by defects, then would removing the defects establish the foundation for ‘perpetual

53 Waltz, 12.
54 Ibid., 16.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 18.
57 Ibid., 20.
58 Ibid., 21.
59 Ibid., 39.
60 Ibid., 81.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 82.
peace”? (2) Can wars be eliminated through the reform of states? To counter such propositions Waltz asks: “in just what ways, should the structure of states be changed? What definition of the ‘good’ state is to serve as a standard?” He contends that change may be possible only if a majority of states in the international system reform in ways that can cultivate, secure and sustain a peaceful environment. At the same time, he notes that the essential component of such reforms indicates that a state can provide stability and justice within the state and peace along its borders. Waltz believes that perfection is impossible for states just as for individuals. He contends that “peace with justice requires an organization with more and more of the qualities of government, just as internal justice was found to require an ever stronger and more active government.” It is said that men make societies and conversely that the societies in which they live make men. The same is applicable to IR. The behavior of states (or of the men leading the states) determines the substance of IR. As a consequence, the international political environment depends on state behavior.

Waltz’s third image describes conflict from a system perspective and asserts that “in anarchy, there is no automatic harmony,” and “in the absence of a supreme authority, there is a constant possibility that conflicts will be settled by force.” In an anarchic system, conflict can be viewed as a vicious circle. Waltz explains that “so long as the notion of self-help persists, the aim of maintaining the power position of the nation is paramount to all other considerations.” Therefore, without central authority states typically use force to attain goals, especially if the prospects for success are high, and naturally tend to value those goals more than peace. The state is considered a sovereign power and the final judge of its own actions; as a result any state, at any time, may use force to implement policies. Consequently, because states have the capacity to use force at any time, all states constantly must be on guard to counter-attack or they may suc-

---

63 Waltz, 83.
64 Ibid., 120.
65 Ibid., 122.
66 Ibid., 123.
67 Ibid., 160.
68 Ibid., 188.
69 Ibid., 160.
70 Ibid.
cumb to weakness.\textsuperscript{71} If anarchy is the primary cause of conflict, Waltz suggests two possible solutions: (1) “to impose an effective control on the separate and imperfect states;” (2) “to remove states from the sphere of the accidental, that is, to define the good state as so perfect that it will no longer be particular.”\textsuperscript{72}

Waltz’s levels-of-analysis thesis establishes a broad framework to study the causes of conflict, employing either one or more of the three images. Although this framework puts forth three distinct paths to explain the causes of war, they are interconnected. In other words, analyzing the causes from one image while overlooking the other two might either distort one’s interpretation or provide only a partial answer. This thesis also offers a fitting theoretical framework to examine the underlying causes of conflict in Auroville from the individual, group and system level. At the individual level, Auroville struggles to overcome human limitations such as egoism, selfishness or insecurities, that are common problems of mankind. However, it takes the optimists position that individuals are capable of rising beyond their petty and narrow motives, to a higher consciousness (or as better and deeper human beings). This does not imply that they do not recognise latent human imperfections. Moreover, Auroville is an experiment to test the theories of the optimist and pessimist in the real world. As indicated earlier the second level concerns the point of view of identity groups and interest groups. Group and individual behavior are intricately linked to each other (just as states actions are linked to the behavior of men that govern them). The third image of system gives an analytical base to further study the role of conflict in a structure that lacks a governing body or authority.

\textit{Conflict Resolution}

Conflict is an inevitable and a universal feature of social relations.\textsuperscript{73} Consequently, how can social conflicts be managed or resolved? This question directs to the field of conflict resolution (CR), which is a vast and rapidly growing academic field. Having emerged in the 1950s when the conflict between superpowers threatened the very existence of humankind, CR has

\textsuperscript{71}\textsuperscript{}Waltz, 160.
\textsuperscript{72}\textsuperscript{}Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{73}\textsuperscript{}Dixon, 655.
evolved into a self-contained, interdisciplinary field “where theory and practice pace real-world events.” It is an important practice that concerns individuals, states and the international system because non-resolution, at the very minimum, can be highly problematic for the system in which it occurs.

The concept of CR often is interpreted in bewildering ways in relevant literature. It is therefore important to clarify what is meant by the term. In the 1950s “conflict resolution” was widely referred to as “mutually acceptable ways of ending conflicts.” However, as conflict and its nature changed, so did approaches to its management and resolution. At present, conflict resolution is neither about “suppressing, eliminating or controlling” conflict, nor avoiding conflict or using greater force to eliminate adversaries. Rather, it encompasses activities (ideas, theories or methods) that help limit or reduce the level of conflict, achieve better understanding of key relevant issues or realize a political agreement or mutually acceptable decision on future interactions. In other words, conflict resolution is about “accepting a conflict, recognizing that there are ways out of it, and engaging in some tacit or explicit coordination, without which none of these goals can be achieved.” According to Bercovitch et al., conflicts can be resolved when: (1) “a discernible outcome has been reached;” (2) “conflict behavior terminates;” and (3) “a satisfactory distribution of values and resources has been agreed on.” Whether focused on interpersonal, communal or international conflict, successful conflict resolution may facilitate newer and better modus vivendi or agreements allowing parties to coexist peacefully.

Over the years, the scope of conflict resolution has broadened immensely in response to changing trends in the international system. During the Cold War, the traditional CR approach was based on the state-centric Westphalian system of conflict management, involving diplo-
macy, legal methods, peacekeeping, mediation and negotiation frameworks. The approach aimed to resolve conflict for the purpose of realizing and protecting state security, order and other interests. In the post-Cold War era, the traditional statist paradigm does not explain sufficiently pressing challenges such as intrastate or ethnic conflicts and asymmetric warfare. As a result, the international system has moved into a post-Westphalian era where issues such as “human security, identity, poverty and representation are included within hegemonic discourses” in IR. Furthermore, innovative and dynamic ways of peacemaking are becoming more relevant. Some approaches include building conditions for peace, including post-conflict reconciliation and truth commissions, conflict transformation and promoting justice. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes and techniques such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration, restorative justice, nonviolent communications and reconciliation have gained attention in the field of conflict resolution as well.

John Paul Lederach, an eminent contemporary scholar and practitioner in the field of conflict resolution and peace studies, argues that the nature of present-day conflict requires new approaches beyond traditional state-centric diplomacy. He believes that, “building peace in today's conflicts calls for long-term commitment to establishing an infrastructure across the levels of a society, an infrastructure that empowers the resources for reconciliation from within that society and maximizes the contribution from outside.” According to Lederach, building peace should exceed post-conflict or post-agreement reconstruction and encompasses the full range of processes, approaches and stages essential to transformation of conflict into sustainable and peaceful relationships. Peace, for that matter, is not perceived simply as a particular condition or stage in time, but as a dynamic social construct. Lederach has developed a conceptual framework for building peace, comprising a comprehensive approach to conflict transformation focused on reconciliation and social dynamics of enhancing relationships. He contends that the

---

83 Bercovitch (2009), 6.
84 Ibid., 14.
85 Ibid.
86 Kriesberg, 456.
87 Lederach, xvi.
88 Ibid., 20.
89 Ibid.
transformation of conflict must be rooted in “social-psychological and spiritual dimensions that traditionally have been seen as either irrelevant or outside the competency of international diplomacy.”

Reconciliation can be seen as a social space that enables conflict transformation.

According to Lederach, the very nature of contemporary conflict demands innovation of both IR and conflict resolution scholarship and practice to control and transform conflicts into constructive and peaceful outcomes. The intersection between realism and innovation is reconciliation. Reconciliation primarily focuses on building relationships between conflicting parties or groups. It is argued that relationships are integral to understand the dynamics and structure of any system as a whole. The relational dimension draws in “emotional and psychological aspects of the conflict” and “the need to recognize past grievances and explore future interdependence.” People need a space where they can express the loss, grief and anger accompanying previously experienced pain and injustice. Acknowledgement is critical to reconciliation. It is one thing to know something and yet another to acknowledge it. Lederach explains, “Acknowledgment through hearing one another’s stories validates experience and feelings and represents the first step toward restoration of the person and the relationship.” Reconciliation is a locus, a place where people can focus on their relationship by sharing feelings, perceptions and experiences for the purpose of creating new perceptions and shared experiences. It is also a place where “the diverse but connected energies and concerns driving the conflict can meet, including the paradoxes of truth and mercy, just and peace.”

Lederach also emphasizes the structural aspect of establishing frameworks for building peace. He suggests conflict should be analyzed and represented by three different leadership levels: top-level, the middle-range and grassroots. Top-level actors consist of political, military or sometimes religious leaders. The middle-range includes leaders respected in sectors such as business, education or agriculture. Grassroots leadership comprises local leaders directly con-

---

90 Lederach, 29.
91 Ibid., 25.
92 Ibid., 26.
93 Ibid., 26.
94 Ibid., 34.
95 Ibid., 30.
96 Ibid., 35.
nected to masses of people and includes refugee camp officials, NGO workers, and health workers. Each level has an important role to play in building peace. Unless the reconciliation paradigm can be established at all levels, especially at middle-range and grassroots, the progress achieved at the top level will remain incomplete or in danger of collapse. In summary, the main goal and contribution of Lederach’s framework is “to create a time and a place within various levels of the affected population, to address, integrate, and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present.” Conflict resolution practices in Auroville conform to Lederach’s principles of conflict transformation. The following section outlines some of the key methods employed by the community to resolve conflict.

**Auroville Koodam: A Space for Constructive Communication**

Auroville faces challenges of conflict and tension at individual, group and system levels. Regardless of the community’s intentions, conflict is inevitable. It occurs when people in the same community who depend on each other for various purposes, have feelings, goals or values that are incompatible or irreconcilable. Auroville Koodam was initiated by a few trained conflict resolution practitioners to provide a platform and space for constructive communication. Facilitators from this project see that “conflicts often have a great creative potential that can lead to positive change – when dealt with constructively.”

Koodam means a ‘gathering space’ in Tamil. The Koodam project is “a center that serves individuals and groups who need support with communication, facilitation and conflict resolution.” Accordingly, it aspires to be a physical space encouraging empathy and knowledge, where individuals and groups can engage other people in constructive communication. Koodam attempts to effect an attitudinal shift in the community towards conflict transformation – from one of truth versus lies and a judiciary system, to one of “multiple truths, conflict trans-

---

97 Lederach, 34.
98 Ibid., 35.
99 Koodam presentation, 5.
100 Auroville today newsletter, January 2014, 6.
101 Ibid., 2.
formation and taking responsibility to engage with our own challenges.”\(^{102}\) The center employs various approaches and processes to resolve and transform social conflict into harmonious outcomes. The processes consist of nonviolent communication, restorative circles, facilitation and mediation.\(^{103}\)

**Utopia and Intentional Communities – Idea and Ideals**

In addition to some of the major previously reviewed IR theories and conflict resolution concepts, the subject of intentional communities is relevant to this study. It is worthwhile to introduce the idea of utopia before segueing into the discussion of intentional communities. Kanter describes Utopia as “an imaginary society in which humankind’s highest aspirations come to fulfillment, where all physical, social, and spiritual forces work together, in harmony, to permit the attainment of everything people find necessary and desirable.”\(^{104}\) Contrary to Hobbesian thought of excessive human self-interest and continuous state of war, ‘utopia’ assumes that harmony and cooperation are more natural to human existence than exploitation, competition and conflict – and common conditions of imperfect societies. By supporting “material and psychological safety and security, the utopian social order eliminates the need for divisive competition and self-serving actions, [...] it ensures instead the flowering of mutual responsibility and trust, to the advantage of all.”\(^{105}\)

The concept of utopia is often understood in two different ways. Some scholars believe the term suggests “an escapist fantasy” or an impossible dream. Others consider it a refuge of hope for creating a better world from existing and imperfect societies.\(^{106}\) Members of the latter group have ventured to create utopian or intentional communities with the hope of realizing their ideals. Broadly defined, an *intentional community* is a “group of people who have chosen to live

\(^{102}\) Koodam presentation, 8.
\(^{103}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{104}\) Kanter, 1.
\(^{105}\) Ibid.
\(^{106}\) Levitas, 1.
together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values.”¹⁰⁷

Intentional communities often are seen as havens for hippies with misdirected focus in life.¹⁰⁸ This negative image leads casual observers to regard such societies with apprehensiveness, skepticism and hostility. However, many such associations of people are created in sincere search of themselves, new ways of life or perfectible societies.¹⁰⁹ The core belief of such communities originates from the philosophy of idealism, which understands people as perfectible and capable of living together in harmony, brotherhood and peace.¹¹⁰ The focus of this research is on communities where social harmony is the principle objective.

Historically, initial efforts to establish utopian or intentional communities comprised religious, politico-economic, and psychosocial characteristics.¹¹¹ Earliest attempts started with religious ideals such as “Sangha”¹¹², the “Shakers communities” (1787 -), the “Harmony Society” (1804 - 1904) and the “Community of True Inspiration” (1843 - 1933).¹¹³ Kanter argues that these groups prioritized spiritual ideals and believed in “human perfection through conversion to the more spiritual life offered by the utopia.”¹¹⁴ The second category, “politico-economic” based communities, emerged from the impact of inequality and poverty left in the wake of the Industrial Revolution.¹¹⁵ These evolved into socialist communities and refuges from the evils of exploitation in capitalist systems – portrayed by competition of many for the benefit of a few. The socialist utopian ideal is that all members of the community would cooperate to ensure everyone benefits and, in time, “with proper education, men of higher moral character would emerge.”¹¹⁶ The majority of contemporary communal experiments belong to the third category, psychological

¹⁰⁷ Communities Directory, 18.
¹⁰⁸ Bouvard, 4.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
¹¹⁰ Ibid., 3.
¹¹¹ Ibid., 3.
¹¹² Sangha meaning “association” or “community”, often refers in Buddhism to the monastic community of the ordained monks or nuns
¹¹³ Kanter, 4.
¹¹⁴ Ibid.
¹¹⁵ Ibid., 5.
¹¹⁶ Ibid.
communities, and reject modern society’s emphasis on achievement. Instead these groups adopt the philosophy of “self-actualization” or “personal growth.”

As a unique experiment in human unity, Auroville exhibits some key utopian and intentional community characteristics. Although its origin is spiritual (not religious), Auroville approximates Kanter’s description of spiritual, economic or psycho-social principles of utopia and intentional communities. Though certain objectives, aims or ideals of Auroville may be found in other communities and projects around the world, “Auroville is perhaps the world’s only internationally recognized experiment in Human Unity.” The following chapter discusses Auroville as a case study, and examines the role of conflict and conflict resolution therein.

Chapter 4 - Auroville: A Case Study in the Socially Constructive Role of Conflict

**Philosophical Foundation**

In 1954, Mirra Alfassa, also known as the Mother, published her well-know text ‘A Dream’. In it she described “a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood.” She envisioned Auroville as a universal township, to give concrete form to Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of human unity and evolution. According to Sri Aurobindo, man is a transitional being and he is not the final stage of the evolution. Man being a rational being, mistakes the mind as the last rung of the evolutionary ladder. However, just as mind emerged out of life, the ‘supermind’ or ‘supra-mental consciousness’ will evolve out of mind. It is only by the descent of this supermind that the perfection dreamed of by mankind can manifest.

---

117 Kanter, 7.
118 An Introduction of Auroville, 14.
119 Sri Aurobindo considered Mirra Alfassa to be an incarnation (Avatar) of the Supreme Shakti (the Sacred Force) - Divine Mother. Throughout this thesis, I will refer to her as the Mother as people address her.
120 An introduction to Auroville, 11.
121 The prefix ‘Sri’ is used traditionally as a mark of respect or worship, in this case forms an integral part of the name.
123 Sri Aurobindo Ashram Website
framework” and the interpretation of his teachings by the Mother “furnished the pragmatic application for the formation of Auroville.” In a message to UNESCO the Mother wrote, “Auroville is meant to hasten the advent of the supra-mental Reality upon earth.” Her vision of this international township was a center for transformation that in time would be an example to the world.

Once the project of Auroville gained support and sponsorship from the Indian Government and UNESCO, architects started designing the dream city on barren and arid land located in Tamil Nadu, India. Leard notes, “The Mother argued that for Auroville to live up to its mandate to find living solutions to global problems to locate it in the midst of severe environmental and social problems was appropriate, an opportunity. Locating it in a developed country would leave much undone.”

**Genesis**

On 28 February 1968, for the inauguration ceremony of Auroville, representatives from 124 nations and 23 Indian states placed handfuls of earth from their native lands in an urn situated at the center of the township. It symbolized the creation of the city and its goal of human unity. On this day, the Mother read in French the aspiration of the ideal city in the four-point ‘Charter of Auroville’:

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 realizations.

---

124 Shinn, 1.
126 Leard, 17.
127 Auroville means the City of Dawn.
128 Following which the Charter was read in 16 languages: Tamil, Sanskrit, English, Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Tibetan.
4) Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity."

The city is being planned and designed to house 50,000 inhabitants from around the world. At present Auroville is an emerging township of over 2400 residents, representing 49 countries from all age groups, social backgrounds and cultures. (NB: Though established in India, two-third of Aurovillians are non-Indians.) The Charter identifies Auroville as a place for endless learning and experimentation (at all levels – individual, collective, academic, social, economic and spiritual). This gives Aurovillians abundant freedom and scope to excel internally and externally. The former involves discovering and fulfilling their individual spiritual goals and ideals in the material existence. The latter involves building and developing the township and also trying to practice the ideals of the charter in reality.

**Matrimandir and City Development**

Unlike most cities, the heart of Auroville is not a boisterous or chaotic center, but a ‘Peace zone’ and place of quietude and harmony. In it stands Matrimandir, the ‘soul of the city’: a large golden sphere-like structure symbolizing the birth of a new consciousness. Matrimandir means the ‘temple of the Mother.’ According to Sri Aurobindo, the ‘Mother’ concept stands for

---


130 Auroville Website, Auroville in Brief.
the great evolutionary, conscious and intelligent principle of Life, the Universal Mother – who
seeks human progress beyond present limitations into “the next step of its evolutionary adven-
ture, the supramental consciousness.”\textsuperscript{131} In the globe is an inner chamber for meditation, the
middle of which is a crystal ball (of seventy centimeters diameter). Vrekhem describes the crystal
as projecting “a ray of light directly into the core of your being, in a harmonious room of mate-
rial purity – one can give all kinds of interpretations to it or simply undergo the unworldly beauty
of the place. The Matrimandir cannot be explained.”\textsuperscript{132}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{matrimandir.jpg}
\caption{Matrimandir and the marble urn containing soil from all the nations of the world.
Photo courtesy Auroville website.}
\end{figure}

The city is designed in the shape of a spiral galaxy, divided into four zones radiating out of the
Matrimandir: the International, Cultural, Residential and Industrial. The International zone is the
nucleus of global human unity and the site for national and cultural pavilions of the world. As of
now the Indian and Tibetan pavilions have been built. Other active pavilion groups include Af-
rica House, the House of Americas, Asian Unity, the European Plaza, the Mediterranean Space,
as well as those of Scandinavia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Ka-
zakhstan, Korea, Philippines, Russia, Spain, Slovenia, Switzerland, US and the pavilion of Chi-
nese culture.\textsuperscript{133} These twenty-four pavilion representations aim to help individuals become aware

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{131} Auroville Website, Matrimandir.
\bibitem{132} Vrekham, 419.
\bibitem{133} The Auroville Handbook, 25.
\end{thebibliography}
of the core genius of their respective countries and simultaneously understand and respect the genius of others. In this connection, the Mother wrote in 1952,

“The unity of human race can be achieved neither through uniformity nor through domination and subjection. A synthetic organization of nations, each one occupying its own place in accordance with its own genius and the role it has to play in the whole, can alone effect a comprehensive and progressive unification which may have some chance of enduring.”

The Cultural zone serves as a place for continuous education and comprises institutions and research centers related to education, arts and sports. The Residential zone consists of residential community buildings, meeting spaces, crèches, a health center and other utility needs. Finally, the Industrial zone facilitates Auroville’s economic development, limited to manufacturing services and other eco-friendly industries.

![Figure 3: Auroville Galaxy Model. Photo courtesy Auroville website.](image)

Spread across these zones, the Auroville community currently encompasses over one hundred settlements (sub-communities). Around these zones lies the Green Belt – the environmental research and sustainable rural development area that includes farms, dairies, foresters,
a botanical garden, medicinal and herbal plantations, water management stations and bio-reserves.\textsuperscript{138}

As for the activities of community members, they engage in educational research, small-scale industries, village development, community services, healthcare, organic agriculture, water management, administration and cultural activities. They are all volunteers “who either receive a basic monthly ‘maintenance’, in cash or kind, or pay for themselves partly or entirely from their own resources as a contribution to the project.”\textsuperscript{139}

Furthermore, Auroville is a place of research and experimentation for humanity as a whole in diverse fields such as agriculture, energy generation and sustainable practices\textsuperscript{140}. In the late 1960s, the site chosen for Auroville consisted of arid and severely eroded terrain. “Over two million trees have been planted” since then and erosion control measures stabilized and re-fertilized the soil.\textsuperscript{141} Current city grounds are no longer dry and arid, but filled with dense vegetation. The Auroville Center for Scientific Research (AV-CSR) and the Auroville Building Center (AV-BC) continue to gain prominence globally for pioneering work in renewable energy. For example, over one hundred houses in Auroville use only solar energy. In addition, many of the houses are constructed by the residents, made out of either compressed mud bricks, or recycled or natural materials.\textsuperscript{142} From arts to research to sustainable development, as Vrekhem puts it, “Auroville is chockfull with life and talent.”\textsuperscript{143}

\textbf{Auroville Organization and Governance}

The Mother wanted no fixed rules or laws, let alone a political structure for Auroville. She explained that human beings usually tend to apply mental rules and regulations according to their ideals and understandings. However, such ideals may be arbitrary, absolutely false or un-
real, and this eventually results in a revolt or withering away of a system. She explained that the experience of ‘Life’ itself “should slowly elaborate rules which are as flexible and wide as possible, to be always progressive. Nothing should be fixed.”\textsuperscript{144} As for the social organization of Auroville, she foresaw a ‘divine anarchy’.\textsuperscript{145} She also pointed out that the world will not understand it, however, “men must become conscious of their psychic being and organize themselves spontaneously, without fixed rules and laws – that is the ideal.”\textsuperscript{146} In short, such a structure calls for an organization to be flexible and progressive.

Since its inception, Auroville organization has taken different forms to support the growth of the township, owing to pressures from inside and outside the community. In 1988, the Government of India passed the Auroville Foundation Act to safeguard the development of Auroville according to its Charter.\textsuperscript{147} It comprises of three authorities: the Governing Board (GB) (which supervises city development in collaboration with its inhabitants), the International Advisory Council and the Residents' Assembly (RA)\textsuperscript{148}(which provides international support and advice, as deemed necessary by the GB).\textsuperscript{149} Though the overall responsibility for ensuring achievement of Auroville’s goals lies in the hands of the Foundation, daily affairs and accountability rest with all Aurovillians. As such most administrative tasks are carried out by ‘working groups’\textsuperscript{150} which are empowered by the RA or community-at-large. In addition, groups such as “Working Committee” (WC) and “Auroville Council” (AVC) are elected biannually from volunteers within the Auroville society to meet basic administrative needs of the community; but these bodies have no ongoing power.\textsuperscript{151} While there are representative groups and a general structure to organize the functions of the city and its members, the community by-and-large maintains a nonhierarchical

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{144} The Mother on Auroville, 7-21.
\bibitem{145} Vrekham, 413.
\bibitem{146} Words of the Mother, Vol. 13, 219.
\bibitem{147} Auroville Website, The Auroville Foundation Act, 1988.
\bibitem{148} Resident Assembly (RA) consists of Aurovillians on the Master list over the age of 18.
\bibitem{149} Auroville Website, FAQs On organization and Credentials.
\bibitem{150} Working groups (WG), deal with specialized matters – i.e. economy, farming, health care, entry process, the needs of commercial units, and these groups are often answerable to the community at large. (Auroville Website)
\bibitem{151} Auroville Website, FAQs On organization and Credentials.
\end{thebibliography}
structure. Essentially “all are equal and have an equal voice in the affairs of the community; no one individual or group is 'in charge’.”

The Gap Between the Ideal and Real - The Role of Conflict

The philosophical foundation and overall background of Auroville set a record of an ideal township that is not easy to dismiss, but is that the whole story? Is there a gap between the ideal and real world in Auroville? Yes, there is a gap – one that consists of several challenges, tensions and differences at various levels. The following section points out some of the key challenges, particularly in the context of social conflict.

The underlying philosophy of utopian or intentional communities stems from an idealization of society, in which members live in harmony, brotherhood and peace. No matter how utopian the aspiration, conflict seems inevitable as it is rooted in the very nature of mankind. Like any other community Auroville also experiences tension and conflict in varying forms. At a fundamental level, ‘commitment mechanisms’ of belongingness and leadership seem to guide the community in discordant situations. To attain this level of individual commitment the group needs a compelling shared belief system that includes leadership with qualities like “wisdom, inspiration and spiritualness.”

---

152 Auroville Website, FAQs On organization and Credentials.
153 Shinn, 250.
ismatic leaders,” notes Kanter. In the case of Auroville, it is evident that the Mother has assumed this role since its very inception.

In its foundational years, the Mother’s presence and leadership helped resolve contentious issues of different nature (e.g. social, political, economic). Additionally, the Charter and guidelines formulated by her are crucial for Auroville’s development and in realizing its vision of human unity. Some of the guidelines are broad and afford the community freedom to individually and collectively experiment and realize its full potential. The Mother’s vision and ideals can be found in her writings. However, without the presence of the founder after 1973, these texts are subject to individual interpretation. The different perceptions naturally generate tensions that test the ‘ideal’ versus the ‘actual’ world. It is observed that members of the community tend to side with two major positions on the founder’s vision of Auroville. “There are those who are in favor of following it as textually as possible where as others are more of the view that what she said should be adapted to the times and circumstances.” Some of the internal disagreements and challenges arise from these two diverging views.

Although the Auroville Foundation was established in later years and the evolving internal structure provides a basic support mechanism, the absence of the Mother and a formalized governing structure often has lead to obvious anarchy. As Sri Aurobindo indicated, “The anarchic is the true divine state of man in the end as in the beginning; but in between it would lead us straight to the devil and his kingdom.” Again there is a distinct gap between the ideal of ‘divine anarchy’ and real world. All kind of problems – political, cultural, racial, interpersonal and financial – are put to test with incessant “discussions,” “friction” and “quarrels about trifles.” In other words, in this intermediary stage between the ideal and real, challenges such as disorder, confusion and conflict, that exist in the international community are experienced equally by Aurovillians at different levels.

154 Kanter, 113.
155 The Mother left her physical body in 1973, a few year after the foundation of the town.
156 Gonzalez, 15.
157 Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts & Aphorisms, 54.
158 Vrekhem, 414.
On closer examination, it is clear that conflict or tension occur fundamentally at three levels: individual, group and system. Waltz’s levels-of-analysis theory serves as a suitable framework to further study the role of conflict in Auroville, which serves as a microcosm of the international system. Although conflict in this case does not deal with violence or international conflict, it is considered from a social and psychological point of view. At the individual level, the same elements that Waltz points out, such as human nature and behavior of man, are core determining factors of conflict. For state-level analysis, Waltz presents how economic and geographic deprivations\(^{159}\) can foment conflict. This image is only partially relevant to the Auroville case study, where ‘groups’ assume the role of ‘states’. The groups refer to identity groups (representing cultural and ethnic differences) and also interest groups (such as pro-environmental, pro-spiritual or the various working groups). According to Waltz system-level, international anarchy (of lack of governance) leads to conflict, often as a result of power struggle between states. From the system-level-of-analysis, Auroville can be seen as a mirror of the world situation of international anarchy.

**Conflict Resolution and Building Peace**

Despite the challenges, differences and conflict at various levels, the Auroville community constantly is searching for ways to overcome the problems of social life and human nature, as well as the contradictions and dilemmas that they encounters daily. In his research on Auroville, Kapoor observes, “...the process, the experimentation, the attempt to move in that direction (towards the vision) is very much alive.”\(^{160}\) Various measures are being taken to bridge the gaps and resolve differences consciously and amicably, with the help of conflict resolution specialists or in collective meetings.

Koodam is a one such recent project which strives to facilitates conflict resolution by means of conflict transformation. It starts with a premise that conflict often has great creative potential and, if dealt with constructively, it can lead to positive change.\(^{161}\) It provides a platform

\(^{159}\) Geographic deprivations refer to the “natural” frontiers or borders of states. (Waltz, 83).

\(^{160}\) Kapoor, 633.

\(^{161}\) Koodam Presentation, 5.
to individuals and groups who need support with communication, facilitation and conflict resolution, in cooperation with AVC and other relevant official bodies. To address disputes within the society several methods such as ‘Nonviolent Communication’ (NVC), ‘Restorative Circles’ (RC), mediation and facilitation are practiced and cater to different situations or cases. NVC promotes peaceful interactions, emphasizes ‘empathetic listening’ and, in turn, helps individuals discover the depth of their compassion for themselves and others. In RC, all parties participating in the process get an opportunity to express themselves and be heard for the meaning they want to impress. It is not about who is right and wrong, but about finding a way towards a positive outcome. Some of the differences or disagreements in Auroville are settled by facilitation as well as mediation, with the help of skilled mediators. Mediation aims to bring the conflict to a settlement that is acceptable to both parties, in consensus with the third party’s interest.

Beyond the numerous conflict resolutions facilities and resources, the member’s faith and conviction in Auroville’s vision – and the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy is instrumental in building peace in the community. It is based on the belief that in every conflict there are two sides, each one claiming to be right and the other wrong and expecting the official bodies to side with them; but “no truth can claim exclusive rights against other truths, however disfigured they present themselves.” In a world of conflicting interests and ideals, ultimately, as the Mother said, “For everyone to agree each one must rise to the summit of his consciousness; it is on the heights that harmony is created.”

---

162 i.e. “Those who have acted, those directly impacted, and the wider community – within a specific context to dialogue as equal.” (Auroville Today, August 2011, 3).
163 Auroville Today, August 2011, 3.
164 Touval et al., 437.
165 The Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s teachings are the same.
166 Auroville Website, Unending Education in Auroville.
167 The Mother on Auroville, 27.
Chapter 5 - Data Analysis, Findings & Discussion

The topics – conflict, conflict resolution and Auroville case study – recorded in preceding chapters establishes the groundwork necessary for data analysis. The objective of this chapter is to analyze the data, present findings (results) and further discuss the implication of the results.

In effort to gain greater understanding of dynamics of conflict and peace in a multicultural environment, twenty-five structured interviews were conducted. Participants included Aurovillians from ten different countries and regional backgrounds, comprising of British, Dutch, French, German, American, Swedish, Italian, Chinese, and Indian (North and South) nationals. Among this group, members residence in Auroville ranges from 2 years to 44 years.\(^{168}\) In addition, respondents encompassed different age groups and came from various social, economic, traditional and professional backgrounds.

The interviews cover individual, group and system levels and perspectives, and are based on their roles or experiences in the community.\(^{169}\) Key themes addressed in interview questions were: (1) motivations that led participants to join Auroville; (2) human unity and extent of its realization; (3) sources and causes of conflict – according to levels-of-analysis theory, (4) conflict resolution in regard to community measures to overcome internal differences and tensions, and (5) building and sustaining peace. The interviews are coded in different categories and subcategories based on repeated ideas, surprising or interesting statements, theories and concepts similar to those discussed in existing scholarly articles, and thoughts emphasized by participants as important. The following section is divided into two parts. The first part presents the data analysis and findings (or results) of each theme. The second part discusses the results and implications of the findings for this thesis. It also revisits the research objectives and addresses the research question.

\(^{168}\) Out of the 25 interviewees, 3 resided for forty plus years, 7 for thirty plus years, 6 for twenty plus years, 7 for ten plus years, 1 for eight years and 1 for last 2 years.

\(^{169}\) Some of the responses and ideas are quoted as formulated by the interviewees, however their names are not disclosed.
Part I - Interview Analysis and Findings

What factors motivated members to join Auroville?

Three distinct types of answers recur among respondents describing motivations that attract them to Auroville. Most (11 out of the 25) refer to the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (or the vision of Auroville) as core reasons. The second set of respondents (8 out of 25) cite ‘mixed factors’ such as spiritual, economic, ideological, emotional and cultural elements. In this instance, a few even mention the notion of “a strong sense of belongingness”\textsuperscript{170} or factors such as “interest in environmental work.” The third group (6 out of 25) comprises those either born and/or raised in Auroville since childhood. In many of these cases respondents came out of circumstance (because of family) but not out of a personal or conscious choice. Nevertheless, they chose to stay due to strong belief in the vision of Auroville or as a result of “mixed factors.”

Accordingly, it seems that key factors in joining the community often are connected to the fundamental philosophy and vision of Auroville or “mixed factors” such as personal beliefs and interests.

Human Unity

Still another major theme is human unity. In that connection a central aspiration of Auroville is to create an international township where people from all countries can to live in peace and progressive harmony – beyond the limitation of creeds, politics and nationalities, so as to realize human unity. The concept of human unity is an integral dimension for members of Auroville. When asked whether the community has been realizing this ideal, the unanimous response was both, yes and no. On one hand, the interviewees indicated the progress made by the community, and on the other, pointed out drawbacks that stop Auroville from achieving its vision. Responses generally reduce to four categories indicating positive and negative arguments. The majority (15 out of 25) of the respondents believe that progress is being attained at different levels. These levels refer to people’s commitment toward Auroville’s development and quest to learn,

\textsuperscript{170} Individual interviewee response.
change and grow individually and collectively. Some (6 out for 25) spontaneously expressed, “The fact that we are all here is itself a message of human unity” (or that a collective life is possible in such diversity.) “Ultimately the vision of Auroville is to realize that unity.” A few (4 out of 25) felt more unity existed in the past, particularly under the guidance of the Mother during the early years of Auroville. They believed there was more concentration, sincerity towards work and faith, noting that life in Auroville then was extremely hard, with scarce facilities and resources for basic survival. Therefore, during those times people either had deep self-motivation and connection to Auroville’s vision or they left.

As for the challenges to achieving human unity, respondents expressed two dominant ideas. One group (7 out of 25) emphasized that realizing the goal has been ‘more complex’ or ‘slow’ since more members are joining the community, which in turns brings more diversity as well as new perceptions, beliefs and differences. In addition, people are more dispersed within the community, pursue their personal interests (such forestation, farming, alternative energy, social responsibility) rather that focus on the vision of Auroville. Consequently, “there is a dilution taking place (within the community).” The second group (7 out of 25) identifies the problematic day-to-day blockages and limitations at the collective level: power struggles, childish interactions, narrow-minded perceptions related to caste, creed, nationality, personal biases and cultural differences. Another set of respondents (5 out of 25) suggested that the gap between the ideal and actual (the daily challenges in Auroville) prevents the community from reaching its goal. They believed that there are “no intermediary steps” or efficient “tools and mechanisms” to facilitate the process. A few (3 out of 25) perceived it as until each individual experiences “the oneness within” unity cannot be realized. Oneness refers to the “true identity,” understanding and knowing oneself promotes individuals to “identify” or “unite with others” (irrespective their culture or background). The remaining interviewees did not specify the challenges.

Respondents varying viewpoints indicate that the answer – to whether the community has been realizing the ideal of human unity – is not binary. It is an evolving process and progress

---

171 In addition, out of this set of views, two participants specifically observed that outside Auroville or in the case of emergency situations there is an extraordinary sense of unity and brotherhood.

172 Refers to Aurovillians coming from diverse backgrounds.
does not necessarily follow a linear path. As previously mentioned, in Waltz critique on the optimist, “each advance in knowledge, each innovation in technique, contains within itself the potentiality of evil as well as good.” The same applies in assessing progress on realizing human unity in Auroville. Moreover, what is noticeable is as one interviewee aptly framed it, “some random activities are taking place for achieving human unity at the top and bottom levels, but there is no logical framework to connect both.” The top level indicates the high, “lofty or inspiring aims” and ideals, and bottom level refers to the “day-to-day activities that occupy Aurovillians, seem largely unrelated to Auroville’s vision.” Therefore, developing intermediate goals by connecting Aurovillians daily activities with the vision, might bring Auroville closer to achieving its overall purpose of human unity.

The next question determined what is human unity from the participant’s point of view. Three fundamental interpretations emerged. Most (11 out of 25) respondents definitions of human unity mirror Sri Aurobindo’s view. In his book, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, he concludes, “[...]while it is possible to construct a precarious and quite mechanical unity by political and administrative means, the unity of the human race, [...] can only be made real if the religion of humanity, which is at present the highest active ideal of mankind, spiritualises itself and becomes the general inner law of human life.”

Respondents who embraced described human unity as “experiencing the oneness within” or a change toward a higher consciousness. Others (9 out of 25) saw it as “acceptance” and “tolerance” of people. These interviewees explained human unity in terms of respect, trust, sharing and freedom. One person made an interesting observation that differences in race, gender, culture are much less significant than “differences between people.” This reveals that it is not always about color, creed and caste, but about “acceptance” of people in general. Remaining respondents (5 out of 25) stressed that “unity is not uniformity,” it is about “unity in diversity.” In addition, it deals with people “connecting inspite of their differences” – i.e. “acknowledging the differences and similarities and trying to bring them all together to complement each other” and for that matter “sometimes even agreeing to disagree.”

---

173 Refer to Chapter 3, section on ‘Three Images of Conflict - Man, the State and War’
174 Waltz, 21.
175 Sri Aurobindo, Social and Political Thought, The Ideal of Human Unity, 571.
These definitions essentially consider human unity from two perspectives. At a high or philosophical level human unity involves “experiencing oneness.” Respondents seem to believe that one can arrive at such awareness by first acknowledging the differences and then accepting, respecting and valuing people for what there are.

Conflict

Although there is a profound philosophical base concerning human unity in Auroville, from a pragmatic point of view there are differences and conflicts. Accordingly, the next set of questions addressed the theme of conflict. The primary query asked: despite the ideal of “human unity” does conflict occur frequently in Auroville and at what levels (individual, community and/or system) do you feel conflict occurs most often? The 25 participants unanimously acknowledged the presence of social conflict in the form of differences, tensions or clashes and its occurrence at all levels. One interviewee mentioned interestingly that the levels shift based on which level one identifies with – thus implying that selfish motives can foment conflict at a very personal or individual level. Similarly one’s identification with the group or system may convince her/him that conflict is more likely from that level. Although all agreed on existence of conflict at each level, some emphasized that it was more dominant at a certain level. For instance, six interviewees highlighted that conflict starts at the individual level and spreads to other levels. Some (7 members) observed that conflict at the group level is most prevalent. However, each perceived these groups differently, as either ‘working groups,’ ‘working committee,’ ‘Auroville council,’ ‘nationalities,’ ‘interest groups’ or ‘sub-communities’ (i.e. different settlements). A few (5 members) identified the system-level conflict as the primary source of conflict.

From these answers it is clear that although some emphasize the occurrence of conflict at a particular level, there is a common recognition that it occurs at all three levels. Moreover, there is often an overlapping of levels as well. This understanding goes in sync with Waltz analysis of conflict from the perspective of the three images (or levels). He remarks, “[...] all three images are a part of nature. So fundamental are man, the state and the state system,” and further points out that “emphasis on one image may distort one’s interpretation of the others.”

176 Waltz, 160.
Responses concerning main characteristics of social conflict in Auroville can be divided broadly into two groups. According to the first set (12 members), the core traits of conflict are identity or a sense of national/regional affiliations. The mix of people in Auroville come with an international view of structure, governance, educational system and development. Inspite of their belief in the ideal of human unity, they tend to eventually “sink into their mental constructions” of biological inheritance, culture, nationality, education or family; quite naturally misunderstandings, misperceptions, biases and differences emerge from these constructions. In addition, there is an element of fear of losing one's identity. The second set (11 members) perceived the characteristics as rooted in individual and group ego-centric behavior, resulting in powers struggle, insecurity, animosity and human stupidities. The members also pointed out that some people or groups take advantage of lack of structure to fulfill their selfish motives, which leads to manipulation and internal power politics. Three respondents associated the main characteristics of conflict with both identity and ego centric actions.

It is notable that characteristics identified by the interviewees – ego, identity, insecurity, power, lack of structure or anarchy – are the same as those emphasized by realists (as specified in chapter 2) in their arguments concerning causes of conflict. Participants also recognized misperception and biases (as earlier identified) as key psychological causes of conflict. This leads to the conclusion that causes of war which are determined by the realist theory are equally applicable in the case of social conflict, from the psychological point of view.

The next question dealt with other sources of conflict in the internal and external community. The responses generally comprised three internal and three external community sources of conflict. In the case of internal sources, some participants (9 members) associate the same characteristics such as power, cultural and regional centric divides of conflict as reviewed earlier. One respondent emphasized that there are no conscious power or cultural struggles. However, in Auroville different approaches to handling processes and activities sometimes lead to clashes or conflict. In the opinion of the second set of interviewees (8 members), internal conflict largely is determined by differing views or understandings of how Auroville should develop economically and structurally. In this regard, confusions, disagreements and conflicts result either from a lack of focus in or clearer understanding of Auroville’s vision, or a defined governing structure. The
third category (8 members) of responses emphasized economic differences as the sources of all internal clashes.

Regarding external sources of conflict, a majority of the participants (10 members) also attribute it to economic differences, especially in comparison to neighboring Tamil village populations. There is a marked difference in standards of living and financial status between Aurovil- lians and the indigenous people which sometimes leads to hostility from the village population. Another popular notion (as per 8 respondents views is) of external source of discord is “land en- croachment” (of Auroville land) by villagers and outside investors (those not connected to Auro- ville). In this context, two interviewees referred to potential tensions with the Indian Government with the possibility of dominance and taking control of Auroville land. Seven participants perceived the disputes at personal and group levels with indigenous Tamil populations in the periphery regions of Auroville. Of these seven some argue that local villagers have been “extremely tolerant” of the Auroville community. According to these interviewees some Aurovillians project a sense of superiority over local people; and such behavior makes the villagers feel disrespected. Conversely, a few participants believe that Auroville has done immense work for rural development and empowering village populations with education and other services. They therefore sense a lack of gratitude and resentment in the local people.

These responses indicate, firstly, that internal sources of conflict are linked to main char- acteristics discussed previously. In addition, lack of a governing structure in Auroville inevitably leads to problems such as inefficient organization, power struggles and psychological insecuri- ties. Secondly, the external sources conflict often arises as a result of territorial disputes. Moreo- ver, territorial disputes essentially are struggles for power and recognition.

Conflict Resolution

Over the years, Auroville has explored various conflict resolution (CR) mechanisms to settle disputes and conflicts within the community. Although some measures failed, others continue to show positive results in numerous situations, as well as at various levels (individual, groups and system). The next theme explored CR facilities and their efficiency. The initial ques- tion dealt with identifying whether the participants were aware of CR resources and facilities in
Auroville, and they were. Out of the 25 participants, 23 mentioned Auroville Council (AVC) and Koodam (encompassing independent trained mediators, NVC and restorative circles) as resources for resolving issues within the community at different levels. Out of this set of people, 7 respondents were aware of Koodam (to some extent) as the only available facility at present. The remaining 15 discussed the role of AVC as a CR facilitating body along with Koodam. However, some of them explained that, despite AVC’s attempts to resolve individual and group-level differences in the past, it lacks expertise in CR. Apart from Koodam, independent mediators and AVC, two respondents mentioned other resources of CR. One felt that conflict is dealt with often by themselves at an individual level, without having to resort to an external mediator. Another participant pointed out a group called Small Employers Welfare Administration (SEWA) which helps resolve employee-employer issues.

The responses indicate no clear demarcation of the role of AVC; some consider it a CR resource, whereas others clearly disqualify it as such. Alternatively, there exists a substantial community awareness of Koodam and CR tools like NVC, mediation and restorative circles.

The participants further were asked: “What CR facilities and tools are effective and in which way? And if not, why?” In that connection, they could share suggestions for making existing CR practices more effective or propose new ideas.\(^{177}\) In regard to effectiveness of CR measures, 10 members thought Koodam was too new a project to assess. Out of these respondents, 4 interviewees saw huge future potential for Koodam; 4 others took a neutral stand, stating that they were “not aware if CR measures are effective” or noted that “may be there is a yes and no to the answer,” and 2 maintained that they were not effective. Beyond these notions, 9 respondents considered the CR facilities as either effective or helpful. The remaining 6 members identified challenges limiting CR practice success and made some observations concerning failure. For example, one of the respondents explained that people who are capable of supporting Koodam as mediators are not interested in it. Therefore, Koodam does not enjoy enough support from individuals interested in training or helping in CR practices. According to the respondent experiences, several CR groups over the years attempted to resolve issues at various levels but eventu-

\(^{177}\) The responses consist of overlapping views on the effectiveness of CR facilities, the challenges and solutions for improvements. Therefore, the responses concerning solutions and improvements have not been quantified.
ally collapsed because of a lack of goodwill among individuals. Such outcomes demonstrate that not all CR facilities are appropriate for all situations. Moreover, CR success also depends on phenomena such as persons handling the disputes or the way in which mediators and individuals (or groups) relate to each other. Sometimes lack of trust in the process or facilitator results in failure of Auroville CR tools.

Regarding solutions, one suggested establishing a formal ‘ombudsman’ so that groups feeling ill-treated by other groups, or the community as a whole, have a path for recourse. Additionally, making the community contemplate the purpose of Auroville and coming to a common ‘understanding about the vision’ or ‘reality’ can help overcome disputes. To reach this common reality, designing workshops to make people think deeper, more aware and appreciate the diversity, freedom and other unique facilities of the place, can help promote peace. Another thought-provoking solution indicated the notion of ‘brotherhood’. In the triple gospel of ‘liberty, fraternity and equality,’ humanity has worked little on the aspect of brotherhood. This is often the reason for conflicts and clashes between people and states. Consequently, the interviewee pointed out that inculcating a sense of brotherhood in people might help resolve conflict.

The answers primarily suggest that most participants recognize the importance or utility of CR, but a few have a neutral opinion. Additionally, respondent suggestions for improvements and new ideas indicate openness and willingness to find more effective and lasting CR measures.

Building Peace

Despite the tensions, personal differences and social conflict, Auroville has persisted and persevered for 46 years. To understand what binds the members together and further study the process of building and sustaining peace in the community, interviewees were asked: “Beyond the Mother’s vision, what do you think are key factors that keep the community together?” Although the question indicated “beyond the Mother’s vision,” the dominant view (10 members) was that “it is the Mother’s vision.” They responded in different ways, including “the Mother’s force” or “energy,” the founder’s vision, the concept of human unity, “collective aspiration” and “trust and faith in the vision.” Six others did not directly identify the vision as a key factor, but provided various reasons that alluded to Auroville’s vision. For instance, they explained: “Differ-
ent motivations bring people together here. Some people came because they escaped from the regular norms of the world, others came for resources or freedom and so on. But, ultimately we are all tied together by Auroville’s vision.” Another participant remarked that: “Often people are here because of their individual dreams, which eventually leads them to the final goal – the Mother’s vision.” The nine remaining respondents believed it was “community spirit,” “social fabric,” respect, tolerance or “love for each other” (beyond the difference) or a “sense of a family” that knit the community together.

These factors indicate that the vision plays a significant role in bringing and keeping the community together. Moreover, one of the participant aptly observed that “people come here often because something was missing or lacking in the life outside Auroville, which they find here. That ‘something’ is what keeps us together.” That “something” is defined differently by each individual. To some it holds the place of a family, whereas to others it is the goals, objectives and contributions to a noble cause that connects the community.

Participants subsequently were asked what crucial features can bring a diversified community together in the long run. To this, a majority of 18 members considered “shared ideal” as a deciding factor in linking the diversified community together. The “shared ideal” was perceived differently by each individual; examples include “common goal,” the “founder’s vision,” a deep aim or purpose that inspires individuals at every level, “common property,” “love for the place and community,” or a “vision with a spiritual base.” Two other interviewees concluded that awareness of how one’s own identity and growth is socially conditioned, and searching who one actually is in the core of his being, can eventually help realize that all individuals are similar in nature, substance and feeling. This understanding at an individual level assists people in integrating with a diversified community. The remaining five participants viewed “trust and respect for one another,” “education, where younger generation studying in a multi-cultural environment brings parents together” and “clear goals, but at the same time a lot of freedom” as critical features in connecting a diversified community.

In the original question, the participants were asked what are the two crucial features that can bring a diversified community together. However, as most of the respondents limited their responses to single view, I have addressed the question in general terms for the analysis.
The importance of deep vision and inspiring role of founder or guide constitute prevalent thoughts in these responses. The goal should be clear and should give everybody a chance to express themselves without fear of being wrong or hesitation. In other words, making people believe in themselves, that they can contribute towards a certain goal (human unity for example), can also persuade a diversified community to bond.

Inquiry into how a diversified community coalesces and flourishes, enabled further exploration of how Auroville builds and sustains peace in a multi-cultural environment. One respondent stated: “I don’t think we consciously sustain peace, but we have it.” In short, most interviewees (17 members) attributed the idea of peace to the “Mother’s grace or force,” implying trust and belief in her vision. According to them there is a certain “special atmosphere” or “presence” in Auroville that sustains peace inspite of the tensions. A few described that “presence” as “something miraculous,” and explained that Matrimandir - the temple of the Mother - helps create that peaceful atmosphere. Another participant recounted: “at an individual level we sit and meditate and quieten ourself, that is often the first step for most people.” Two other respondents concluded that regardless of discord, everyone aspires to peace and that in and of itself enables peace. One of these two supported this view by asserting that 95% of the time “peace is the natural state,” and that most community member find peace in their work. The remaining 6 participants indicated various examples of promoting peace. Largely, people who come to Auroville join an ideal (such as human unity) and are not there for a successful career, money or religion.179 Having no pressure for money and career also “gives time to think deeper about your relationship with the environment, family, etc.” A place like Auroville, lets people search for meaning in their life. One respondent explained that “the search for meaning helps to build or eventually find peace.” Another important observation was that peace cannot be gauged by resolving issues, disputes and disagreements at a superficial level, but that it must be found from a deeper source within each person. The process of building peace also was described as having “respect for each others space,” “being objective,” and “reorienting the focus on unity rather than

179 It does not imply that people do not focus on work. One interviewee reinforced, “There is better work-life balance here. People work much more here than outside, but they do it for themselves and not for satisfying others.”

43
conflict.” Additionally, enabling people with freedom promotes peace because at certain levels it removes many blockages or oppositions.

Ultimately, the ‘glue’ that binds the community together and sustains peace therein is the collective aspiration or dream to realize the ideal of Auroville together. In addition, it is clear from these responses that faith in the founder’s presence and vision further empowers Auroville in promoting peace.

Overall respondents thoughts on various themes such as human unity, conflict, conflict resolution and building peace suggest that Auroville encounters challenges at individual, group and system levels. However, there is also very strong emphasis on the positive aspects of Auroville. This prompted the last question: “What features can the international community adopt from the Auroville model, to facilitate more effective and lasting experiences of CR within and between countries?” 16 out of 25 acknowledged that Auroville does not have anything to promote or disclose as yet in the area of CR. However, some of these respondents foresee future potential in this area. For example, one remarked that, “Auroville is not a utopia, it was never meant to be, it is an experiment and therefore a continuous process.” By experimenting at various levels, Auroville might become able to overcome conflict and create peace, that force or impact might eventually reflect in the world. Some respondents mentioned that Auroville is gaining prominence globally in the areas such as “green work” and renewable energy.” Similarly, further developing skills and gaining expertise in the area of CR might lead Auroville to such a position. However, to reach such a stage, one interviewee noted that “there should be more concentration at the grassroots level” – by empowering people who suffer most to participate in CR within the community.180 This, in turn, can help resolve some of the internal issues. Eight other responses expressed general commentary on some important attributes that global community can adopt from Auroville’s strengths and efforts toward human unity. They indicated that, if people can go beyond limitations of religion and turn toward spiritual evolution, then most of the fundamentalism in the world might come to an end. Another suggested that breaking through “fixities”181 and

180 This view expresses Lederach’s structural aspect of establishing frameworks for building peace, that was earlier discussed in Chapter 2, in the section on ‘conflict resolution’.

181 One such example of breaking fixities is Auroville’s a flexible organization structure.
“rigidities” of society, and in turn promoting freedom and suppleness in various systems also can help resolve disagreements and oppositions at certain levels. In addition, interviewees specified that conflict has to be resolved or overcome from within individuals. Individuals in Auroville strive to practice it (even though there are CR tools to facilitate the process) and the same can be practiced universally. The remaining two interviewees discussed differences between Auroville and the international system, as well as complexities involved in adopting some features incorporated by Auroville in the larger world community. One of respondent acknowledged that Auroville is much more united than most countries because of its flexibility. Some countries have very strong borders, systems and currencies, and therefore more rigid and complex systems to redefine or restructure. The other indicated that Auroville has a dynamic charter which points the way forward and, to an extent, serves as a beacon of light to overcome conflict. Therefore, what the world lacks is a dynamic perception of a way forward.

On one hand there is a clear indication that Auroville is not in a position to be a role model in regard to CR practices. On the other, it also provides some insightful ideas and features that the international system lacks – flexible structure, freedom as practiced in Auroville, no private property, a spiritual vision, a dynamic goal. These various perceptions suggest that it is more complex to incorporate these features in the international community. However, some of these measures can be explored in international governmental organizations (IGO) such as the United Nations or the European Union. Once the process is tested and results assessed as conducive to peace, further policies for and processes of CR can be developed for state and the international system as a whole.

Part II - Discussion: The Role of Conflict and Peace in Auroville

This research began with three primary objectives: (1) to study the underlying principles of conflict in Auroville, (2) to determine how conflicts are resolved and (3) to understand how peace is created and sustained in a multicultural community. The main recurring themes from the data analysis and interviews are: the importance of a vision, the ideal of human unity, conflict, conflict resolution and building peace. The results indicate that the first two themes (i.e. the importance of a vision and ideal of human unity) are critical to understanding the role of conflict
and peace (a propos CR and building peace) in an intentional community like Auroville. According to the data, the fundamental motives in joining the community are the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and vision of human unity. Defined as “the state of being in full agreement,” “the quality or state of not being multiple” (oneness) or “a condition of harmony” (accord),\textsuperscript{182} ‘unity’ alludes overcoming ‘divisions’ and ‘differences’ and working toward peace. This understanding of the connection between the two new dimensions and conflict and peace helps analyze further the main objectives of this study.

The interview findings demonstrate that social conflict occurs in Auroville at individual, group and system levels in the form of either disputes, disagreements, tensions or clashes. Waltz’s three levels of analysis provides an apt theoretical framework for analyzing the causes of conflict in Auroville. The main causes exhibit themes similar to ‘neorealist’ assumptions of state behavior in the international community. At the individual and group level, root causes include, egoism, selfishness, self-interest, power struggles or insecurities resulting from human/group behavior.\textsuperscript{183} At system level, the anarchic structure of the community foments confusion, chaos and conflict of which some people take advantage to manipulate and advance their self-interest.

Moreover, there exist both internal and external participants in conflict. The former comprises members of Auroville and the latter local indigenous populations, the Indian Government and outside investors not connected to Auroville. Internally, cultural and economic differences, group identities, misperceptions and biases create tensions, disagreements and conflicts. Externally, conflict often arises as a result of land encroachment (by the external community), identity clashes or lack of understanding between the internal and external populations.

The data suggests that the role of conflict in Auroville is at once constructive and destructive. As a destructive force, conflict creates and exacerbates blockages or challenges in the system in realizing the ideal of Auroville and undermines intermediary processes crucial to connecting the ideal and actual day-to-day activities of Aurovillians. These factors lead to resentment and ill-will between individuals and groups in Auroville. However, interviewees’ dominant per-

\textsuperscript{182} Merriam Webster.

\textsuperscript{183} It must be added, that while discussed the role of conflict in the community, there is a strong notion of settling or overcoming conflict at individual level in a majority of responses.
ception of conflict reinforces its utility as a constructive tool as well. One interviewee explained: “There is a huge amount of conflict in Auroville about everything and at all levels [...] it gives us endless opportunities for ‘right action’.” Another said:

“Conflict is obvious, I would have expected more, but it is not that bad. [...] there are differences based on languages, communication gaps, cultural and economic differences, you add all this to the pot and it does not explode! The difference is the path we chose and that is where the clashes come from. The conflict is not in the fundamental aim and goal. Auroville can be compared to a family. We have chosen to be together and some times we are harder on each other.”

Accordingly, to most respondents, conflict at any level makes them recognize limitations and challenges within the system – such as inability to surmount economic, cultural or structural barriers. Consequently, it also gives them an opportunity to look at different positions in a situation of disagreement and arrive at potential solution – one that helps everyone to realize the Auroville vision of human unity. Therefore, the analysis on the role of conflict demonstrates that although it has elements of destructiveness, conflict plays significantly a constructive role in Auroville.

Concerning the second objective, of determining how conflicts are resolved, data analysis confirms Aurovillians use various CR tools such as mediation, facilitation, NVC and restorative circles to resolve and transform conflict. Projects like Koodam support these CR practices. Indeed, there is considerable awareness among Aurovillians about Koodam and various available CR resources. However, there also exists some ambiguity as to the functions of AVC as a CR facility. In addition, the data suggest that most Aurovillians consider CR practices as either effective or useful, despite the past failure of some CR projects and resources. Particularly unique about the Auroville system is its flexibility and dynamic nature, as well as lack of firm or rigid structures. This dynamism demands constant innovation and new measures to which the multicultural community can relate or accept. In the absence of such dynamism some projects fail. This might account for failure of CR resources in the past.

In respect to the third objective about how peace is created and sustained in a multicultural community, the data suggests that the Auroville vision is instrumental in maintaining peace. Despite a lack of substantive conscious efforts to sustain peace, Auroville enjoys an unusual presence of peace among diversity, differences and conflict at different levels. The findings fur-
ther demonstrate that interviewees predominantly attribute ‘peace’ to either the vision of Auroville or the Mother’s grace and force. Additional key factors in unifying a diversified community include ‘a deep vision’, ‘faith in the ideal and founder’. This confirms the secondary hypothesis that restoring and sustaining peace is largely dependent on the community’s belief in its philosophical foundation and its continuous efforts in practicing it.

Another thought-provoking point concerning peace building, is the difference of approach between IR theory and Auroville. Neorealism and Neoliberalism constitute two key paradigmatic explanations as to the causes of conflict, and concern various and sometimes opposing CR mechanisms. Conversely, Auroville was founded on the ideal of human unity, of surmounting differences of nations, culture, caste and creed. As a result, when conflict occurs therein, often no immediate solution arises because the community focuses on how ‘unity’ can be achieved, as opposed to how conflict can be overcome or resolved. Unity implies not uniformity but unity is diversity. Therefore, it is this idea of ‘unity’ that enables the process of building lasting peace.

Finally, Auroville’s continuous efforts to realize its vision of human unity makes it an exceptional experiment. As the Mother foresaw it, “It is a centre of transformation, a small nucleus of men who are transforming themselves and setting an example to the world. This is what Auroville hopes to be. As long as egoism and bad will exist in the world, a general transformation is impossible.”184 Although, not yet an example to the world for building peace Auroville’s constructive outlook towards conflict promises future potential. Its flexible and dynamic endeavor to accommodate a rich and highly diverse community by constantly renovating, experimenting and finding measures (e.g. CR) to serve the community as whole, makes it an inspiring model.

184 The Mother on Auroville.
Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to study the role of conflict in an intentional community, specifically Auroville. This closing section summarizes briefly those preceding and determines the implication of the study on the main research question. It additionally identifies limitations and strengths of the study. Finally, examines further scope for study and concludes with a closing observation.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter one briefly introduced Auroville as a microcosm of the world presenting it as a unique case-study of fundamental problems of conflict in the international system from a psychological point of view. Chapter two discussed the methodological approach, hypothesis, research objectives and chapter outline. Moreover, it posed the main research: what role do conflict and conflict resolution play in an intentional community like Auroville? The third chapter established a theoretical and analytical base for the thesis, by examining prominent IR theories such as neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism, the psychological and economic causes of conflict and Waltz’s three images of conflict. Next, it discussed the importance of CR, its evolving practices and Lederach’s framework of conflict transformation and building peace. It then described Auroville’s Koodam initiative and varying CR practices within the community; additionally, it explained the idea of utopia and various characteristics of utopian/intentional communities that reflect in Auroville.

Chapter four examined in detail the Auroville case-study by introducing its philosophical foundation and providing a historical overview of community development and vision. Subsequently analysis of the role of conflict in Auroville helps examine its causes at individual, group and system levels. This chapter also reviews the manner in which the community mitigates or resolves conflict and promotes peace in a multicultural social context. Chapter five analyzes interview responses and presents the findings, demonstrating the primary and secondary hypothesis. First, despite its foundation on the ideal of human unity, Auroville faces tensions and social conflict at individual, group and system levels. In that connection, the data confirm the role of
conflict in Auroville as partially destructive and predominantly constructive. Second, sustaining or building peace largely depends on vision of human unity and the community’s belief in the philosophical foundation of Auroville. It is the aspiration and efforts of the community toward ‘unity’ that helps build peace.

**Limitation and Strengths of the Study**

One obvious limitation of the study arises from the size and nature\(^{185}\) of the sample chosen for this study. Although the research attempted to include a rich mix of respondents from varying age groups and social, economic, cultural and (ten) national backgrounds, data collected might not represent completely the Auroville community (that comprises a diversity of forty-nine different countries). The limited sample also might fail to capture the possibly wider perceptions and characteristics of conflict, that might not have been captured. Another limitation is lack of secondary data or prior research studies on conflict, conflict resolution and building peace in Auroville. That leaves this research with no existing data to compare with; but this is also reflects its strength by being the first study in this area. Another strength lies in its in-depth analysis of the role of conflict in Auroville, according to the perspective of the community members. Direct access to their views increases credibility and reliability of the study, and contributes new data to scholarly literature in the field of conflict studies.

**Scope for Further Study**

The limited literature and research in the area of constructive roles of conflict in intentional communities like Auroville, offers further opportunity for study. What is more, the data and findings can be applied to conflict studies in other intentional communities. Indeed, one can expand the definition of ‘intentional communities’ to include intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) – created by a treaty or charter among two or more nations working in good faith on issues of common interest and purpose – and apply it accordingly to study of institutions such as the United Nations or European Union. Finally, this thesis focused solely on the role of conflict

---

\(^{185}\) By nature here I mean, the characteristics and distribution of the respondents.
within the Auroville community. A further study can be made analyzing the role of conflict in relations between the Auroville and the external community (i.e. local indigenous population, Government of India and outside investors who are not connected to Auroville) and how peace can be promoted between them.

Closing Observation

In conclusion, Auroville is an interesting current case-study of how people intentionally have come together to form a community, regardless of national, religious, racial and cultural barriers. However, it struggles to strike a balance between its aspiration to human unity and divisive conflicts of everyday life. Auroville contains many of the differences that foment social conflict in the international community. On one hand, it is understandable why each interviewee perceived his/her point of view as most pertinent, especially in the absence of a central governing authority. On the other, there is no single position or solution encompassing all views and satisfying all differences from a rational standpoint. Nevertheless, Auroville is attempting to build a foundation for human unity. This foundation can be portrayed as a tapestry, where there are different sets of interlaced threads, running in multiple directions. The ‘push and pull’ between these different threads – of individuals, groups, attitudes and perceptions – generates conflict of interests and tension of differences. However, if an harmonious balance can be established amidst these diverse interlaced threads, a perfect all-encompassing base can be created: a base that can be lifted to ‘Unity’ and sustained ‘Peace’.
Bibliography

An Introduction to Auroville, 2010. PRISMA, Auroville


Auroville Today Newsletter, January 2014.

Auroville Today Newsletter, August 2011.


