“Where I Feel Most Comfortable in the World”: Searching Utopia for Home

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Abstract

This thesis explores the meaning of ‘home’ for lifestyle migrants and their adult children living in Auroville, an international intentional community in Southern India. I ask why it is that people choose to live in a place like Auroville, and what does this intentional community give to people that they cannot find elsewhere? Additionally, in consideration of this, how do second and subsequent generations of Aurovilians interpret their parents’ motivations for joining while navigating their own relationships with the community? I also consider the relationship non-Aurovilians, be they guests or the thousands of people who live nearby and interact with Auroville on a daily basis, have with the community. I argue that Auroville is a repository for people for whom ‘home,’ already an ambiguous notion, is utopian in the sense that it is something for which they strive knowing they may never realise. Instead of finding ‘home,’ I suggest that in this intentionally liminal space, a sense of communitas driven by a shared feeling of being somewhat a misfit in the place(s) from which they came and by their shared pursuit for something recognisable as authentic endeavour, gives individuals a feeling approximating ‘at homeness.’ That is, one may not feel necessarily that Auroville is home, but it can be nonetheless a place where the feeling of being at home is stronger than anywhere else.
Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Signed: 

Dated: 28 February 2019

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The Blind Men and the Elephant

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me!—but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried:"Ho!—what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 't is mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out his eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
"'T is clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

So, oft in theologic wars
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

John Godfrey Saxe
1. Searching for home

“The human race, like other animals, is a migratory species,” says Aviezer Tucker (1994, p. 186), and “home-searching is a basic trait of being human” (see also Mallet 2004, p. 77). Yet ‘home’ as a concept is little understood despite great research attention. The thought of home conjures feelings of warmth, of love and acceptance. When someone says “make yourself at home,” they are inviting you to share their space as if it is your own, to be one of them, it is an expression of acceptance. Other expressions using the word ‘home’ similarly conjure these positive emotions. ‘Home away from home’ implies somewhere to feel completely at ease, as if ‘at home,’ while ‘home is where the heart is’ tells us of the emotional connection to home. Therefore, we can think of ‘home’ as a metaphor for shelter, a place where discomfort can be ‘shut out.’ Home also speaks to the idea of truth and understanding. For example, to ‘hammer home,’ means to make something abundantly clear or understood.

At the end of each work day I go ‘home’ to my family and the house in which I live but do not own. Every so often I go ‘home’ to my parents’ house, a house in which I have never lived in a town I lived in for just a few short years as a teenager, for a weekend visit. At the end of a holiday I go ‘home’ to Melbourne, or simply ‘home’ to Australia if travelling overseas. I feel ‘at home’ in Bangkok, parts of India and in Canada, all places I have lived or spent considerable amounts of time in. I encourage guests to my house to make themselves ‘at home,’ just as I feel ‘at home’ in the houses of my closest friends. In all of these accounts of home, the location of ‘home’ is shifting and relative; it is almost always somewhere else.

Herein lays the dilemma I have identified with the notion of ‘home’ in this work. Like the very purpose of many intentional communities, I believe ‘home’ can be a somewhat utopian notion, the quest for which is no less important an endeavour despite its abstractness, and perhaps even impossibility. When conflated with ‘house,’ home is problematically thought of as simply a place of abode (see Mallet, 2004; Windsong, 2010). However, while the concept of ‘home’ is accommodated in a place, it is also subjective and constructed according to the needs of the individual at any given point in time. Among other things, it can refer to a place of origin, a feeling of belonging or a sense of comfort. It may be deeply individual or entangled in one’s relationships with
It may be static or mobile. Individuals may have one or several ‘homes.’ As a “metaphor for cultural belonging” (Cohen et al., 2013), the idea of home orients a person’s self-identification (cf. Golob, 2013, p. 158).

Migrants and migration present an interesting ‘lens’ through which to consider the notion of home (Ralph and Staeheli 2011, p. 518). More specifically, I agree with Elena Windsong that intentional communities, especially those which reject personal ownership of property, offer a valuable framework to “explore the complexities of home” (Windsong 2010, p 206). For this thesis I conducted fieldwork in Auroville, an intentional community in Southern India, and examine the meaning of ‘home’ through exploration of why people join Auroville and their relationships to the community.

Existing as an intentional community for fifty years at the time of writing, there are now approximately two and a half thousand Aurovilians holding passports from approximately fifty different countries around the world. In addition, the wider community of Auroville consists of many more people, including local people from the surrounding villages, the thousands of people who join Auroville temporarily each year in order to work in or learn from the community, and many more who live permanently among Aurovilians without official recognition of Aurovillian status.

While addressing that most quintessential of anthropological questions – what does it mean to be a member of this group? – in this thesis I ask why it is that people choose to live in a place like Auroville, and what this intentional community gives to people that they cannot find elsewhere. Additionally, in consideration of this, I ask how second and subsequent generations of Aurovilians interpret their parents’ and grandparents’ motivations for joining while also navigating their own relationships with the community. I also consider the relationship non-Aurovilians, be they guests or the thousands of people who live nearby and interact with Auroville on a daily basis, have with the community. In doing so I uncover some of the ways in which Aurovilians and

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1 Though acknowledged as technically incorrect, ‘Aurovillian’ is spelt with a single rather than double ‘l’ by Aurovilians who follow the spelling of the word used by ‘the Mother.’ As it is their preference, in this text I too will follow this spelling convention.

2 Details of the joining process and requirements are addressed below, in the section of this introductory chapter titled ‘Auroville,’ in greater detail in Chapter 3, and again in Appendix 4.
other members of the Auroville community understand and create for themselves a sense of ‘home.’

I argue that Auroville is a repository for people for whom ‘home,’ already an ambiguous notion, is utopian in the sense that it is something for which they strive though knowing they may never realise. Instead of finding ‘home,’ I suggest that a feeling of ‘at homeness’ is what the people I spoke to pursue and experience in Auroville. This quest for a feeling rather than a location, though somewhat implicit, acknowledges the inherently changing nature of the community and its inhabitants. It allows for the possibility to leave without question should Auroville cease to provide the feelings associated with ‘home’ or another place offer more. Feeling at home is less definite than being at home. It can be understood in terms of degrees of ‘at homeness.’ For example, one may not feel necessarily that Auroville is home, but it can be nonetheless a place where the feeling of being at home is stronger than anywhere else. In this intentionally liminal space, a sense of communitas driven by a shared feeling of being somewhat a misfit in the place(s) from which they came and by their shared pursuit for something recognisable as authentic endeavour, gives individuals a feeling approximating ‘at homeness.’

Following a brief outline of the subsequent chapters, the remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the notion of utopia and background information on intentional communities generally and on Auroville specifically.

In Chapter 2, ‘Unpeeling an Onion,’ I outline literature on the concept of ‘home’ which is central to this work and discuss the methodology of this work. This entails a description of the ethnographic process, interview methods and a brief demographic overview of interviewees. In this section I additionally outline some of the reactions from the Auroville community to my work.

In Chapter 3, I examine personal reflections of arrival recounted to me by community members. Some of these accounts undoubtedly resonate with the reasons why people seek out other intentional and alternative communities, though they are here understood to be particular to these people and the community of Auroville. The purpose of this chapter is to provide some context to Aurovilian residents’ journeys to Auroville before, in following chapters, describing the ways in which Auroville has
become a ‘home’ or, as the case may be, best facilitates one’s search for ‘home.’ I make a case in this chapter for use of the term ‘lifestyle migrants’ to describe the residents of Auroville.

‘Lifestyle migration’ is a term increasingly used to refer to people who choose to migrate in order to find a more fulfilling way of life elsewhere (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009; Korpela, 2010, p. 1302). The most commonly cited definition of lifestyle migration comes from Benson and O’Reilly (2009, p. 609), credited with popularising the term and sparking the growing field of research on this phenomenon, who state:

As we perceive it, lifestyle migrants are relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify for the migrant, a better quality of life.

The value of a lifestyle migration conceptual framework is that it encompasses the diversity of migration motivations expressed by longer-term community members of Auroville, some of which occur concurrently within the same individuals. In addition, this conceptual framework aligns with the discussion of ‘home’ prominent in my interviews with Auroville residents. Their comments suggest that Auroville residents are lifestyle migrants who, for a wide range of reasons, could not achieve a sense of ‘home’ in their places of origin.

Of course the reasons people come to Auroville may not necessarily be the reasons they stay in Auroville. In Chapters 4 and 5 I explore the aspects of community life which keep people in Auroville and encourage consideration of the idea of ‘home.’ In writing about ‘home,’ Hazel Easthope (2004) argues for the importance of the concept of ‘place’ and the idea that “home is, first and foremost, a special kind of place” (Easthope, 2004, p. 135). Drawing from Saunders and Williams (1988) who called the home a “socio-spatial unit” and other theorists who wrote about the importance of identity, security, wellbeing and emotion to the notion of ‘home’ (Easthope, 2004, pp. 134-135), she understands home as “simultaneously a socio-spatial unit and a psycho-spatial unit” (Easthope, 2004, p. 135). With this in mind, in Chapter 4 I consider Auroville as a psycho-spatial unit and discuss the personal incentives to stay in Auroville as told to me by the community’s members. This includes first and foremost the opportunity people
in Auroville say the community gives them to find their own Truth and to live an authentic life. People stay because Auroville gives them a sense of purpose and freedom to express themselves they have not found elsewhere.

Importantly, Auroville is a utopian community. This idea of utopia is also significant to the notion of ‘home’ in Auroville. I found that Auroville may not in fact feel like ‘home’ to some of its members, but they stay because it offers the closest imaginable approximation of a feeling of being at home. More importantly, through its focus on the future and self-improvement, there is suggestion of the creation of a future ‘home’ and all that that entails.

In Chapter 5 I reflect on the idea of ‘home’ as a socio-spatial system or unit (Saunders and Williams’ 1988; Easthope 2004) and look at the ways in which the community of Auroville offers its members a sense of ‘home.’ I examine the commitment members of the Auroville community have to the collective and the way the community encourages this commitment. Drawing on Rosabeth Kanter’s (1972) work on commitment, I argue that Auroville exists due to people’s ideological commitment to the principles of its founders and spiritual guides, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and their logistical commitment to the realisation of the Mother’s Dream. However, it persists as a united community due to the affective bonds each member has with others.

Compared with those who arrived as adults of their own volition, the adult Children of Auroville have a somewhat different relationship with Auroville, both as a place and a community. In Chapter 6 I consider in more detail than has been done previously this particular cohort of Aurovilians and their connections with the community, their parents, newer arrivals and each other. Adult Children of Auroville strictly fit neither the definitions of second generation migrants nor ‘Third Culture Kids’ (TCKs), yet the experiences of both help to explain the worldviews and cultural fluidity of people who grow up in Auroville. For adult Children of Auroville there is a paradox of belonging. Like second generation migrants and TCKs, these Aurovilians do not wholly share either the identity of the dominant culture in which they were raised, nor that of their parents’ homelands. Additionally, many adult Children of Auroville do not share the beliefs and

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3 ‘Third Culture Kid,’ or TCK, is a descriptor often used for the children of expatriate workers. There is a growing body of academic literature on the experiences of such individuals, some of which will be referred to in Chapter 6.
values other members of the community must demonstrate in order to ‘prove’ their place in Auroville. Yet, due to their childhood history in the community and the value and expectations bestowed upon them in the texts left behind by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, they are considered undeniably Aurovilian by others. Ultimately, I argue that although they have not necessarily left their ‘homeland’ in search of a ‘home,’ as many of their parents did, their reason for staying in Auroville is much the same as that of adult arrivals. That is, they have not found the sense of ‘at homeness’ that Auroville offers to them anywhere else.

In Chapter 7 I assess the relationship Auroville has with its neighbours as well as the relationships Aurovilians from very diverse backgrounds have with each other. I explore cultural fluidity in Auroville, Aurovilian led efforts to ‘assist’ the region financially and socially, and the impact of the legacy of colonialism in India on Auroville’s creation and continued existence. I highlight some of the tensions surrounding these topics as shadow issues to Auroville’s attempts to create an equal society and its proclaimed celebration of diversity. I argue that, just as individuals’ sense of ‘home’ in Auroville seems slightly uneasy and is predicated on the impression that this location offers the best approximation of what that may mean to its inhabitants, so too Auroville does not appear to be completely ‘at home’ in Tamil Nadu, yet neither could it be elsewhere.

Auroville is a utopian dream. People who live in Auroville are trying to create a home. They know that the vision they have of the future township and the ways in which they imagine it will eventually underpin their feelings of shelter, self-worth, identity and all of the other positive connotations we have with the idea of ‘home,’ are unlikely to be realised in their lifetimes, if indeed ever. Yet they persist in working towards that goal. In this sense, the idea of ‘home’ is also utopian for these people. It is both eutopia and outopia, the good place and no place.
**Terminology and Context: Utopia, Intentional Communities, and Auroville’s Beginning**

Nobody asks why Great Britain or Greenland exist: they simply do. Nor do we ask why people choose to live there: they simply do. How these societies change and what people in them make of their lives are extremely important questions. But they are only important given the fact that they are already going concerns. Not so with intentional communities. People in these communities are anxious to preserve both their communal existence and their collective purpose. (Shenker, 1986, pp. 7-8)

At the time of Auroville’s creation, utopian thought and practice were anything but new ideas. Thomas More (1988 [1516]) conceived of the word with his widely influential 1516 text titled *Utopia*. As is typical of literary utopias, *Utopia* is based on the premise of a traveller recounting tales of faraway land where social and economic organisation is such that the ills of the contemporary world either do not exist or are drastically diminished.

More was not the first utopian thinker. The origin of utopianism is sometimes attributed to Plato, however if considered simply the desire to create a different and better society which stretches the bounds of, or more likely, goes beyond, possibility and/or probability then it is arguably a timeless notion (*cf*. Sargent, 2010, pp. 13-19; Sargent, 2012, p. 13; Sargisson, 2012, p. 7). For Bloch (1986 (1959), p. 150),

> Without the utopian function, no spiritual surplus at all is explicable over and above what has been attained and thus exists, however full this surplus may be of appearance instead of pre-appearance. Therefore, every act of anticipating identifies itself to the utopian function, and the latter seizes on all possible substance in the surplus of the former.

Some scholars argue that utopia is confined to a Western tradition (see, for example Kumar, 1991, p. 35), a problematic assertion. Abū Nasr Muhammad bin al-Farāhī al-Fārābī’s *On the Perfect State*, for example, was written around six hundred years prior to
More’s *Utopia* (Redd and Bisk, 2015, p. 144-145; see also Sargent, 2012, p. 14), and several examples of Chinese utopian literature have been identified stretching at least as far back as the second century CE and arguably hundreds of years earlier (Longxi, 2002).

Regardless of the history of the idea, More’s *Utopia* is attributed with the sudden explosion of utopian literature from that time (unabated to this day) and still drawn upon in consideration of Utopia and utopianism in contemporary times. The importance of More’s work is, I believe, in large part due to its having given the phenomena a name. Utopia, the name of More’s fabled island, is a play on words drawing from the Greek *eu* meaning good, *ou* meaning not, and *topos* meaning place (see, among others, Sargent, 2010, p. 2). Utopia is therefore both the good place and no place. It is the impossible place we would go if we could.

Levitas in particular, but she is not alone, is very clear in her assertion that Utopias are necessary. Not all utopias should be, or are intended to be, realised (cf. Sargisson, 2012, p. 8). In all cases, utopia’s value lies in encouraging us to “imagine of ourselves otherwise” (Levitas, 2008, p. 20). Arguably encouraging of cosmopolitan mindset, they insist that “people in other times and places might be different, and thus happy in a very different society” (Levitas, 2008, pp. 20-26). According to Levitas (1990, p. 8), utopia can be understood as “the expression of the desire for a better way of being.” Utopianism is, she says, a

... (sometimes) secularised version of the spiritual quest to understand who we are, why we are here and how we connect with each other. It is a quest for wholeness, for being at home in the world ... (Levitas, 2007, p. 290)

Literary utopias generally address the issues of social and economic inequality, however More’s *Utopia* includes slavery, a reminder to the contemporary reader that utopia is specific (Sargisson and Sargent, 1017, p. 2), it is always a reflection of the values and social structures of its time as much as it is representative of the desire to be otherwise. Utopias hold a mirror to society, “illuminating flaws and problems,” demonstrate discontent, offer alternatives (Sargisson, 2012, p. 10; 145), and provide inspiration for
positive change in consideration of current circumstances. Levitas (Levitas, 1990, p. 9) suggests,

...whatever we think of particular utopias, we learn a lot about the experience of living under any set of conditions by reflecting upon the desires which those conditions generate and yet leave unfulfilled. For that is the space which utopia occupies. (see also Ram, 2008, p. 8)

The lay meaning of utopia, the perfect but impossible society (Levitas, 2008, p. 19), is considered dangerous by some, possibly even a threat to humanity’s existence. Perhaps it implies an intention, even need, to eliminate humanity for there cannot be a perfect society that includes the imminently and infinitely fallible human. Moreover, with the diversity of human expression and desire, a single notion of utopia cannot be all encompassing. “The danger of utopianism,” writes Sargent (2012, p. 22) “is that a true believer with power will try to impose a particular vision on others.” Wariness of the notion of utopia can be attributable to historical efforts of tyrannical political rulers to do just that (cf. Pitzer, 1997, p. 4). Fear of Utopia also arises from the conception that it is fixed or a realisable end goal (Bloch, 1986 (1959], p. 157; cf. Cotton, 2003). Especially in the case of literary utopias, and as a result of literary utopias, the error lies in taking them literally or interpreting them as goals (Levitas, 2008, p. 23). Sargent (2006) makes the distinction between utopia, which is potentially dangerous, and utopianism, a necessary precursor to progress. “It is not utopianism that is at fault,” he states, “the problem arises rather from the conviction that a particular utopia can bring about the only correct way to live.”

For Levitas, rather than a goal, utopianism should be thought of as method which “facilitates genuinely holistic thinking about possible futures, combined with reflexivity, provisionally and democratic engagement with the principles and practices of those futures” (Levitas, 2013, p. xi). Some scholars such as Kumar (1991) think of utopia as a dualistic notion, distinguishing “between utopias as entities and utopianism as a broader category of political thought” (cf Levitas, 2008, pp. 21-22), whereas Sargent (2012, p. 13) argues that utopia has “three faces, utopian literature, utopian practice, […] and utopian social theory.” Though not exclusive to intentional communities, utopian practice or
‘lived utopianism’ (Sargisson and Sargent, 2017), is the space of utopianism occupied by intentional communities, or ‘practical utopias’ as Sargisson (2012, p. 21) calls them.

People disillusioned with the ‘mainstream,’ seeking retreat, or pursuing residence with others who have a shared spiritual philosophy and practice have forged together intentional communities throughout history, yet the term ‘intentional community’ is not well understood by those who have little contact with their members. For example, demonstrating suspicion of Utopia, as outlined above, when I try to describe Auroville to people who have no prior knowledge or experience of intentional communities, I am frequently asked “is it a cult?” Similarly, Candrika, an Aurovilian who was born and grew up in the community, spoke to me about the difficulties she has in talking to “outsiders” about where she grew up. She says that in her first few years of living in Europe she stopped telling people and instead would make up shorter, and easier, versions of the truth.

I was just kind of sick of always telling the same story. And nobody really gets it, you know? And sometimes I’m just like, whatever, I don’t really care, because just people get like “oh, so is it a cult, is it a this?, is it a that?” I’m like, no, but I don’t really want to defend it, I don’t really care what you think of it, you know what I mean? This is how it is, and I’m not really interested in advertising it or getting into a huge argument about it being a cult or not and why not, and you know? And I remember back then I looked in a dictionary and [it said] ‘cult,’ okay, the only definition was a group of, I don’t remember exactly now word for word, but basically a group of people who believe in the same thing. So “okay, yeah, then it’s a cult!” But I mean, it’s such a negative connotation, no?

The most widely recognised intentional communities, though not necessarily by that title, are in fact the orders and sects of all of the major religions. These include monasteries, ashrams and other cloistered religious communities. In these places, devotees live and work together in a spirit of cooperation, seeking spiritual advancement and creating for themselves what they believe to be the living conditions most conducive to achieving this goal. Shenker, who based his study on two well-known
groups of communities, the kibbutzim in Israel and North America’s Hutterite communities, simply defines an intentional community as “a relatively small group of people who have created a whole way of life for the attainment of a certain set of goals” (Shenker, 1986, p. 10). Inhabitants of intentional communities join and remain in the community for a common purpose, an intention, a lifestyle decision which has become more popular outside of strict religious orders over the past several hundred years.

In the late 1960s, as a wave of popularity in community building accompanied rapid social change and political angst in the western hemisphere, Rosabeth Kanter (1972) wrote an enormously influential text focused on North American intentional communities of the 19th century. In it she uses the terms ‘communes,’ ‘utopian communities,’ and ‘utopias’ almost interchangeably. These terms appear to resonate more with people who may be unfamiliar with the term ‘intentional community.’ They imply that many intentional communities are based upon ‘new age’ spirituality and earth worship, however accurate these labels and supposed beliefs are for the communities they describe. Less widely imagined are the intentional communities organised around a blend of spiritual and secular precepts, or which even take secularism to almost spiritual dimensions. In his 1960s to 1970s Australian study of alternative community living, Peter Cock (1979) called such communities “alternative communities.”

The term ‘intentional community’ is the most universally accepted moniker by the members of such communities (cf. Sargisson and Sargent, 2004, p. 2). The US based Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC, formerly Fellowship of Intentional Communities) which facilitates a network of intentional communities around the world coined the term in the 1940s. Their definition highlights the shared purpose and geographic proximity of members of an intentional community:

An ‘intentional community’ is a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. The people may live together on a piece of rural land, in a suburban home, or in an urban neighborhood, and they may share a single residence or live in a cluster of dwellings. (FIC, 2009, online)
FIC further defines ‘intentional community’ as “an inclusive term for ecovillages, cohousing communities, residential land trusts, communes, student co-ops, urban housing cooperatives, intentional living, alternative communities, cooperative living, and other projects where people strive together with a common vision” (2009, online).

What is important here is the “common vision” and the spirit of cooperation within and between communities, something which the organisation emphasises in naming itself a ‘fellowship’ and changing its title ‘of Communities’ to ‘for Community.’

A further element of an intentional community that is particularly relevant to an understanding of Auroville is highlighted by Susan Love Brown who observes that intentional communities are communities “bent on solving a specific set of cultural and social problems” (Brown, 2002b, p. 5). “Intentional communities represent a kind of ‘voting with the feet,’” she says, “a call to action that is personal and communal, bringing together the needs of the individual with those of other individuals, re-establishing the bonds that connect human beings but in a particular fashion” (Brown, 2002b, p. 5). To paraphrase, Brown adds that members tend to see themselves as at odds with the larger society or needing to withdraw from it. Often intentional communities are oppositional and aim to critique existing society. Joining an intentional community makes a statement that you believe “there is something fundamentally wrong with your society” (Sargent, 2012, p. 18). Some intentional communities remain simple expressions of frustration while others offer proposals of how things can be changed, fitting somewhere on a continuum between realism and fantasy, from calls for revolution to pure fancy (Pillai, 2005, p. 8).

It is questionable whether indeed all intentional communities seek to solve the problems of the larger society as a primary goal (see, also, Mohanty, 2008, p. 100). However it is clear in the case of Auroville that many individual members do identify with a set of aspirations that seek to address social problems they perceive in the larger society from which they came. If Utopia is “about creating a new environment; and living in a community is always an act of dissent, an expression of counter-culture” (Jones, 2007, pp. 53-54), then Auroville is rightly represented as a utopian intentional community. From the people who choose to live in Auroville, we learn about the problems as they see them in the places from which they came.
In the case of Auroville, its foundations are located in the 1960s’ youth-driven counter culture movements in North America, Europe and elsewhere (Zablocki, 1980, pp. 21-23; p. 42; p. 49-57; Brown, 2002b, pp. 5-7). According to Brown (2002b, pp. 7-8),

...new communities, often encompassing new religions and ideologies, seemed to afford a respite from a world that seemed to be falling apart: a world of parents, life-threatening war, and civil unrest. The number of communities formed in this period exceeds the total number of communities formed in all of the preceding periods of communitarianism in the United States.

Speaking of the Ananda community in California, Brown (2002a, p. 165) says it began “at the precise moment in history when these practices and ideas [Eastern spiritual philosophies] were enjoying a rebirth within American culture.” Zablocki (1980, pp. 21-23; p. 42-57; see also Brown, 2002a, pp. 158-159; Brown, 2002b, pp. 5-8) refers to this as the fifth wave of community building in the United States. Yet the youth-led protest against mainstream values and society expressed there was not unique to North America, but coincided with a worldwide period of community building in response to

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4 Benjamin Zablocki (1980) identified five periods of community building in the United States which coincide with upheavals in the larger society. The first, during the colonial era of 1620 to 1776 saw groups of people leaving Europe in fear of religious persecution for the ‘new world’ where tolerance was a benchmark upon which settlers wanted to base their society and where large tracts of land were more easily available for settlement (Zablocki, 1980, pp. 33-35). These included the Plymouth Colony, the Amish, Labadists, The Ephrata Cloister, the Moravian Brethren and the Shakers (Brown, 2002b, p. 6). In the last decade of the eighteenth century Shaker colonies expanded and fragmented to form new communities, Zablocki’s second wave of communitarianism (Zablocki, 1980, pp. 35-36). 1824 to 1848 are referred to as the ‘Utopian Socialist Period’ (Zablocki, 1980, pp. 36-38), during which time the famous communities of New Harmony, Brook Farm and Oneida arose as a response to “economic and social upheavals within the United States as the country moved from an agricultural to an industrialized nation and from a largely rural to an increasingly urban way of life” (Brown, 2002b, p. 7). Like some more recent communities, including Auroville, these early ‘utopian’ communities are built upon social and political ideologies, sometimes but not always in conjunction with spiritual beliefs, and were experimental in that their members wished to find new ways of living which deviated substantially with that of the larger society (Brown, 2002b, p. 7).

A fourth period of community building took place from 1890 to 1915, the decades prior to the First World War (Zablocki, 1980, pp. 38-39). These urban and rural communities were largely socialist and anarchistic and are seen as a response to increasing urbanisation, “massive immigration from Europe, and the confrontations of business and labor” (Brown, 2002b, p. 7). For these people, forming intentional communities was a way to overcome the issues they personally faced as a result of a rapidly changing society. It was a way to control the impact of that change in one’s own life, by joining with likeminded others in an attempt to define the conditions of life for one’s self and a select group.
global politics and other issues of the time. It was during this time, in 1968, that Auroville began.

**Auroville**

Inaugurated in February 1968, Auroville states as its primary goal the “realisation of human unity.” Initially an offshoot of the Sri Aurobindo Society and ashram located in nearby Pondicherry, Auroville takes as its foundational texts the writings of spiritual guides, the late Aurobindo Ghose, known and hereafter identified in this text as Sri Aurobindo, and Mira Alfassa, known and hereafter identified in this text as the Mother. From its inception Auroville’s goal has been to promote the realisation of ‘human unity,’ with a tagline of “unity through diversity” which ties in nicely with India’s national message. It was started by a motley group of, mostly, European young adults seeking a more meaningful life. Now, with infrastructure and modern conveniences in place, it has evolved into a diverse community of people from around the world, of all ages and social backgrounds. However, the aim of creating a better and more meaningful life remains a constant. Like other intentional communities, people continue to join Auroville with an intention which corresponds with the community’s guiding philosophy. They share an ideology which encompasses critique of society’s structures outside of Auroville, and internal organisation which they believe offer solutions to society’s problems (Melton, 1997, p. 414).

Auroville’s beginnings are rooted in the particular social environment sweeping North America and, in particular, Europe at the time of its inauguration. Though neither political dissent, nor intentional living, nor lifestyle migration were new phenomena by any stretch, their particular entanglement at this particular time, along with advances in communication technology, led to enthusiastic support for the Auroville project.

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5 Officially ‘Puducherry,’ but commonly still referred to by the colonial name ‘Pondicherry.’

6 Mira Alfassa is obviously not the only female spiritual guide to be referred to as ‘Mother.’ Just as ‘father’ is a common title for male spiritual leaders or mentors, so too is ‘mother’ for female in a number of traditions. For her devotees, Mira Alfassa is said to have embodied and continues to represent the Hindu principle of the universal mother (‘The Mother’ with capitalisation of ‘The’ as well as ‘Mother’). Symbolism related to the mother clearly references creation, nurture, guidance, energy, benevolence, power and love. For an overview of women in Hindu ideology, see Wadley (1977).

7 See Appendix 1 for brief biographies of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.
India has attracted lifestyle migrants from European colonial powers, particularly England, since at least the 17th century. The first spiritual tourists to India from Europe probably arrived millennia ago. It is said Thomas the Apostle and a small group of followers reached Kerala in the first century CE. Others from Europe and the Middle East may have arrived earlier in pursuit of early Buddhist, Zoroastrian and other teachings, or later, in the wake of Alexander the Great’s incursion to India in the fourth century CE. More recently, the Theosophical Society, established in the late nineteenth century in the United States but shortly afterward locating its headquarters to India, attracted a great deal of interest from Europe and North America.

It is not until mid-way through the twentieth century, however, thanks to modern mass communication technologies, that we see a clear and increasing trend in spiritual tourism from the West to India (Norman, 2011). As well as the Theosophical Society, which continues to attract many foreign visitors to its Adyar base near Chennai, people from the west are drawn to India in pursuit of spirituality as a result of highly successful public relations campaigns carried out by the architects and followers of several spiritual movements and forms including the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), Transcendental Meditation (TM), and gurus savvy with international media such as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Mata Amritanandamayi, and Paramahamsa Yogananda. Regional politics too attracted, and continues to attract, western interest in the spiritual traditions of the subcontinent. Thanks to the persistent activism and writings of Mohandas Gandhi at the end of the colonial era an international

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8 Known colloquially as ‘Hare Krishnas’ due to the mantra recited in song by members in public, as well as private, displays of devotion.

9 ‘Osho,’ as he is commonly referred to, died in 1990, however the controversy surrounding him, and his ashram in Pune, makes him still one of the more well-known Indian gurus outside of India.

10 Born in Tamil Nadu, not too far from Auroville, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is extremely popular in India and outside of India due to his far reaching network of ‘The Art of Living’ centres. He is also commonly referred to as ‘Gurudev.’

11 Also commonly known as ‘Amma,’ or ‘the hugging Mother,’ Mata Amritanandamayi is based in Kerala and attracts large numbers of Indian and non-Indian followers, many of whom are live-in volunteers with one of her charitable organisations, or travel with her on her frequent tours.

12 Paramahamsa Yogananda’s 1946 autobiography, Autobiography of a Yogi, has been translated into many languages and remains a popular introductory text for many Westerners travelling in India and seeking an entrance into understanding of Hinduism and Indian spirituality.
audience is aware of the philosophy and practice of *ahimsa,* and, in part due to the plight of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan people, an even larger international audience is interested in the tenets of various branches of Buddhism (*cf.* Bloch, 2018, p. 40). Each of these spiritual movements gained greater notoriety due to the attention they received from celebrities and travel writers, in popular culture, and through the hippie movement. People such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Paul Theroux, the Beatles, Richard Gere and others have helped to popularise, and modernise, ancient schools of thought for a new audience (Norman, 2011, p. 145).

This in turn has contributed to considerable scholarly interest in, not only foreigners living and travelling in India (see, for example, Bloch, 2018; D’Andrea, 2007; Ganguly, 2014; Giguère, 2013; Hottola, 2014; Hutnyk, 1996; Jouhki, 2006; Korpela, 2010; Korpela 2014a; Korpela, 2017; Mehta, 1979; Namakkal, 2012; Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005), but also India’s large transient population, many of whom follow the tourists or contribute to foreign interest in certain regions of the country (see for example, Bloch, 2018; Hutnyk, 1996; Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005). These include the Hindu holy men and festivals, Tibetan refugees living in McLeod Ganj and other former hill stations, Kashmiri entrepreneurs, and descendants of the British Raj and Nepalese Gurkhas who served them.

Seemingly an enclave of foreigners, certainly culturally, socially, and economically distinct from anywhere else in India due to its multinational population, Auroville too has attracted considerable academic interest, particularly higher degree researchers, that is, people such as myself. A list of academic papers written based on work and observations in Auroville appears on the Auroville website (Auroville, 2018c). Very apparent is the enormous amount of attention the community receives from town planners, architects and people interested in education, ecology and green technology. Two of the smallest lists of academic papers are under the headings ‘Sociology’ and ‘Cultural Anthropology’ with only three and one paper listed respectively. It may be assumed, however, that a good deal more papers have been written in these disciplines and are lost under the headings such as ‘Social Organisation and Governance,’ ‘Architecture/Town Planning’ and ‘Ecology/Alternative Technology.’

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13 *Ahimsa* translates roughly as ‘do no harm.’ It is a central tenet of Hinduism and other Indian religions. *Ahimsa* applies to actions, words and thoughts, people and animals.
The creation of Auroville in 1968 was a directive of the Mother who hoped to see the creation of a city of the future. It was established to realise the spiritual principles found in the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In 1969 the following was written by the Mother about the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville for a UNESCO committee:

The task of giving a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo’s vision was entrusted to the Mother. The creation of a new world, a new humanity, a new society expressing and embodying the new consciousness is the work she has undertaken. By the very nature of things, it is a collective ideal that calls for a collective effort so that it may be realised in the terms of an integral human perfection. The Ashram founded and built by the Mother was the first step towards the accomplishment of this goal. The project of Auroville is the next step, more exterior, which seeks to widen the base of this attempt to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth, in the collective life of mankind. (Alfassa, 1969; see also Zwicher, 2006, p. 16).

Ostensibly, therefore, Auroville draws as its members devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who, for a range of reasons, are not suited to the monastic life in the ashram. The first Aurovilians were people sent from the ashram by the Mother to build a city. These were largely, though not entirely, non-Indian citizens who were drawn to the spiritual teachings they found at the Sri Aurobindo ashram, but were unable or unwilling to conform to the strictly ascetic lifestyle required of ashramites. They were the western ‘hippies’ of the era, seeking alternative lifestyles and ideologies. Many were from France, having heard of the Mother on French radio and through personal contacts. I have heard some of these earliest inhabitants of Auroville call themselves the ‘radicals’ of the ashram. Today early Aurovilians are generally referred to as the ‘pioneers,’ or those that remain are affectionately called ‘old crocodiles,’ perhaps in reference to the fact that many of their faces hint at a life of physical labour under the sun.

Today, the population of Auroville is quoted as 2,953 people, with passports from fifty-eight different countries including India.\(^\text{14}\) More than fifty percent of Aurovilians are

\(^{14}\) Census September 2018 (Auroville, 2018a). Graphs depicting census data, including breakdown by nationality and age, can be found in Appendix 6.
non-Indian. The official population does not take into account permanent residents of Auroville and the surrounding region who have not been accepted as official members of the community, or the large number of other temporary residents hosted by Auroville each year, many of whom are also non-Indian. These include short and long term guests living in Auroville for a variety of reasons including visiting Aurovilian family or friends, participating in development programs and internships, and holidaying in the region. Many of these visitors stay for extended periods of time and participate in community life, often contributing to the community financially and through volunteer work. Some make the decision to stay in Auroville permanently and are termed ‘Newcomers’ for a period of between one and three years from their application date until the outcome of their application is determined and they potentially join the community as Aurovilians. The population of the immediate surrounding rural area additionally includes approximately 40,000 Indian citizens, commonly referred to in Auroville as the ‘villagers’ (Auroville 2007, p. 19). Up to 10,000 villagers are employed in Auroville and either reside within its borders or travel there each day. As such, the actual number of people living in the territory claimed by Auroville at a given time is significantly higher than quoted in the community’s census.

While the public discourse in Auroville is very much one of commitment to the Mother’s ideals, my research highlighted to me that individual motivations for coming to Auroville and choosing to stay in Auroville are as diverse as the backgrounds of the community’s members. As Bindu Mohanty (2008, p. 1) wrote, “Auroville is a place that escapes easy definitions,” adding it “is at once an international community with high spiritual ideals that one can join, and also a secularized society where one can live and work without formally joining the community or subscribing to its ideology” (Mohanty, 2008, p. 2).

Like Saxe’s fable about the blind men and the elephant at the opening of this thesis, a nineteenth century treatment of one of the subcontinent’s favourite ancient fables,

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15 Information regarding entry requirements and the ‘newcomer’ process, can be found in various articles on the Auroville website (Auroville, n.d.).

16 Bindu Mohanty’s PhD thesis (Mohanty, 2008), explores the “relationship between spiritual ideals and the social psychology of the transpersonally-oriented community” (Mohanty, 2008, abstract). Mohanty is Aurovilian, and so this research helped me to see the more spiritual Aurovilian perspective and provided detailed background information on the formation of the community and particulars of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s philosophies and Aurovilians’ interpretation and embodiment of those ideals.
Auroville defies easy description. Aurovilians are aware of this, and the story of the blind men and the elephant is often referred to by those asked to describe the community. One Aurovilian author calls his community “an anthropologist’s nightmare,” adding “[t]he individuality of belief and behaviour is extremely diverse” (Sullivan, 1994, p. 137). Many people I spoke to made a point of telling me that guests of Auroville, even long term guests, cannot claim to know the community as they can only have experienced a part of it. Several added that they themselves can only describe the Auroville of their own experiences, which may be quite different to others’ (see also Mohanty, 2008, p. 2). In saying this, Aurovilians are recoiling at the numbers of researchers who visit them each year, the intrusion into their private lives experienced as a result of these researchers, and the perceived negativity or insensitivity with which some people report on their stay in Auroville and limited understanding of the community’s goals conveyed in those reports. Likewise, Aurovilians recoil at the assumption that they are just like any other ‘commune,’ a frustration Candrika described in the previous section, perhaps with good reason. When I mention Auroville to people who haven’t been there or have not heard of other intentional communities, I sense an assumption that all intentional communities are modern hippie communes. Auroville is not a hippie commune, and, as Mohanty (2008, p. 103) says, unlike hippies’ “disdain for established culture, Auroville, at least officially, has worked hard to gain acceptance in established Indian culture, both at a local and national level.”

With over two thousand members, Auroville is said to be the largest intentional community of its type in the world and one of the longest surviving intentionally international communities. Like Damanhur in Italy, which is formally titled ‘Damanhur Federation of Communities,’ Auroville is a large community comprised of many smaller communities. Some of these smaller communities do indeed live communally and could be adequately described as communes. However many, such as the community I lived in for most of my time in Auroville, are simply geographic areas, much like suburbs, held together not by their individual community based ideals but by each resident’s commitment to Auroville itself. Interestingly, Auroville is not listed as an intentional
community on the FIC website, however one of Auroville’s sub-communities is.\textsuperscript{17} This, perhaps, demonstrates the independence of some of Auroville’s smaller communities.

Aurovilians seek personal spiritual growth and the realisation of social equality following the precepts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who envisaged a community where “people of different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, could live and work together in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration” (Auroville 2007, p. 2).

The writings of philosopher, Sri Aurobindo, provide the framework to the guiding philosophy of Auroville which was advanced by the writing and activities of the Mother. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother believed that human beings are “the first species to be on the cusp of a new kind of evolution” led by consciousness rather than nature (Gleig and Flores, 2014, p. 43). That is, through conscious self-transformation we can expedite evolutionary transformation. A process to do this that Sri Aurobindo called ‘Integral Yoga’ is outlined in his text \textit{The Life Divine} (Ghose, 2011 [1914-1920]). Integral Yoga is not a postural yoga, as per hatha yoga which is increasingly popular outside of India,\textsuperscript{18} but a spiritual practice which incorporates all aspects of life, as indicated in Aurobindo’s motto, ‘All life is yoga’ (see for example, Gleig and Flores, 2014, p. 44; Sri Aurobindo Studies, 2014). According to Gleig and Flores (2014, p. 42), Aurobindo,

\begin{quote}
...reinterpreted the Vedas and \textit{vedānta} philosophy through a Western evolutionary lens to produce a spiritual evolutionary metaphysics. He rejected both traditional Indian renouncer paths and Western scientific materialism in favor of an all-encompassing or “integral” model that recognized the partial
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} Sadhana Forest is a community dedicated to sustainable living, particularly reforestation and veganism, located just outside the main area of Auroville (approximately a ten minute ride by motorbike), which operates semi-independently of Auroville. This independence is demonstrated in particular by the additional Sadhana Forest communities in Haiti and Kenya not falling under the auspices of Auroville proper, and the very little mention of Auroville on Sadhana Forest’s website. Due to its location some of its residents also reported to me that they felt quite separate from Auroville. A mini bus runs between the centre of Auroville and Sadhana Forest for the vegan feast and sustainability-themed film or documentary showing held weekly on Friday evenings. More information can be found at www.sadhanaforest.org. See also www.ic.org./directory/sadhana-forest.

\textsuperscript{18} The Mother and Sri Aurobindo believed strongly in the importance of a strong and healthy body, believing physical perfection an important goal toward evolution. Under the Mother’s guidance in particular, sports became a big part of ashram life. It is in this capacity only that they approved of postural yoga such as hatha yoga. Ashram residents were permitted to practice such yoga for health purposes, however Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not believe it “a means to spiritual opening” (Gleig & Flores, 2014, p. 45).
truths of both “spirit and nature” and postulated an evolutionary teleology that aimed at the radical divinization of matter rather than liberation from the world.

According to Auroville’s promotional materials adapted from writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the purpose of Integral Yoga is “to enter into a higher Truth-Consciousness or Divine Supramental Consciousness in which action and creation are the expression not of ignorance and imperfection, but of the Truth, the Light, the Divine Ananda (Bliss)” (Auroville, 2017d). By doing so, they say, we can expedite the arrival of the ‘Supramental’ or next evolutionary stage. This is done by “self-concentration inwards or upwards,” concentrating on “the presence and power of the Mother to take up the being and by the workings of her force transform the consciousness” (Auroville, 2017d). The difference between our present human condition and that of the Supramental is said likely to be as great as the difference between our present human condition and that of apes.

While it is not essential that Aurovilians be devotees of Integral Yoga, or believe in the evolutionary ideals of Sri Aurobindo which many confess to thinking far-fetched, this idea of conscious self-transformation, or at least conscious betterment of oneself, does permeate all that Aurovilians do and their reasons for staying in the community. Aurovilians share a belief that societal structure outside of the community is not conducive to this ‘inner work’ (as it is referred to in Auroville) and that such personal transformation will result in demonstrable solutions to social, economic, political and environmental malaise in wider society.

The Mother was Sri Aurobindo’s ‘spiritual collaborator.’ From her permanent arrival in Pondicherry in 1920 until Sri Aurobindo’s death in 1950, the Mother ran the day to day affairs of the Sri Aurobindo ashram on his behalf while he cloistered himself in his room to focus on ‘bringing the Divine to earth.’ From 1950 the Mother continued to manage the ashram and additionally became increasingly the focal point of spirituality in the Sri Aurobindo ashram, continuing the work of Sri Aurobindo. In more than one brief biography, she is labelled “a conscious laboratory of the new species” (Joshi, 1989, p. 185; G., 2010, p. 33; see also Van Vrekhem, 2007 [2004], pp. 248-257; 268-274; Wilfried,
2009 [1986], pp. 77-87). In the Hinduism of many of the families of Pondicherry and
surrounds, both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are worshipped among the pantheon of
gods of that religion.

There is suggestion in the literature, including their diaries, that Sri Aurobindo had
hinted at the possibility of a future international township dedicated to Integral Yoga,
however it is the Mother who visualised the community in a dream,\(^{19}\) wrote the Charter
of Auroville, undertook the necessary material transactions in order for Auroville to
exist, and sent the first Aurovilians to build a city. While some Aurovilians did in fact visit
or live in the Sri Aurobindo ashram as early as the 1940s and may have glimpsed Sri
Aurobindo during a rare *darshan* (audience) or seen him lying in state for days after his
death, very few Aurovilians actually met the man. Therefore, perhaps partly due to the
fact that pioneering Aurovilians actually met the Mother, and her direct involvement in
the creation of Auroville, it is the Mother rather than Sri Aurobindo who is evidently the
greater inspiration and guide in Auroville. While pictures of both of them are ubiquitous
in Auroville, it is the Mother’s face who looks upon the living from at least one wall in all
public buildings, and almost all homes.

Due to age related fragility and illness, the Mother never actually visited Auroville
herself, however she managed Auroville’s affairs from the ashram in Pondicherry and
met daily with Aurovilians regarding the physical and social progress of the community.
Her death in 1973, at the age of ninety-five, threw the community into a state of
disarray which lasted for more than ten years and at times threatened Auroville’s
survival. It was not just the absence of her direct guidance which unsettled people, but
also the very fact of her death. Some had believed her supposed level of spiritual
advancement to place her beyond the human affliction of inevitable physical death.

Residents who decided to stay and continue the project were quickly confronted by the
Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) based in Pondicherry who claimed proprietorship and
control of Auroville. After years of battle, a period of time often referred to as “the
war,” Aurovilians requested that the Government of India (GoI) become involved to
settle the dispute. This was a controversial act, but seen by most Aurovilians as the

\(^{19}\) In 1954 the Mother wrote ‘A Dream.’ Auroville is said to be an attempt to manifest the society depicted
in this text. A Dream is reproduced in Appendix 2.3.
lesser of two evils. In 1980 the GoI passed the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act which placed all assets and management of Auroville under the jurisdiction of the central government. The SAS objected, arguing that because Auroville emerged from the teachings of Sri Aurobindo it should remain within the religious domain of its own work. The residents of Auroville successfully argued in the Supreme Court, with the assistance of some high profile politicians including Indira Gandhi, a devotee of the Mother, that “there is no room for doubt that neither the Society nor Auroville constitute a religious denomination and the teachings of Sri Aurobindo only represent his philosophy and not a religion” (cited in Minor, 1999, p. 128; see also Bernard, 2014). In 1988 India’s parliament passed the Auroville Foundation Act which vested all assets and responsibility for ongoing management of Auroville in the Auroville Foundation. The name ‘Auroville’ and the emblem of Auroville (pictured below alongside symbols of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo) (Auroville, 2014a; Auroville, 2014e; Auroville, 2017f), have also been protected under the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act 1950 (Auroville, 2014a; Government of India 2011).  

Fig. 1: Symbol of Auroville

Fig. 2: Symbol of the Mother

Fig. 3: Symbol of Sri Aurobindo

20 Each of these symbols may also appear in monochrome. Pendants with one or more of these symbols are easy to find in Auroville and nearby Pondicherry. They are worn by many devotees as necklaces, bracelets, rings or even keyrings.

21 According to the Auroville website, “The dot at the centre [of the Auroville symbol] represents Unity, the Supreme; the inner circle represents the creation, the conception of the City; the petals represent the power of expression, realisation” (Auroville, 2014a).

22 Each ‘petal’ in the symbol of the Mother represents a separate power or attribute of the Mother, as defined by Sri Aurobindo. “The central circle represents the Divine Consciousness. The four petals represent the four powers of The Mother. The twelve petals represent the twelve powers of the Mother manifested for Her work.” Those twelve ‘powers’ are: sincerity; peace; equality; generosity; goodness; courage; progress; receptivity; aspiration; perseverance; gratitude; and humility (Auroville 2017f).

23 According to the Mother, “The descending triangle [of Sri Aurobindo’s symbol] represents Sat-Chit-Ananda. The ascending triangle represents the aspiring answer from matter under the form of life, light and love. The junction of both – the central square – is the perfect manifestation having at its centre the Avatar of the Supreme – the lotus. The water – inside the square – represents the multiplicity, the creation” (Auroville, 2014e).
The Auroville Charter reads:

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

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

3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

Aurovilians refer to their community as an “experiment in human unity.” Recognised as the world’s only “experiment in human unity,” Auroville has been endorsed, and continues to be supported, by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (Auroville 2018d).24 Since its inception, UNESCO has passed five resolutions supporting Auroville, most recently in November 2017 in recognition of the lead up to Auroville’s 50th anniversary celebrations in February 2018 (Auroville, 2018d, UNESCO, 2017). Auroville has also received statements of support from notable political figures in India including several Presidents and Prime Ministers, as well as from other parts of the world.

While it is clear that Auroville is not communal and not all community members are there for the same reason(s)/intention(s), there is enough of a common thread to the Aurovilian informants’ reason for continuing the project to justify continued use of the term ‘intentional community.’ Aurovilians do share a belief that social and personal life can be organised differently and that an individual focus on self-growth is not to the detriment to society but can in fact fix many of the ills of society. Auroville was intentionally formed, and people continue to join with an intention which corresponds with the community’s guiding philosophy. Community members share an ideology which encompasses both critique of the structures of society outside of Auroville and an internal organisation which embodies solutions to society’s problems (Melton, 1997, p.

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24 Information regarding the UNESCO-Auroville relationship can be found on both the UNESCO and Auroville websites (UNESCO, 2008; Auroville, 2018e). See also (Funding Auroville, n.d.-b).
The commonality rests in providing a small but scalable example of how this may work. Obviously, it doesn’t always, and there are some serious failings, however where Auroville has been successful, particularly in environmental management and coordination of labour (not including paid labour), it has found its niche in the intentional community milieu.

Auroville is particularly praised for its environmental work. Most, if not all, people who write about Auroville mention the incredible physical transformation of the land “through massive environmental regeneration efforts” (Mohanty, 2008, p. 3). When the first Aurovilians arrived in the 1960s the land had suffered through decades of government sponsored deforestation. All that remained was a single banyan tree, which the Mother designated the centre of Auroville, some straggly palms and saltbush breaking up the expanse of dry red earth. Interestingly, early settlers told me that they initially planted trees, not with any real concerns for environmental restoration, but simply to provide shade in the blistering hot summers. Trees used were Australian acacia trees due to their strength and rapid growth rate. Today these trees are nicknamed “work trees” due to the work they do to provide the conditions for the restoration of the indigenous tropical dry evergreen forest.

Spared from the logging of colonial times due to the sacredness with which banyan trees, symbols of religious awakening (Shinn, 1984, p. 246), are typically held in Indian culture, this impressively large tree was one of very few trees standing in the area when the Mother selected this site for the township. Literally and metaphorically, banyan trees provide shelter – shade and protection. From a wide canopy they send aerial roots down to the ground, a feature which lends itself to symbolic importance in many of the Hindu scriptures. The banyan tree is important also for Buddhists who believe that it was while meditating under a banyan tree the Buddha became enlightened. For the Mother, who saw symbolism everywhere, the presence of this tree in the centre of the land earmarked for Auroville was an auspicious sign, and it continues to hold great importance for Aurovilians today (Sullivan, 1994, p. 16).

Cyclone Thane hit Auroville region in late December 2011, shortly after my departure. According to my contacts in Auroville this event had a dramatic impact on the community, both physically and socially. It is said that up to 60% of Auroville’s trees were uprooted within a period of several hours, dramatically altering the landscape. The successful reforestation of the region is something which Aurovilians, I believe rightly so, are universally most proud of and so the large undoing of over forty years of work sent the community into a period of mourning. This was quickly chased by what seemed a renewed sense of community and rejuvenated work ethic with everyone working together to clear the region of debris, repair homes, manage fallen trees, and, perhaps most importantly, rethink Auroville’s future. The cyclone seemed to offer the opportunity of renewal, to take stock and consider how the community may best proceed in its plans for the future. During my return visit to Auroville in 2013-2014, several Aurovilians told me that the ‘work trees’ had done their job anyway, the conditions had been provided for the resurrection of indigenous plant species and now that the acacia were gone the indigenous tropical dry evergreen forest could flourish again, as was always the intention. Over time, this optimism seems to be well placed with reports of monkeys and other long absent wildlife also returning to the region (even if some, such as monkeys, are more difficult to live alongside!).
In time it was realised that planting trees had other benefits. Soil erosion during the wet season lessened, crops flourished and the water table rose. Today environmentalism is a key feature of the Auroville psyche and environmental projects such as reforestation, organic farming, renewable energy production, water management, and sustainable building practices are a focus of many of Auroville’s sub communities. Auroville is called an ecovillage, and it is one. But to call it this denies the motivations for being there that are equally as valued but are not ecological. Likewise, but perhaps more controversially, to merely call it a spiritual community does not represent all of its inhabitants and its diversity.
This picture appears on the Auroville website (Auroville, 2015a) and is ubiquitous in Auroville in depictions of the early years. The stone marker is located on the outskirts of Auroville looking towards the centre.

This picture, taken by me in 2011 on a walking path near the centre of Auroville, shows the difference in the landscape since the earlier photo above.
Though dead, the Mother is ever present in the lives of most Aurovilians who are still trying to build the city according to her wishes. However, times have changed and so too has the physical direction of the city. The continued relevance of the ‘Master Plan’ drawn by the Mother’s appointed architect, Roger Anger, who passed away in 2008, is hotly disputed, as is the Mother’s suggestion of an ideal population of fifty thousand people. At a little under just five percent of this number after fifty years, the present population of Auroville still adheres to the principles of Integral Yoga and strives to build a city of which she would approve in changed circumstances.

As stipulated by the Mother (Auroville 2018g, online), membership of Auroville is ostensibly open to anyone who:

1) is “convinced of the essential unity of mankind and [has] the will to collaborate for the material realisation of that unity;” and

2) has “the will to collaborate in all that furthers future realisations.”

Material needs of the community, however, result in further conditions to entry. In addition to living costs, which are slightly higher than in the surrounding region or elsewhere in India, financial requirements to join Auroville state that people must make a non-refundable donation to the community of 9,000 rupees upon application and must contribute 2,000 rupees monthly to the Central Fund. Applicants must also be able to provide for their accommodation, whether that be having the means to purchase or build their own home, the ability to rent available accommodation in the community or have made firm arrangements to live with other Aurovilians. Foreign nationals must also be in possession of private health insurance, and need to submit to the Auroville

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27 These figures reflect the financial requirements of joining Auroville in 2011, the year of my long period of fieldwork.

28 The value of the Indian Rupee fluctuates significantly. While I lived in Auroville (the period for which these figures are relevant) the exchange rate went from approximately Rs45 = AUD$1 to Rs53 = AUD$1. For a graph of activity over the past two years see http://www.xe.com/currencycharts/?from=AUD&to=INR&view=2Y

29 While there is no private ownership in Auroville – all housing remains the property of the Central Fund – Aurovilians are expected to contribute the expense of their own housing. See the Auroville Housing Policy (Auroville Housing Service, 2011) for more information regarding property ownership.
Central Fund a return flight ticket to their home country, or the equivalent in cash, as surety against the event that they wish, or need, to leave the community and are no longer personally able to finance the expense of return (Auroville 2018e). These requirements, and the fact that a large percentage of the long-term guests are of foreign origin, means Auroville is perceptibly wealthier than the villages in the surrounding region of rural Tamil Nadu.

Growth is an ongoing concern in Auroville. The community does not reject capitalism and is very much engaged in the global market. The Mother said that, eventually, “money would be no more the sovereign lord,” not that it would no longer be of importance. In fact, the Mother suggested money and its accumulation is actually important to the realisation of the community’s goals. Aurovillian business units are encouraged to seek consultancies and commercial markets outside of Auroville in order to bring money into the community and further Auroville’s growth. However, the Mother also envisaged money would not be circulated within Auroville. Auroville hopes to develop and live effective change around three core aspects of social organisation: governance, education and economy. It is the latter on which Auroville is least successful. Despite free education, health care and cultural activities, money is as much a present and circulating necessity in Auroville as it is anywhere in the world.

Despite apparent wealth, the ongoing financial viability of Auroville and the affordability of living in Auroville for its permanent members is a constant and contested concern for its residents. Aurovilians who do not have an external source of income are entitled to receive a ‘maintenance’ provided they contribute to the community in some form through their labour. During the time I lived in Auroville the standard maintenance received by Aurovilians was 6,500 rupees per month, which was considered sufficient for

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30 This is a line in The Dream, a short piece of writing from the Mother in which she describes her vision of Auroville, the ‘city of the future.’ The Dream is reproduced in full in Appendix 2.3.

31 Auroville operates a large number of commercial enterprises. These include guesthouses and gift shops within the community, through to all manner of consultancies and large manufacturing and exporting companies. Auroville’s technology experts are very much in demand as consultants throughout India and in some cases abroad as well. Aurovillian run enterprises also include large scale clothing, accessories homewares, food, and fragrance manufacturers, the products of which are available in the Auroville gift shops, in stores throughout India and in some cases overseas. The incense and candles made by Maroma, for example, are available in stores in Europe, Australia and other parts of the world. Auroville also runs a commercial website, www.auroville.com, from which many of the products made in Auroville can be purchased.
a frugal existence. Aurovilian maintenances, services, building works, and events are funded by the profits of Auroville’s commercial enterprises, contributions from Aurovilians, donations from private sources and from the Indian government. It is important to note that despite apparent wealth in Auroville, not all Aurovilians, or even non-Indian Aurovilians, are in fact wealthy, or even comparatively wealthy. Indeed many live obviously close to relative poverty. The maintenance, while sufficient to live in Auroville and even more so when supplemented by the community’s free education, health care and subsidised meals for Aurovilians in several dining halls, is far from extravagant. People living on a maintenance generally find it difficult to purchase clothing and household items and must rely on donations to take annual holidays outside of the immediate vicinity of Auroville, to visit friends and family in their home countries (if not Indian), or to participate in non-subsidised social activities outside of Auroville. How people survive financially in Auroville is a sensitive and often debated issue with both extremes of wealth and disadvantage represented and not as predictable by one’s ethnicity as some guests first assume. In the early years, pioneers relied upon weekly and monthly community care packages of food and clothing provided by the ashram and supplemented with whatever food they could grow in Auroville. Any money they had was poured into building the infrastructure of the city which included paying local Tamil workers for their labour. Today, remaining pioneers budget for their own provisions as do the rest of the community. Though in a still largely impoverished region of Tamil Nadu, many local families have successfully capitalised upon the ongoing construction industry and tourist trade Auroville attracts and there are obvious signs of wealth, if unevenly dispersed, in the immediate vicinity of Auroville. As one European pioneer told me in reference to his cohort of Aurovilians, “we used to be the rich ones, but now the villagers are rich and we are poor.” Such statements clearly overlook structural issues which privilege non-Tamil Aurovilians, however also highlight social and economic change in the region which is attributed, rightly or wrongly, to the existence of Auroville.

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32 Aurovilian commercial enterprises are run for profit, a percentage of which is paid into the Auroville Central Fund. Commercial enterprises are expected to make their accounts public. Managers of commercial enterprises are not entitled to set their own wage, however are entitled to a maintenance somewhat higher than that paid to other Aurovilians. As is the case anywhere in the world, creative accounting provides some flexibility to these rules!
The centre of Auroville is marked by the presence of the Matrimandir, which literally translates as ‘temple of the Mother.’ This does not mean that it is dedicated to the Mother, but rather to the ‘principle of The Mother,’ in Hinduism the feminine energy “associated in Sri Aurobindo’s writing with the Divine, evolutionary force” (Mohanty, 2008, p. 54). Designed by the Mother in consultation with Roger Anger, the Mother’s appointed architect, work on the Matrimandir, the ‘soul of the city’ commenced soon after the very earliest Aurovilians arrived and took approximately 40 years to complete. The Matrimandir is a spherical shaped meditation chamber, 29.5 metres high and 36 metres wide (G., 2010, p. 10), covered in circular discs plated in 24k gold leaf. Its all white interior is intended to reflect the purpose of the building, quiet reflection. The Inner Chamber, located at the top of the building and a long winding ramp from the bottom, contains twelve white marble columns and, in the centre, a crystal globe of 70cm diameter manufactured in Germany specifically for this purpose. The crystal sits upon a three dimensional gold symbol of Sri Aurobindo (as above). It is placed so that a beam of light from an opening in the top of the building, directed throughout the day with mirrors, penetrates the centre of the crystal.

The Matrimandir is said to be the heart of Auroville. For some it is Auroville’s “central force” (see, for example, Mohanty, 2008, pp. 260-261). The Matrimandir is located next to the banyan tree, and amphitheatre which contains the urn in which soil from around the world was placed on the day of inauguration in February 1968. Yet it is not without controversy. The concern regarding the Matrimandir most commented on among guests to Auroville is the cost of its construction compared to the poverty of the region. People, Aurovilians and non-Aurovilians alike, also disagree over whether the building ought to be more or less accessible. For example, twice-yearly ‘dawnfires’ are held in the amphitheatre on the occasion of Auroville’s anniversary, 28th February, and Sri Aurobindo’s birthday, 15th August. Outside of these events, it is a complicated, though not unencouraged, process of advance application for non-Aurovilians to gain access to the Matrimandir and gardens. For non-Aurovilians access to the Matrimandir is only allowed after first viewing a short documentary about the community and the building,

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33 During my first visit to Auroville in 2003 the Matrimandir was covered in scaffolding and my visit to the inner chamber involved a vertiginous climb up the bare concrete ramp which, at that point, had very little in the way of hand rails or other safety precautions. By the time of my 2011 stay in Auroville, the Matrimandir appeared ‘finished’ with scaffolding removed, the interior painted white, carpet and white marble laid, and hand rails in place!
at which point one is permitted to view the building from the ‘Matrimandir Viewing Point,’ quite some distance from the building itself. After having done this, it is possible to join a group ‘tour’ into the grounds of the building and allowed a short time of ‘concentration’ in the Inner Chamber on a designated day following the first viewing. Aurovilians and long term guests who have completed these first stages are able to access the building more frequently, but only at designated times and after prior notification of up to several days in advance.

At a more basic level, there is disagreement as to whether the Matrimandir has been built exactly to the specifications of the Mother and whether or not any modifications to her original plans have any bearing on the ability of the building to adequately fulfil its purpose and intended symbolism. More about the Matrimandir and each of these issues can be found on the Auroville website and an enormous number of publications (see, for example, Auroville, 2007 p. 8; Auroville, 2015b; Auroville, 2017h; G., 2010, pp. 10-11; Matrimandir Action Committee, 2012; Mohanty, 2008, p. 56; pp. 264-265).

The Matrimandir. Picture taken by author from the ‘Matrimandir Viewing Point’ during a visit in 2010. Other photos of the building are available on the Auroville website.

The Auroville township surrounds the Matrimandir gardens, also called the Peace Area (which includes the Matrimandir, gardens and banyan tree, and amphitheatre). The town is very loosely divided into four zones, the Industrial zone, Cultural zone, Residential zone, and International zone, as per the ‘Galaxy Model’ of the anticipated city designed by the Mother and Roger Anger (see below). In actuality, town planning has occurred in a more haphazard and organic fashion according to needs and available

1. Introduction: Searching for Home
resources. However, as per the plan, the built area of the town is surrounded by the ‘Greenbelt,’ consisting of farms and reforestation activities providing sanctuaries for flora and fauna. A significant number of Aurovilians live in the Greenbelt, usually those who are dedicated to such activities or more reclusive individuals. It was my perception that houses within the greenbelt were more likely to be simply built, often of bamboo and with thatched roofs for example, than the more ‘architecturally designed’ houses and apartment complexes built in the residential zone and elsewhere in the township.

An image of the ‘Galaxy Model’ is reproduced below. This three dimensional model located in Auroville’s Town Hall demonstrates the intended and anticipated density of Auroville in those early years with the white structures representing buildings, many of which are apartment complexes. Today there is still significant debate within Auroville about the model and its applicability to current town planning efforts. Despite the sometimes heated debates and the impossibility and impracticality of following it precisely, the model does guide to some measure current construction and future planning. Below the image of the Galaxy Model, I have included a diagram of Auroville from one of the many introductory books about the community which shows a map of Auroville, including some sub-community names, buildings, and Tamil villages, overlaid with the ‘zones’ and Greenbelt as it has developed.

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34 There is however some semblance of the plan in the fact. For example, the Visitors’ Centre, Bharat Nivas (the ‘Pavilion of India,’ Bharat Nivas houses many of the cultural activities and archives of Auroville, as well as a large performance space for visiting artists) and several other buildings dedicated to cultural awareness are located in the International zone. Many, but not all of Auroville’s manufacturers and commercial enterprises are located in the Industrial zone. The sports ground, youth centre, a second amphitheatre and other venues for performance and classes related activities are located in the Cultural zone. Residential communities are spread throughout Auroville, including in some of the surrounding Tamil villages, particularly Kuilapalayam and Mudaliarchavadi close to the coast, however are somewhat more concentrated in the Residential zone.
Auroville Galaxy Model (Source: Auroville, 2014c)
Though intentionally secluded, Auroville does not seek to isolate itself from the rest of the world and nor could it. Its non-Indian residents maintain ties to the lands of their citizenship, some leaving Auroville as often as annually for family, friends, paid employment and cooler climes abroad. Its Indian residents continue to visit and participate in their more local ties and traditions. Sri Aurobindo, though from Calcutta, was educated exclusively in some of the most prestigious schools in England, spoke English as his first language and was also fluent in Latin and several other European languages before learning Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali and Tamil. The Mother was French of Egyptian and Turkish parents and lived for years at a time in Algeria and Japan before arriving in Pondicherry. Auroville itself is a product of globalisation. Though apart from the world, it is very much a part of the world. Sometimes referred to as “the city of the

35 Other versions of this map highlighting different aspects of the physical environment of Auroville can be found on the Auroville website (for example Auroville, 2017a).
future,” Auroville hopes to create a community which can serve as a guide for society generally, but in doing so it does not engage in any missionary-type activities or initiate explicitly self-promotional activities. Intriguingly, while Auroville draws cultural inspiration from around the world through its multinational and multicultural residents, and has inspired learning and research institutions around the world, it does not advocate for the establishment of more Auroville communities elsewhere.

Werbner (2008, P. 2) argues that cosmopolitans make a concerted effort to reach “out across cultural differences through dialogue, aesthetic enjoyment and respect...” and are committed to “living together with difference” (see also Amit, 2012, p. 44). Adopting this cosmopolitan outlook, Aurovilians also attempt in principle not to recognise false political national loyalties. They describe their community as “the city the earth needs” (see for example, Auroville, 2014b; Bhati, 2009; Estivie, 2007; Zwicher, 2006, p. 14). Aurovilians want to blend eastern and western thought, spirituality and rationalism, as per their namesake and founder, Sri Aurobindo, and the Mother. According to Gleig and Flores (2014, p. 42), Aurobindo

...rejected both traditional Indian renouncer paths and Western scientific materialism in favor of an all-encompassing or “integral” model that recognized the partial truths of both “spirit and nature” and postulated an evolutionary teleology that aimed at the radical divinization of matter rather than liberation from the world.

At their most basic, modern definitions of cosmopolitanism are cornerstones of the principles upon which Auroville was founded. The last line of the Auroville Charter reads:

Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.36

36 ‘Human unity,’ drawn from the Sanskrit notion of at the Ātma or Ātman which resides in each of us and to which we return, refers to the inner self or soul, and also to universal consciousness. In ‘To be a True Aurovillian’ the Mother wrote ‘At the centre there is a free being, vast and knowing,’ here she is referring to the Ātma. This is similar to the Christian notion that God resides in each individual, though the concept of God differs. This concept is often drawn upon in explanation of the notion of ‘human unity.’ ‘To be a True Aurovillian’ is reproduced in full in Appendix 2.5.
Autonomous and multicultural, Auroville treads a fine line between the traditions and expectations of its surroundings, in rural Tamil Nadu, and the expectations of itself and its members. It struggles to offer residents the personal freedom and physical comfort they demand while also engaging with the development issues of its very materially poor environment. Up to ten thousand people from neighbouring villages are employed in Auroville, many as manual labourers on construction sites or cleaners and gardeners in private homes. The Mother requested there be no servants in Auroville, but the reality of its location, capacity of its members and expectations of growth means the employment of additional hands is required to create the township’s infrastructure and continue to assist with ongoing day to day affairs. The argument that providing employment is one way Auroville can assist its neighbours out of poverty is a compelling one, but the hugely uneven power relations and stark differences in living conditions mean the whiff of neo-colonialism is something Aurovilians are quick to deny but sometimes struggle to do so convincingly.\(^{37}\)

With such diversity of inhabitants and others closely associated with the community, and in consideration of its history and surroundings, the idea of ‘home’ in Auroville is particularly interesting. Time and again I heard Aurovilians tell me that you do not need to live in Auroville to be Aurovilian. Indeed the principles of Auroville, outlined in the Charter and the Mother’s Dream, can be read as universal guiding philosophy, applicable to anyone in any location. Using the themes of home, explored in the next chapter, I aim throughout this work to provide some explanation for why these two thousand or so people nonetheless choose to live in this geographical location, to make Auroville their home, despite the supposed non-geographically fixed applicability of its guiding principles.

\(^{37}\) This is discussed in further detail in Chapter 7 in particular. Through Jukka Joukhi’s (2006) PhD thesis, I was able to access in some small measure a Tamil perspective of Auroville which my own fieldwork and contacts in the community would otherwise have led me largely to mere speculation. Likewise, Jessica Namakkal’s (2012) analysis of the ways in which the legacies of colonialism has provided the context for the existence of Auroville in Tamil Nadu was enormously beneficial for untangling some of the issues associated with how Auroville and the surrounding villages relate to each other.
2. Unpeeling an Onion: Home and the Anthropology of Home

It is like trying to describe an onion. It appears simple on the outside, just a spheroidal shape. But it is deceptive, for an onion also has many layers. If we cut it apart, we are left with a pile of onion skins, but the original form has disappeared; if we describe each layer separately, we lose sight of the whole. To complicate matters further, the layers are transparent, so that when we look at the onion we see not just the surface but also something of the interior. (Rybczynski, 1986, p. 230)

There is no clear definition of ‘home.’ Just as Rybczynski’s description of ‘comfort,’ above, a word often associated with ‘home,’ it seems at first an abundantly simple concept but on closer inspection riddled with complexity. Relevant to issues of security, identity, migration, gender, and politics, the complexity of the word ‘home’ is seemingly contradicted by the apparent mundanity of its everyday usage, which makes it an attractive topic of exploration for social scientists. As a result, the volume of academic work on the notion of ‘home,’ particularly over the past three decades, is not inconsiderable. Yet consensus on its meaning remains elusive. Jeanne Moore wrote that there had not yet been a workable inclusive definition of ‘home’ (Moore, 2000, p. 208), and Hazel Easthope calls it “a contested concept in the academic literature” (Easthope, 2004, p. 134). Following Hollander, Moore wonders if there is a concept more “loaded” than ‘home’ (Moore, 2000, p. 208). ‘Home’ is often conflated with ‘house,’ or ‘town,’ that is, understood in terms of the physicality of place in which a person resides, however this is but one aspect of home (cf. Windsong, 2010, p. 207). Shelley Mallett referred to home as “a repository for memories of the lived spaces” (Mallett, 2004, p. 63; see also Doucet, 2013, p. 247) which I believe does not quite go far enough to convey the affect inherent in the word.

The idea of ‘home’ becomes particularly relevant for migrants. In this work I consider all residents of Auroville migrants, whether they have journeyed from the other side of the world or from a neighbouring village. Aurovilians and other long-term residents of the
community have made a decision to call Auroville home, to leave behind the cultural and/or physical comfort of familiarity, the home they were born into, in order to create for themselves a sense of ‘home’ elsewhere. The idea of ‘home’ flows through how Aurovilians think of their community. The most ardent devotees are trying to create a new society, a ‘home’ for a new species, while less spiritual residents may be simply trying to create a sense of ‘home’ for themselves, now. It may mean something different from one Aurovilian to another, but all, I argue, are trying to create the conditions of ‘home’ in Auroville, whatever that may mean to the individual.

Below I give an overview of the academic literature on the concept of ‘home,’ particularly but not exclusively in the social sciences, by expanding on its most thoroughly explored associations and complications. These themes overlap and bleed into one another, for example the belief that ‘home’ is necessarily a spatial concept is not divorced from the importance of the idea of home for migrants. So too, movement and migration are necessarily implicated in the notion of ‘homelands’ and in questions concerning ‘home’ and identity. Though I look at some of the metaphorical onion’s layers, their transparency is apparent, as suggested by Rybczynski.

Following a review of the literature, I outline the methodology of this project. While explaining how I collected data, I also show that the concept of ‘home’ in Auroville was personally important to me too, as an anthropologist fieldworker. In fact, the process of ethnography, that is, my desire for an emic perspective of life in Auroville, and therefore intention to create something of a home for myself in the community, informed the principle themes of this work. Prior to fieldwork, the intention of this research was to investigate understandings and lived experiences of concepts relating to international development, taking into account Aurovilians’ definitions of ‘development’ and how, in an international and multi-cultural context, appropriate development is achieved. I wanted to examine how residents of Auroville, who are, for the most part, noticeably wealthier and have greater opportunities to choose the realities of their lives than the majority of the population of the region, understand the concept of ‘development’ in relation to their own experiences. However, as is frequently the case in ethnographic

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38 In addition to these literature on ‘home,’ I have drawn extensively from writing on lifestyle migration throughout this work, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4; commitment in Chapter 5; expatriate communities, particularly ‘Third Culture Kids,’ in chapter 6; and colonialism in Chapter 7. These additional bodies of literature are introduced where relevant in the following chapters.
research (Schensul et al., 1999, p. 96), time in the field did not mesh with my research expectations and pre-fieldwork research questions. Rather than perceptions of development, I found perceptions of home and belonging to be more dominant themes in conversations and interviews with Aurovililians and other residents of the community. In the context of Auroville and the intentions of most of its residents, ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ are not fields of inquiry incompatible with the idea of development, as will be shown throughout this thesis. Aurovililians are ostensibly trying to create a new and better society. That conversation about ‘development’ often led to themes I relate to ‘home’ such as freedom, identity, shelter, commitment and so on, is not therefore surprising.

Though initially a source of some personal frustration, I believe the change in my research focus while in Auroville demonstrates my changing involvement and attachment to the community. My wariness of right-libertarian values among other issues, some of which are addressed in Chapter 7, prevented me from consideration of formally joining Auroville, however my understanding of the community and sense of community grew the longer I stayed in Auroville, as did my acceptance in the community and therefore right to call myself a part of it. My ethnographic preoccupation with ‘home’ undoubtedly guided my scholarly interest in the community.

**The Concept of ‘Home’**

Yuvan, a long term guest of Auroville, highlighted how the complexity ‘home’ is masked by the instinctive way in which we use the word to signify dwelling place when, during a mid-afternoon conversation, he asked me where I had eaten lunch. After I responded “at home,” Yuvan asked where that was. I told him the name of the sub-community of Auroville I was living in, to which he asked rhetorically “oh, it’s become a home?”

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39 Libertarianism is clearly a core value in Auroville, and the variety of diverse perspectives encompassed in this perspective are represented in sometimes confusingly intermingled ways in the community. Analysis of libertarianism in Auroville could easily provide enough material for another thesis. Suffice to say for now that the critical distance required of my scholarly interest in Auroville was not tempered by my genuine eagerness to both actually feel in some measure at home in Auroville and to be accepted by the community as such.
Voluntary migration to an intentional community suggests conscious and continual examination of the meaning and relevance of the idea of ‘home,’ if not the word itself. Below I discuss ideas related to the notion of ‘home’ I found both most prevalent in the literature and also directly related to the experiences of those I met in Auroville. I consider ‘home,’ firstly, as a place. In such rendering it can be considered a domestic space, as is often done in consideration of ‘home’ as ‘house.’ In relation to the individual, ‘home’ as place is often also instinctively linked to the past, a site of memory and fundamental to biographical history. However, ‘home’ is more than simply a physical space, it is usually understood to be a private space, where we feel safe, where our innermost selves can be expressed without fear which leads, therefore, to contemplation of the more conceptually expansive and descriptive idea of ‘home’ as shelter, both physically and metaphorically. However, this notion masks the potential oppression experienced at or in the home, an issue highlighted by many, particularly feminist, authors and those who write about forced displacement. Importantly for this work, ‘home’ is therefore next discussed in relation to migration. This involves consideration of multiple types of homes, where homelands and rootedness contrast with discovering or making a ‘home’ in a new location. Finally, I discuss some of the literature on how the idea of ‘home,’ whether the one assigned to us or the one we create for ourselves, is implicated in one’s identity, that is, as a lens through which we describe ourselves and are described by others.

**Home as place and past**

Historically, typically conflated with ‘house,’ a far less convoluted word, it is now accepted that this is a very much simplified and frequently inaccurate conception of the highly charged term ‘home.’ As Elena Windsong (2010, p. 208), who researched the idea of home among members of an intentional community which, like Auroville, prohibits private ownership of dwellings wrote, “By reducing a multifaceted concept of home to a simpler experience of house or dwelling, we lose some of the value and insights that place attachment theories on home offer.”

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40 Though real estate agents continue to use the association between the two as a selling point for property. (cf. Dovey, 1985, pp. 53-55; Mallett, 2006, p.66; Moore, 2000, p. 210).
Clearly ‘home’ is understood to be far more nuanced, however most theorists including Windsong still argue that ‘home’ is necessarily geographically located. For example, geographers Blunt and Dowling (2006) argue that, while it is incorrect to conflate house with home, home is indeed a spatial concept. Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1991, pp. 288-289) also argues that home is most certainly a type of space by arguing that one always asks “‘Where is your home?’, not ‘How?’ nor ‘Who?’ nor ‘When?’” “[H]ome is located in space,” she says, “but it is not necessarily a fixed space. [...] home starts by bringing some space under control” (Douglas, 1991, p. 289).

Importantly in the Aurovillian context, the idea of ‘home’ is also inextricably geographically bound in the Tamil culture, and expressed as such through language. The Tamil word akam means, among other things, “interior, heart, self, kind, house, family, place of activity, settlement, [and] earth” (Mines, 2008, p. 203). As a result, we see the importance of home and place to the Tamil identity, which, according to historians of religion, is distinct in Tamil culture compared to Hinduism more generally and to other religious traditions in India (Selby and Viswanathan Peterson, 2008, pp. 7-8). Though located in space, ‘home’ in Tamil culture is a fluid notion, changeable in relation to the wider community, the “world at large,” and the cosmos (Dohmen, 2004, p. 22).

In this thinking we also see the geographically contextual nature of the idea of ‘home,’ which is not limited to Tamil culture. One non-Indian middle-aged adult Child of Auroville, for example, told me that India is always home, irrespective of where he is, however he only considers Auroville his home when he is outside of the community. Demonstrating home as a spatial concept, but variable according to circumstance and perspective, Tucker (1994, p. 182) calls on Havel’s interpretation of ‘home’ which echoes the stoic notion of cosmopolitanism in stating that it is

... an existential experience that can be compared to a set of concentric circles on various levels, from the house, the village or town, the family, the social environment, the professional environment, to the nation including culture

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41 Auroville is located in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, which renders Tamil understandings of ‘home’ relevant to this thesis, especially in consideration of how those who live in the community’s surrounds engage with Aurovilians.
and language (Czech or Slovak), the civic society (Czechoslovak), the civilisation (European), and the world (civilisation and universe).

Though we tend to think of ‘home’ as place of varying specificity, more and more writers on the topic now acknowledge that it is not an actual location which is recognised as ‘home,’ but the feelings associated with certain locations. More than simply place, ‘home’ is understood as a “particularly significant type of place” (Easthope, 2004, p. 128). Home for Heidegger was “the key location in which a spiritual unity is formed between humans and things” (McDowell, 1998, p. 129). While ‘house’ is merely a dwelling, ‘home’ “is understood as an emotionally based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and their dwelling places” (Dovey, 1985, p. 33-34). For Prohansky et al (1983, p. 60) ‘home’ is “without exception […] the ‘place’ of greatest personal significance in one’s life” (see also Easthope, 2004, p. 135). Mallett (2004, p. 63) recounts her memories of the houses she has lived in and their association with the notion of home. “Home is a place,” she says,

...but it is also a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings – a familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived. In my account home is a virtual place, a repository for memories of the lived spaces. It locates lived time and space, particularly intimate familial time and space.

For some, the idea of ‘home’ imbued with a sense of family is particularly anchored in time and space in the memories associated with festivals such as Christmas in Christian cultures (Hauschild, 2001, p. 157), and, presumably, its equivalent family-focussed events in other cultures including Lunar New Year celebrations, Diwali, Hanukkah and so on. Later I will show how Auroville’s twice annual bonfire which marks the founding of the community in February and birthday of Sri Aurobindo in August serves as festival of cultural remembrance alongside Diwali and Christmas which are also widely celebrated in Auroville.
As a repository of memories, the past cannot be delinked from the idea of ‘home.’ This is reflected in how many authors conceptualise the significance of the spatial elements of ‘home’ to individual identity. For example, “home is a place where through primal socialisation individuals receive information that orientates their self-identification” wrote Tea Golob (2013, p. 158). Bourdieu and Wacquant (in Easthope, 2004, pp. 133-134) “argue that we feel ‘at home’ in the fields where our habitus has developed.”

According to Saunders and Williams (1988, p. 82), ‘home’ is “the physical setting through which basic forms of social relations and social institutions are constituted and reproduced” (see also Mallett, 2004, p. 68). Drawing upon Heidegger, for Dovey (1985, p. 42) “The sense of identity embodied in the phenomenon of home has an important component of autochthony.” “Home in this sense,” he says, is “something that grows in a place rather than being imposed from without.” For him, home’s connection to the past is explicit, “who we are” has much to do with “where we have come from” (Dovey, 1985, p. 42).

‘Home,’ then, is typically thought to be the location where one was raised. Many authors write about, or refer to a general impression of, the importance of ‘rootedness’ to a sense of being ‘at home’ (see for example, Ahmed, 1999, p. 339; Doucet, 2013, p. 254; Dovey, 1985, pp. 36-37; Easthope, 2004, p. 133; p. 137; p. 46; Somerville, 1997, pp. 227-228; Tucker, 1994, p. 184). Acknowledging some of anthropology’s troubling past, “Anthropologically relevant references to ‘home,’” wrote Hauschild (2001, p. 155), “initially appeared during the nineteenth century in Anglo-Saxon and German romantic and gothic styles of writing in which it denoted Ur-Heimaten or certain groups of humankind.” Under the South African apartheid regime, he says the term later took on a political meaning in reference to the ‘homelands’ assigned to groups of ‘black’ citizens, “which had the purpose of containing them in reservations or similar constructions of ‘home rule.’” In any case, ‘home’ was seen a matter of autochthony.

As utopians in search of a ‘home,’ I believe that most Aurovilians would challenge the idea of home being embedded exclusively to the past. However, though they are largely reluctant to speak of the past, people who live in Auroville do not entirely leave their previous identities, which are linked to the places from which they came, behind when they join the community. Indeed, it is inevitable that they bring aspects of their previous ‘homes,’ culture and worldviews with them when they choose to live in Auroville. This in
turn influences the collective culture of Auroville, its relationships with others who live in the region, and those who seek to join the community, as is considered in Chapter 7.

Consideration of ‘home’ as related to the past additionally has particular social implications for those who are born and raised in Auroville, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. In fact, for them, ‘home’ is considered the memory of the Auroville of their childhoods rather than the place that Auroville is today. This situates ‘home’ in both place and time (cf. Easthope, 2004, p. 135; Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p. 22). Emphasising the importance of memory on the feeling of home hints at the changing, potentially even fictive, nature of what ‘home’ may be, something I will refer to more in discussion of why people stay in Auroville in Chapters 4 and 5.

Home is not just a place, however that it is found, or not, in place explains to some degree the motivation to seek another. For most migrants, like those who have come to live in Auroville from afar, the spatial element of the idea of ‘home’ is important. However, as much as one’s past is implicated in the idea of ‘home,’ for them, ‘home’ is representative of the present as much as it is embedded in expectations and aspirations for the future. To call a place other than where one was born and raised ‘home’ ties one to the land and its culture. It speaks to one’s sense of self and to some degree objectifies claims of belonging.

**Home as shelter**

For Aviezer Tucker (1994, p. 184), home is

... where we could or can be ourselves, feel at ease, secure, able to express ourselves freely and fully, whether we have actually been there or not. Home is the reflection of our subjectivity in the world. Home is the environment that allows us to be ourselves, allows us to be homely. Since in a home environment we can express our true identity, home is the source of home truth. Home may be an emotional environment, a culture, a geographical location, a political system, a historical time and place etc., and a combination of all the above.
Conflating the notions of ‘home’ and ‘house’ is now rightly recognised as problematically limited, or simply inaccurate in many circumstances, however the metaphor of ‘home’ as a shelter, as “a reflection of our subjectivity in the world” has traction, as will be seen is evidenced in the Aurovilian example. Many Aurovilians refer to the community as their ‘family.’ Auroville is home because they have created relationships with others in the community which resemble relationships of kin. The suggestion of ‘family’ gives a measure of legitimacy of belonging, but also an impression of security, of shelter, provided by the physical, social and spiritual environment.

Contemplating the obviously emotionally changed notion of ‘home,’ Doucet (2013, p. 247) who argued it is “an act of simultaneous courage and folly to attach one’s heart to any place we live.” Nevertheless, for many the words of Maya Angelou (1986) who describes the “aching longing” for ‘home’ which is understood as “the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned” ring true. From this perspective, ‘home’ is where we return to, where we want to believe we can be ourselves, at ease in our environment. It immediately conjures feelings of warmth, of harmony and peace. It suggests privacy and security as well as family and intimacy (Moore, 2000, p. 210).

According to Sara Ahmed (1999, p. 339),

> Home is implicitly constructed as a purified space of belonging in which the subject is too comfortable to question the limits or borders of her or his experience, indeed, where the subject is so at ease that she or he does not think.

This is how we want to think of home, and descriptions of home as analogous with ‘shelter’ and ‘security’ appear repeatedly in the literature. For example as “a place of security within an insecure world, a place of certainty within doubt, a familiar place in a strange world, a sacred place in a profane world” (Dovey, 1985, p. 46); and as a “hearth, a haven, a shelter, or the homeland” (Doucet, 2013, p. 247).

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42 These relationships are mitigated by individual experiences of the community and, in particular, length of association in terms of one’s own biography. This in turn influences the degree of sanctuary associated with past memories or salvation associated with the future. This becomes clearer in discussion of the relationship to Auroville of adult Children of Auroville, discussed in particular in Chapter 6.
This sense of security associated with ‘home’ is, however, based on a sometimes spurious or illusory “dialectic between inside and outside” (Dovey, 1985, p. 46). Typically ‘home’ and ‘work’ are seen as diametrically opposite. Home is the private sphere while work is public. Home is relaxation and comfort while work is productive. Our sense of security is based on this dichotomy which is called into question in many instances of usage of the word ‘home.’ A nursing ‘home,’ for example, is anything but private (Doucet, 2013, p. 248; see also Mallett, 2004, p. 69; Moore, p. 212; Somerville, 1989, p. 114). In the Auroville context too, where work is used as a mode of self-discovery and growth (cf. Leard 2011, p.13), this dialectic does not make sense.

Moreover, the idea of home as a place of warm and comfortable familiarity, where one can be at peace, masks the insecurity of home for many people, particularly women and children, as argued by feminist writers since the 1970s who identify the home as a potential site of fear and violence. Though men may be more likely to risk violence in the public sphere, “women are more likely to be raped, assaulted and even killed at home than in any other place” (Goldsack cited in Mallett, 2004, p. 72; see also Moore, 2000, p. 212; Sabra, 2008, pp. 85-87). Drawing from some of this work from the 1970s and 1980s Mallett (2004, p. 75) points out that for some ‘home’ may be anything but a place of shelter. Rather, it may be, she writes, “a site of oppression, tyranny and patriarchal domination of women”. Additionally, typically thought to be a feminine space, for women in particular, the home has historically been, and continues to be a place of work as well as abode (cf. Gurney, 1997, p. 375; Després, 1991, p. 106; Mallett, 2004, p. 72, 76; Sabra, 2008, pp. 85-87; Saunders and Williams, 1988, p. 91).

We also need to be critical of the connection between home and family for similar reasons. The construction of the home as haven is “an historic and culturally relative idea which is integrally linked to equally fluid concepts of the family” (Mallett, 2004, p. 71; see also Blunt and Dowling, 2006, pp. 16-18). For example, historian Tamara Hareven (1991. P. 258) contends that this idea of home dates only to mid-18th Century Western Europe as a development

closely linked to the new ideals of domesticity and privacy that were associated with the characteristics of the modern family—a family that was
childcentered, private, and in which the roles of husband and wife were segregated into public and domestic spheres, respectively.

Drawing on Hareven’s work, Mallett (2004, p. 71) teases this out further, stating that the notion of home as related to privacy is

... a consequence of industrialization, urbanization and the related transformation of family life and work. Prior to industrialization work was primarily situated in households which comprised family members and other non-kin workers and boarders. The organization of these households was predicated on sociability rather than privacy. As industrialization took hold, work was relocated away from the home and, in time, the State assumed greater responsibility for education and health care. As a consequence, households were increasingly seen as a domestic retreat for the nuclear family.

It is also around this time, notes Moore (2000, pp. 208-209), that the meaning of ‘home’ in the English language changed from the place, township or country of birth, to the dwelling or family house in which one lives. This shift, she says, is reflected in the usage of the word in romantic literature and poetry of the time. Still further, some authors note that the home has never been strictly defined as either public or private when there are both public and private realms of homes and ‘public’ buildings (see, for example, Blunt and Dowling, 2006, pp. 16-18; Mallett, 2004, p. 69; pp. 71-72).

Clearly ‘home’ does not always provide autonomy, nor the comfort and protection with which it is habitually associated and this is important to highlight. Those who write about forced migration and its causes, domestic violence and other abuses recognise that “[a]n idealized notion of home as a physical space of safety and comfort is only partial, exclusionary, and constructed through multiple erasures” (Sabra, 2008, p. 82). Mary Douglas (1991, pp. 287-288) uses the phrase “the tyranny of the home” in the opening line of her article attempting to define the space of ‘home,’ clearly gesturing to the complications inherent in the term otherwise often unthinkingly and
unproblematically positive. “As to those who claim that the home does something stabilizing or deepening or enriching for the personality, there are as many who will claim that it cripples and stifles” she writes.

In the example of migration, often one’s memories of ‘home’ are “nostalgic and sentimental,” writes Mallet (2004, p. 64), however this does not mean that ‘home’ in the sense of ‘homeland’ is necessarily remembered positively. In a world of movement, both voluntary, as is the case in Auroville, and involuntary, we need to think critically about the concept of ‘home.’ In Chapter 7 in particular, I address issues of power relations in and around Auroville and show that while indeed ‘home’ can be a problematic notion for those who have come to Auroville from afar, for the community’s Tamil neighbours the legacy of colonialism problematises and politicises the meaning of ‘home’ even further. For first nations people, such as the Tamil people living in the region of Auroville, voluntary migration in order to overcome oppression or to assert one’s identity may be neither desirable nor practical. For others however, it may be that searching for, perhaps even finding or creating, a ‘home’ which corresponds with or reinforces the positive connotations of the idea ‘home’ is a possibility.

**Home and migration**

Notions of home as fixed and directly related to our past, discussed briefly above, are now largely considered, firstly, historically and culturally inaccurate, and, secondly, increasingly irrelevant (cf. Golob, 2013, p. 156). This is exemplified in the Auroville example. As I stated previously, in this thesis I consider all first generation Aurovilians to be migrants, whether they have travelled from the other side of the world to live in Auroville, or from as close as one of the Tamil villages whose land overlaps that of Auroville. In both cases, as will be shown, the individual has willingly traversed a social and cultural distance in order to make Auroville, a place evidently distinct from their previous place of residence, their ‘home.’ Tucker (1994, p. 186) argues strongly that

...assumptions that the land of our birth is for some reason our home, or that our home is determined by our ethnicity, that there is an inevitable and involuntary connection between geography, ethnicity and what we are and
where we can be fulfilled, are based at best on misunderstanding of language, and at worse, on deliberate misuse of it for justification of morally questionable political decisions.

Movement towards belonging in a home place of one’s choosing does not, however, necessarily diminish the applicability of the description ‘home’ nor its significance for the places from which one has come and did not choose. Many migrants, including Aurovilians, merge everyday cultural practices from the places from which they came with cultural practices of the place in which they live, a topic explored to some degree in Chapter 7 (cf. Ralph and Staeheli 2011, p. 521). Accordingly, in consideration of the idea of ‘home,’ there has been a shift from the idea of “bounded socio-cultural units” towards recognition of the increasing prevalence of people who relocate throughout their lives over varying distances “and who imagine communities of belonging (and invent their traditions) on their way” (Golob, 2013, p. 156). This includes people who may move between multiple homes, and those for whom movement itself “can be one’s very home” (Golob, 2013, p. 156; see also Ralph and Staeheli, 2011, p. 521).

For example, Ralph and Staeheli (2011, p. 521) wrote about the concept of ‘home’ as both rooted and mobile using several examples including that of Italians living in Morocco who import cooking ingredients from each place into the other, just as many Aurovillian residents merge everyday cultural practices from the places from which they came with cultural practices of the place in which they live, a topic explored to some degree in Chapter 7. They contend “that the challenge for those studying migration today is to conceptualise together this tension between home’s mobile and sedentarist aspects” (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011, p. 517). For them (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011, p. 518), through migrants we can better understand the meaning of the concept of ‘home.’ It is, they write,

...accordion-like, in that it stretches to expand migrants outwards to distant and remote places, while also squeezing to embed them in their proximate and immediate locales. In this way, home seems to extend outward and to be mobile, but also to be grounded and sedentary. Such a conceptualisation
better reflects the ways in which many migrants understand and experience home.

The idea of ‘home’ is fraught for many migrants. Searching for a ‘home’ may be forced, undertaken by choice due to perceived restrictions on the ability to feel ‘at home’ in the place of birth, or simply the result of wanderlust. Typically, Aurovilians fit into the second and third of these categories.\(^43\) For those who make a home in Auroville as an end result of what was initially simple wanderlust, the accordion-like notion of ‘home’ as described by Ralph and Staeheli is particularly pertinent. Though, in some cases becoming Aurovilian has resulted in fraying of familial relationships (or even cutting ties entirely) and connections associated with their previous place of residence, irrespective of the physical distance of relocation. For such residents of Auroville, whose migration may have been motivated by constraints and restrictions of their original ‘home,’ ‘home’ may be a more charged concept.

Some migrants experience a post migration lack of sense of home (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011, p. 522). Attempts to create a sense of ‘home’ within an unfamiliar and culturally distinct environment may in fact lead “to the creation of a new community of strangers,” a common bond with those others who have “‘shared’ the experience of living overseas,” as argued by Sara Ahmed (1999, p. 336). To some degree, this in fact is what Aurovilians have done. Their common estrangement from previous ‘homes,’ as much as their shared ideological aspirations, creates affective bonds to the community of Auroville, as described in Chapter 5.

Through travel and migration we find new homes, and, as a result, our understanding of the concept of ‘home’ changes, becomes more fluid. Rather than something fixed and determined by an accident of birth, ‘home’ can be conceptualised as something actively sought to align with self-perceived identity which may not be supported, for a variety of reasons, by the community of birth. In this sense, ‘home’ becomes future-oriented.

\(^{43}\) Despite a few Aurovilians aligning themselves with the first, that is, ‘forced,’ by describing themselves as ‘refugees.’ This is clearly a problematic label for most members of this community, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.
Referring to more voluntary migrations as well as forced, Tucker (1994, p. 186) argues that we are “a migratory species,” and that an

... ability to migrate has been one of our basic assets of survival, allowing us to free ourselves of geographic constraints, from bondage to the earth. [...] this home-searching is a basic trait of being human. (see also Mallett, 2004, p. 77)

This ability to seek, possibly find, a new ‘home’ also allows greater exploration of one’s identity as it relates to ‘home.’

Identity and a quest for home

One can be physically ‘home’ but emotionally elsewhere. “Home is thus a complex intersection of geography and feelings of belonging” wrote Amanda du Preez (2015, p. 794) who analysed the application of the concept of ‘home’ to contemporary global mobility. Ralph and Staeheli (2011, p. 517) showed similarly, using the film The Wizard of Oz as a metaphor to point to migrants’ “complicated relationship with home.” In this story, Dorothy “needs to escape” home,

... in part to save her dog, but also to develop into an adult. Yet she is loathe to break ties completely for fear of losing her sense of self and for fear of losing touch with the people closest to her.

They mention that there is a question at the end of the film as to whether or not Dorothy ever actually left home, however I would add that the story offers implicit suggestion that ‘home’ is found within, for Dorothy it is a frame of mind, or attitude to a location, rather than the location itself. For Thomas Doucet (2013, p. 253), home is “space in the center of the eye of the storm, without nuance and movement.” For Dorothy, the storm ended as she located herself within her surroundings. The story suggests that becoming the best version of oneself, and finding ‘home,’ does not require journeying to magical lands far away, but instead demands self-reflection. I believe that most Aurovilians would agree with this in principle. However, for them, the places from
which they came constitute the storm and Auroville the centre which allows (even
demands) introspection.

Though, as discussed above, there is much written about the shadow issues potentially
related to the experience of ‘home,’ we are unable to escape the overwhelming
apparent need to associate the idea of ‘home’ with its positive attributes, especially as it
relates to identity and future aspirations. The idea of ‘home’ as a centring force features
heavily in the literature. For example, “To be at home” writes Dovey (1985, p. 36), “is to
know where you are; it means to inhabit a secure center and to be oriented in space.”
“People’s sense of self is expressed through home” argue Blunt and Dowling (2006, p. 9).
“Home,” they say, “is hearth, an anchoring point through which humans are centred.”
Centring ‘home’ in this way gives it a sense of gravitas, of authenticity, and of
biographical primacy. Brian Hoey (2014, p. 117) connects this search for an authentic
self, or a better version of oneself to lifestyle migration by invoking the idea of the
therapeutic landscape, “a healing experience through personal connection to place.”
Recalling an encounter Michael Jackson had during his ethnographic fieldwork in Central
Australia, he recounts a journal entry he made, writing “Home is where you feel free to
be yourself, without apology or doubt” (Jackson, 1995, p. 47). And later, “If home is
where a person is at peace with himself, where he can honestly say there is nowhere
else he would rather be, then the desert had become my home,” (Jackson, 1995, p. 51).
Each of these sentiments are echoed in the depictions members of the Auroville
community gave me of their connection to the community.

Accounting for the interest anthropologists have in the concept of ‘home,’ Easthope
(2004, p. 135) writes

In understanding a person’s connection with their home, then, we go some
way towards understanding their social relations, their psychology and their
emotions and we can begin to understand their ‘lived experiences.’

“People refer to their home as a symbol of how they see themselves and want to be seen
by others” (Després 1991, p. 98). Our homes reflect our “tastes, interests, and
character” writes Després before adding, “After the body itself, the home is seen as the
most powerful extension of the psyche” (Després, 1991, p. 100; see also Tucker 1994,
Mallet, 2004, p. 82). Though Després is writing in particular about home as house and refers to the furnishings of the place where one lives, she could just as easily be referring to the place one calls home as township, city or country, or even, importantly, social circle. The importance of ‘home’ as an expression of identity is a notion I found very apparent in Aurovilians’ accounts of Auroville as home, as will be seen in the remainder of this thesis, but particularly in Chapter 4. The community is where people feel free to be themselves, or at least discover who that might be. Being Aurovilian acts both as a personal affirmation of authenticity as well as a projection of one’s values. Being Aurovilian says something about who they are, it announces to the world something of the values of the individual without need for personal introduction. Importantly for Aurovilians, Auroville as a value reference is also about movement. It is about looking to the future and seeking alternatives to the present.

For Aurovilians, a sense of self is derived through both “lived and imaginative experiences of home” (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p. 24, 254), where “Home reflects both reality and ideal” (Moore, 2000, p. 209). For Tucker (1994, p. 181), this multivariate aspect of how we experience ‘home’ is explicit in the very ability to choose another home. “Our actual home is the result of our efforts to reach our ideal home, departing from our natural home” he writes, adding,

> Our particular ideal home is as voluntary as our personality, being its ideal fulfilment in the world. Our actual home tends to be the best approximation of our ideal home, under a given set of constraining circumstances. (Tucker, 1994, p. 184).

In so writing, Tucker highlights the potentially utopian aspect of the very concept of ‘home.’ While the search for ‘home’ might “be a human universal” (Hauschild, 2001, p. 155; see also Tucker 1994), it may be that “the idea is never totally realized, as human fragility and dispersal drives us always and again away from our homes” (Hauschild, 2001, p. 155). According to Tucker (1994, p. 186), this search for home “may end in homelessness rather than in homecoming.” Homelessness in this sense “goes much deeper” than a mere lack of place of abode he tells us, it is “a state of lack of self-
fulfilment, control of one’s physical environment, lack of emotional comfort, absence of intellectual stimuli, state of utter social loneliness” (Tucker, 1994, p. 184).

For Mallett (2004, pp. 69-70) the idea of the “real” home as oppositional to the “ideal,” as proposed by Tucker, is “at odds” with other researchers who propose that the real and ideal homes are in tension (rather than oppositional). Reflecting upon various conceptions of the idea of ‘home,’ Jackson (1995, pp. 122-123), for example, writes that it is “a double-barreled word.” It is, he says,

... always lived as a relationship, a tension. Sometimes it is between the place one starts out from and the places one puts down roots. Sometimes it is between the experience of a place when one is young and the experience of the same place when one is old. Home [...] always begets its own negation. Home may evoke security in one context and seem confining in another. Our consciousness shifts continually between home and the world, as those Gestalt images where figure becomes ground and ground becomes figure. (see also Mallett 2004, p. 70)

I believe, however, the distinction between the real and ideal is important, irrespective of whether the two are oppositional or in tension. ‘Home’ may be a goal, an experience of feeling for which one searches rather than something possessed unquestionably as a result of life history. The feeling of being at peace within one’s self may disappear and reappear or change over time. Much like the elephant in Saxe’s fable, the identity “of a place must be constructed and negotiated” (Mallett, 2004, p. 70). The concept of ‘home’ is accommodated in a place, but it is also subjective and constructed according to the needs of the individual at any given point in time. Referring to claims of Ulf Hannerz, Nira Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 11) notes this bivariate nature of ‘home,’ that it is

...essentially a contrastive concept, linked to some notion of what it means to be away from home. It can involve a sense of rootedness in a socio-geographic site or be constructed as an intensely imagined affiliation with a distant local where self-realization can occur [emphasis added].
Belonging consists of two interrelated states, being and longing (see, for example, Probyn, 1996; Ralph and Staeheli, 2011, p. 524). Belonging may take people away from ‘home’ towards a new home, the etymology insinuating potentially unrealised arrival. “In today’s usage,” according to Moore (2000, p. 209), “longing for home has become a central part of our everyday understanding of the word.” Much like the Aurovilian quest, for Ernst Bloch (1986 [1959]) hope is a function of utopia, the desire to be other than the present is the foundation of the intention of a better life, a quest for heimat, of being at home in the world (see also, Ram, 2008, p. 85; Levitas, 2007, p. 290).

Ahmed writes “To be at home is the absence of desire, and the absence of an engagement with others through which desire engenders movement across boundaries” (Ahmed 1999, p. 339). Indeed, as I believe Ahmed is suggesting in her writing about migrants and nomadism, those journeying in search of ‘home’ may be fully cognisant of the potential utopianism of such pursuit. In lieu of expectation of finding ‘home’ as it is described here, they may accept a sense of ‘at homeness’ found among others undertaking a similar quest. This, I will show in this thesis, speaks directly to the experience of Auroville’s residents. Once again invoking the intuitively positive, almost romantic associations of the notion of ‘home,’ linking ‘home’ to both identity and desire makes it a future oriented phenomenon. Contradicting Mary Douglas, above, and using the community of Auroville as a case study, I will show that it might just be possible to ask, “what is your home?” followed by the subjectively fragmented question, “(where) have you found it”

Starting with the methodology of this study in the next section of this chapter, which in essence speaks to my own connection with the idea of ‘home’ in Auroville, in the remainder of this thesis I explore these understandings of ‘home’ as told to me, witnessed and experienced in Auroville. In particular, I show how Auroville, as home, is experienced as tied to a particular space, despite community members’ assertion that it is possible to be Aurovilian anywhere, and even some people’s suggestion that they do not feel at home in Auroville. Community members told me that the site of the community is ‘charged,’ particularly the amphitheatre, the location of the Matrimandir, banyan tree and urn. In Auroville, attendance at the twice-yearly bonfires, described in Chapter 5, is one of the few traditions in the community which ground the collective experience in a form of historical ritual. Taking place in the amphitheatre, the bonfire
service serves to centre Auroville’s philosophies and activity in the geographic heart of the community, a place as well as an ideal. While it was possible to live an Aurovilian life elsewhere, people told me, this place was more conducive to doing so as a result of being infused with the presence of the Mother, and, most importantly, the collective energy of others striving for the same thing in the same location. As a result, I show, Auroville is experienced by its members as a shelter. For some however, it is also a site of domination. It is associated with familial relationships, real and fictive. Though not all Aurovilians journeyed to the community from great physical distance, all of those who arrived as adults are in fact migrants. More importantly, to call Auroville ‘home’ is a choice that all Aurovilians have made. It is both a grounding place in which residents’ identity is formed as well as a projection of future identity and stability. Auroville, as ‘home,’ is both a reflection of a reality and an ideal for community members.

**Methodology and Anthropology of ‘Home’**

...anthropology is itself a product of an age of trespass and travel, a world in which frontiers no longer contain those born within them. Crossing erstwhile boundaries in order to transmute local into global knowledge, anthropology has usurped the restive role which the German Romantic poet, Novalis, accorded philosophy: the urge to be at home everywhere. There may be something heroic about this, as Susan Sontag suggests. Rather than be oppressed by the intellectual vertigo of living without determinate borders, one celebrates the possibilities that are opened up for understanding oneself in otherness. (Jackson, 1995, p. 4)

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44 Indeed, many people spoke of the possibility of doing so and seemed somewhat non-committal to their futures in Auroville, as discussed in Chapter 4. I was told of the importance of the principles of Auroville, of striving for authenticity and self-betterment, of the values of sustainability coupled with ‘unending education’ and ‘constant progress’ (Auroville Charter), and of recognising the self in others. All values Aurovilians wish to see in others irrespective of location or ‘home.’

45 The Mother did not actually ever visit Auroville, though as Auroville is a result of her vision and efforts, her presence is recognised throughout.
Following a brief visit to Auroville in 2010\textsuperscript{46} to determine the feasibility of this study, I commenced fieldwork in Auroville in January 2011 and departed in December 2011, with an additional short visit in December 2012 to January 2013. During this time, either I or my partner, or both of us, took part in daily life which, in Auroville, has much to do with work and learning.

Long term visitors to Auroville, including researchers, are expected to contribute to the community for the duration of their stay in some immediately tangible way, as do permanent Aurovilians. Written or verbal commitment to do so is required before an invitation letter is provided enabling a visa of longer duration than is typically allowed for tourist visits to India. Contribution is generally through participation in volunteer work with one or more Aurovilian work units, of which there are many varied positions.

During my eleven months in Auroville I held two volunteer positions, one short (one month) and one longer term (ten months). The first was as an administrative assistant with the central town planning group called L’avenir, and the second placement entailed interviewing representatives from Auroville’s work units about their human resource needs and then writing brief but detailed articles about each unit for the Auroville Learning website managed by Savi\textsuperscript{47} (formerly AVIS), the Auroville Volunteer and Internship Service. Happily, each of these positions required that I meet and work with a large number of people in the Auroville community, and these contacts facilitated introductions to a great many more. My partner, who joined me for the duration of my fieldwork, also worked daily for the duration of our time in the community on one Aurovilian-run organic vegetable farm, and for several months spent two to three afternoons per week working at construction tasks on a second Aurovilian farm. His work in the community facilitated introductions to additional people who I may not have met otherwise. As a result of the contacts and friendships we made I also found myself agreeing at various times to additional shorter ad hoc tasks on a voluntary basis such as assisting with the planning and running of a sustainability festival, writing fundraising

\textsuperscript{46}This was in fact my second trip to Auroville, having briefly visited a friend living in the community in 2003. It was this first earlier visit which piqued my interest in lifestyle migration, intentional communities and Auroville.

\textsuperscript{47}“Savi” is a transliteration of the Tamil word for ‘key,’ with the intended implication that through Savi, Auroville guests can access the key to being a part of the community.
and promotional copy, and proofreading and editing a number of promotional and administrative texts. In addition to our volunteer work placements, my partner and I participated in classes and workshops including organic farming, creative writing, wind power (making a functional wind turbine), earth brick construction, bamboo furniture design and build, Iyengar yoga, vegan cooking, Tamil cooking, and several introductory courses on the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

As an ethnographic study my primary research method was participant observation, which aids in the appreciation of participants’ subjective experiences and understandings relevant to the research topics. Detailed fieldnotes were compiled by me throughout the duration of my time in Auroville, and these comprise my own reflections as a participant in the community as well as excerpts from community newsletters and commentary on other public media with regard to Auroville and my research.

During my time in Auroville fifty-six people agreed to contribute to my research through further discussion of their opinions and experiences in semi-structured interviews. This is approximately twice the number of interviews I anticipated conducting at the outset of my period of fieldwork, however I was happy for the willing participation of so many people. As hinted at above, each stage of data collection was informed by the previous, which resulted in a greater number of interviews than anticipated, meaning data analysis occurred largely in conjunction with data collection, a feature typical of qualitative analysis informed by grounded theory (Ezzy, 2002, p. 73). Using a combination of purposive and theoretical sampling methods, more specifically “reputational case selection” and “chain referral selection” (Schensul et al., 1999, p. 240), I found, during the course of my data collection, that I wanted to give voice to a range of different people in the community including Aurovilians and non-Aurovilians, people of different ages, of different backgrounds, and people who had lived in Auroville for different periods of time. This necessarily increased the number of people I needed to speak to. Strauss and Corbin (cited in Ezzy 2002, p. 90) note that “constant comparison” is central to this methodology. To summarise, Ezzy (2002, p. 90) writes,

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48 Auroville is a community of approximately two thousand permanent members, however a great deal more than this comprise the fabric of the community. There are 'guests' who live in Auroville or on its periphery and participate in the community’s social life as permanently as official community members.
Comparisons allow data to be grouped and differentiated, as categories are identified and various pieces of data are grouped together. Through the comparative process, events that at first seemed entirely unrelated may be grouped together as different types of the same category, or events that seemed similar may be categorised differently.

Interviewees were recruited through social and professional networks which arose through the course of living and working (as a volunteer) in the community. Though of varied backgrounds, ages and lengths of time associated with Auroville, people who participated in this research were of course limited to the people I had encounters with through the course of living in Auroville, and as such, the opinions presented here may be a reflection of my own background and path through the community as much of the participants themselves. Key community gatekeepers met particularly through the course of my volunteer work with L’avenir and Savi as well as my friendly relationships with people generally and, serendipitously, with a few people in particular who proved to be well known and revered members of the Auroville community facilitated an ongoing rapport with other community members (cf. Schensul et al., 1999, p. 83).

Interviewees included Aurovilians, Newcomers, long term guests to Auroville and people from the surrounding villages; people aged from their early twenties to an octogenarian;\(^{49}\) people from every inhabited continent; pioneering Aurovilians; people who had been born and raised in Auroville; and more recent arrivals. I did not restrict my interviews to Aurovilian participants because as much as I was interested in their motivations and experiences of Auroville, I was also interested in and wanted to give

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\(^{49}\) Unfortunately, at the outset of my research on Auroville I did not consider the usefulness and weight of the youth voice in Auroville and therefore did not request permission from my university’s ethics department (for whom research involving minors is considered of higher risk and requires greater explanation and care in the planning process) to access this particular cohort of Aurovilians via interview. As a result, I did not formally speak to the youth of Auroville, that is, people under the age of 18, and so this important voice is missing from my work. Especially because of the importance with which the community views this group of individuals, the ‘future of the community’ as it were, future research with this group of Aurovilians would likely prove interesting and worthwhile.

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Auroville is built on the backs of its enormous Tamil labour force and the significant minority population of overseas volunteers and researchers as much as it is the dreams and activity of Aurovilians, and so it is my opinion that the voices of these non-Aurovilian cohorts are as valid as those of Aurovilians.
voice to the opinions of others associated with Auroville who for a variety of reasons either have not, or have not been able to, officially join Auroville.

Below, I have tabled interviewees by passport country and status in Auroville, by age and status in Auroville, and by years in Auroville and status. As qualitative research, these figures should not be of huge import, and indeed, when compared to Auroville’s population data, they show that I did not seek statistical accuracy in selecting interview candidates. However, they do show to some limited degree the range of backgrounds of participants included in this research, and, as a likely result, a range of informing perspectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Aurovilian</th>
<th>Newcomer</th>
<th>Villager</th>
<th>Guest</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australasia</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Interviewees by the geographical region of their passport country and status in Auroville

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Aurovilian</th>
<th>Newcomer</th>
<th>Villager</th>
<th>Guest</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50s</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>70s</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Interviewees by age and status in Auroville

50 See table in Appendix 6 for Auroville population data, also found on the Auroville website (Auroville, 2018a).

51 ‘Auroville’ is listed as ‘country of origin’ for adult Children of Auroville to distinguish this group of Aurovilians who spent their formative childhood years in the community and who did not make an adult decision to join the community (this decision was made by their parents) from adult arrivals. Also, many of the Children of Auroville have more than one passport and national affiliation due to their parents having met in Auroville.
Interviews were limited to the use of the English language due to my inability to communicate with fluency in another language. This posed little problem as, as stipulated in Auroville’s joining requirements, “English is the common language for collective communication in Auroville,” and Newcomers are therefore encouraged (if not required) to “acquire basic communication skills in English.” English is therefore spoken widely by most residents of the community. English is also a national language of India, and due to their proximity to the international community, English is spoken widely by the Tamil population of the region. However there were a couple of potential willing research participants from the local region who were regrettably excluded from the research by necessity due to communication difficulties.

Interviewees were provided with an information statement in advance of interview dates which was also summarised verbally at the commencement of interviews. The information statement reiterated my cover story (see Schensul et al., 1999, p. 88), gave a brief overview of my research interests in Auroville and outlined confidentiality concerns. As explained to participants, my interest in Auroville was to “explore and highlight perceptions and experiences of development, of equality and of ‘unity through diversity’ as observed and lived by community members.” Despite my changing interests in the community, the information statement with this research description remained current and did not require modification except to add my local mobile phone number.

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52 See the Auroville Admission Policy, downloadable from the Auroville website (Auroville Entry Service, n.d.)
Interviews were largely unstructured, however a brief interview guide ensured key topics were raised in each interview. While I did have this guide, I found it more conducive to building rapport with my interviewees and conversing in a meaningful way for myself and my interviewees to allow them to guide me to questions through broad conversation rather than ask a list of predetermined questions in a specific order. According to Patton (1980, p. 161), “the task undertaken by the interviewer is to make it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world.” Or, as Ray Madden (2010, p. 73) writes, asking good ethnographic questions interrogates...

...in a manner that draws out descriptive, structural and comparative responses from the interviewee. A good ethnographic interview will give the ethnographer insight into how a participant sees the world in analytical, typological, and relational ways, and such information helps to create an insight into the participant’s world-view (Weltanschauung).

With this in mind, as much as possible I would allow interviewees to speak about Auroville freely and would interject questions as appropriate when needed to either nudge conversation towards a certain topic or expand upon the current. I found people were enthusiastically effusive in their discussion of what it means to be Aurovilian (this includes opinions from non-Aurovilians), both positive and negative, what it means to live in Auroville, what community entails, and how Auroville differs from elsewhere. This, obviously, affected my own interests in Auroville.

Some questions, or topics of conversation, I did try to cover with all participants included asking each to relate their motivations for joining the community and their experiences of living in the community. Participants were asked to comment on ideas of diversity and equality, and upon their perceptions of development and social wellbeing as observed and lived in their community and in India more broadly. I also asked all whether Auroville could be anywhere else in the world and whether it is important that Auroville is in India. If so, I wanted to know why, and whether this importance lay with India or Auroville.

Inevitably the topic of how one joins Auroville and how Auroville welcomes new members would arise in interviews. At this point I attempted to gauge reactions to the
suggestion of a possible Exit Service to complement the Entry Service and found a wide variety of unpredictable responses from “of course!” to “that would be ridiculous!” to “hmmm, a good idea...” I asked Aurovilians what it means to be a true Aurovilian and asked if there were any people, places or ideas which embodied this concept. Answers were vague, but, people did tend to agree that it is possible to be a true Aurovilian without actually being accepted as such by the bureaucracy and without actually living in Auroville. This shows the idea of community is not based upon geography or even personal relations, and some suggested it could make a mockery of the selection process.

Ray Madden (2010, p. 33) tells us “the things that make ethnography valuable to the social scientist are the very same aspects that can render it as a negative experience for the participants in ethnographic research” and reminds us of an “ethnographic ethics dictum,” “first, do no harm.” The question of to whom I was responsible in working on this project inevitably played on my mind throughout fieldwork through to the final conclusion (see Madden, 2010, p. 89). My initial interests in what we come to think of as ‘development’ caused me to ponder whether the answer to this question might be the people of Auroville or the people affected by Auroville, particularly when my understandings might lead me to be critical of some participants’ views. In reality however, not all interviewees gave positive accounts of Aurovillian life, ideals and lessons. In fact, I found those most critical of the community tended to be Aurovilians themselves, rather than non-Aurovilians, and that those both most cynical of its ideals and disappointed in its direction tended to be the people who had been raised in the community from childhood.

At times I sensed from my research participants that my active and enthusiastic participation in the community was understood as active and enthusiastic support for the community and its ideals, perhaps even assumption of potential desire to one day become Aurovilian. This was never actually the case, however I did at times feel unable to correct research participants for fear of losing their trust. While I am not an enthusiastic supporter of all that is Auroville, neither do I have an aversion to many of the ideals of its members. There is much merit in Auroville and I believe the intentions of the vast majority of inhabitants are sincere. As already mentioned, I actually found the people most critical of Auroville were Aurovilians themselves.
In answering questions about my research, I have encountered many people who seem to have an almost visceral aversion to the idea of Auroville. This includes guests to Auroville I met while on fieldwork, people I have conversed with outside of Auroville and who are familiar with the community, and people who have not heard of Auroville before but have formed an opinion based on assumptions they hold about intentional communities more broadly. I believe much of this stems from a general distrust of Utopia and utopian ideals, as previously discussed.

To ensure participant anonymity, fieldnotes, interview recordings, summaries and transcripts were, and continue to be, password protected and kept securely on a standard laptop computer. Participants and other members of the community were not informed of the identities of other participants in this study. Names and other clearly identifying information has been changed or removed from reporting of data. In order to protect the anonymity of several otherwise easily identified participants, some of the personalities appearing below are actually composite characters, that is, amalgamations of two or more individuals. I have done this only in instances where doing so does not jeopardise the overall point being made, information, or messages conveyed to me by community members.

Interviewing community members on an almost daily basis for my volunteer work, which was also enormously beneficial for getting to know people in the community, inevitably meant that my work for the community and my academic fieldwork often became somewhat enmeshed and the outcomes of my fieldwork became largely interview driven, in evidence in this thesis. However, my relationship with many of my interviewees went beyond merely the duration of the interview. These are people I had multiple interactions with throughout the course of living, working and socialising in Auroville, giving strong basis for evaluation and analysis of their comments and more nuanced view of the biographical narratives recounted to me.

The topics of community belonging and inclusion and exclusion were very apparent to me throughout my year in Auroville. I arrived in January and the peak tourist season. Auroville was full of people, the weather was perfect and there were lots of organised learning and entertainment activities to fill each day. I quickly made a lot of friends and had a busy social life. However, it did not take long before I realised none of my new friends were permanent residents of Auroville. Like me, all were guests of varying
duration. Over several weeks, helped by my capacity as a volunteer worker in an Auroville service unit located in the Town Hall where I was able to meet a lot of people in a short period of time, I soon became more or less proficient at identifying Aurovilians from guests. If unconfirmed through actual introduction, I could reasonably accurately spot the open and smiley guests from Aurovilians with their heads down, avoiding eye contact and rushing through public spaces. I spoke of this with other guests and found they, more often than not, thought the same. One told me “there is not a lot of joy residing here;” she asked me “have you seen an Aurovilian laugh? I haven’t.”

Acceptance took time, but it seemed to happen suddenly. The ‘tourist season’ ends each year in March. The weather gets hot and those who have no need to stay leave for more comfortable climes. As a relatively small community, the same faces are seen around the town and quickly become recognisable. By the beginning of April I found people who had previously been reluctant to acknowledge my presence would smile, possibly wave, and occasionally say hello or even introduce themselves. It was as though at some point I was recognised as no longer a transient tourist, I was prepared to ‘stick it out’ through the difficult months of summer when even the locals who can afford to leave do. I had read and been told of other long-term visitors’ accounts of similar experiences.

If, as Jackson (1995 p. 163) tells us, fieldwork is “a method for putting oneself in the place of another, and extending one’s social capabilities,” and “it becomes a mode of using our experience in other worlds to reflect critically on our own,” then I feel my year in Auroville was a success. By the last two months of my time in Auroville, I felt I had finally become a member of the Auroville community and expanded my social circle to include permanent residents on the Masterlist. I was mistaken for an Aurovilian by guests a number of times (hopefully not for my lack of apparent joy!). Humorously, guests to Auroville seemed disappointed to find that I was not Aurovilian and, as an inquisitive long-term guest myself, I understood their desire to meet and socialise with a ‘real life’ Aurovilian, it is a way to measure one’s own integration and acceptance in the community. I was told by one Aurovilian that I have “the Aurovilian spark” and by another that “you seem to have found your earth,” by which she meant I appeared to belong. I was also asked by Aurovilians about my Newcomer process, the assumption being that I had or would apply to live there permanently. My reading of this being that
I had integrated enough for people to assume that I ‘fit,’ obviously a compliment for one hoping to gain some measure of emic perspective.

However I was also given negative feedback about my project and my assumption to be able to write with any credibility about the community. One adult Child of Auroville told me pointedly “People come here and they think that in two weeks they’ll understand it. No, no! I don’t even understand it!” adding the fact that it is changing makes it hard to define. Another Tamil Aurovillian who had lived and worked in the community all his life told me he is sick of outsiders trying to tell his story, echoing the previous while also highlighting his ownership over the community, a quality that I did not possess, he said “I can’t explain this place and it is my place!” One interviewee talked specifically about what he perceives to be an imbalance between the numbers of Aurovilians and guests, telling me he does not think it creates an ideal environment for an experiment in human unity. I suggested having so many guests may make some Aurovilians feel at times that they live in a zoo, to which he laughed, pointed at my voice recorder and notebook and snickered “yeah, well!” before laughingly adding, “You know, we’re a rare species. We are bound by responsibility to have scientists prod us! That being you!” I should add here that this interviewee, like all others, volunteered his interview and, at the end which, thanked me for “allowing me to indulge, I quite enjoy yabbering.”

As mentioned, many of my friends and contacts were made via my volunteer work placement in Auroville. For most of the year my partner and I lived as housesitters in the large home of two early pioneers and their four adult children with all but one member of the family returning to the house for periods of between a couple of weeks to several months at a time between stints living abroad and elsewhere in India. Another three people, two Newcomers and another long term guest, also lived in the house at various times during the year.

To paraphrase Susan Love Brown (2002b, p. 8), the job of anthropologists is to note the disparity between the real and the ideal when it comes to culture, but more importantly, how people attempt to reconcile the contradictions it creates. Rather than seeking universal truths or statistical information about a given population, qualitative research techniques are interested in the way people give meaning to their lives, how people make sense of themselves and others. It is concerned with depth rather than breadth (Bryman, 2004, p. 275).
In this thesis I have given in-depth accounts of how members of the Auroville community speak of Auroville as home, supplemented with my own experiences of living in Auroville. My intention was to capture the emic perspective as faithfully as possible and to fairly represent the views of Auroville’s community members. However I have not stepped back from my scholarly obligation to critically examine the discourses around the themes raised in this thesis. In Chapter 7 in particular a more critical view of the community is taken.

In the following chapters I unpack some of the contested representations of Auroville and Aurovilianness. I examine what people told me in comparison, sometimes contrast, with accounts from other community members and with observances. Though wary of charges of essentialism, in this thesis I have in some ways deconstructed Auroville by talking about the different groups of that comprise the Auroville community, as they identify themselves and each other, and how they relate to Auroville as ‘home.’ In each Chapter I have provided a conceptual introduction followed by close attention to self-reports and exploration of personal narratives, before a critical analysis specific to the main theme of the chapter. There are multiple emic interpretations, and my analysis considers the “contextual uniqueness” of the social setting in which I placed myself in Auroville (Bryman, 2004, p. 275). This study seeks to convey how I and these particular research participants appreciate my and their particular experiences and understandings of the Auroville community. At the risk sounding like some of the Aurovillian detractors I mentioned above, I therefore make no claim that these findings will be relevant to all Aurovilians and people in the Auroville community either at the time of my fieldwork, today, or at some other point in time (see also Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 316; cf. Mohanty, 2008, p. 2).
3. Be-longing: Lifestyle Migrants, Self and Home

People, unlike trees and bushes are not 'rooted' — people are born with legs. The fact that we are born with legs and intelligence opens to us ever new spatial and intellectual horizons. [...] The human ability to migrate has been one of our basic assets of survival, allowing us to free ourselves of geographic constraints, from bondage to the earth. Bosnians, East European refugees in German hostels, Chinese, Haitian, and Vietnamese refugees, like our ancestors and ourselves, whoever we may be, are searching for their home. (Tucker, 1994, p. 186)

The evolutionary ideals which form the basis of Sri Aurobindo’s writings are unknown to many Aurovilians when they first make the decision to join the community, and are seen by many as irrelevant to their lives now, or even farfetched. Pillai (2005, p. 504) tells us, “... officially – certainly as according to Auroville’s Entry Group – one comes to Auroville in order to manifest it,” however this does not necessarily mean that one must believe in the spiritual philosophies of its founders. Auroville is a spiritual community attracting people devoted to the teachings of its founders, but it is also a secular community “where one can live and work without formally joining the community or subscribing to its ideology” (Mohanty, 2008, p. 2). Intriguingly, one can not only live in Auroville, but actually join the community by subscribing to its ideology but not its spirituality. Pillai (2005, p. 192) notes in her work on Auroville, “I definitely got the sense from several people that there is concern that not enough people are conversant in the core ideas that comprise the community’s original philosophical base,” and so, in this chapter I ask, why are they there?

53 In her PhD thesis of 2005, Auroville: Philosophy, performance and power in an intentional utopian community in South India, Shanti Pillai (2005, p. ix) “examines the relationship between the ideals and everyday life in Auroville.” Through a lens of “performance,” Pillai notes in some detail the ways in which the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and the founding texts of Auroville are lived or contradicted by members of the community. In so doing she highlights the pervasive importance of the Charter and the Mother to Aurovillian life, despite the apparent inconsistencies in interpretation and realisation. Through Pillai’s work I was able to glean appreciation for the centrality of these ideals in the community to complement findings from my own fieldwork.
That not all long term members of the community are there to “satisfy a spiritual need” (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005, p. 167) is something which comes as a surprise to many visitors to Auroville (cf. Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005). This makes Auroville an anomaly among intentional communities where, ordinarily, members are expected to adhere to the overall guiding philosophy and principles of the community, whether or not spiritual, without exception. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not outline a dogmatic path to enlightenment or prescribed spiritual practices one must follow. Rather, as is the case at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, it is merely expected Newcomers will have a general understanding of the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, will abide by the principles outlined in the Auroville Charter and the Mother’s Dream, and will pursue their own path to development using the community to do this and in turn, presumably, help to advance the collective goals of the community.

Thinking about the idea of ‘home,’ in this chapter I make a case for use of the term ‘lifestyle migrant’ in reference to residents of the Auroville community. I do this cautiously, aware that its use with reference to spiritual devotees may appear to trivialise the perceived importance of their work in Auroville, or the uniqueness of the community. However, my review of this literature suggests that longer term residents of Auroville share much in common with other lifestyle migrants. Like other lifestyle migrants, Auroville’s long-term residents live in Auroville in order to avoid an expected unsatisfactory life in the place(s) they lived before. Importantly, it is the assumed ability of place to affirm people’s self-identity that drives this search for a new home. Benson and Osbaldiston (2014, p. 4) tell us that lifestyle migration “represents a lifestyle choice that should be considered as a stage within the reflexive project of the self.” Lifestyle migration is thought of as a search for a better way of life, but for people in Auroville it is a search for a better self. In a world of movement, ‘home’ for these people is a quest to make the ideal, a place where the notion of ‘home’ fulfils its mandate to provide shelter and self-fulfilment, real (cf. Hauschild, 2001; Moore, 2000; Tucker, 1994, p. 181).

I also demonstrate in this chapter that lifestyle migrants in Auroville are distinctly and inherently utopian. This is a theme built upon further in future chapters when I discuss why people stay in Auroville, however it is important to note the connection to utopianism in consideration of why people seek Auroville.
Following discussion of the phenomenon of lifestyle migration, below I will highlight some of the motivations for joining, participating, or merely living in Auroville given to me by Auroville residents.

Lifestyle Migration

If the place thought of as ‘home’ does not provide the feelings typically associated with ‘home,’ then is it really home at all? The experience of voluntary migrants, suggests that places of unconscious familiarity, a key feature of a sense of rootedness (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 60), may not in fact be ‘home’ enough. We search for a home, or make one, that stabilises or deepens when the one we have “cripples and stifles” (Douglas, 1991, p. 288). ‘Home’ for people who choose to find another does not necessarily mean rejection of their roots, but more importantly it entails finding routes to realisation of a home which aligns with self-perception.

Like Graeme MacRae (2016, p. 18), who wrote about multicultural Ubud, I have “terminological difficulty with those who come from elsewhere and stay longer.” In the United States, terms such as ‘noneconomic migration’ or ‘amenity migration’ may be used to refer to the type of migration we see in Auroville whereby people relocate in order to pursue a personal quest for meaning (Hoey, 2014, p. 60). In Australia, the terms ‘tree changers’ and ‘sea changers’ are common for those who relocate from the cities to rural and coastal locations in search of more fulfilling lives (Hoey, 2014, p. 60; Osbaldiston, 2014). In fairness, any of these terms may also be applied to members of the Auroville community, however they too do not seem descriptive enough for people who have in essence sought to change their entire lifestyle and framework of understanding in joining Auroville. Sharpley and Sundaram (2005, p. 167) call Auroville residents “permanent tourists,” further classified as either spiritual seekers, tourist trail followers or yoga practitioners. Though I agree that many community members do in fact fall into one of these groups, clearly not all of these terms are applicable to all. This categorisation then, seems somewhat clumsy when the term ‘tourist,’ even preceded by ‘permanent,’ is not readily applicable to Auroville’s Tamil residents, and is considered with some disdain by many of Auroville’s inhabitants. Just as Brian Hoey’s participants did in his study of lifestyle migrants in the American mid-west, Aurovilians are often
“quick to distinguish themselves from tourists, whom they characteristically come to see negatively as an unattached and potentially destructive force that may damage the very qualities of place that attracted them” (Hoey, 2014, p. 144). We can see this in particular in one Aurovilian’s gentle mocking of me and other guests, noted in the methodology section of Chapter 2. More importantly, the word ‘tourist’ implies impermanence. Tourists do not intend to live out their days in the location we find them, unlike the many residents of Auroville I focus on in this work who are looking for a home. MacRae (2016) settles on use of the term ‘expatriate,’ in part because it is used by the people he writes about themselves, and by locals. However I believe the term ‘expatriate’ is paradoxically both too specific in its implications while also insufficiently illustrative of the reasons for migration for the particular people I lived with in Auroville. Additionally, as Korpela (2010, p. 1302) suggests, it is “tinged with an elitist flavour” that is not necessarily fitting of the motivations and goals that drive people to and in Auroville.

Instead I settle upon the term ‘lifestyle migrants’ to describe the residents of Auroville. In her exploration of foreigners living in Rishikesh, Calcutta and Goa, India, Nadia Giguère (2013, p. 19) cautions against the use of the term ‘lifestyle migrant’ as, she says …the ascetic lifestyle and spiritual ideal of informants stand in stark contrast to the quality of life often sought by lifestyle migrants, which is typically focussed on recreation, rural idyll and a lower cost of living.

While this is a valid assessment I nonetheless find it a useful term for residents of Auroville for the reasons I outline below.

O’Reilly and Benson, who popularised this term and recent research into the phenomena of lifestyle migration, tell us that lifestyle migration involves leaving an imagined dissatisfactory future for a “fuller and more meaningful life,” which is typically thought of as being more “authentic,” simple or “pure” (O’Reilly and Benson, 2009, pp. 4-5). We can see here a resonance with the idea of ‘home’ affirming of one’s identity. As pointed out by Noel Salazar (2014, pp. 122-123), lifestyle migrants embody two “seemingly opposing processes: a desire to be ‘elsewhere’ that is deeply rooted in sociocultural imaginaries; and a desire to belong and feel at ‘home’ somewhere.”
People looking for a more ‘authentic’ life are doing so not just for the perceived ‘authenticity’ of the destination, but also for the ability of the destination to offer them to live more authentic versions of themselves or, as the case may be, who they wish to be.

As well as identifying with places, “people also identity against places, establishing their own sense of place by contrasting themselves with different places and the people in them” (Easthope, 2004, p. 130). Of course this may be in reference to a political difference, but also as mundane as the example of a teenager or young adult who rebels against the family home in favour of a circle of peers. This person is not necessarily rejecting ‘home,’ but is “reordering a spatial schema to center on a new ‘home’ – a subcultural group and its preferred places” (Dovey, 1985, p. 39). Two ‘homes’ are then created, each representing two aspects of one’s life. Similarly, lifestyle migrants often also speak of the ‘home’ from which they came, as well as the ‘home’ they are making for themselves in a new location. The latter being a choice corresponding with how they want to live or who they want to be.

Brian Hoey (2014, p. ix) defines lifestyle migration “as the movement of individuals at all stages of the life course who relocate either full- or part-time to geographic places made personally meaningful by belief in the potential of their own act of relocation and the places themselves to improve quality of life.” They are searching, he says “for what Charles Taylor simply calls the good” (Hoey, 2014, p. 52). “[T]he lifestyle migrant” says Hoey (2014, p. 54), “identifies him or herself with an emphasis on quality of life rooted in a very personal sense of their ‘true’ self.” A common thread to the migration narratives he found among his participants was that their relocation gave them “a feeling of empowerment against potentially fragmenting pressures of the world of work.”

“Guided by their own moral compass, constructed itself out of a concern for quality of life, lifestyle migrants define the good life” (Hoey, 2014, p. 54). The core motivation behind lifestyle migration is avoidance of an imagined and dissatisfactory future. According to Hoey (2014, p. 23), for lifestyle migrants, identification of an inner self is of paramount concern, and so the ability to design a lifestyle which resonates with that imagined or intended true self is key to location. “As intuitively understood by lifestyle migrants,” Hoey (2014, p. 107) writes, “sense of self is determined in large part by what people do, and what they do is shaped by where they are in the world.” Furthermore, as
we will see below, just as Hoey found among his research participants in North America, residents of Auroville believe in the healing properties inherent in the location of Auroville. This is in part due to the community’s guiding principles and the social atmosphere which reinforces these principles. For those who are more enamoured with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, there is also the belief that Auroville is in some way charged with their presence, a ‘vibration’ which, they believe, is a guiding force.

In his often cited paper on authenticity in tourist settings, MacCannell (1973, p. 589) argues “tourism absorbs some of the social functions of religion in the modern world.” According to Alex Norman, “Spiritual tourists,” a label which Sharpley and Sundaram (2005) would argue applies to many people in Auroville, “come to places like Rishikesh [or, presumably, Auroville] to try and become better people, or better human beings, at least as they see it. They want to fix what they feel is wrong or misguided in their lives” (Norman, 2011, p. 159). The implication is that the environments these people came from were disempowering to them, whereas Auroville is experienced by those who stay as empowering.

Though Aurovilians are not, in fact, tourists, some of the observances made about tourism and authenticity nonetheless apply. For example, Ning Wang (1999, p. 358) tells us,

In common sense terms, existential authenticity denotes a special state of Being in which one is true to oneself, and acts as a counterdose to the loss of “true self” in public roles and public spheres in modern Western society.

He references Turner and Manning’s argument that authenticity can only be found once the security of one’s familiar surroundings is questionable or no longer. “Tourism is thus regarded as a simpler, freer, more spontaneous, more authentic, or less serious, less utilitarian, and romantic, lifestyle which enables people to keep a distance from, or transcend, daily lives” argues Wang (1999, p. 360). While we can certainly see, below, the relevance of these ideas in the ways in which guests to Auroville speak of the importance of their time there to their own lives, long term and permanent residents of Auroville also told me of a certain level of precariousness to their existence in Auroville. In part, Auroville exists due the continued goodwill of the Government of India and so
there is, in some minds, a perception that the entire community experiment could be discontinued should the government deem it no longer useful or worthy of support. However, this is not what I am referring to here. Aurovilians seek personal and societal change through their activities in the community. As a result, I found that they constantly evaluate the usefulness of their time in Auroville and are open to the option of leaving at any time should living in Auroville no longer feel, for the individual, that it is serving its purpose. People were very willing to speak about the ‘future’ in terms of broader visions for the community and wider society, but reticent to speculate on their own personal futures as decisively attached to Auroville. The transformative objectives of the community, as well as the fact that Auroville is also a tourist destination, means that it is always in a state of flux. This aids the individual quest for authenticity of its residents who see this as their constant motivation.

Though it is apparent that unlike other forms of migration from poorer to wealthier countries or from war to peace, where the desire for, and apparent path to, a better life is relatively clear (if not always realised), lifestyle migration, like tourism, typically reverses the direction of utopian-driven migration, from ‘developed’ countries of North America and Europe to ‘lesser developed’ countries in Asia and Latin America. As O’Reilly (2012, p. 3) says, North to South and West to East migrations are considered much less often than the reverse. Lifestyle migration tends to follow “the trails of earlier colonisation” (Benson and O’Reilly 2009). Benson suggests it is “migration made possible by the position of privilege occupied by the migrants in relation to local populations within destinations” (cited in O’Reilly, 2014, p. 224). By and large, lifestyle migrants are able to return to their previous life and locale should they choose.

I asked almost all interviewees “what brought you to Auroville?”, however this is also a question I found arising often in various forms in regular conversation with Auroville community members (directed at myself as well as others). Continuous personal evaluation of one’s life is a feature of life in Auroville, and, with such a large population of transient residents, ‘getting to know you’ conversations are frequently had. In the following section I outline the joining process before exploring some of the reasons people gave me to the question “why are you here?”
Why they came

The first Aurovilians were overwhelmingly European. It is said that in the beginning the Mother asked some ashramites to leave the ashram, move to the area ten kilometres north of Pondicherry and start building the new city. In Auroville’s first five years driblets of information about the ‘city of the future’ reached eager ears in Europe, North America and other parts of the world via the verbal reports of recently returned foreign visitors to the ashram in Pondicherry and radio telecasts. In the era of youthful rebellion in the West, accompanied by rapid increase in interest in Eastern philosophies and, particularly, in India (cf. Norman, 2011, p. 156), a steady stream of inquisitive people came to see for themselves this supposed tropical utopia in the making.

While the Mother was alive she personally approved all new members of the Auroville project. People hoping to be a part of the community were asked to send a letter explaining their motivations along with a photo of themselves to the Mother for approval. She would select from these applicants those she thought most suited to the nascent ‘city of the future’ as seen in her dream. Those who spoke of the benefits they saw for their own development were not given permission to join. Of those who expressed a desire to contribute, it is said, the Mother was able to assess their integrity and suitability by looking into their eyes, whether in person or photograph. Her assessment was never questioned, though it took a number of applicants several pleading attempts before they were admitted.

In the absence of the Mother, a more formal administrative process of admission took over. The Entry Group, now called the Entry Service, came into existence in 2002, born out of a more informal committee formed in the 1980s (Pillai, 2005, p. 207). Its mandate is to assess applications for membership of Auroville, taking into consideration the original goals of the community, the community’s current needs, and the motivations of applicants. It approves new members of the community and oversees a probationary period of residence of one to three years, during which people are termed ‘Newcomers’ before they are entitled to have their name put on the ‘Masterlist’ and be referred to as
Aurovilian. The Entry Service also provides the required documentation for non-Indian Newcomers to obtain necessary residency visas from the Government of India.\(^{54}\)

The Entry Service is now an accepted but controversial entity in Auroville. My own interactions with community members indicate that need for the existence of an Entry Service, *per se*, is not generally contested, however its role as a gatekeeper is very much so. As it is, it is the gatekeeper to membership rather than a welcoming committee tasked with helping new members settle in Auroville, as some would prefer it. More disputed, however, is who should be encouraged and allowed to join, with the Entry Service effectively having the final say over these matters.

An issue particularly intriguing from an international relations point of view is the authority handed over to Auroville by the Government of India in relation to immigration. India does not allow dual citizenship and, though not impossible, it is extremely difficult for people who are not of Indian descent to obtain Indian citizenship. However, a separate visa category has been created especially for Auroville. Though it is a requirement that successful applicants not be previously convicted of a ‘serious offence,’ the criteria for joining Auroville are quite different to those to become a citizen of India or even to obtain an Indian tourist visa without the backing of the Auroville Foundation. With a letter of recommendation from the Entry Service, foreign Newcomers and newly accepted Aurovilians are entitled to an unlimited multiple Entry Visa valid for five years and renewable three times from within India. In effect this means Aurovilians do not have to leave India for bureaucratic reasons for up to twenty years. Furthermore, the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) category previously only claimable by citizens of other countries and of Indian descent has recently been extended to include people of foreign descent born and residing in India. This has paved the way for Children of Auroville, with written recommendation from the community’s representative body and regardless of their parents’ citizenship, to gain all the rights of an Indian citizen barring the right to vote or own agricultural land (rights unobtainable by those without full Indian citizenship). In effect, a small portion of the state’s

\(^{54}\) Non-Indian Aurovilians and Newcomers are entitled to a special visa status from the Government of India. ‘Entry’ visas which enable a residential permit can be granted to long-term residents (that is, people whose names appear on the Auroville masterlist) for up to five years, renewable three times from within India (Auroville, 2014d). The administrative process of joining Auroville is explained in more detail in Appendix 4.
authority over who visits and settles in its territory has been outsourced to a separate, almost independent, entity, Auroville’s Entry Service.

It is not, however, necessary to formally join the Auroville project as an Aurovillian in order to participate in the Auroville community. People with Indian citizenship, for example, do not need the visa associated with Auroville in order to stay in India long term, which means there is nothing to prevent them living in or near to Auroville and participating in Aurovilian life. Citizens of some countries receive tourist visas of up to five years, allowing them also to participate in Aurovilian life for a period of time longer than the typical tourist without becoming Aurovilian or even requiring the involvement of Auroville in obtaining their visas. 55 Auroville also welcomes guests to the community, in part for the financial support and volunteer labour they provide. With this in mind, not all of the people I highlight in this work do indeed become, or even apply to become, Aurovillian. A point of difference in my research compared to that of other work I have read based on fieldwork in Auroville is that I sought to give voice to people who choose to live and or work in Auroville but are not formal members of the community, as well as Aurovilians (see, for example, Leard 2011; Mohanty, 2008; Pillai, 2005). This includes people who have applied to join Auroville but are still considered ‘Newcomers,’ that is, not yet formally recognised as Aurovilians, and people who have put off their application to join to a later date. I also spoke to a number of people who do not wish to become Aurovillian, but choose to live within the community of Auroville either for a short time or more permanently. Interestingly, people not seeking to become Aurovillian seemed just as likely to be devotees of the Mother or Sri Aurobindo or both as Aurovilians, and, Aurovilians just as likely as non Aurovilians to have other, non-spiritual, motivations for joining the community.

55 Visa requirements and validity details change periodically. At the time of my visits, Australians were able to receive a six month tourist visa for India. With an introductory letter from the Auroville Foundation including invitation to participate in volunteer work, my partner and I received visas with twelve months validity (apparently now standard for tourist visas). People I met with lengthier tourist visas of up to five years told me that they came with certain conditions including a requirement to leave the country periodically. Auroville is three hours’ drive from the Chennai international airport which is a short flight from Colombo, therefore Sri Lanka is a popular short holiday destination for people in Auroville wishing to extend their Indian visa.
In my time in Auroville I interviewed fifty-six members of the community, Aurovilians and non-Aurovilians. Not all of these people are lifestyle migrants per se, some are intentionally transient visitors, however their stories also provide context to the Auroville project and elucidate its appeal to longer term residents. I refer to Aurovilians and non-Aurovilians, including some shorter-term guests, as ‘members’ of the Auroville community. I do this because all of the people I interviewed, whether Aurovilian or not, were actively engaging with the community, working (on a volunteer basis or paid labour), participating in education programs run by Auroville, and socialising in Auroville. For all of these people, Auroville is the focus of their activities, even if only temporarily, and not merely the location of their accommodation. Additionally, I gleaned information about people’s arrival stories from several published texts from the community including *Turning Points: An inner story of the beginnings of Auroville* (Devin, 2009 [2008]) and *The Journeying Years* (Bowler, 2009). I have divided this section into three ‘types’ of community members, that accords with how people tend to be classified in Auroville by community members as either permanent community members from overseas or further afield in India, whom I term ‘Aurovilians from afar’; permanent members who are Indian nationals from Tamil Nadu, whom I call ‘Local Aurovilians’; and ‘guests’ who may or may not be temporary residents.

**Aurovilians from afar**

The majority, forty-two, of the Aurovilians I interviewed in Auroville held passports from countries other than India and are recorded as non-Indian on the Auroville Masterlist. Of these, eight are adult Children of Auroville who were either born in Auroville or came

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56 See table on pages 55-56 of Chapter 2 for a summary of interviewees by relationship to Auroville and passport country.

57 *Turning Points* (Devin, 2009 [2008]) features the personal stories of some of the earliest Aurovilians, their encounters with the Mother and dedication to her and the community of Auroville. While I was able to interview several of the first arrivals in Auroville myself, this work was enormously beneficial in further capturing the mood of the community in those early years as well as the significance of the Mother for those who met her. *The Journeying Years* (Bowler 2009) features the stories of thirty-five Aurovilians who arrived in Auroville between the years 1966 and 2005. Ordered chronologically, it tells, in people’s own words, their reasons for leaving the places they had lived previously and settling in Auroville, as well as their experiences of Aurovillian life. Noting its source, I have quoted a small number of times from entries in each of these collections in much the same way as I have used my own interview data. However, unlike people whose stories or words I refer to from my own fieldwork, I have not used pseudonyms, or in any other way altered identities, for people whose stories appear in either of these texts.
to Auroville with their parents at a young age. As these Aurovilians did not come to the community of their own volition and are a unique subset of the community’s population, I have dealt with their relationships with and within the community separately, in Chapter 6. However, I did ask many of the Children of Auroville I spoke to if they knew much about their parents’ lives at the time of their arrival in Auroville. Some of the people who grew up in Auroville did know something of their parents’ motivations for joining the community, but most told me their parents did not speak much about what brought them to Auroville more than a desire to be a part of the ‘new world’ or the unfolding Auroville project. Instead they speculated on the reasons why their parents came based on what they know about Auroville’s history and the places their parents left behind, including the social and political climate of Europe at the time. Where appropriate, have included some of those accounts below along with firsthand accounts of people’s arrival stories.

The ‘oldest’ person, in terms of length of time in Auroville, I interviewed arrived at the ashram in Pondicherry in the mid-1960s. I asked Henri how he came upon Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He told me he was in the Himalaya looking for an ashram and was told by a sadhu\textsuperscript{58} there that it was not his place, that he ought to go to Pondicherry to “see the Mother there.” Henri did not elaborate on why he was looking for an ashram in the Himalaya. However we do know that the arrival of Westerners at the ashram in Pondicherry, as well as in other ashrams around India, and of the early Aurovilians coincided with the counter-cultural revolution in the western hemisphere. This was also the period of Zablocki’s fifth wave of community building in the United States, mentioned in Chapter 1, a time characterised by searches for alternative ways of living, and social and political activism especially in European and North American countries. “In the 1960s and ‘70s” says Jouhki (2006, p. 110),

\textsuperscript{58} Sadhus are Hindu ascetics. They are usually easily identifiable, with their limited clothing and possessions, depending on the tradition and sect they follow, often dressed in saffron or white robes (some not dressed at all) often dreadlocked, occasionally shaven heads. Sadhus are widely respected in deeply religious India and survive on donations. Begging in India is not frowned upon, and donating to sadhus considered a karmic act benefitting the donor as much as the recipient. In some cases sadhus act as spiritual advisors or gurus, or are considered as such, especially by foreign tourists eager to participate in India’s spirituality, for better or for worse. Unfortunately, as an increasingly common occurrence, some ‘sadhus’ prey on naïve foreigners who may provide a lucrative income. Sadhus are a more common sight on the streets in the north of India and Nepal, especially around the Himalaya, than in southern states.
...new Aurovillians were mostly young explorers who sought to broaden their minds and follow a more liberal, tolerant and untraditional lifestyle beyond the conventional normal of society. Hippie culture seemed to fit very well with these ideals emphasizing cultural understanding and human unity. Most Western Aurovilians had experienced detachment from what they thought were Western, mainstream, bourgeois and materialistic values. Rebellion, psychedelic experiences, harmony with nature and humankind were seen as more valuable. Many regarded the East as the source of wisdoms that could not be experienced in the West. Especially “mystic India” seemed to give answers to significant questions concerning the meaning of life. For many, just to do something totally different was a sufficient motivation.

Devata, an adult Child of Auroville, raised the issue of Auroville’s inauguration being in 1968, the year of enormous social upheaval in Europe. Auroville, she says, “seemed like an answer that went one step ahead of the movement that was happening at the time.” She believes “the dream of Auroville appealed to that whole generation very viscerally. And so there was the incredible spirit and energy of that time,” adding the “hardship level was quite high in Auroville in that time so the people who came to Auroville were really exciting and strange people.”

Jean came to Auroville after the student riots in Paris in 1968. His story, and the stories of many others of his generation are written about in Auroville-produced book *Turning Points* (Devin, 2009 [2008]). At this time Auroville counted less than one hundred people (Auroville, 2018a). This number was intentionally boosted in 1969 and again in 1974 with the arrival of the first and second caravans from Paris. Not all of the people

59 Here I am referring to people whose purpose for living in this place was to realise the township of Auroville. This figure therefore discounts the many indigenous Tamil people living in the now surrounding villages, some of which had, and still have, Aurovilian settlements within their borders.

60 In August 1969 the ‘first caravan’ left Paris for Auroville. This was organised, perhaps at the request, or at least with the blessing, of the Mother by one of the earliest Aurovilians. The purpose of the journey was in part to recruit more Aurovilians, and also to bring back in the two vans and two cars to Auroville tools to help build the city. In 1974 a second caravan, a bus and two vans, was organised. Between fifty and fifty-five people, including several children, travelled overland to Auroville from Paris in these two expeditions. Some had prior connections with Auroville, Aurovilians, or the Mother, but some did not. Several of these people still live in Auroville today. In 2015 Alan, an Aurovilian, interviewed these people and published their reflections on their trip to Auroville in *Auroville Today*, the community’s monthly newsletter (Alan, 2015a; Alan, 2015b).
who arrived in those early years stayed, however even those who returned to Europe served to increase the number of permanent new arrivals via their word of mouth. About the first of these expeditions, Alan (2015a, p. 10) writes “they present[ed] the spirit of the times which combined the 60s search for freedom with a thirst for new forms, new beginnings.”

AuroAnon’s parents trekked separately overland from Europe to India and each heard about Auroville via word of mouth. “Definitely the hippie trail” he says of his parents’ individual journeys to Auroville. Divija’s father also made the journey overland from Europe. Intending to travel to East Asia, Claude learned of Auroville while in Nepal in the mid-1960s. Once he arrived, the Mother sent him to Auroville, one of the first community members at the time before inauguration. Divija’s mother stumbled upon Auroville while seeking spirituality in India. “It was love at first sight” says Divija, tongue in cheek, in reference to her parents’ love for each other and for their new community.

Though he arrived sometime later than these first Aurovilians, Gyan talks about the anti-academic atmosphere that he, an academic, experienced when he first arrived, something which has noticeably shifted in the years he has now lived in Auroville. “Every time I opened my mouth [I was told] ‘oh, you’re too mental, shut up!’” he says putting on a derisive voice. “I mean those days it was a bunch of hippies basically, and it was hippie energy that built Auroville.”

Robert heard about Sri Aurobindo via a course on Eastern Religious Disciplines in California in 1972. Around this time Cross Currents (1972) magazine dedicated an entire issue to Sri Aurobindo. A spiritual seeker, Robert read this and decided he “had to go and check this place out.” Sri Aurobindo, he says, was the only author he had come across,

...who was able to put everything together in an evolutionary philosophy that was not only reasonable but was also mystical and deep and, ah, this is what I wanted, this is really what I wanted.

Theo’s parents arrived in 1978 with himself and his siblings. His parents had read about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and attended several talks and lectures regarding their
teachings in Europe. Becoming a devotee of the founders and following them to their city of the future in order to further personal spiritual goals, was and continues to be, a common route to Auroville.

Like Theo’s parents and Robert, Leila, also a spiritual seeker, discovered Auroville through her reading of Sri Aurobindo while living in Israel in the 1990s. Shortly after reading Savitri, Leila met someone who had lived in Auroville in its early years. She quickly became interested and read all that she could about the community on the internet and any other sources she could find. Having recently recovered from cancer, Leila told me she was inspired by Sri Aurobindo’s writing on change and the cycle of life.

Gyan did not come to Auroville looking for spirituality, which is not necessarily uncommon in Auroville, nor did he think himself a spiritual person before his arrival in Auroville twenty years prior to our interview. Gyan is an academic scientist who jokes about his discovery of Sri Aurobindo’s writing and subsequent move to Auroville ending his career:

Well, part of it was, here people were actually doing work, you know, and there I was just writing about it, and I thought doing it would be far more satisfying than writing about it. And the other thing was that any scientist, now I realise that this is the norm, experiences moments that can only be described as spiritual. When you’re concentrating very hard on a piece of data or something and you try to piece it all together, you trip into another state of mind. And you’re trying to put it all together. And I never discussed it with anybody, I kind of, you know, was embarrassed to discuss it, and I find a lot of us are. Because in scientific circles, if you say something like this people tend to call you crazy. But I came here and picked up *The Synthesis of Yoga* and

61 *Savitri* (Ghose, 1951), is an epic poem written by Sri Aurobindo based on the *Mahabharata*. It is considered a sacred text by devotees and even some non-devotees. Claire, for example, introduced below, told me that when she feels at a crossroads or is mulling over some problem she will often open her copy of *Savitri* to a random page and find an answer to her problem within the text therein. Many of the texts written by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are used in this way by their devotees, and, as evidenced the example of Claire, some non-devotees as well.

62 In *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Ghose, 1996), first published in monthly instalments between 1914 and 1921, Sri Aurobindo outlined his system of yoga, in comparison with traditional systems. Like other texts written by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, perhaps more so, it is used by residents of Auroville and the ashram as a guide to spiritual life as much as an insight into the life and thoughts of its author.
after the first few pages [Sri Aurobindo] said there are many steps, and he described what I had been through as the first step, he said “make an experiment.” And so that was probably the end of an excellent scientific career [laughing].

When I asked Marcus, an Austrian man in his sixties, what brought him to Auroville in the 1980s, he laughingly responded as if the quest is inevitable for one such as himself:

That’s what I am asking myself sometimes. I guess the search, yes, the search. But also, I’m a child of the sixties, so, so, well, there are many places to go, except, um, this was quite a nice alternative.

While many people, including most of those mentioned above, were actively looking for a more spiritually fulfilling environment when they arrived in Auroville, others, such as Asmi, like Gyan, happened upon the community and realised, as it were, this desire more serendipitously. Asmi told me she came to Auroville for a two week work-related visit in the 1990s and never left.

I came here and something happened which led to an experience and the very first day I knew that Auroville is my home. And it’s not logical, there is nothing logical or mental about it. It was more intuitive, that I knew that’s my home. And I didn’t even want the service of my logic to justify that.

Hannah, from Australia and Aurovilian for ten years, also describes her arrival in Auroville as “a synchronistic thing.” While travelling she met someone who had lived in Auroville and found his recounting of life in the community intriguing. Shortly afterwards a friend travelling in India at the time called her from Auroville and requested that she join.

It just felt like the right time suddenly so I came to India to visit Auroville. [...] … when I arrived here I just found myself feeling, first of all, very much at home, like I don’t know, it was just more atmospheric, it wasn’t particularly
any thing that happened, [...] I think the kind of short answer to it is that destiny brought me here.

Claire, from northern Europe, came to Auroville several times during her early twenties to visit her mother who lived in the community. She was far from enamoured with the spiritual teachings of the community, saying she actually found this aspect of Auroville repelling at first and still struggles with what she observes as “blind devotion” to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. However, when her mother became sick and then ultimately died, Claire stayed on. “Somehow it feels right,” she said,

...it’s because of my mum that I’m here. And it’s a very strange sensation that something that wasn’t, that you had not expected, ever to end up in a place like Auroville, it’s something I’m most thankful for, you know? Like, when I look back I think that it’s the best thing that could have happened to me. So in a way I’m very happy that she, well, she showed me this place. So it’s good in a way.

Some of the people living in Auroville I spoke to had lived in Auroville previously, left for some significant period of time, and returned, again ostensibly on a permanent basis. Marcus, introduced above, left the community with his family when it was decided the educational opportunities in Auroville were not sufficient for his teenage children. After approximately ten years ‘out,’ he says of his return to Auroville only a few years before our meeting,

I did come back. Oh, the children were brought up, family broke apart, my wife and me split, and then I was free to go wherever I wanted.

Luke, from Belgium, was one of the first Aurovilians and helped lay the foundations for the Matrimandir. I met Luke on his very first return visit to the community since leaving in 1975 during the difficult years between the ashram and the community. Though he had been away so long, Luke had not entirely abandoned the life he led in Auroville. He had lived in two intentional communities in Europe and continued his interest in Indian
spirituality. Now at retirement age Luke told me his return to Auroville and, after several weeks visit, his intention to apply to formally rejoin the community, had much in common with the reasons he arrived as a teenager in the 1960s:

Actually, when I was about 18 I was already into yoga, doing hatha yoga and I worked in a macrobiotic shop and restaurant, so many people came from India, went to India, so I got involved in also going to India, I was interested. But I had a couple of friends who came to Auroville already, they were here before me, so I came to visit them. And I stayed for five years [laughing]! So, it was quite amazing thing, but ah, I liked it so much, it was so, kind of romantic and adventurous and, and I wanted to, I needed to have a big change in my life because my studies didn’t work out and so on, and so, I liked it very much and so I stayed.

Archan, from France, had lived in Auroville during the 1960s and early 1970s. He returned to Europe for thirty years before deciding to return to Auroville once again. Although there had been enormous physical changes in Auroville in the twenty years he’d been gone, Archan told me that socially and spiritually he felt like he had “only been gone a week,” that he had “come home.”

Several community members I interviewed came to the community for love and personal relationships. Nick moved from North America to Auroville after rekindling a romance with his university girlfriend, an adult Child of Auroville returned to the community. Margot decided to move from France to Auroville when her second husband expressed interest in returning to the community he had helped found in his twenties in the 1960s and 70s, and it also coincided with a phase in her life in which she “didn’t see much my future. It was like doors were shutting down, you know, the roof was going down and down…” While dating, Anjali’s husband, who she met at an artists’ retreat in Auroville, gave her an ultimatum, either she live in Auroville with him or the relationship could not last. Estelle came to Auroville on what was supposed to be a short sojourn from her yoga studies in the Himalaya. She was curious about the community aspect, wondering, “was it really possible to live harmoniously in such a community?” Shortly after arrival in Auroville, Estelle met and fell in love with an
Aurovilian man. Though now ended, the relationship kept her in Auroville, and despite some reservations, she was persuaded to join the community. All of these people told me they now see Auroville is as integral to their own lives as their spouses’, and believe themselves to be as Aurovilian as their spouse or any other Aurovilian.

Irrespective of whether one is seeking spirituality or not, Auroville offers an alternative lifestyle to the ‘mainstream’ dominant in people’s understandings and perceptions of where they lived previously and often criticised in Auroville. This, more than anything else, motivated many of its inhabitants in their departure from wherever they came and lured them to Auroville. They are proud of having left what they perceive to be structural restrictions to their happiness, and of the alternative lifestyle Auroville offers. For many of these Aurovilians, events in the West in the 1960s, and the legacy of that era, evidently informed their lifestyle migration decision. Since the 1970s, say Huber and O’Reilly (2004, p. 328), writing about lifestyle migration and home, “Individual freedom of choice has become a decisive criterion for the quality of life.” This is obviously more marked in the earlier arrivals stories, of following the ‘hippie trail’ and searching out eastern spiritual traditions increasingly popular among people looking for alternatives to the dominant models of thought they had grown up with.

In other examples, the quest may not be as apparent, however the need to differentiate oneself from the places from which they had come no less striking. Gyan, for example spoke of finding himself as a scientist, separate to the scientific community, in the writings of Sri Aurobindo. This recognition of his self-identity in a foundation text of Auroville negated, for him, his previously held identity related to his previous home. Likewise, Asmi, Hannah and Claire, among others, told me of a “deep knowing” that Auroville is home for each of them. While not to their minds begging logical analysis, it is clear to see from their discussion of Auroville that there they have found a vehicle for their expression of self, perhaps one they had not realised was lacking before arriving in Auroville.
Local Aurovilians

Auroville is indisputably international, differing markedly from most other intentional communities due to the size of its permanent multicultural and multinational population. However, today more than forty per cent of Aurovilians are Indian citizens (Auroville, 2018a), with almost half of this number coming from the surrounding region. Census data from 1972, one year before the death of the Mother, shows a population of 320 people, including 121 Indian nationals. Of these, just 15 people were Tamil (Namakkal, 2012, p. 72). Today Tamil people are actually the largest ethnic group of Aurovilians. While some non-Tamil Aurovilians fear being ‘overrun’ by Tamil people, others submit the proximity of source populations to the project suggests the local Aurovilian population should be significantly more numerous than it is. Either way, people on both sides of this particular debate seem to suggest that disproportionately high numbers of one single ethnic group in Auroville can contribute to factionalism, something which will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

Ten of the total fifty-six people I interviewed in Auroville were Tamil. Four of these were ‘guests,’ though one was living ostensibly permanently in Auroville, another two worked full-time in Auroville, and six were Aurovilian.

Dakini has lived in Auroville for thirty years. After leaving an abusive husband in Pondicherry, Dakini found work in the ashram during the time that the Mother was

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63 It is worth acknowledging use of the word ‘local’ in and around Auroville. Despite the existence of second and third generation Aurovilians, people who, regardless of the nationalities or ethnicities of their parents and grandparents, may identify most strongly as Aurovillian over and above the issuing country of their passport or any other way of categorising people according to place, culture or ethnicity, ‘local’ still refers only to Tamil people from the immediate surroundings, Aurovillian or not, and not to all people who call Auroville or the local region home. The language used continues to perpetuate difference rather than bring people together, as an adult Child of Auroville, Jishnu, intimated when he told me “it’s the village and Auroville, but we’re also a village, you know?! So it’s kind of like us and them, and that’s really a little bit sad.” Related issues are discussed further in Chapter 7.

64 According to the September 2018 census, Auroville’s total population (including children) is 2,953 people, of whom 1,305 are Indian, which represents almost forty-four percent (Auroville 2018a).

65 Anecdotally Tamil Aurovilians are the largest ethnic group in Auroville. The Aurovilian Masterlist records members by passport country, but not region, therefore it is actually impossible to know exactly the percentage of Aurovilians who hail from the immediate area.

66 The same is also said of the French Aurovillian population, the second biggest population by national representation. When I asked my informants about social groups in the community, more often than not I was told of the Tamil Aurovilian and French Aurovillian cliques, which also often correspond with factions on certain political issues arising periodically in the community.
alive. From there she met some Aurovilians who convinced her to formally divorce her husband, something frowned upon in Tamil society even today, and move to Auroville with her infant child. Despite living in Auroville almost since the community’s beginning, and having worked with the Mother, Dakini says it has only been in the past ten years that she has paid attention to the spiritual teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Until this time, she told me, she had a tendency to run from difficulties but the trauma of grieving the death of a family member caused her to decide to “face up” to challenges. She said this resulted in a realisation she could hand the stress over to the Mother and those challenges would cease to exist. She laments not coming to this conclusion earlier in her life, but speaks of the happiness she finds in surrender to the Mother today. “Slowly I choose my life, I want [to] be Auroville, inside.” Dakini finds refuge in Auroville, and in her faith in the Mother. This refuge extended from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to Auroville, not an uncommon path of settlement for both Indian and foreign Aurovilians.

Kalavan grew up in a village about five kilometres from Auroville and became Aurovilian in 2001 in his early twenties. During his childhood he visited Auroville almost daily to run errands for family and friends from the village working in the community. Today he runs a handicrafts business which employs approximately twenty local people and funnels profits back into the region by way of training programs and sponsorship of local village events. Kalavan says he always found the spiritual side of the community intriguing and this is basically what convinced him to become Aurovilian, however he was also puzzled by the apparent naïveté of foreigners to their Tamil surroundings and today continues to work on apparent lack of communication and misunderstandings between local people and foreigners in Auroville.

... and then I see the Westerner, and I can’t forget, you know, like things like what they ask me like, you know basically they question me about like where I am, and what is I’m doing and what is my culture and this and that. [...] then I had a dream that I want to come back after my school. I want to come back to Auroville and I want to take part in my life in this change. And also create this

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67 This is an example of an Aurovilian run commercial enterprise. While a certain percentage of profits must be paid to the Auroville Central Fund, the remainder can be channelled back into the business or gifted to local communities as is done in this example.
thing. And also same time that I want to make a bridge between small, in small way, work together with the village and Auroville. You know, this is basically what brought me to Auroville.

Much like Kalavan and so many other Tamil Aurovilians I met, Rohit, Vihaan and Manan, each hailing from separate nearby villages, were made aware of Auroville as a consequence of being born close by. Rohit and Vihaan, both the eldest sons in their families, attended Aurovilian-run schools as children. As a result, both men were very familiar with the philosophies of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the guiding principles of the community before deciding to formally join Auroville. While Rohit worked for some years following school in a large city in central India before returning to Auroville, Vihaan moved to Auroville at the completion of his schooling, much to the chagrin of his parents. Though his parents wanted Vihaan to receive the benefits of an Aurovillian school, they also wanted him, as the eldest of three children, to remain in the family home to provide for them and their daughters. Vihaan, on the other hand, believes his Auroville-infused childhood thanks to the school environment has contributed to a worldview more compatible with living in Auroville proper. He has completed further studies and is pursuing a higher degree via distance education, something he believes is facilitated by the support he receives from the Auroville community. He placates his parents with frequent visits and ongoing financial support.

Unlike Rohit and Vihaan, Manan did not attend an Aurovillian school, however the close proximity of his childhood home to Auroville meant he was well aware of the existence of the community, if only vaguely aware of its purpose before moving to Auroville. Manan told me that as a result of what he considered “few prospects,” as an adolescent and young adult he became an alcoholic and “caused trouble in the village.” The suicide of a close friend in his early twenties caused Manan to seek a way out of his situation.

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68 Auroville runs a number of schools for village children in the region as part of its outreach program. Some of these schools are directly connected to an Aurovillian commercial enterprise which directs profits to the school, others are funded by the community more generally. It is typical that these schools offer two meals a day for students, free uniforms, books and all tuition costs free of charge. I learned from people who attended Aurovillian-run schools that it is also usual that only one child per family attends the school, typically the eldest, while other children attend a regular village school. I was unable to determine whether this is a rule of the schools themselves or family decision. Aurovillian village schools teach to the national curriculum, with an added emphasis on the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, particularly ‘integral education’ (Auroville, n.d.-c; Auroville, n.d.-d; Lung, 2010).
At this time he came to Auroville purely in search of work and change of environment. Labouring in exchange for food and accommodation Manan became acquainted with the principles of Auroville and eventually decided to become Aurovillian. Doing so, he told me, released him from his difficult past and aligned his identity with a purposeful future.

Despite logistical differences, I nonetheless refer to Tamil Aurovilians as lifestyle migrants. While Rohit, Vihaan and Manan have all retained close ties to their villages near Auroville and each of the men visits their families regularly and provides financially for family members when they can, they too have made a decision to move to a different environment and culture for the benefit of their personal futures. Like other lifestyle migrants, these Aurovilians found that their previous ‘home’ environment, for various reasons, no longer aligned with their sense of identity or desired future wellbeing whereas Auroville offered the opportunity to live in a way that did. In Auroville they feel empowered to control the quality of their lives and how they are perceived by others unlike they believed possible in the villages in which they were raised.

While each of these men have retained their Tamil identities and continue to varying degrees to participate in village life, they self-identify as ‘Aurovillian’ more so than ‘villager’ and see their own values in alignment with the values of Auroville. For each of these men, Auroville and not the villages of their parents represents and affirms their self-identities, yet unlike Aurovilians who came from afar they negotiate their Aurovillian identities in tandem with Tamil identities and cultural expectations of their families whom they see often. Several non-Indian Aurovilians told me that it is easier for people from the surrounding region to live in Auroville because they do not have to leave their families, friends and familiar cultural environment to do so. These men however, implied the opposite, telling me they believe it is more difficult to have to straddle two homes and two identities simultaneously, with people from each of their homes having little comprehension of the other.

**Guests**

Auroville’s actual residential population is a great deal more than the roughly two and a half thousand officially quoted thanks in part to the legions of youthful and enthusiastic
guests who descend on the community each year, especially during the peak tourist season from January to March, and upon whose work and money Auroville’s survival is very much dependent. Volunteers, particularly those who are willing to commit to a month or more in the community, are welcomed and encouraged, so while some come just to “hang out,” a great deal more work on Auroville’s farms and other community projects. As an experimental community calling itself a “human laboratory,” Auroville also welcomes internal and external researchers. As a whole, Aurovilians are, perhaps surprisingly, open to constructive criticism from people who have taken the time to live in the community for a period of time and made attempts to learn beyond a superficial level what community members are trying to achieve. In particular, Aurovilians welcome practical suggestions and assistance in building the town. For this reason it attracts a large number of student and professional town planners, architects, environmental scientists and people interested in organic farming, reforestation, ‘green’ construction and ‘alternative’ living to participate in research projects and volunteer their time and labour in the pursuit of ‘the Dream.’

In fewer numbers social scientists also find ample fodder to fuel their research imaginations in Auroville. Via the website and word-of-mouth, Auroville promotes itself very successfully as a place to get involved and learn about a range of different farming techniques, building techniques and environmental programs. Pippa came to Auroville on a village development research project. She and her project partner travelled to India,

...and Auroville naturally came on to that list because there are so many projects here which, in a wider or narrow sense, have to do with rural development, that it seemed like, you know, treasure box of projects in the one place.

Elliott was undertaking a one year volunteer project with Engineers Without Borders when I met him in Auroville. He had not heard of Auroville prior to applying for the position and had little interest in the community or its reasons for being but was

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69 See The Dream, Appendix 2.3.
intrigued by the community’s research into solar power and the readiness of residents to adopt alternative forms of energy.

Jonathon and Josie, social scientists from North America selected Auroville as the field site for their research on environmentalism and religiosity based on the information they gleaned from the Auroville website. Of their decision making process, Jonathon said,

Auroville seemed to have so much cred because it’s so India, it’s so pioneer, it’s so very starting from little economic grounds of nothing and building up, and that’s really attractive, because you’ve really got to dig and try hard to make an environment happen because there’s not an environment already here.

Josie added “it gives us cred for our hippie friends back home!”

All non-Tamil non-permanent Aurovilians are considered ‘guests’ in Auroville. Obviously the label is not questionable for the vast majority of tourists, students and volunteers, however Auroville it also applies to the many ostensibly permanent residents who have decided to live in the community for the foreseeable future for cultural and social opportunities it offers without ever seeking to become officially Aurovilian. I met several such people in my year in the community and found their reasons for being there were by and large much the same as those of Aurovilians.

Sumitra, for example, has no desire to become Aurovilian, therefore, despite her intention to live in Auroville for the foreseeable future, will continue to be considered a ‘guest’ in the community. She is an Indian passport holder and when pressed says she is from Delhi, however she has lived in many places in India due to her father’s military career when she was a child and her own academic and professional trajectory as an adult. Prior to relocating to Auroville the year before our meeting Sumitra lived in the United States for more than a decade, visiting Auroville frequently. Sumitra says she can currently live comfortably nowhere else in India. She puts this down to being, herself, a “misfit” in other communities, something she says she has in common with other residents of Auroville.
... well I lived abroad for many years so it’s really hard for me to fit back into regular sort of Indian society. So I figured that out and I knew about this place and I’ve always loved it, so I thought okay, maybe this is a way to be away from India and yet be here. So that’s one reason, it’s very, very selfish I would say.

Bhumi is a Tamil woman in her early thirties who grew up in Edayanchavadi, a village bordering and in places overlapping Auroville land. As a child, Bhumi and her siblings would go to the Matrimandir to enjoy the “quiet peacefulness” of the gardens and building, and to watch foreigners in their daily activities. Despite her close proximity to Auroville and frequent youthful “adventures” in Auroville, Bhumi says she had no idea of the purpose of Auroville and had not heard of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo until adulthood. She learned about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo when she separated from her husband and started attending night school, seven years prior to our conversation. There she was told to speak to the Mother about her problems and given a book of the Mother’s writing. Bhumi has now incorporated the Mother in her spiritual life, wears the symbol of the Mother around her neck and prays to Mother whenever she has a problem. As many Aurovilians do, she uses the book of Mother’s writing as a guide, asking it questions and then opening it at a random page, each time reportedly finding a solution to her problem. “This, Mother is giving me, this chance Mother is giving me, you know?’ she says. ‘She sends me to different places. I believe this, you know, really, I believe.”

Now divorced, Bhumi earns a salary of approximately six to seven thousand rupees per month, including commission, from her retail work in Auroville to support herself and her two children. This is considerably more than the wages of an amma, though still places her in a financially precarious position as a single mother. Bhumi would like to

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70 Edayanchavadi is a pre-existing village located on the south western fringe of Auroville. See Appendix 5 for maps of Auroville and locations of neighbouring villages.

71 ‘Amma’ literally translates to the English word ‘mother,’ however it is typically used in place of ‘housekeeper,’ as is the case here. Local ammas are employed by the vast majority of Aurovillian households and business units, and working as an amma in Auroville is a popular mode of employment for local village women, many of whom support their families with the income of approximately 100 rupees per day they receive for this work.
become Aurovilian, in part to escape some of the social pressures of the village where divorce is frowned upon, however says it would be financially irresponsible for her to do so as she would then have to accept an Aurovilian maintenance, up to two thousand rupees per month less than her current salary, for the same work.

Yuvan is a Tamil man who calls himself a “mystic.” Though his application to the Entry Group has been rejected “more than once,” Yuvan’s Indian citizenship means he does not need Aurovilian status, and the relevant visa, in order to live in Auroville for all intents and purposes as an Aurovilian and so he has decided to abandon his quest to formally join the community. About his desire to nonetheless live there he says “you could say Auroville is a kind of refuge.” Yuvan insists I term Aurovilians ‘refugees’ in my writing,

...because we’re taking refuge from the so called real world and seeking an alternative world, and the whole, you know, it’s so similar to the Iranian guy going to Australia or America and seeking refuge because he’s being pressurised politically. And then the whole visa process and the Entry Group process.

Others’ intended stay in Auroville is much shorter but no less significant to the individual’s life at the time. Patrick arrived in Auroville shortly before I did, staying for a little less than six months. We met on an orientation program for guests and new arrivals. With a magnetic personality, and not shy to invite himself to social events, if not instigate them, Patrick had no trouble making friends with Aurovilians and non-Aurovilians; he became something of a social link between the two groups. The reasons for his Aurovilian sojourn came as a surprise to me, not in keeping with his apparently happy and carefree persona. During the course of our friendship, and a semi-formal interview, I learned that Patrick’s life in the United States had fallen apart in the months prior. His marriage ended and he found himself without a place to live, he had lost most of his life’s savings in a failed investment scheme and his business was faltering. Taking some time out to volunteer and explore a new part of the world was an escape from these worries. Speaking in the present tense about his earlier decision to come to Auroville Patrick says,
I’ve created a situation where a window is in sight, I’ve got a lot of clean up to do of this sort of toxic waste that was sitting there, you know, work and family stress, I’ve got to do all of that. But then I’ve really got to step away and create for myself some kind of sabbatical experience and I thought deeply about this and the best thing in my judgement was to go do some type of volunteer experience.

Early in his time in Auroville, Patrick contemplated becoming a Newcomer, joining the project permanently. Eventually, however, he became less enamoured with the community and ultimately left at the conclusion of his initially planned stay, citing his disenchantment with the ideals of Auroville, the community’s ability to realise them, and an inability to admit more dysfunction into his life. Echoing Dakini but reaching a different decision, he came to the conclusion that his troubles in the United States could not be easily escaped and ought to be handled before making any decision to migrate. Patrick emphatically did not rule out the possibility of returning to Auroville at a later date. About his time in Auroville and his own catharsis, Patrick told me,

I was very much lost at sea for a long time and only in the last month have I been able to get a handle on [it]. But you know, when you come here you do need to take some time, take quite a number of weeks to get your arms around what it is all about and then if [...] you don’t go through that period of six weeks or more to get a handle on it then you really have no business going under the hood and doing that kind of thing. So, I don’t view any [of my time here] as lost.

Like Patrick, Chrissie came to Auroville as a short-term guest in early 2011, however unlike Patrick, Chrissie made the decision to join the community more permanently after approximately just three months, becoming a Newcomer by the end of the year. Chrissie’s life in Germany had been difficult, a single mother whose only child had recently left home, Chrissie’s parents disapproved of some of her lifestyle choices, and she had poor relationships with her siblings. Shortly before leaving Germany a close family member had died and she was told she was unwelcome at the funeral. Feeling
alone, for Chrissie Auroville was a place where she felt reborn, free to be herself, or anyone she wanted to be, safe in the company of strangers unaware and unconcerned by her personal troubles left behind in Europe. Reflecting on what Auroville gives her, Chrissie told me,

It’s a very, very, very, very special place. Because it’s, first of all it’s in India, then it’s an international thing in India, so you have these movements, these religions, these um, kind of living from the Indian people and you have all these Europeans looking for something, you have that mixture. So in Auroville you can live like an old woman or old man doing nothing, yeah? And then you have everything between. And you can meet people you will never meet again, and you can have very deep spiritual experience, if you want. You have just to go into the forest and sit down and meditate very deeply. This is what I can say, for me, if I am open, if it’s the right time, if I want, I can make every experience I want. And if you don’t want, so then just go to work and go home and drink coffee, and, you can do that too. [The difference between Auroville and Germany is] like earth and moon or like earth and sun. You cannot have these experiences in Germany. It’s really hard in Germany to start in a new way. And it’s the air, look around, you have the air, you have the trees and the animals and everything, you’re surrounded by that. In Germany you’re surrounded by walls. Not only real, and everywhere! On the bottom, left and right, on the top, everywhere, every day walls. [Auroville] is really like a medicine.

Approaching his thirtieth birthday, Ganesh felt pressured by his family in nearby Chennai to marry and ‘settle down.’ Though unlikely to leave the material trappings of a corporate life permanently any time soon, a six month sabbatical in Auroville gave Ganesh space from his parents’ persistence to consider his options. He said of his choice of Auroville that it seemed from his internet research to be a community where “there are a lot of experts” and “it would be interesting to work with people who know what they are working on, so I decided to come here.” He added,
I want to figure out what I am doing, so like, I was not having any expectation when I came down here. I thought that to work for about six months for a good cause and I can also find myself, I was lost, so, that’s why I came here.

Aside perhaps from Sumitra, Yuvan and Chrissie (who, if it were not for the categorisations of people used by Auroville would perhaps better fit in previous sections due to their intention to live either permanently or at least for the foreseeable future in Auroville), the Auroville guests I have featured here did not decide to make Auroville their permanent home. However, we can see clear parallels in the way they arrived in Auroville to those who do. As with lifestyle migrants, in each of these examples there is an aspect of trying to align one’s day to day life with one’s self-identity. For Pippa and Elliott this involved learning in the short-term more about something which gives them purpose. For Jonathon and Josie the allure of Auroville, and India, had much to do with their own credibility, using Auroville’s perceived struggles to portray adventurousness and grit in their own identities.

Auroville does offer refuge, as Yuvan insisted, for people such as Dakini and Bhumi who have been able to live there in accordance with their values which do not align with the society in which they had lived previously. While for people such as Patrick and Ganesh, time in Auroville has provided respite they felt needed to reassess their self-identities and goals.

**A Quest**

As we have seen above, not all people coming to Auroville do so with the intention of making it their home, but a significant number do. I have included the stories of shorter term guests above, in part because guests comprise an integral component of the community of Auroville and also because, for many Aurovilians, the experiences they had during time spent in Auroville as a short-term guest prompted them to join, or consider joining, the community more formally, as can be seen in the stories of Chrissie,

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72 Though use of the word ‘refugee’ is problematic, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.
Ganesh and Pippa. I term these members of the community ‘lifestyle migrants’ even though, as I intimated in the beginning of this chapter, the term is somewhat fraught.

Referring to members of intentional communities as lifestyle migrants is not without precedent. Some intentional communities try to create a society without the distractions present in the wider society that prevent one from leading a meaningful life, while others attempt to create a society that includes things that promote a more meaningful life and which its members believe are lacking in the larger society. The latter tend to be more exclusive and secluded communities. In The Story of Utopia, Lewis Mumford calls them “utopias of escape and utopias of reconstruction” respectively (cited in Levitas, 1990, p. 15; see also Sargent, 2012. P. 15). Aurovilians would say that Auroville is of the latter kind. However, this does not mean that some do not cautiously admit they have gone there to escape a past, whether personal or societal, rather than exclusively to reconstruct an ideal society of the future.

Lifestyle migrants are commonly described as privileged elite. When crossing international borders, they are typically people from wealthier nations who relocate to poorer nations in search of personal fulfilment and an affordable lifestyle (cf. Benson, 2014; Benson and Osbaldiston, 2014, pp. 11-12; O'Reilly, 2014; Salazar, 2014, p. 132). However, as we have seen, there are plenty of Tamil people, from anything but privileged backgrounds, even relatively speaking, who have made Auroville their home.73 I consider these people to be no less lifestyle migrants than those who have come from Europe or elsewhere. Tamil people who have made Auroville their home are equally on a quest for Charles Taylor’s ‘good’ (Taylor, 2003 [1991]), seeking to avoid an imagined dissatisfactory future and discover a more meaningful life in Auroville in pursuit of the fulfilment of their own individual potential. We can see this clearly in Dakini’s surrender to what she understands as the higher power of the Mother, Bhumi’s story of freedom, Kalavan’s desire to be a part of the creation of a new life, and the sense of refuge Yuvan finds in Auroville. Moreover, though Tamil Aurovilians are physically closer to their families and friends from their previous homes, in many ways they are just as distant, or perceive themselves to be just as distant, as Aurovilians from Europe are to their previous lives’ associations.

73 A link between Auroville’s place in India and (neo)colonialism will be discussed in Chapter 7.
Aurovilians, and many other members of the Auroville community,²⁴ share with other lifestyle migrants the phenomenon of a “personal quest” for “places of refuge that they can call home and that they believe will resonate with idealized visions of self... the ‘potential self’” (Hoey cited in Benson and Osbaldiston, 2014, p. 2). According to Hoey (2014, p. 85), lifestyle migrants “practice self-definition by relocation. This choice involves consumption – if not of physical things, then of the idea of a place or community that is shaped by an individual’s perceptions and judgements.” They are acting upon their need to feel ‘at home’ in a place other than that considered ‘home’ (cf. Salazar, 2014, pp. 122-123). Gyan, for example, considers Auroville a social experiment which aligns with his self-perception (though initially apparently contradictory). This idea is also evidenced in Sumitra’s story. She uses Auroville in part as a way to define herself, but also defines Auroville and other Auroville residents through her own sense of cultural disjointedness. Telling me she is essentially Indian but unable to fit into “regular Indian society,” she calls herself a “misfit” and says this is something she recognises in others living in the community. Sarah Ahmed (1999, pp. 336-337) suggests a sense of community is provided in part through a sense of collective past which may mean “sharing the lack of a home rather than sharing a home,” as in the case of Sumitra’s understanding of her ‘fit’ with the Auroville community.

For Bachelard (1994 [1969]) home is “a key element in the development of people’s sense of themselves as belonging to a place” (McDowell, 1998, p. 130; see also, Easthope, 2004, p. 135). In many ways we can see Aurovilian residents identifying against the places from which they came as much, if not more than they identify with Auroville (cf. Easthope, 2004, p. 130). Relocating to the community represents an individual quest for ‘the good,’ a reflection of people’s dissatisfaction with the lives and the structure outside of Auroville, and signifies, for them, their ability to break free or to assert individual agency. Auroville offers a “nice alternative” to the “dominant model” as Marcus and Chandana told me.

O’Reilly (2014, p. 219) says it is typical for lifestyle migrants’ decision to move to occur shortly after a time of change or perceived loss of or threat to cultural capital in the

²⁴ Excluding, for example, Tamil workers in Auroville, who I also understand to be members of the Auroville community. While Tamil workers have arguably made a choice to be a part of the Auroville community, this is for the purpose of employment rather than fulfilling any spiritual, social, or emotional need for ‘home’ as have residents.
places they had been living previously (see also Salazar, 2014, p. 122). We see hints of this in the stories of Luke, Hannah, and Chrissie in particular. In the 1960s when Luke first moved to Auroville he did so due to a sense of collapse in his previous life resulting in his perceived need for “a big change” which was nevertheless in keeping with aspects of his previous life he felt represented his true self. For Hannah, awareness of the Auroville community came about at a time when she was unsure of herself and her next move. Hoey (2014, p. 27) says of lifestyle migrants, they “recognize how place is essential in shaping them as persons” and, using a “vocabulary of healing,” “seek the kinds of experiences that they believe a new place can offer them for starting over,” something abundantly clear in Chrissie’s description of Auroville as a ‘medicine.’

While these descriptions fit the motivations of individual Auroville residents, they also appear very familiar to the philosophy behind the community itself. Auroville, as enshrined in the writings of its founders, represents a community-wide quest for a fuller and more meaningful life. For those who study the texts left behind by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the work of Auroville and its members is essentially to expedite widespread realisation of a more fulfilling and satisfactory future for all humanity. The Auroville website, which is many people’s first introduction to Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and the stated lure of Auroville, includes the following very brief summary of Aurobindo’s vision:

The unfolding of more and more complex forms and higher levels of consciousness out of an original total material inconscience is seen as the gradual return to self-awareness and the diverse self-expression of involved Spirit. This process is evidently not complete, and the evolution of higher levels of consciousness and less unconscious forms of expression are to be expected. But with the development of Mind, individual human beings can, if they choose, use their will and intelligence to begin to participate consciously in this process of self-discovery and self-exploration. This knowledge founds an optimistic and dynamic world-view, which gives each individual a meaningful place in a progressive cosmic unfolding, and casts our understanding of human endeavour, whether individual or collective, in a new and purposeful perspective. (Auroville, 2016c)
This summary hints at both the quest of each individual for a personal Truth and realisation of ultimate potential, as well as the importance of community and the recognition of others in this process which is fundamental to Auroville’s collective quest for ‘human unity.’

In exploring some of the reasons people come to Auroville, I have argued that, excluding shorter term guests, most Auroville residents can be termed lifestyle migrants. Like other lifestyle migrants, residents of Auroville are searching for quality of life and a place to feel ‘at home,’ if even temporarily, they believe can be found through their relocation to Auroville. They do not move to Auroville due to the lure of economic gain, despite some notion among Western Aurovilians and guests that this is what attracts Tamil people to the community, but in order to find personal fulfilment. They are escaping what other writers on the phenomenon of lifestyle migration call an imagined dissatisfactory future, as described by Benson and O’Reilly (2009), that may be unavoidable in their previous place of residence. Auroville, for its residents, represents a quest for something better, for themselves and, for those who follow the texts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, for humanity as a whole. Whether or not these people find home in Auroville, we can see in their descriptions of why they came that the identity-affirming security and sanctuary necessarily associated with the idea of ‘home’ are lacking (at least in their narrative reconstructions) in the places from which they came, whether they realised that before arriving in Auroville or not. In describing the various motivations for joining, or living in, Auroville, I have also alluded to the sources of some social tensions in the community, particularly regarding the differences between social, cultural and economic groups, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7. In addition, some people expressed a sense of futility when speaking of their lives both before Auroville and after joining the community, aspects of which are explored further in later chapters.

However, why one comes to Auroville is not necessarily why one stays. In the following three chapters I will discuss the answers people gave me to the question “what keeps you in Auroville?”
4. The Promise of Home

... I was disappointed at first because Auroville had been projected in the literature as something much more developed. And it was totally primitive! [...] it was really, really primitive in all senses of the word, I mean people were really struggling to survive. (Robert)

My impression when I arrived is I thought “Oh my god, where have I put myself?! What are those people?” You know?! Look at this, there is this old woman everywhere on the walls, and she doesn’t really look good, she’s a little bit scary actually! [...] I don’t know if I want to call it disappointment, it was “oh, okay, it’s not there yet,” it was a setback, but not something that would necessarily discourage me. (Joseph)

If, as was suggested in the introduction, one of the most obvious and interesting questions about intentional communities is why people choose to join them, we must logically progress to the question of why people choose to stay in them. In the previous chapter we explored some of the motivations for seeking and joining the Aurovilian community as told to me by its residents. Members of the Auroville community, both those who have joined the community formally and those who are yet to do so, or simply choose to live among Aurovilians for the foreseeable future without formal membership, are typically extremely effusive about the lifestyle Auroville permits or enables. In the previous chapter I referred to residents of the Auroville community as ‘lifestyle migrants.’ Lifestyle migration can be thought of as an explanation for leaving a place and in this way it is somewhat self-explanatory – one migrates in search of a more fulfilling lifestyle. I showed that the arrival stories of many of Auroville’s residents had more to do with leaving the places from which they came than actually joining Auroville. For many, finding Auroville was a serendipitous recognition of potential conditions for personal fulfilment in their quests for contentment and worthwhile endeavour.

In this chapter I look more closely at the reasons people make Auroville their home, not just why they sought a new home. That is, I consider why residents in Auroville believe
they have found the more fulfilling lifestyle they sought in this particular community, or, more simply, what keeps them here. I argue that Auroville’s residents stay in Auroville because they feel it allows them freedom to be authentic, it aligns with their self-identity, and it offers the promise of home in the future if not now. In fact, many residents of Auroville have not actually found ‘home’ in the community. Rather, Auroville offers the promise of home. Inherent in all intentional communities is the notion of utopia. Here, I extend the descriptor ‘utopian’ from the community to the individuals and even to the concept of ‘home.’ ‘Home’, that is, the good place which may in fact be no place. This renders the search, however, no less necessary. The utopianism inherent in the choice to live in Auroville means there is overlap between the reasons people come to Auroville, the focus of the previous chapter, and the reasons they stay, the focus of this and the next chapters. In some sense, they haven’t yet arrived.

Sharon Nepstad, who writes about activist movements, argues that though “receptive attitudes predispose some individuals to a movement,” social ties and biographical availability, that is, freedom from life responsibilities which may inhibit such activity such as work and family obligations, are required in order for people to remain committed (Nepstad, 2004, p. 44). Taking this a step further in consideration of the reasons people told me for relocating to Auroville, the movement, or community, must also continue to hold some relevance to the lives of each of its members with respect to their own goals, values and sense of self. Hazel Easthope provides some clues here. She draws on the work of Heidegger and Bourdieu to answer the questions “how exactly is it that people’s identities are tied to places?” and “What are the mechanisms through which this attachment is realised?” (Easthope, 2004, p. 132). Easthope’s analysis of the idea of ‘home’ as a special kind of place “and its influence on identity” (Easthope, 2004, p. 128) proves useful in a more general sense when applied to the Aurovilian example. According to Easthope (2004, p. 135), recognising how people interpret and connect with ‘home’ is important to understanding “social relations, their psychology and their emotions and we can begin to understand their ‘lived experiences.’” I have somewhat reversed this. In this chapter I examine people’s accounts of what Auroville gives to them, the psychology and emotions of community members, in order to understand their “lived experiences” of home, that is, the psycho-spatial element of home for Aurovilians.
I show that people in Auroville talk not of “freedom from life responsibilities” allowing them to join Auroville but of the freedom from expectations Auroville offers them once they have joined. In fact, “freedom” was the answer I most frequently received to the question “what does Auroville give you?” Responses to further questioning suggest that this means freedom to feel authentic, to autonomously define one’s self-identity, unlike what was possible in the places from which they came. Aurovilians are typically anti-authoritarian (cf. Pillai, 2005, p. 194), and so find the freedom from authority and constraint they so desire upon their move to Auroville. This desire for control over a redefined, more authentic, identity is a common feature of the migration stories of lifestyle migrants, irrespective of their more specific goals or destination.

One of the undergirding principles of Auroville is the notion of Truth. The mother wrote in ‘A Dream’ that there should be a place where “education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones” and that “the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment.” The first lines of ‘To be a True Aurovilian,’ also written by the Mother, reads:

The first necessity is the inner discovery in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the centre there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville.

(Auroville, 2017c)

This disregard for “certificates and posts,” minimisation of “material enjoyment” and necessity of “inner discovery” flows through to the way labour is organised in the community. What is important in Auroville is that you live your Truth. Or, as one Aurovilian told me, “if you are truly a teacher, then go teach, a builder, then build.” Emphasis on authentic endeavour to nourish one’s soul is something that Aurovilians prize in themselves and seek to recognise and encourage in others as a way to advance

75 ‘A Dream’ is reproduced in full in Appendix 2.3.

76 ‘To be a True Aurovilian’ is reproduced in full in Appendix 2.5.
the authenticity of the collective. It also means that in Auroville you can change your workplace at almost any time without judgement for if things are not going well it may be because the individual is not in a position which aligns with their authentic self. Auroville, then, offers its residents the chance to live authentically, for that very individual authenticity to be recognised and celebrated by others, an identity which is, if not oppositional, then at least alternative to ‘mainstream’ culture in the places from which one has come (cf. Korpela, 2019).

In what follows, I discuss the ideas of authenticity, identity, utopia and home as they relate to Auroville, after highlighting some of the reasons people told me for making Auroville their home, which hinge on the perception of freedom.\footnote{Exploration of why people stay in the community clearly lends itself to discussion of commitment building mechanisms. This is especially so in people’s accounts of why they stay that seem contradictory to notions of freedom and authenticity. However, as ‘commitment’ is a central topic of Chapter 5, following, I have omitted it from discussion in this chapter.} Authenticity and identity are, obviously, enormous themes in the social sciences. My aim in this chapter is not to give a thorough analysis of each, but rather to show, using my data, why residents of Auroville stay in the community long term, demonstrating how these ideas are important to these people.

**Why They Stay**

“Freedom” is the word most commonly used by Aurovilians, Newcomers and long term guests to describe what Auroville gives to their lives and is a central tenet running through the narratives of people’s arrival stories. Though in everyday usage the concept of freedom is expressively simplistic, in the context of lifestyle migration it requires some examination. In the eleventh century CE, Anselm defined freedom as “the ability to keep rectitude for its own sake” (cited in Kane, 1973, p. 298), Benn and Weinstein suggest that freedom is “non restriction of options” (Benn and Weinstein, 1971, p. 201; see also Parent, 1974, p. 432), and Bauman (2000, pp. 16-17) defines the feeling of freedom as experiencing “no hindrance, obstacle, resistance or any other impediment to the moves intended or conceivable to be desired.” Of her work with contemporary vagabonds in the United States, documentary photographer Kitra Cahana (2014) states “freedom” is a catch-all phrase encompassing “escape, liberation and rebellion.”
I found many residents of Auroville speak of their choice to live in the community not so much as a choice, but as a compelling obligation arising from their sense of personal integrity. In the following, I recount some of the reasons people give for staying in Auroville and acknowledge the many, sometimes seemingly contradictory, ways Auroville’s residents understand the notion of ‘freedom’ cited so often. In fact, for many, a sense of having surrendered or being ‘captured’ is almost equally as apparent. Reconciling these two apparently opposing forces is the notion of refuge. Auroville, it would appear, acts as a kind of refuge for many of its residents who feel they cannot find a sense of ‘home’ in any other place. As with the ‘definitions’ of freedom cited above, the sense of trying to live authentically, as described above, flows through all of these accounts.

**Freedom**

Pippa, who had been in Auroville just three months and, at the time of our interview, had recently had her Newcomer application accepted told me she sees life in Auroville as an opportunity to escape an identity she feels has been assigned to her. Pippa particularly relishes the importance in Auroville of experimentation and finding vocation. From an early age, she said, “we” are conditioned to think in a certain way and not allowed to “freely and aimlessly explore,” adding,

> I’m such a bumble bee naturally, I want to explore, and you can do that here. I’ve been rock climbing, I’ve been doing a course on polarity, I’m dancing the five elements, I’m learning French, I’m getting involved in different utilities [sic], but there’s none of this notion that if you start something you have to start it with the intention of sticking to it. Like, where is that coming from anyway? Like something about diligence and discipline and all that, but there’s also a stage of exploring and I think probably many of us, even Westerners, we need that stage, that childlike, you know, just being in one minute.

Bringing to mind Isaiah Berlin’s (2002) ‘negative liberty,’ Brian Hoey (2014, pp. 56-57) writes of the sense of freedom “as the right to be left alone by others,” and that it
“encourages development of so-called gated communities or ‘lifestyle enclaves.’” “It is,” he says, “about not having other people’s values, ideas, or styles of life forced upon oneself” (Hoey, 2014, p. 57). In other words, freedom can be understood as liberation from other people’s expectations, the possibility for a self-defined authentic life. Claire, who has lived in Auroville six years, agreed the community gave her agency that she did not feel she had in Europe. She told me “wanting for a house and a car and all the rest is conditioning, it’s normal only because of that, not because it’s natural [...] it’s a structure that’s laid out for you and you’re expected to follow.” While wondering whether the ‘structure’ might provide freedom for some, from decisions and from forging an unknown path, for Claire,

...by coming to Auroville I finally got an opportunity to realise that it wasn’t really my thing and that it, yeah, it just gave me a chance to yeah, to work on what I really want. And I still don’t really know [laughing], but I know much better than before, so it’s yeah, it came at the right moment, really. Yeah, it changed, it changed my life, you know?

Sumitra, who, as we saw in the previous chapter, believes her choice to live in Auroville is “very, very selfish,” told me Auroville provides her with the

...immense mental freedom I feel, mental and physical freedom that I feel as a single woman. I’m being very selfish, but I think the mental freedom gives me time to work through a lot of things that have been going through my mind and that’s kind of tied to the lifecycle stage that I’m at, you know, I’m at a certain age and whatever, the kind of situation that I’m in, so I think this place gives me the space to work through that stuff.

Like Claire, Asmi, from North India, found herself following a completely different path after moving to Auroville to that she had set out on. Though she had a ‘successful’ and well-paid career in a large cosmopolitan city prior to coming to Auroville, when asked what Auroville gives her that she did not have previously Asmi responded,
Huge amount of richness which is intangible, not a material richness, we are a society which talks about no circulation of money. But I wouldn’t have been so rich anywhere else. I feel so free, so vast, so rich, so fulfilled, happy and so connected that I almost have forgotten, I feel I am fifteen years old. I almost have forgotten, life before Auroville has become an archival file which belongs to my earlier incarnation. And I think that’s where the difference comes, your consciousness comes to recognise your life earlier not as a life as such.

Robert also speaks of his life in Auroville in terms of richness. When asked what Auroville gives him, he said “Auroville always gives me the sense of living fully, this richness.” A child of the sixties, Robert told me he grew up in California with ideas about peace and sustainability but felt trapped in a “system which means driving a car and using a credit card etcetera,” but “when I’m living in Auroville I feel so good because I can live those [ideals].” In Auroville, he says, he is “not flushing things down the drain. I feel like I’m facing things and that I’m in to nature,” he is able to live his values.

Spiritual freedom is another element in this narrative of freedom. Ganguly notes that the religions of India, allow for a greater freedom of belief and expression, they are more ‘open,’ than many monotheistic religions, particularly Christianity. Westerners living and seeking spiritual lives in India, Ganguly (2014, pp. 122-123) finds, do so largely due to “spiralling disenchantment and the deeply felt existential need to live an alternative lifestyle.” Although Auroville is officially non-religious, even anti-religion (Sullivan, 1994, pp.223-226), this spiritual openness is a key feature of life in Auroville, even more so than elsewhere in India. Rebellion against the perceived confines of religion, especially of one’s family, is a commonly cited appeal of life in Auroville.

Hannah talks of her mother as living life as a “secular nun.” Hannah hated her catholic

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78 The Mother was expressly anti-religion. Religious freedom is respected in Auroville, however religion in general, like party politics, is seen as divisive, oppositional to Aurovilians’ goal of human unity. This is a matter of some debate in Auroville, especially among guests who often note that in Auroville it is, arguably, difficult to distinguish between religion and the expression of spiritual devotion to The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Nonetheless, guests and residents alike are reminded frequently through reference to the Mother’s words in tourist information about the community, talks about the founding philosophies, regular columns in the weekly newsletter and other sources, that Auroville is formally against religion. More, easily accessible, information about this in the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother can be found on the Auroville website (for example, G., 2016).
upbringing and sought to get as far away as possible from it, literally as well as figuratively, as soon as she was old enough to leave home.

Elena also talks about the freedom she has to be herself in India and to work on her own sadhana. She, and others, feels sure there are cultural forces in India particularly receptive to the Aurovilian journey. However, some Indian nationals told me that living in Auroville offers them freedom from aspects of Indian culture which are stifling to their ability to express their authenticity. Chetana, for example, is a Tamil woman from a village south of Pondicherry who was not at the time of our interview Aurovilian, however aspired to be so as quickly as she could. Unmarried and in her mid-thirties, she says she is now considered unmarriageable and therefore stigmatised in her village community. This is not, however, of particular concern to Chetana who says “roughly one percent of Tamil men are good men. In one hundred only one person good person,” and then, “it’s very, very bad my culture.” Unlike her also unmarried sister, who Chetana says cries herself to sleep each night out of the shame of not being a wife, Chetana tells me she never desired a husband, that she does not have much respect for the men of her village or desire to be, in her words, “a man’s servant. [...] I will earn my money myself. I will manage.” Chetana has relocated to one of the villages neighbouring Auroville. From there she is able to visit Auroville almost daily to participate in a village outreach program run by an Aurovilian NGO for Tamil women. She is also seeking work in the community. Chetana talks a lot about freedom in Auroville, and she relishes the ability she has in Auroville to disengage with some aspects of her Tamil culture but not completely her local identity. For Chetana, life in Auroville enables her to actively reject all that she finds abhorrent or stifling in Tamil culture, specifically gender relations. Apparently unaware of organised and wide scale international feminist movements, which have only recently become visibly active in India, Chetana sees relative gender equality in Auroville and believes this is something inherent to Western culture.

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79 Sadhana is a Sanskrit word meaning the practice one participates in towards a spiritual goal. One of Auroville’s communities has used this term in its name, Sadhana Forest. The sadhana for residents of Sadhana Forest, for example, includes reforestation work, communion with nature, veganism, and unschooling their children. This is what people in Auroville are referring to when they speak of “doing the work,” they are performing their sadhana, doing the work required to reach their spiritual goal. In Auroville people are free to determine their own sadhana according to their own needs.
Chetana also told me that she is troubled by what she sees as increasingly competitive consumerism in Tamil culture which, despite the relative overall wealth of Auroville, she believes does not exist in Auroville. “Auroville is very, very good. My mind is free and everything beautiful in Auroville,” Chetana says. When asked directly why she would like to become Aurovillian, Chetana told me that there is a freedom in Auroville not available to her in her Tamil village to select or reject cultural practices from the very many cultures represented in the community. “Life is very different,” she said, “here everybody smiling, everybody friendship. And, if I don’t want I take out, if I like I keep it. This much I like.”

While members of the Aurovillian community from outside of India tend to speak of the freedom Auroville gives them to disassociate from social expectations they feel are placed on them in their passport countries, and Chetana spoke of the freedom the community gives her to disassociate from expectations of Tamil culture, two Aurovilians from elsewhere in India told me that in Auroville they feel more Indian and it is this which they find enriching. Asmi said “I am Indian, but I had no idea I was Indian until coming to live in Auroville.” Prior to moving to Auroville’s multinational community, being Indian was irrelevant to her life. In response to the question of what living in Auroville gives her, Anjali, an artist, exclaimed “Everything actually!” More specifically, she declares, “My cultural identity is stronger here. I’m more Indian in Auroville!” I asked Anjali if she meant more Gujarati, in reference to her home state, to which she told me quite definitively no, she was “quite sure of this, more Indian.” She recounted a story of visiting village artisans with a non-Indian fellow Aurovillian craftsperson soon after her arrival in Auroville in order to learn about local and grassroots practice. Though not in the state of India in which she grew up, she found herself needing to explain to her friend cultural beliefs and practices she had previously taken for granted. “[...] when I go to the villages, with someone who is a Westerner,” she told me, “I started looking at my own culture completely differently, this is a turning point.” Anjali tells me that living in Auroville gives her daily opportunities to explore aspects of her own culture through the eyes of others without feeling restrained by it.

80 This is not to say that all non-Indian Aurovilians necessarily try to disassociate from the cultures of their passport countries or that all Indian Aurovilians do not. In fact, in the time I lived in Auroville a workshop titled ‘Soul of the Nation’ dedicated to recognition of the cultural influences of one’s birthplace on personality and outlook became very popular among non-Indian Aurovilians. Also, it is notable that for
Refuge

I was introduced to Marcus by some fellow long-term guests as “the happiest Aurovilian.” A description at which Marcus himself snickered with distinct derision. At this first meeting our mutual friends encouraged us to make an appointment for an interview, but Marcus resisted, suggesting that, though he welcomed the opportunity to contribute to my research, it would be best to hold off until later in the year. He said there was no point meeting under the sign of Cancer (as it was then), he would prefer to be interviewed under almost any other sign and wanted to make an appointment to do so at a chance future meeting.

Under the sign of Virgo, I met Marcus at his house on the edge of the Greenbelt where he lives with various wild and domesticated animals. He has a passion for nature and wildlife and surrounds himself with both, often preferring, he says, the company of animals and trees to people. Marcus’ house is a simple but comfortable three rooms, mostly open to the elements save some mesh walls which act as barriers to insects but allow ventilation, and, as is common in Auroville, shows consideration for design aesthetics despite its simplicity. Books hinting at his diverse interests fill shelves along the entire wall of one side of the living room. Marcus’ personal appearance matches the simplicity and nature of his home. From central Europe and in his mid-sixties, he is a distinctive looking character, perhaps a stereotype of the aging hippie of his era. His greying hair and beard are unkempt, and his everyday attire consists of little more than a pair of shorts, moth-eaten t-shirt and sandals.

Marcus enjoys living in Auroville, but, more than community, it is the lifestyle Auroville affords him that he relishes. He sees himself as a recluse, and an anarchist. He is proud of being able to buck the system, of having held on to his hippie ideals of the 1960s and 70s. On this issue, he regards many of his contemporaries still in Europe as “sell outs.” He has spent time in jail, mostly on drug and sedition charges, for which he is unashamedly proud. Questions about his political leanings and adventures were people such as Chetana, Sumitra and Dakini, living in Auroville gives them a chance to withdraw from aspects of Indian culture they found stifling given each of their individual personal situations. The point made is that Aurovilians feel a sense of freedom to be authentic, to engage with, even appropriate or discover, or to divorce from cultural expressions and expectations as applicable to their own sense of self.
welcomed unguardedly. Auroville’s posited lawlessness drives Marcus’ identification as Aurovilian.

When I asked him what qualities he thinks Aurovilians possess he quickly said,

  Being unconventional. Being detached from their original conditioning which fucks up most of our lives, as much as possible. And really looking towards the future and just going there no matter what the consequences.

Suggesting Marcus’ understanding of the importance of authenticity over conditioning in Auroville, he added there are plenty of people in Auroville who are not as detached as others from their “original conditioning” and it is these people who he thinks have the most difficulties in and with the community, or who take it in directions he disapproves of, such as implementing rules by which to live.

In explaining his journey to Auroville in the mid-1980s, Marcus referred to himself as a rebel and anarchist of the 1960s:

  As I said, I’m a child of the sixties and the big thing then was stop following all the rules, stop participating in things like Vietnam war and all these doctrines, it was part of the trigger, and there was a few other things, and just don’t follow governments, just like that. It doesn’t make sense. This bit [of Auroville’s philosophy] makes sense. And also in the Western countries I don’t necessarily follow all the rules which brought me into prison several times and all the things, but the world changes.

Marcus takes refuge in Auroville from what he sees as punitive restrictions on his ability to live according to his moral philosophies on life in Europe, something not unique among Aurovilians. Other Aurovilians stay in Auroville due to the absence of any other place to call home. When I asked him what holds the community together Gyan joked “we’ve got nowhere else to go!” A participant in another study of Auroville remarked

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81 Here Marcus is referring to the premise that there should be no rules in Auroville. This proves a controversial issue in Auroville today.
“Everyone is in exile here because the country that we want to immigrate to doesn’t exist yet” (Mohanty, 2008, p. 154). In the previous chapter I noted Yuvan’s insistence that Aurovilians be likened to refugees. Claire, too, told me “we are all refugees in Auroville.” Gyan described Tamil Aurovilians as “economic refugees” due to his perception of the poverty in which they lived before becoming Aurovilian. He also referred to Aurovilian “pensioners from Europe” as “economic refugees” due to the difference in lifestyle their pensions afford them in Auroville compared to their home countries. Estelle told me of a man from France who calls himself a “political refugee” because he left Europe dissatisfied with the political climate there.

The appropriation of victimhood gives residents of Auroville a certain kind of agency. It allows them to feel justified in their determination to stay in the community, despite the challenges and often strained relationships with indigenous neighbours. For Tamil Aurovilians and would be Aurovilians it demonstrates their shared commitment to the values of Auroville and rejection of those elements of Tamil culture which led them to Auroville. Many of these people take great delight in the apparent freedom Auroville offers them, but in fact, to be a refugee means to not be free (cf. Renfro-Sargent 2002, p. 99). Though insensitive to the plight of actual refugees who cannot freely return to their previous homes, Aurovilians appropriate the label ‘refugee’ in order to reference the restrictions and lack of authenticity they felt in their previous lives, the tenuousness of their present (which is partly at the mercy of continued goodwill on the part of the Government of India), and to highlight identity issues involved in their intentional move from one society to another, the uprooting of their lives. In referring to themselves as refugees, then, Aurovilians are not saying that their lives are constrained as refugees, but in fact the opposite, that Auroville allows them like no other place they have lived, the freedom to live authentically.

The notion of refuge implies a degree of temporality which aligns with Aurovilians’ non-commitment to the idea of future. The people I spoke to in Auroville largely suggested they instead prefer to leave consideration of the future in the Mother’s hands in order to themselves concentrate on the present. I asked Archan what he thought the future of Auroville would hold, curious to see how he would answer in light of the lamentations about the increasing presence of governance in the community he expressed immediately prior. Rather than scoffing at what I expected to be a perceived futility of
the question, Archan seemed to interpret the question as though I had implied Auroville no longer held relevance in today’s world. In his answer we see that, for Archan, Auroville is a refuge for the people who choose to live there, just as it is provided refuge by its deceased founders via the Government of India:

Maybe, if it is, I believe it is divine will, so the Divine can do anything. But I think it will protect, Auroville will be protected enough so that it is going on, it’s a shelter no? It’s the idea of a shelter, Auroville. For people who are willing to experiment something which they cannot experiment elsewhere. It does not mean that elsewhere there is nothing which exists in Auroville, but there they have a plan on everything, and we have the freedom and we have the responsibility, supposedly, and we have fantastic help from India’s atmosphere, from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s research and testimony and help, and we have freedom, and a very, very, very high, very high ideal.

Sumitra, above, spoke of the “mental and physical freedom” Auroville gave her to work through personal issues tied to her identity and stage of life, presumably something she believes would be impossible to do elsewhere. In this way Auroville is for Sumitra a safe place or refuge of sorts, a place where she can be herself and develop into the person she wants to become.

Common to these accounts is a perception of being a ‘misfit’ in the places each had lived before, as discussed in both the previous and following chapters. Marcus certainly considers himself something of an outsider in his previous place of residence. Noted in the previous chapter, Jonathon referred to the many “loners” in Auroville, Josie suggested Aurovilians, certainly early Aurovilians, are renegades, and Sumitra called Aurovilians “misfits in regular society.” Estelle told me she had always lived “not in the stream, outside, on the edge, always,” and in Auroville she did not feel judged for this. Kerryn told me that she feels like “an oddball” in America. “In Auroville,” said Pippa, “anyone can find their space.”

Though not intending to move to Auroville permanently in the immediate future, Ganesh says he will consider it in the future. He says his friends in Chennai think he is “crazy” to have spent six months in Auroville, but “Yeah, I like to be crazy, I don’t mind”
he says. Hannah told me one of the best things about Auroville for her is being in a place where she can talk about things on her mind and in her heart freely, she can be “really open about being a dreamer and trying to make the world a better place and self-improve and not be thought crazy.” Alex Norman (2011) writes about ‘spiritual tourism,’ a term which Sharpley and Sundaram (2005) would argue applies to many of Auroville’s residents. Spiritual tourists in Rishikesh, Norman argues, “are articulating that, at least in part, their view of Western life is that it is inherently unhealthy” (2011, p. 41). Though writing about shorter-term tourists in Rishikesh, he could equally be speaking about many of the residents of Auroville, both Western and non-Western, who tend to see the community as an oasis and seek “re-creation in their recreation time” (Norman, 2011, p. 41).

**Surrender**

When I asked Paul what brought him to Auroville he also told me “destiny, my soul, it’s ingrained on my soul. I was captured by this place.” Paul is clearly using poetic language to express the delight he takes in being a part of the Auroville community and not actually conveying a feeling of imprisonment, however this is indeed analogous to how some of my informants spoke of their lives in Auroville. Hannah, in the previous chapter, told me “destiny” brought her to Auroville. When I asked Leila if she considers Auroville to be her home, she told me,

> Even the earth is not my home. I was brought here and so now I am here and I try to do the best I can. Stop asking myself why I’m here, it’s just okay, I’m here, and when I started I was like, okay there’s a reason why I’m here, I don’t even need to know why. I’m here so why shouldn’t I have fun, why shouldn’t I really enjoy it?! Each day is a gift and it’s a special blessing.

Despite now being one herself, Estelle does not appear to have a lot of respect for Aurovilians. She says the community attracts strange people, and “makes normal people strange.” She joked to me “They want to create a new species, but they are already a different species!” Estelle went through the Newcomer process twice of her own volition before becoming Aurovilian, she wanted to delay the outcome in order to
be really sure. Estelle credits, or blames, the Mother for her life and frustrations in Auroville. After seven years living in Auroville, though Aurovillian for just one year, Estelle told me she would desperately love to return to Europe, however this apparently is not according to the Mother’s will. In the beginning a love affair kept her in Auroville. When this relationship ended after several years, her work kept her in Auroville. Now Estelle says it is a course of spiritual study that keeps her there. She believes the Mother repeatedly opens new paths for her to travel in Auroville when previous paths cease to exist, and each new path leads further into the Auroville maze and away from her home in Europe. “I am in exile here” says Estelle. Though she speaks of something more akin to entrapment than liberation when she speaks of her life in Auroville, in essence Estelle believes her time there will ultimately give her more freedom to realise her authentic self. In reference to the difficulties she encounters with the community, she told me “I am learning and growing myself, I was so naïve before!” Estelle told me she asks herself on a regular basis what she is doing in Auroville and if she still needs to be there. Estelle would like to leave, but, she says, she needs to stay, the journey is not complete.

Contradictory to accounts of freedom and autonomy above, a great deal of Aurovilians such as Estelle talk about their lives as a journey of which they are partially in control having relinquished much of the navigation to a higher power. On one hand Auroville allows individuals to take control of their own development, on the other they tend to talk about the role of the Mother or, perhaps, fate, in guiding people’s lives, the inherent contradiction apparently unnoticed. While Aurovilians may believe they share control of their lives with the Mother, it is defined on their own terms. Estelle, for example, cites the Mother for her inability to leave the community. However others suggest the Mother, or an unnamed other force, will guide a person who is not suited to life in Auroville out of the community. Demonstrating this perception of sharing the driving seat of life’s course with a higher power, the quote below from Elena suggests her not uncommon belief that people will not stay in Auroville if it is not “their place”:

I believe very much that if you are not in tune with Auroville something is going to happen, you are not going to stay here if it’s not something that should happen. So, yeah, each one has to find out. Because here it’s like, it’s open, no? Each one has to, each one can do whatever it wants, no one is going to tell you don’t do that or do that, you should do this or do that. So it’s
much more harder if you have to look inside yourself and just find your way, and you know, just keeping track of okay, that’s what I want, that’s what I don’t want. So the job is quite something.

Though Claire is not so enamoured with the Mother as many other Aurovilians and does not refer to the Mother as a guide, she nonetheless also demonstrated this idea of partial surrender to a journey mapped by another:

You think you’re following a path, you know, and all of sudden something, not blocks you but turns you around and you find yourself walking another path. And it’s a new adventure, I mean it’s not always easy and, Auroville has its own challenges to overcome, but it’s, yeah, it’s still an adventure in a way.

Reflecting on why she remains in Auroville, Claire later added, “sometimes I ask myself the question, am I really the right person to be in Auroville, you know, what am I contributing?” “[S]o what’s keeping me here?!“ she asks pondering the fact that her life in Auroville has been relatively smooth, and yet some others who are far more enamoured with the Aurovilian ideals seem to meet with insurmountable difficulties in their quest to become part of the community and so eventually leave. In response to her own question, Claire suggested,

Okay, so you could say yeah, it’s spiritual. I can’t help wondering, you know, is it some, some, yeah, I don’t call it ‘divine’…? And then I look at other things I do and I think, okay, I do volunteer work and I do, you know, [speak to] people in this way. So yeah, Auroville has been kind to me. Maybe if [the Mother] is there she has no hard feelings for me.

82 Claire is referring here to her agreement to speak to me on record about the community. Aurovilians are not necessarily required to speak to researchers about the community, but it is hoped that those who do are honest about their experiences while also shining a favourable light on the intentions of the community.
This relinquishing of power over the course of their lives is what in fact gives people freedom to explore their day to day without apparent concern for their personal futures. Claire described this embracing of uncertainty which gives her freedom to live more fully in the present in terms of what it means to be at home in Auroville:

…it’s strange because in a way I realise that feeling at home has nothing to do with having security. Like I say, I’m housesitting, but yeah, I don’t know how my life will look next month, you know? It can change any moment, this is what I mean, it brings a lot of challenges, but I don’t know, the feeling at home has nothing to do with having a home, having, you know, having the security of having a family, having a car and house. It is more within you than outside you. Yeah, this is also something I discovered. And a lot of people back in Europe, they just think it’s a phase and I still get that question, Claire, when will you finally come back and start working, or start a life or start a family? And I’m like wake up, okay that’s a way of thinking, that’s the way I thought before also but it’s, feeling at home is, I think it’s an internal process more than anything else.

I interviewed Patrick, a long-term guest and volunteer in Auroville, shortly before he left the community, who highlighted a sense of entrapment in Auroville may come from more logistical issues. Until a few weeks before this interview Patrick had been considering applying to become a Newcomer, but it had suddenly dawned upon him that such a commitment to the community may be irrevocable at a later date. His own search for freedom was measured by this fear of entrapment.

I think some people come here with a tremendous amount of optimism, they go through the process, they maybe see some of the defects, but they become so excited with it, or about it, and they go further down the path and make an investment in being here, go through the Newcomer process, build something, put their entire net worth behind it and etcetera. And then, that’s it, they’re fully hooked, they’re in. How do you extricate yourself from that? Let’s say you dedicate those years of your life which are normally the most productive years, into this. And you go from age 24 to 44, or something, dedicating your
time to building some kind of community here that’s experimenting in some thing and you have now drawn on every financial resource you have. And what you have now is a house that you paid for that sits on land that you do not own and, where, you know, you’re not getting anything back. [...] and I think some of them stay for that reason. You don’t have any choices anymore. Um, if you’ve been making something like 5000 rupees a month working here in some office, which is what, a little over $100 a month, what kind of funds do you have to return to Switzerland or Germany or the United States or whatever, to start your life, even when you’re still young, like 45 or whatever, what are you going to do at that point? And then, what if you’re 55, and especially then what if you’re 65?

This feeling of being trapped has been identified in previous studies of Auroville. At least one person suggested to Mohanty (2008, p. 145; 155) the financial restrictions to relocating back to their ‘home’ country as they have not had the opportunity to save or participate in a pension scheme, and their age would work against them in the job market. Following discussion of people’s frustration with the community, Pillai (2005) asks why “someone so despairing of the community’s proposal and development continues to live there?” She reaches the same conclusions as Patrick and Mohanty, that for even for those who have passports of other countries, the possibility to leave Auroville can seem logistically near to impossible. There is a “perception of being ’stuck’ in the place” (Pillai, 2005, p. 296).

Feelings of entrapment or being captured seem counter to any notion of freedom. However, this paradox in the comments of some interviewees who see that their individual self is best served by submission to the Mother’s authority is a tension noted in studies of religious communities elsewhere (see, for example, Mahmood, 2005). If indeed they felt ensnared by Auroville, Hannah, Paul, Leila and Estelle have all willingly surrendered. Each alluded to a sense of powerlessness in telling me that their lives in Auroville are the result of ‘destiny,’ the Mother’s guiding hand or some other intangible force. Even Claire, who does not feel a strong connection to the Mother, spoke of not being fully in control of her life. Relinquishing control gives Claire a sense of freedom she did not feel in Europe where she felt constrained by societal expectations. While
Estelle is the only Aurovilian I spoke to who expressed a clear desire to leave the community, she too believes that for the present time at least (at the time of our meeting), Auroville is where her identity is best served. Estelle told me that the Mother will decide when it is time for her to leave. Auroville’s freedom, so effusively described by other Aurovilians, is somewhat tempered by these people, perhaps in order to avoid the suggestion that they could in fact leave. It may be that the anticipated blow to one’s security and sense of identity likely to result from leaving (whether or not founded) causes some Aurovilians greater anxiety than the sometimes significant challenges of day to day life in Auroville, as discussed in the following section. As Hoey (2014, p. 129) surmises of his research participants, too much freedom may cause sensations of “anxiety and even fear” and so “[i]t may be easier for people to act as if there were no options and as if they did not have a choice.”

**Authenticity and Utopia**

Frustration with the contest between “resentment of insecurity” and “fear of lack of freedom” (Bauman, 2011, p. 432) is evident in many people’s reflections on Aurovilian life. A large number of Auroville residents talk about the freedom they experience in the community as the key reason to be there. However, as I have shown above, for some Auroville offers a sense of refuge from an uncooperative world outside of the community, and for others the reason for staying is more akin to a feeling of being captured or even trapped. Hoping to resolve some of this incongruity, I asked most interviewees about the challenges of living in Auroville. To these questions people often laughed and told me there were too many to list! Few expressed a clear desire to leave and feeling of unwilling entrapment such as Estelle, instead many seemed to delight in the challenges they find in living in the community. What struck me as most remarkable is that the very things that seemed to bring people to Auroville, the things which Aurovilians and community members seemed to relish about their lives in the community, were the same things they reported to be the most difficult. It is actually these challenges which keep them there. When I asked James about some of the challenges of living in Auroville, he answered “freedom” without hesitation. By this, he explained, freedom can be as much of a problem as it is a solution. Like James, Joseph
sees the freedom offered by Auroville as an exciting reason to live in the community and equally a daily challenge. When asked what keeps him here, he responded,

What keeps me here is that um, ah, you know when I was a kid I used to read this fantastic cartoon, it was one of those things that come in just a few pictures, like two or three pictures, and the character was a man, a little short fat man, so already I can identify pretty good [laughing], and this guy was dressed in a toga and the particularity of this character is that he had a cloud above his head and there was a hand coming out of that cloud and the whole story was that according to what was happening to the character of the cartoon, what was happening in the cloud would be changing, so it was becoming very self-evident that the cloud was his consciousness, or his awareness, or there was a relationship there going on, and that’s what keeps me in Auroville. There is nobody else to point the finger at but myself. So, that’s, that’s why I’m here, to discover that. When you have nobody that you can point your finger at then how do you deal with, you know, all your thoughts and all you think is right and so on, what should be done, what should not be done, and it always comes back to you, so it’s a challenge. That’s what keeps me here.

Dakini told me the greatest “gift of the Mother” is the knowledge that “nobody controls you and this is good.” However, Chandana told me thoughtfully that in Auroville you need a lot of self-discipline to take advantage of the freedom that is there. This is good for some people while others need the structure of “the outside.” This is clearly exemplified by Joseph’s response to the question of what it means to be Aurovilian. After a prolonged pause he answered by referencing a painting he once carried, a postcard reproduction, which represented to him the challenges involved with the freedom experienced in Auroville. “This image that always stayed in my mind,” he says,

…the painting represents a tightrope walker that holds the rope on which it’s walking. That’s what it is to be an Aurovilian. So that, that’s the image, you know? It all depends about you, if you give some slack to the rope, you’re gone.
The Mother was very clear in her desire that Aurovilians be “free of all social conditioning” (cited in Mohanty, 2008, p. 190). “One lives in Auroville in order to be free from moral and social conventions,” she wrote, “but this freedom must not be a new slavery to the ego, to its desires and ambitions...” (Alfassa, 2017 [1971]). Perhaps counter to the intentions of the Mother as demonstrated in this quote, many of the complaints about the cultures from which Aurovilians came, the imagined futures they escaped, are based on individualism. In the previous chapter I referred to residents of Auroville as lifestyle migrants, and as is common among lifestyle migrants, “their migration to escape the horrors of the contemporary world, many of which stem from excessive individualism, is facilitated and explained precisely by the migrants’ own individuality” (O’Reilly and Benson, 2009, p. 6).

According to Dennis Waskul (2009, p. 58), the common understanding of authenticity, that it is associated with “properties of genuineness, realness, and at times even originality” is too simplistic. More pointedly, authenticity can be described as referential to the act of living in a manner which acquiesces entirely with one’s values. Authenticity, he says, “accounts for the degree to which a person feels they are fulfilling commitments they have to self” (Waskul, 2009, p. 58). An authentic person “believes they are the person they portray themselves to be” (Waskul, 2009, p. 62; see also Vannini and Burgess, 2009, p. 104). “When actions are congruent with core self-conceptions, one’s self is affirmed and one experiences authenticity; when one’s actions do not reflect or affirm one’s core self, one feels inauthentic” say Vannini and Burgess (2009, p. 104). Charles Taylor argued that we are driven to find our authentic selves, even if unattainable. So doing, he said, is a “moral task,” “for the benefit of the common good” (cited in Kotarba, 2009, p. 156), a statement very much corresponding to the intentions of Aurovilians and views of the Mother.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the idea of home is tied up with concepts of authenticity and self-identity. While authenticity a personal matter—am I who I say I am?—identity is also a social issue. One may be able to determine what it means to live an authentic life for themselves, even define self-identity, but is it recognised by others? Is it enabled or resisted by others? “An identity is established when others place an individual as a social object by assigning that person the same words of identity that she
or he announces for her- or himself” says Dennis Waskul (2009, p. 61), “…authenticity does not reside in the person him- or herself but in fleeting and momentary acts of communication and interaction – by the person as well as others who act toward him or her.” Should ‘home’ fail to offer the ability to live in a manner corresponding with one’s values and sense of self, people may seek another where not only are they able to do that, but where other residents will, to use some of Waskul’s words, assign the same words of identity that the migrant announces for her or himself.

An example of a way to make an implicit, though pointed announcement of one’s search for authenticity and identity, is to change the label by which one is known. In reference to some of her research participants’ desire to “create a new, happier, self and to leave old expectations and roles behind” Korpela (2014b, p. 31) notes that it is not uncommon for lifestyle migrants in India to adopt an Indian name typically with a spiritual meaning or connection to nature, a “good illustration,” she says “of a change of identity.” Similarly, it is not uncommon for non-Indian residents of Auroville to have selected a name, different to that given to them at birth, which reflects the qualities they either aspire to or those recognised in them by others as in the not uncommon case of having spent some time with a ‘guru’ elsewhere on the subcontinent prior to arriving in Auroville.\(^{83}\) An Indian name gives these people an identity tied to their adopted land, satisfying a need to assert the Indianness of the community they have chosen to belong to, as much as it does their Aurovilianness. It helps to ground Auroville firmly on Indian soil and in Indian cultural traditions, as much as it helps to mark the life path sought by these individuals.

James, for example, changed his name upon arrival in Auroville to the Sanskrit name ‘Anand’ meaning ‘joy’ or ‘bliss,’ and Heike changed hers to ‘Hritika, meaning ‘truthful.’\(^{84}\) Kerryn, a newer adult arrival to Auroville whose search for authenticity is self-limited to resonance with her English language heritage rather than the cultural environment in which she has placed herself, is exploring English names that are synonyms for words

\(^{83}\) A number of, particularly European, Aurovilians, especially in the early years, ended up in Auroville at the end of a spiritual quest that took them to the ashram in Pondicherry via other holy sites and centres of ashrams in other parts of India and Nepal. Some of these people changed their names \textit{en route}, adopting names assigned to them in other ashrams, or by ‘gurus’ or other spiritual seekers met along the way.

\(^{84}\) The requirement in this work for anonymity wherever possible means that these names are merely examples of the types of names, rather than actual names, found in Auroville.
such as ‘compassion’ or ‘to serve,’ names such as ‘Clemency’ and ‘Nurture,’ in the hope that adopting such a name, or ‘label,’ will help her to live the qualities the name implies. For Kerryn, this is a part of what life in Auroville is about, there

...is an opportunity to play with what you think are immovable, or make yourself up. Be yourself, but who are you anyway?! [...] in any authentic exploration of human endeavour, hopefully the endeavour is to be your authentic self, your true self. But you have to slough off layers of imposition of some authority, you know, so you’re under control.

Babies born in Auroville while the Mother was alive were named by her, each with the prefix Auro- or Aura- in honour of Sri Aurobindo and the community they were creating in his name. Each of these individuals therefore carries their identity as belonging to, and their ownership over, the community in which they were born within their name. For these Aurovilians, their names function as a “marker of status” (Vannini and Williams, 2009, p. 3) irrefutably representing their authenticity as Aurovilians. Apparently only a small number of parents continued this tradition following the death of the Mother, however it is common of non-Indian parents in Auroville, as well as Indian, to give their children Sanskrit names which embody the spirituality and values they hope their children will possess as they grow, and perhaps equally importantly identify them as belonging to an Indian tradition adopted by their parents.

According to Tea Golob (2013, p. 157), “finding oneself may be equated with finding a ‘home,’ as the concept could denote a house, a family, a locus of belonging and/or imagined community.” “People refer to their home as a symbol of how they see themselves and want to be seen by others” wrote Després (1991, p. 98). “In social psychology,” she adds, “the home plays a crucial role in people’s definition of their self-identity, acting as a dialogue between them and the larger community” (Després, 1991, p. 101). Somerville (1997) also refers to psychological approaches to understanding ‘home.’ People “become attached to certain objects in the world insofar as they tend to identify themselves with those objects and attempt to preserve this sense of identity in their everyday lives,” he says. Linking Proshansky et al’s (1983) influential ‘place-identity’ to the idea of ‘home,’ Somerville (1997, pp. 229-230) says that “when the
object to which one is attached is a place, we have ‘place-identity,’ and when it is a place which is central to the individual concerned, we have ‘home.’”

However, identity and home are not static, and in Auroville this is a conscious and ongoing concern of community members. For Aurovilians, authentic expression and self-identity is a journey, an important component of which is the perception of personal change and development, as is outlined in the Auroville charter. One Aurovilian, Leila, told me “If you’re not willing to change, don’t come around here, you’re not ready if you think ‘okay, I will come here and I will stay the same way that I am.’ It’s not worth it.” Estelle’s conviction that she needs to live in Auroville, at least for the time being, as described above, despite her apparent disdain for the community is also indicative of this attitude. For her, authenticity and personal growth will lead to a happiness or contentment more important than the present discomfort of Auroville life.

The idea that “home is less about ‘where you are from’ and ‘more about where you are going’” (Ginsburg 1999, p. 35 in Mallett, 2004, p. 77) is a popular one which suggests potential utopianism of the very idea of ‘home.’ “Home suggests a certain dynamic adaptability” writes Dovey (1985, p. 43), “The growth of identity requires a certain freedom of interaction between present and future, between our experiences and dreams.” Dovey is writing here about “Knowing that we have the power to remain in place and change it,” but could feasibly just as easily be writing about knowing that we have the power to change place. For Blunt and Dowling (2006, p. 23), “home does not simply exist, but is made,” it is “a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging,” they say, which “has both material and imaginative elements.”

Lifestyle migration, as discussed in the previous chapter, whether that be spiritual migration, retirement migration, or any other type of migration undertaken in order to realise a more fulfilling life, represents the beginning, rather than end, of a process or project of change for those who undertake it (see O’Reilly and Benson, 2009, p. 2). The first line in the book Turning Points, a collection of stories of pioneering Aurovilians’ journey to Auroville is “This collection of stories is not about the past” (Devin, 2009 [2008], p. 5). Though the people featured in the book recount and reflect upon the factors which led them to Auroville and their early experiences of building the community, the book tries to make clear that the pioneering spirit continues, the goals
are not reached, nor perhaps can be, but the task of Aurovilians who stay in the community is to continue asking of themselves and their community the same questions they asked at arrival. Ganguly (2014, p. 125) says of her study of foreign residents of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry:

The arrival narratives are thus not as much about arriving at as they are about arriving to(ward), that is a journey that unfolds in the process of approaching the destination.

It is through migration that people in the Auroville community seek to find the better life, not necessarily immediately as a result of it. More importantly for Auroville and Aurovilians, if not its detractors, is the view of utopianism as a necessary and constructive precursor to social or personal change (cf. Sargisson and Sargent, 2017). The realisation of Utopia is therefore considered irrelevant, more important is the striving towards it. As O’Reilly and Benson (2009, p. 10) argue,

In this rendering, the ongoing quest parallels Bauman’s (2008) argument that as “artists of life,” we are all continually engaged in the pursuit of (an albeit vaguely defined) happiness. We might be seeking to live in utopia, but this is always just out of reach.

I found Auroville’s residents typically coy about speaking of the lives they lived prior to Auroville. According to Anthony D’Andrea, global nomads, who have much in common with lifestyle migrants, often minimise the relevance of their past because they feel it “was constructed under conditions imposed upon them, whereas in their present situation they emphasise their own agency” (cited in Korpela, 2014b, p. 31). This is evidenced in Asmi’s description of her life before Auroville as an “archival file” belonging to an “earlier incarnation.” Auroville encourages, perhaps even demands, that people seek their own Truth and express themselves as such. Of his research participants, Anthony D’Andrea wrote “their utopian drives are propelled by a pragmatic individualism” (D’Andrea, 2007, p. 14).
The promise of home suggests that there are certain qualities of that place which in some way define who you are, what you desire in life, and what you stand for. “Home” says Dovey (1985, p. 40), “means to be identified with the place in which we dwell.” Importantly, as a utopian community, Auroville affirms its residents’ identity inside and outside of Auroville as somewhat subversive, individualistic, perhaps idealistic, risk-takers. In the previous chapter I wrote about identifying against places and we can see this in the example of Sumitra who calls herself a misfit in “regular Indian society.” This is not an uncommon refrain, as will be explored further in Chapter 5. While this evidently causes enough of a sense of alienation for Sumitra and others who note similarly of their lives elsewhere to seek out an alternative community, being regarded as nonconformist is a matter of pride in Auroville as it demonstrates lived commitment to personal values.

Auroville is not necessarily an oppositional alternative to ‘mainstream society’ as many of its members would have it due to the many forms of conscious engagement the community has with the world outside of Auroville especially in a capitalistic sense (see also Mohanty, 2008, p. 168), however living in Auroville is nonetheless considered unconventional even by its residents, and intentionally so. Although many community members are intensely private, calling Auroville ‘home,’ an intentional community to which one must make a conscious commitment (rather than a community one becomes a lifelong member of due to an accident of birth)\(^{85}\) makes a public statement about one’s values and self-identity. Abrams and McCullough (1976, p. 218) argue “to live communally must, in short, be seen, in a capitalist society [...] as essentially oppositional” (italics in original) and for many of its members, the decision to live in Auroville is representative of their willing subversiveness with regard to capitalist society. Intentional communities “hold a mirror (to the flaws of the present)” says Lucy Sargisson (2012, p. 8), “and they inspire (saying ‘things could be so much better’).” For Levitas (1990, p. 34), “[t]he acceptance that the proper role of utopia is to criticise the present is universal.” Marcus, for example, who told me that “being unconventional” is a key personality feature of Aurovilians, is explicit about his subversive behaviour prior to

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85 Children of Aurovillian parents who live in Auroville are termed ‘Children of Auroville’ and, though counted in the annual census, are not automatically placed on the Masterlist. At, or after, the age of eighteen they, like their parents, must apply to the Entry Service if they wish to become Aurovillian, however given they have been raised in the community the process is slightly different than for adult arrivals.
moving to Auroville and views his political leanings as compatible with Aurovilian life. He has moved there, in part, to indelibly print the community values which he shares on his identity.

Of his research participants, Brian Hoey (2009, p. 31) says they “use their act of relocation to personally meaningful places as a way of redefining themselves and gaining a sense of control.” Mari Korpela (2014b, p. 30) describes her research participants as fitting the lifestyle migration definition through their belief that there is “a core self to be realised and that knowing one’s true self does not come automatically – one’s true self has to be actively searched for, developed and expressed,” and the other aspect of the search for self being “inventing a new self.” For Auroville’s residents, there is an authentic self to be discovered and lived, if only the environment of the individual would allow it. The rhetoric of Auroville provides the conviction that this environment will do so. As we have seen, they very much feel that they belong to Auroville, it is their home, because Auroville allows them to portray themselves as the people they believe they really are (Waskul, 2009, p. 62; see also Vannini and Burgess, 2009). Where place may influence identity, Auroville aligns with these people’s pre-inscribed self-identities. Aurovilians may not be able to live in a manner which acquiesces entirely with one’s values, however common to all of my informants’ reasoning of why they stay is an expression of perceived ability to explore their authentic selves, to fulfil the “commitments they have to self” to use Dennis Waskul’s (2009, p. 58) definition of authenticity, at least to a greater degree than they consider possible in the social environment from which they came, or indeed perhaps anywhere else (cf. Mohanty, 2008, p. 190).

Murali, an adult Child of Auroville, perhaps most eloquently summed up the feeling of many people who come to Auroville feeling misfits in the places they had lived before. “If I could be comfortable within my own skin,” he told me, “I could feel like home anywhere. I don’t feel at home in myself at all.” He goes on, “... this is what we are all trying to do ultimately, to find a sense of home in the world, wherever we are, we need to look internally to find this.” When I then ask what ‘home’ means to him, he adds,

> Home is somewhere where you feel safe, you feel connected to, you know? Ah, I think that’s it, you just feel connected, you know, you feel a deep sense of
belonging. *That* I haven’t had for some time. But I don’t think that’s part of Auroville, it’s my personal journey.

I then asked if he thought it was something he *needs* to find, to which he responded “I think that’s what we are all looking for, more connection, more happiness, more contentment.” While Auroville may not feel like home for Murali anymore, he told me he stays because it is nonetheless where he feels “most at home.”

My informants spoke of a quest for ‘freedom’ driving their decision to join Auroville, and it was the most commonly cited motivation for staying in Auroville. However, this freedom is not actually realised in Auroville. Instead, the ‘freedom’ they seek is a utopian notion, an unreachable goal ever on the horizon. Auroville’s residents have not settled in Auroville necessarily for what it is today, but for what it promises in the future. The journey is not complete, requiring Auroville’s residents to continually ask themselves “is this where my identity is best served?” One could argue that this is true of any community, with change inevitable anywhere in the world, however that this is a stated goal of this community begs for investigation of each members’ intention to do the same. Ahmed (1999, p. 331) writes “home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject’s future (one never gets there, but is always getting there), rather than the past which binds the self to a given place.” For residents of Auroville, Auroville may not be home, but it is an essential stepping point towards home.

What Auroville provides, or what Aurovilians enable in each other and their guests, is eternal optimism, refusal to acknowledge any sense of futility in striving for the impossible. Moreover, it gives people a sense of agency and ability to actively critique the cultures from which they came, feeling no longer ensnared by them. If we look at the few definitions of freedom cited above, I believe the emotional and aspirational quests for freedom cited by Cahana, escape, liberation and rebellion, are central to the ideas of Utopia and of home and can be found in all of the stories of arrival recounted to me by Auroville community members. While some scholars, such as Karen O’Reilly and

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86 This underscores the significance of frustration of Auroville’s residents who disapprove of certain decisions made by the community as a collective. In Chapter 6, for example, I mention the annoyance caused to one Aurovillian as a result of Auroville’s town planning decisions, particularly the amount of apartments being built in the community. This, she believes, undermines the expectation of residents for a life surrounded by and in harmony with nature.
Michaela Benson (2009) argue all lifestyle migration is a form of escape in one way or another, it can equally be argued they are all a quest for liberation, an expression of hope or, perhaps, even an act of minor (if not major) rebellion. None of these categories are mutually exclusive. However, it is perhaps Anselm’s early understanding of this notion that most resolves this conundrum in Auroville. Though people such as Estelle feel entrapped by Auroville, it is nonetheless where they are most able to “keep rectitude for its own sake.” Though I recoil at the notion of Aurovilians terming themselves refugees, the idea of ‘refuge’ is possibly a more accurate descriptor than ‘freedom’ of what residents of Auroville find in the community and is easily discernible in community members’ discussion of their life in Auroville, even if labelled as such by just a few.

Resolving Bauman’s conundrum, Auroville additionally offers the possibility to lean on, or deflect responsibility onto, the ‘higher power’ of the Mother with regard to one’s pursuit of authenticity or ability to progress. However, in so doing Auroville evidently becomes a trap for some, most clearly seen in Estelle’s discussion of her life in the community, though it is, for most of the long-term and permanent community members I spoke to, one with more freedoms than they find on the ‘outside.’

Auroville is a utopian community, it is the promise of the future ideal society that keeps people working towards fulfilling the goals of Auroville and their own expectations of themselves. The impossibility implied in the idea of Utopia is not overlooked by Auroville’s residents and as such, unlike many intentional communities, the community allows people the possibility of leaving and returning at any time. Ironically then, Aurovilians may stay because Auroville does not demand that they do. The ongoing nature of the quest for ‘home’— the promise of Utopia always around the corner— is what, essentially, keeps people in Auroville.

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87 Some intentional communities insist on lifelong commitment of their members without the possibility of coming and going. This is obviously impossible to enforce in most societies, and is increasingly less popular today than in intentional communities of the past. One way that a community may practically, if not legally, demand permanent membership is through the complete cutting of ties with members who do leave the community, as was done in the Christian ISOT (In Search of Truth) community in California until the mid-1990s (Siegler, 2002, p. 60).
5. Commitment and Community

I’m starting to get a bit sad about leaving soon. [...] came over yesterday to wish us well on our journey, then we went to the Tibetan Pavilion for a fundraising dinner and saw lots of people we’ve met over the year who seemed either surprised or disappointed to learn we are leaving next week. This of course set off a new wave of nostalgia about our time here. I wonder, maybe one of the reasons that we like Auroville so much now is because Auroville seems to like us. At least, we feel that Auroville likes us, and has accepted us a part of the community. Acceptance, goodwill and affection are much harder to say goodbye to than ambiguity. – Diary entry as I prepare to leave Auroville at the end of my long period of fieldwork. 88

I think we’re all misfits here, we’re all misfits. Misfits, we don’t want to fit in. That’s the irony of it, it’s like, how do you have a community that’s a composition of misfits? They don’t fit into the uniformity. (Kerryn)

Notwithstanding Kerryn’s musings, above, over the irony of a community of ‘misfits,’ Auroville is in fact a relatively harmonious community. In writing this I am very aware of the smirk which may appear on the faces of many Aurovilians should they read this line. Like any community, whether a family or large organisation, Auroville has to contend with a number of competing views and suffers from many dysfunctions. Perhaps in some ways the social makeup of the community amplifies the challenges of attaining social cohesion in Auroville. However, Auroville is promoted as a collective, Aurovilians and other members of the Auroville community profess shared goals and aspirations,

88 It took a few months before my partner and I felt comfortable in Auroville. My fieldnotes and diary entries in the early months reflect many of the difficulties we experienced in trying to ‘fit in.’ We were unsure of our places in the community, had little to no permanent resident acquaintances outside of our volunteer work placements, and were quite critical of the community and its residents thanks to some preconceived ideas about intentional communities and troublesome encounters with prickly characters. By the end of the year, however, my notes reflect a completely different story. Here I begin to ponder whether this change of heart is not uncommon, and whether for some people, in lieu of any real connection to another ‘home,’ it might be sufficient for Auroville to become a home.
decisions affecting the physical space and social life of the community are made within the community after lengthy processes of consultation with all adult members, and, most tellingly, Aurovilians often refer to the community as family. The Mother’s Dream, which is understood, along with the Auroville Charter, by a significant proportion of the community as one of Auroville’s constitutional documents, concludes:

... it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.

Aurovilians appear to be deeply individualistic and in the previous chapters I explored people’s personal, and oftentimes very individualistic, reasons for coming to and staying in Auroville and their individual relationships to Auroville as ‘home.’ However, “tension between the individual and the community” needs to be resolved in order for a community to survive (Kruger, 2006, p. 319). Auroville is not simply a collection of individualistic endeavours congregated in geographic space as may have been implied, and we also saw in Chapter 3 that some people came to Auroville for more communitarian or social reasons. These include the large number of short term guests coming to Auroville to work on specific projects. I asked many of my interviewees what holds the community together. Correctly anticipating the response to hinge almost exclusively on the notion of ‘human unity,’ I also asked people what human unity means to them and how Auroville contributes to a feeling of belonging, or of being at ‘home,’ for these people. Below I discuss people’s answers to these questions, reflections on community life, both positive and negative, and expressed need for community. Thinking of each other as family, whether actually related or not, gives Aurovillian community members freedom to dislike and disagree with each other without negating a bond they have based on a shared vision centred around the Auroville Charter, the Dream, and, perhaps most importantly to those I spoke to, the concept of human unity. Concurring with Benson and Osbaldiston (2016, p. 5) who “argue against the privileging of individualism” (cf. Kruger, 2006) in the field of lifestyle migration, in this chapter I seek to explore how the community is experienced by its members who are, by and large, individualistic loners by their own admission.
In fact, it is dissatisfaction with life at a social level, and a belief that the community of Auroville will offer a chance of personal satisfaction that brings even the most reclusive individualistic people to Auroville. Auroville is where they find their tribe, though diverse, and where they feel others recognise who they are. Socio-psychological, or socio-spatial (Saunders and Williams, 1988; Easthope, 2004, pp. 134-135), interpretation of ‘home’ helps Aurovilians to find their place. “Feeling at home is a chosen way of being with others and situations while moving on with hope and dreams” writes Thomas Doucet (2013, p. 249). Identification with place, “a sense of being ‘at home,’ – of being comfortable, familiar, and ‘really me,’” typically involves emotional connections with others, “shared interests and values” (Cuba and Hummon, 1993, p. 113). Or, as Hugh Mackay (2014, p. 168) writes in The Art of Belonging,

Even the most contented singletons are still social creatures with social needs, including, most particularly, the need to belong. The solution is not necessarily to move into a larger household; the solution is to find communities – friendship circles, work groups, associations, groups of every kind – where you can feel both connected and sustained and where the great paradox of the human condition will be revealed: that we become whole by responding to the needs of others.

How people engage with the communities in which they live is very much related to the question of how communities survive. With the idea that persistence is commensurate with commitment (Cress et al., 1997), I specifically examine people’s commitment to the Auroville community. The issue of commitment is famously addressed by Rosabeth Kanter (1968) in her article titled ‘Commitment and Social Organization: A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities,’ and further teased out in her classic text on intentional communities, Commitment and Community (Kanter, 1972). In each of these publications, Kanter describes commitment-building mechanisms in utopian “communes,” as she refers to all intentional communities, in North America of the nineteenth century. She selected communities of this era in order to view the lifecycle of each of them, utilising the value of hindsight to enable a clearer picture of the reasons for each community’s lasting strength or early demise. Clearly showing the link between
the ability of individuals to feel personally authentic, discussed in the previous chapter, and their dedication to collective goals, commitment, says Kanter (1972, pp. 66-67),

...refers to the willingness of people to do what will help maintain the group because it provides what they need. [It] means the attachment of the self to the requirements of social relations that are seen as self-expressive. Commitment links self-interest to social requirements. A person is committed to a relationship or to a group to the extent that he sees it as expressing or fulfilling some fundamental part of himself; he is committed to the degree that he perceives no conflict between its requirements and his own needs; he is committed to the degree that he can no longer meet his needs elsewhere. When a person is committed, what he wants to do (through internal feeling) is the same as what he has to do (according to external demands), and thus he gives to the group what it needs to maintain itself at the same time that he gets what he needs to nourish his own sense of self.

Kanter makes the point that commitment “is part of the essence of community,” not just important for community survival. Referring to the work of Charles Horton Cooley, she writes that commitment “forms the connection between self-interest and group interest. It is that identification of the self with a group [...] considered essential for self-realization” (Kanter, 1972, p. 67).

As have other researchers since, Kanter identifies three types of commitment building mechanisms. Below I outline each of these mechanisms, which I have labelled ideological, logistical, and affective commitment, as they relate to the Auroville example. Ideological and logistical commitment are most obvious in Auroville and these are each treated in some detail under the Commitment heading below. However, contrary to Kanter (1972) who suggests that shared ideological commitment ensures a community’s survival, I argue that it is affective ties people have to the community which are central to keeping Aurovilians connected and to the community’s endurance (cf. Sargisson and Sargent, 2004, p. 110). Affective commitment encompasses Aurovilians’ general sense of community, as well as their emotional bonds to each other which in many cases are experienced as familial, even between community members who do not share a deep
Commitment

In Chapter 3 I mentioned briefly some of the controversy surrounding Auroville’s Entry Service. Commonly, Aurovilians who stated they have no objection to the selection process controlled by the Entry Service expressed disappointment with a lack of follow up to ensure continued compliance with Auroville’s joining criteria following acceptance. A number of times I heard variations of the statement “once you’re in you can do what you like.” A dictate of the Mother was that Auroville was to be a place where there would be no rules or laws and no police. And so Auroville has no judicial system, nor does it encourage the presence of Indian law enforcement personnel in its territory except in extreme circumstances, of which there have been a handful of highly publicised cases over the past four decades.89 Violence within the community or in neighbouring villages threatens Aurovilians physically, but also threatens one of the ideals upon which the community was formed, that is the notion of ‘divine anarchy.’90 Though a foreign citizen can be issued a ‘Quit Notice’ from the Government of India if involved in a serious criminal offence in India, once on the Auroville Masterlist, there is no process of formal exclusion from Auroville if one does not adhere to the values and unwritten ‘rules’ of the community. A reason given for the absence of law enforcement in Auroville is the logical expectation that people striving for human unity should be able

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89 These include the BBC exposé on alleged paedophilia in Auroville, the murder of a French Aurovilian man in 2009, and apparent escalating gang violence in neighbouring villages. On a return visit to Auroville two years after my long period of fieldwork I was surprised to see police stationed in Auroville as an apparent security measure. This, and the issue of violence and police presence more generally, is discussed further in Chapter 7.

90 The Mother described her preferred method of governance for Auroville as ‘divine anarchy’ (see for example, Shinn, 1984, p. 246). Aurovilians, especially those who have been in Auroville since its early years, are therefore reluctant to enforce too many rules and procedures seeing such measures as counter to the Mother’s intentions. However, several issues require a more coordinated approach, such as how to prevent and respond to violence as well as matters arising in association with Auroville’s increasing population. See Appendix 3 for more information about governance in Auroville.

5. Commitment and Community
to look after themselves and one another without being compelled by the threat of
punishment to do so. Recognition of the self in others, as prescribed by the notion of
human unity, theoretically propels this notion forward.

This issue of law and order is, in an intentional community, largely an issue of the
commitment individuals have to the collective. While the issues of safety and security
are palpable in Auroville, receiving enormous attention in the weekly community
newsletter and frequently discussed among friends and strangers alike, other more
obvious issues of commitment, such as membership requirements that are inherent in
all intentional communities, are not as freely discussed by Aurovilians with non-
Aurovilians.

Rosabeth Kanter (1968; 1972, pp. 59-162) identified three types of commitment-building
mechanisms which she terms “retention of members, group cohesiveness, and social
control” (Kanter 1972, p. 67). She makes the argument that communities instituting
more of these processes, and in stronger forms, are more likely to be successful than
those who institute less of the processes or do so less strongly. Each of the three types
of commitment identified by Kanter correspond, she says, to the “three major social
system problems involving the commitment of actors” (Kanter 1968, p. 500) and, despite
significant social, environmental and technological changes influencing reasons for
community formation, should still hold true in principle in contemporary communities.

Other authors have also identified three broad instruments of commitment in
primary sociogenetic processes have produced most intentional communities.” To
paraphrase, these processes are interpersonal bonds due to allegiance to a charismatic
leader; shared ideology or lifestyle interest; and pre-existing non-communitarian
connections between individuals. Vered Amit (2012, p. 6) describes “joint
commitment,” “forms of association” and “affect or belonging,” as three points of
“ambiguity” which serve to either strengthen or weaken a community. Sharon Nepstad,
whose work focusses on peace activism, writes that normative commitment refers to
the moral obligation members feel towards the goals of the group, continuance
commitment is concerned with supposed costs associated with leaving the group, and

91 Issues of safety and security, specifically problems around theft and harassment, particularly for
women, are ongoing concerns in Auroville. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 7.
affective commitment relates to the emotional attachments members have to the group, (Nepstad, 2004, pp. 45-46). She argues that “a key characteristic distinguishing persisters from terminators [in the US peace movement] is the capacity to manage issues that disrupt movement participation,” “[t]hose who successfully managed these threats to commitment were more likely to remain involved” (Nepstad, 2004, p. 47).

Each of these authors identifies three relatable essential processes of commitment: an ideological commitment; a formal logistical commitment; and a social or emotional commitment to the group. While all very similar, each author uses different names for these processes and possibly understands the priority of each type of commitment differently in terms of its influence over group longevity and individual engagement. Intending to simplify matters with more descriptive labels for each of these types of commitment (rather than complicate matters by assigning yet more labels!), below I have used slightly different terminology again but loosely followed the work and language of Kanter, who defines two processes within each commitment building mechanism, one of detachment “from other options” and one of attachment “to the community” (Kanter 1972 p. 70), in identifying aspects of Aurovilian life which hold people in and to the community.

Arguably, the age of Kanter’s work on commitment raises questions about its applicability to today’s intentional communities. Though this work was published fifty years ago and we could argue that the ‘contemporary’ communities of that time have little in common with communities today, I believe that Kanter’s work has stood the test of time (as she intended in her study of older ‘communes’ no longer in existence) and the nature of her argument suggests that it should continue to hold true. Additionally, the language used by Kanter is readily applicable to the Auroville example.

There are, however, valid criticisms of Kanter’s work centred on her definition of a ‘successful’ community hinging on its longevity (see, for example, Metcalf, 1986, pp. 326-328; and Hall, 1988). Andelson (2002, pp. 132-134), for example, queries the intentionality of the commitment mechanisms identified by Kanter on the part of community members who ‘use’ them. He also argues that the commitment concept ought to be processual but is treated in static terms by Kanter. “Kanter’s model,” he states, “does not allow her to deal with changes in custom during the course of a community’s history,” with some of the commitment mechanisms described both
adopted and abandoned by various communities during different states of their life cycles. “In short,” he says, “not only is Kanter’s approach not processual, it is strikingly undynamic and insensitive to local conditions” (Andelson, 2002, p. 133).

Andelson instead focuses on the life cycle of the community rather than the commitment of individual members. He believes Van Genep and Turner offer a more useful model for thinking about this, inversing the typical interpretation of their theory of liminality to argue that “the beginning of the community involves not so much a separation as a joining together, an act of aggregation among individuals who share a vision, which the third stage involves an unravelling of the bonds that were created when the community began and that held the members together” (Andelson, 20002, pp. 133-134). Although, writes Andelson, most communities reject the notion inherent in the use of Turner’s model that their existence is temporary, using Turner’s model is nonetheless compatible because “the importance of shared identity for communitarians resonates with Turner’s description of communitas, one of the defining characteristics of the liminal period” (Andelson, 2002, p. 134).

In agreement with Andelson, I believe Kanter’s description of commitment-building mechanisms is somewhat static. However, Andelson’s approach is also flawed. It views the community lifecycle as an integrated whole, leaving little to no room to account for staggered membership, that is, people joining at different phases in the life of a community, nor for evolution of community goals or generational change, nor about the individual commitment of members. Moreover, I believe that communitas arising in liminal conditions, a key concern of Andelson, is an essential component of affective commitment.

In the context of Auroville, Bindu Mohanty (2008, pp. 137-138; pp.146-149) also found minimal applicability of Kanter’s commitment-building mechanisms. Mohanty sees Auroville as being “marked by the absence of formal and ideologically elaborate commitment mechanisms that Kanter speaks of” (Mohanty, 2008, p. 148). She states, “Auroville is not and never has been a tight-knit collectivity. There is just a loose sense of the collective that allows for the expression of a wide range of opinions. And yet, despite its amorphous, ill-defined identity, and contrary to Kanter’s expectations, Auroville somehow continues to develop” (Mohanty, 2008, pp. 146-147).
As will be shown, despite these criticisms, and agreement with Mohanty that Auroville is a “loosely bound, racially and economically diverse society [...] with no central authority” (Mohanty, 2008, p. 148) I do believe Kanter’s commitment-building mechanisms, loosely interpreted as I have done, are in fact applicable to the Auroville example.

‘Social control,’ or what I call ‘ideological commitment,’ refers to the “readiness of people to obey the demands of the system, to conform to its values and beliefs and take seriously its dictates” and consists of processes of mortification and transcendence; ‘retention,’ or what I have termed ‘logistical commitment,’ she explains, “refers to people’s willingness to stay in the system” and consists of processes of sacrifice and investment; and finally ‘group cohesiveness,’ or ‘affective commitment,’ concerns the ability of the group to act as a united front against “threats to the group’s existence” and consists of processes of renunciation and communion (Kanter 1972, p. 67). As previously stated, it is these latter processes which contribute to affective commitment which are most important in accounting for Auroville’s ongoing survival as a place-bound community.

### Ideological commitment

When I asked Paul what holds the community together, he said simply, “it’s a shared aspiration for a higher consciousness.” It is unlikely all of Auroville’s community members would word their connection to the rest of the community exactly so, however many do share a similar sentiment. When asked the same question, Asmi categorised levels of community thought on a continuum. “…I feel that before [Auroville] we are all living for our individualistic or tribal consciousness” she said,

...so either we are thinking about me, myself, and I am very important, the universe can go to the dogs but I am very important. Or, oh my lovely children and my beautiful husband, my beautiful wife, the centre of my universe, and my family who I would die for, but I don’t care if something happens to the neighbour. That’s the consciousness we are born with.
By contrast, in Auroville, she said,

> We really have expanded our own sense of ‘I’ to our collective, and able to give totally to die for the larger community and to having lived by such a visionary master and their thinking processes. \(^92\) It’s tough. A lot of people have done that, a lot of people have not done it too, but I am so drunk with the people who have done it that I have no time for the others who have not done it [laughing]!

Elena links the sense of community with the personal quest of which we spoke of in the previous chapter. Though she is surprised to find that there are people who live in Auroville who are not devotees of the Mother, Elena shares with Asmi the idea that it is transcendence from the shackles of one’s upbringing that binds the community:

> It depends on how open our consciousness is for this understanding of what Mother has said and what Auroville should be, each one is looking for something different, something else, so we are getting together for that. But, yeah again, it depends, ... even if you don’t have connections to the Mother, I mean I heard it from one Aurovilian, like she was telling me that she doesn’t have this connection with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, but she feels here is her place somehow, it was not something mental, it’s something more. So it’s like that. So you have to get your own understanding, get your own, you know, feeling that, okay, that’s it, whatever level it’s going on inside, so, yeah.

Henri, who has been a member of the Auroville community since its inception, having lived as a devotee of the Mother in the ashram in Pondicherry during the 1960s speaks very much from a spiritual perspective when he told me that human unity is discovered only through delving into the “inner world.” In the “outer world we are all so different, there is not one man who is same as the next one” he says, but in the inner world,

> ...you become automatically one. You become the Ātma, no? In spiritual [discussions] we say that when you discover yourself you become the world.

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\(^92\) Asmi is referring here to the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.
So this is, according to me, the type of unity to realise. Not the one that you and me, we are friends, no. This is okay, but just a small path.

Nick told me,

I know it’s stereotypical to say, but also everyone has the same goal of enlightenment, that everyone desire’s to reach some goal of enlightenment as opposed to working towards anything else like personal gain. Even though there’s that, it doesn’t necessarily take a front seat.

The quest for self-authenticity is considered a pillar of Aurovillian activity, something which has previously been theorised as potentially “the most important basis of commitment to a group” (Gecas, cited in Weigert, 2009, p. 41). In Auroville, this quest can be interpreted as either a spiritual endeavour, as is done by those quoted above, or of more temporal importance as is the case for people such as Claire. When I asked Claire, who is not enamoured with the spiritual side of the community, what it means to be Aurovillian she told me,

You’re no longer just a PhD student, or a professional, or Norwegian, you’re part of something bigger and the willingness to let go and not be too attached to what you have, you know, these assets or money or status. Yeah, to live in the present and to um, yeah... For one maybe it is to follow Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, but for someone else it is to live green, to stop riding a motorbike, to stop buying unhealthy food, to be more related to nature and then for someone else it is to be more spiritual, to do yoga, so I can only say what it is for me. And maybe with all those different realities of people, you know, what they think is a true Aurovillian, maybe that’s what, maybe in the end you have human unity [laughing]! Because all these things have to be brought together you know? But, yeah, I don’t think there is really one, one rule or one thing that defines a true Aurovillian. Not like a true Aurovillian is like this! No [laughing]! It’s not! It’s, okay, that’s what she envisioned, but it’s not, it works differently for different people. For such a small place we are quite a variety of people, you know? It’s quite a, how do you say it, when you
play with watercolours and it becomes very colourful? [I offered “mixed palette”]. Yeah.

In each of these accounts of people’s devotion to the community we can see processes of mortification (detachment) and transcendence (attachment), as described by Kanter (1972, p. 70; pp. 103-126). Aurovilians believe their lives in Auroville are not just enriched by their participation in the community but that they have actually transformed or are in the process of transforming into a better version of themselves, and in so doing expediting a societal change. For some the mortification process may be understood as death of their previous, perhaps non-aspirational, selves, as intimated by Paul, Asmi, Henri and Nick above. However, for the less spiritual people such as Claire, it may also refer to a change in how individuals perceive their connections to others. Where previously people thought of themselves as individuals, the experience of Auroville forces them to consider themselves either a small part of greater whole, or as intimately connected to those around them.

In intentional communities, ideological commitment is typically engendered and advanced throughout the community’s life via community leaders. In other words, the lure of, and commitment to, a charismatic leader often contributes much to a community’s survival. We see time and again the demise of a community shortly following the death of its founder. In this sense the survival of Auroville is particularly interesting. The Mother, ostensibly Auroville’s founder and leader, did not ever actually visit the community, though she was readily available for personal consultation with community members from her rooms in nearby Pondicherry, and died within five years of the community’s inauguration.

Older Aurovilians told me that some experienced a sense of betrayal at her departure and some had cause to rethink their commitment to the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the ideals of the Auroville community. When the Mother lived it was both her charismatic presence as well as the community ideals she espoused that drew people to Auroville and held them there, however if the Mother herself could not overcome the burdens of the physical, then what was the point of her disciples striving for the supramental (see, for example, Shinn, 1984, p. 251)? As the initial period of grief passed the ideals of community won over, her supporters became more determined
than ever to continue to build the city of her dream, and the Mother’s legacy became the ongoing survival of Auroville.

According to Peter Berger (1970), beliefs relating to the supernatural become less tenable in a society in which these beliefs are not shared. Intentional communities with an emphasis on spirituality, then, serve as “plausibility structures”. That is, communities such as Auroville strengthen normative, or ideological, commitment to their ideals by “providing interaction with ‘confirming others’ and by offering explanations that legitimate beliefs and assuage doubts” (Nepstad, 2004, pp. 50-51). However, finding people in Auroville today who are not devoted to the Mother or to Auroville’s particular spiritualism, such as Claire or Gyan is not a difficult task. ‘Joint commitment’ is of and to the principles of the Mother, or perhaps more specifically to the Charter in case of people such as Claire, rather than to the Mother or Sri Aurobindo themselves (cf. Amit, 2012, p. 6)\(^3\).

For those who do share beliefs relating to the supernatural, by removing oneself from ‘mainstream’ society, as is done in an intentional community and particularly one such as Auroville, members of the community strengthen these beliefs despite the presence of those who do not share them. Indeed, for them, spiritual beliefs are necessarily respected if not followed out of devotion to the community’s overarching philosophical principles and expectation of reciprocal respect for difference. We can see this in the way Elena speaks of a fellow Aurovilian who does not share her devotion to the Mother and in Claire’s understanding of what makes someone Aurovilian. Some Aurovilians actually seem to feel a sense of guilt for not connecting with the Mother, something I sensed in general conversation with people during the time I lived in Auroville, but also evident in the story of Charlie recounted in *Turning Points* (Devin, 2009 [2008], p. 48). About meeting the Mother, he says,

\(^3\) In recent years it seems that the current Entry Service, if not previous, is trying to bring commitment to Auroville back to a commitment to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, something which returning Aurovilians, particularly those who were there in the beginning and then subsequently left for a number of years and those who grew up in Auroville are somewhat resentful of. For them, often it is the ideals of the community that bring and hold them rather than the Mother per se. Though they may acknowledge her presence and their devotion to her, they are less likely to have read her work than newer arrivals, which may be interpreted by the Entry Service as less of a commitment.
I saw the Mother and went to her room a couple of times [...]. But I have to be honest; I was not like most people here. Everyone went to the Mother and saw her, and wow! I went to the Mother and I saw her and it was all fine, but I didn’t have any big wow at all. I saw the Mother there in front of me, and nothing wrong with it, but nothing bowled me over. I have to be honest, my contact was more with the Auroville Charter and what Sri Aurobindo had written. I am not very open on that level, I know it. [...] I was not very open to the mystic side.

In Charlie’s description of his meetings with the Mother we can see something approaching apology for his lack of connection, his connection to Sri Aurobindo and the Auroville Charter offered almost as a concession to his disconnection with other members of the community at that time. Pillai (2005, p. 294) points out that one of her informants “raises the issue of the social pressures that sanction particular perceptions of the Mother over others,” and that,

> These performances and displays create an atmosphere of respect, the effect of which is to render mute the voices of those who might openly admit that their relationship with the Mother is mundane, ambivalent, or even irrelevant. Making reference to the Mother lands one squarely in the realm of the sacred, which can be dangerous territory.

As we have seen, though not all Aurovilians are devotees of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, all display processes of mortification and transcendence. That is, through devotion to the values of the community, if not its founders, they are trying to become better, authentic, versions of themselves.

**Logistical commitment**

When I asked members of the community what holds Auroville together, the answer more often than not referred to the values spoken of above, that is the ideological
commitment each person has to the collective. However, when I asked people about the ‘ideal’ Aurovilian or what makes someone Aurovilian, aside from the bureaucratic process of the Entry Service, I was told that it was those who made “the sacrifice” and who “do the work.”

In the previous chapter the issue of being ‘stuck’ in Auroville was raised. For some (perhaps many), the financial investment made to life in the community seems to preclude any possibility of returning to one’s previous home or settling elsewhere. As already discussed, Auroville asks of its members a one off payment upon formally joining the project as well as a minimum weekly labour requirement. Additionally, it is expected that Aurovilians will be able to survive either on their accumulated savings from life prior to moving to Auroville or on the Auroville ‘maintenance’ which is sufficient for basic living costs but does not allow for additional luxuries. As a result, the option of leaving Auroville can seem something of a financial impossibility, forcing people to stay and “make the most of it.”

Non-Aurovilian guests are also strongly encouraged to contribute to the community financially and via their labour. A one hundred rupee per day fee is levied via guesthouses to all non-Aurovilian guests.94 Opportunities to volunteer in the community abound and it is more or less expected that guests of any length of time will contribute their labour. In fact, work is a requirement of some guesthouses. Several of the farming communities, for example, run guesthouses. These communities typically consist of a small number of Aurovilians and varying numbers of short and long term guests who contribute to the daily running of the farm. The weekly newsletter and notice boards throughout the community include volunteer opportunities and quite frequently casual conversations will include suggestions of current or possible volunteer work options. A further financial incentive for guests to work in Auroville comes in the form of discounts for services, such as classes.95

94 This fee is contributed directly to the Central Fund in exchange for an ‘Aurocard.’ Guests can then use the Aurocard in much the same way as a debit card, putting additional money in an account and using it to make purchases at Aurovilian stores, many of which do not accept cash. If a guest contributes his or her labour to the community this daily fee is reduced or removed altogether, depending upon the number of hours worked.

95 Members of the Auroville community, including some long term guests, run an enormous number of classes, workshops and special interest groups for residents of Auroville. These include yoga, cooking, building, spiritual awareness, art practice, reading groups (particularly focussed on the texts of Sri
Encouragement of a strong work ethic has become enshrined in Auroville’s collective thinking. That Aurovilians need to work in the community makes them engage with the community as an active member, even if that work does not require being part of a ‘team.’ For Sumitra, this obvious work ethic is something she particularly revels in:

...so many of my friends who live in big cities, they’re searching for this work life balance, and this kind of a place offers that. And that’s sort of what I appreciate about the community here, that they’re all working, it’s not just “oh I’m going to meditate and live in the forest,” they’re also practically working, taking care of their needs and providing employment. I mean, they can do much more of that, with the local villages and stuff, but I think they’re doing a pretty good job considering the challenges they have. I mean, this is India, it’s impossible, you know?! So I do like this industrious side of the community very much.

Tara, a long term volunteer in Auroville from the United States, struggled in her first six months in Auroville. She found the community exclusive and oppressive, suffered a bout of almost debilitating depression and several other physical illnesses. When asked if she considered herself to be a spiritual person Tara responded with a laugh “No, not at all! […] I’m just not that interested!” Tara initially stayed in Auroville despite her difficulties due to the commitment she felt towards the Aurovilian village outreach organisation she was volunteering with. If it weren’t for this work she would not have stayed long enough to finally find, and join, a particularly communal sub community of Auroville where the mostly volunteer members live, work, and socialise together on a daily basis. Here Tara found a sense of community she craved and, as a guest, had felt excluded from elsewhere in Auroville. By the time I interviewed Tara, having known her for approximately six months and been witness to many of her struggles, she had reached a point that she could actually envisage returning to Auroville at some future
point in order to raise a family. Knowing that Auroville is theoretically based on a type of spirituality, Tara evidently believed from her observations and experiences that this did not mean that sharing these values was required in order to become an official member of the community. Tara sees the value of work underscored in Auroville and highlighted in the teachings of the founders and it is this aspect of the Aurovillian philosophies she found connection with. “You have to work,” she told me, “you have to have something that you’re focussed on and you really believe in that is work, and it gives you, like, meaning and purpose. I found that true for myself.”

Kanter (1972, pp. 76-82) writes about retention type commitment mechanisms involving processes of sacrifice (detachment) and investment (attachment). These processes, she writes, demonstrate willingness to stay within the system of the community. Both sacrifice and investment are clearly evident in the way Auroville handles the issue of work and reward. Investment in the community, both financial and through labour and expertise, are expected and are often the vehicles through which people commit their time to Auroville despite the hardships and often intangibility of return. Investment in the community through work serves to align one’s personal goals with those of the collective and in turn increase the sense of attachment individuals have with the community.96

Benjamin told me that the true Aurovilians are those who “do the work that needs to be done every day, [...] they just get on with it.” When asked about the idea of the true

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96 Aurovilians are not supposed to work outside of the community for pay. Instead, Aurovilians are required to volunteer their labour for the good of the community and receive a maintenance in return if they are unable to provide financially for themselves from an external income source (such as prior savings). However, I heard of many Aurovilians, and met several (who were happy for me to write of the existence of such transgression so long as they were not identifiable as being themselves guilty) who do in fact work outside of the community and, instead of labour, contribute financially to the community in exchange for the community turning a blind eye. Some insist that the opportunities they require, for either their career growth or sadhana, to use an Auroville-friendly term, are not available within the community while others more frankly admit to preferring a higher income more readily available outside of the community. There are many obstacles to implementing any clear policy or restrictions on this issue, the first being the aversion Auroville, as a collective, has for rules. Another significant hurdle to such regulations arises in relation to the multinational community, many of whom spend long periods of time, sometimes regularly, outside of Auroville or even India. I met several people who work as consultants in Europe, North America or elsewhere in their time ‘out’ in order to fund their lives in Auroville, and oftentimes contribute significantly to the Auroville coffers. The income the community receives from such people is a compelling disincentive to regulating this activity. Yet, frowning upon those who seek paid employment in Pondicherry or Chennai (presumably less lucrative) raises issues of hypocrisy and so those who do work outside do not speak openly about it, and all parties refrain from pointing fingers and overlook apparent or potential transgressions.
Aurovilian, Devata initially laughed but then said she could think of people over the years “who were very committed to their work, whatever it was.” When I proposed to Kalavan, who wakes at four thirty each morning in order to run the three Aurovilian business units he has created, that he is the living embodiment of the idea of a karma yogi, he awkwardly brushed aside the suggestion and told me “the work is what we are here for.” While the expectation and commitment to work in Auroville is encouraged and revered, Margie also told me that it can cause problems because “people are involved in so many things that they can’t really commit or dedicate themselves too much to any one thing, so everything suffers.”

Auroville was built on the values and ideology of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and for many this still drives their commitment to the community. This philosophical drive, in turn, propels commitment to the realisation of the Mother’s dream, which necessitates constant logistical work on the part of community members. For many community members, that Auroville will one day reach its utopian goals is inevitable because it was foretold by the Mother. The question, therefore, is how they, as individuals, will contribute to this future. For example, Chandana, an adult Child of Auroville, is firmly committed to the project of Auroville. Referring to the belief in impending evolutionary change, Chandana says “…it’s better that we’re conscious of it and working towards it than that it happens in spite of us.” Shanti Pillai similarly ponders Auroville’s ‘continuance’ commitment in stating “It is the belief in the ideal Auroville that motivates people to create the place” (Pillai, 2005, p. 486). I wonder then if, for some people, logistical commitment to Auroville has as much to do with what the community has not achieved as what it has.

**Affective commitment**

We have seen above that Auroville is built upon an ideological commitment to the principles enshrined in the documents left behind by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (mortification and transcendence), and it continues to function due to the ongoing sacrifice and investment, or logistical commitment, of its members who revere the value

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97 Karma yoga means ‘selfless action.’ A karma yogi, therefore, is someone who works selflessly. It is the yoga of work, referring to someone whose sadhana involves work, and who performs this tirelessly.
of work for its personal and collective benefits, real and supposed. Ironically, it is these former processes described by Kanter as mechanisms of commitment amounting to social control which seem to tie to Auroville those libertarian community members who state that they are against levels of control experienced elsewhere. The latter two processes, collectively ‘retention’ commitment mechanisms in Kanter’s language, arguably ensure Auroville’s survival in terms of procedural endurance.98

However, without the support and recognition of the community and tight social bonds, there is little community to speak of. Affective commitment, also referred to as processes of renunciation (detachment) and communion (attachment) amounting to ‘group cohesion’ commitment mechanisms by Kanter, is what, I argue, in effect ties people to the location of Auroville and ensures Auroville’s survival. Affective commitment ensures the ongoing survival of Auroville as a place-bound community rather than merely a philosophy available to all regardless of location.

In the following section titled ‘Community’ I consider some of the expressions of community told to me by members of the Auroville community. I demonstrate that despite frequent lamentations of a lack of community feel in Auroville, the deep connection each person felt to the collective as a result of their shared circumstances, personal and mutual goals, and aspirations ensures Auroville’s survival and a place-bound community. Aurovilians consider each other family. They share a history,99 common aspirations, and a sense that their community uniquely enables their individual and collective search for authenticity.

98 In the following section I will argue for the primary importance of affective commitment building mechanisms. However, a note here to acknowledge that even with affective bonds, without the ‘rules’ by which to live (in the Auroville example, commitment to a vision of the future, personal or societal), which amount to ideological commitment, a community may become nothing more than a social group with shared values rather than an intentional community. Also, we saw in Chapter 4, some people say they stay in Auroville due to processes of sacrifice and investment. The examples of people who have lost their productive years to the community and have no resources upon which to start lives elsewhere also exemplify this.

99 By sharing in the utopian aspirations of Auroville’s founders, even the more recently arrived Aurovilians in some way claim as their own the historical struggle of Auroville’s past, which becomes a part of their personal narrative, though not physically experienced.
Community

…it is one of the most common types of human collectivity – to group together, band together, unite around a common ideal, a common action, a common realization but in an absolutely artificial way. In contrast to this [...] a true community [...] can be based only upon the INNER REALIZATION of each one of its members, each realizing his real, concrete oneness and identity with all the other members of the community... (Alfassa [the Mother], 1978, p. 70, emphasis in original)

... it’s people who were sort of misfits, I think misfits in regular society. It’s not a good or bad thing, they’re just different, don’t fit into regular society, so I think that everyone sort of notices that in each other, the need for freedom that they can’t find in conventional societies. (Sumitra, permanent ‘guest’)
five years who she has never met. Lamenting the loss of what she calls “intensity of experience” of earlier years, which she believes brought them together as a community, Devata says “on a collective level we’ve lost our innocence, so we don’t really know how to express or move forward together.” She used the example of building the Matrimandir as a common purpose for the community, saying it was a place where everyone came to work regardless of individual issues and interpersonal problems, now that it is finished the opportunity to come together as a community is gone. Devata believes one of the problems may be the historical need Auroville feels to differentiate itself from the ashram in Pondicherry, which means they “can’t even come together to meditate.”

Though many of the older Aurovilians remember a greater sense of community in the early days, Luke, who left Auroville in the 1970s and has recently returned, told me that the lack of community was actually one of the reasons he left, hinting at perhaps a tendency among others to romanticise the past. It is something he is disappointed to find still a concern.

I think why I left Auroville is the lack of fraternity, lack of really, that one is there, that Mother is, that Mother was, this unity. I think it still has to be worked on, very much. Very much. And okay, she said that when the Matrimandir will be finished, unity will be there, but I still doubt it. But it will come, but it will take more time than thought I think. That’s because there’s still a lot of influence from the outside society, but building a new society, it’s difficult to get rid first of your habits, you’re educated in that way so it’s a big fight inside yourself to get to something new. But that’s the yoga of Aurobindo and the Mother. For me Auroville is about that.

Yet, as in so many other facets of life in Auroville, community members remain optimistic. Just like the utopian journey that Auroville is, Aurovilians believe it is the struggle to reach an end rather than the end itself which is important. Gyan told me with a smirk, “I think ah, in another ten or fifteen years we might be able to say that you know, we’ve shown that people from different parts of the world can live with each other without murdering each other, but ah, not yet.”
There is debate in the literature about the significance of the concept of ‘community,’ whether it may in fact mask problematic aspects of social experience for individuals (see for example Joseph, 2002), however Sherry Ortner (1997, p. 63) argues community is a useful concept, “so long as we do not identify the concept with harmony and cohesion.” Hoey (2014, pp. 11-12) further argues we also should avoid the assumption that community is “something bounded, discrete, and particular to a single people in a specific place.” Rather, he says in writing about lifestyle migrants, community ought be considered “perception, as imagining, and as something experienced or sought in the lives of migrants – as what we might call a *structure of feeling*” (Hoey, 2014, pp. 11-12).

When I asked Kerryn “Why Auroville?” she told me that despite knowing very little about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo before she arrived, the concept of human unity along with the diverse population brought her here. Kerryn told me of her first impressions,

… there is a lot of energy here, I could *feel* it. And there’s, I felt very alive when I was here. I got into motorcycle accidents and I got help right away, some people appeared out of nowhere and gave me help.

Elena, now Aurovillian, describes the feeling of arriving in Auroville as a guest, that she was instantly aware of being where she wanted to be. “I was very happy,” she told me “like, a different kind of happiness, you know, something I’ve never experienced before. And then I was, it was so clear for me, okay, it’s *my* place. Yeah.” Like Estelle, Elena told me that part of this comes from feeling that she is living with likeminded people, something she told me she was not able to do in her passport country, and the emotional freedom that comes with this. “Everyone is supposed to understand that you are doing your yoga,” she said,

…and you don’t have to pretend anything, you don’t have to pretend you are happy if you’re not, you don’t pretend you like a job if you’re not liking it. […] And this feeling we are all in the same boat, you know?

Robert was one of the first people in the community to acknowledge my partner and me, to smile at us, to recognise us, and welcome us non-verbally to Auroville when Aurovilians were still being quite short with us because we were obviously guests. While
speaking with Robert towards the end of the year I joked that I sometimes say “we” in reference to those of us that live in Auroville because after all these months I sometimes forget that I am not actually Aurovilian. He told me that I am “part of the family” of Auroville.

The analogy of Auroville as a family continued to crop up in questions about human unity and what holds the community together. Even Marcus, who initially appears more or less reclusive, told me that “it is some sort of family on the social level.” When Nick was asked about the concept of human unity, he answered half-jokingly, “Human unity is paved with good intentions [laughing],” but more seriously he said it is similar to smaller community and family structure “where family and community are one and the same.” Nick adds that families do obviously have flaws and disagreements, but

...as long as a community is communicating, that’s my definition. A community of people who communicate like family on a continual basis, both positive and negative, that’s what I see as human unity. That’s my definition of the intent of the creation of Auroville.

Asmi told me that the Auroville community offers an extension of her family:

What I learned is that a community is family, I was born in a family and there were nine members all together, a big bunch of children, seven of us, and my parents, mum and dad, then I came to a community and suddenly my family grew from nine to two thousand. And actually, I didn’t mind it. And it actually became like that.

It has been argued that the “kinship system has arguably declined in significance as a structuring principle of social life” (Mallett, 2004, p. 68) and the “nuclear family is increasingly irrelevant in contemporary Western societies” or indeed anywhere (Saunders and Williams, 1988, p. 82; see also Mallett, 2004, p. 74). Rather, ‘families,’ it might be said, are now chosen rather than born into, and people can choose who they refer to as family by choosing the community in which they live. Relating to other community members as family means that, just like in a family, Aurovilians do not feel obliged to like or get along with every member of the community in order to maintain an
emotional connection. It also means that the overall emotive connection Auroville’s residents have to one another is undiminished despite some claims to a lack of day to day communion, as cited above. Devata, for example, told me,

.. it’s like yeah, we are a family, we are a sort of spiritual family. Well, maybe not so spiritual, but a family. And I believe in that too. And even, I have to say I kind of enjoy [that] I feel close to even people I don’t like here, I have some sort of engagement with some other lives, or will have in other lives to come. So even if I’m not getting along with them, I’m like, you know, we’re going to be doing this for a while [laughing] so it’s okay! So I still have a feeling of, yeah, belonging to family. And the other thing I think is cool about Auroville is that you have your family, your kin or whatever, your real relatives, but it’s sort of a little bit irrelevant here, because your family is a family of people that is sort of chosen, of people you sort of trust, and you don’t know why you run into each other and why you like each other or why you’re even here but something a bit bigger binds you.

Peter Somerville (1997, p. 237), who writes about the social construction of home, explains the link between family and the idea of ‘home’ by saying that family,

...consists of those persons (or surrogate persons such as pets) who are closest and therefore most familiar to oneself. The construction of home as a familiar place is then, by extension, the construction of a place for one’s family, however that family is conceived or perceived.

He adds that, consequently, “households which are not seen as families [...] may be less likely to feel at home” (Somerville, 1997, p. 237). I suggest, then, that the incorporation of community members, some actually unknown, into one’s depiction of family demonstrates the conflation of the idea of home with family. The, perhaps largely subconscious belief is, if these people are my family, then this is my home. Just as in a

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100 As will be discussed further in Chapter 6, this is also relevant to the ways in which adult Children of Auroville talk about the community and their ‘home.’ For them, home is the memory of Auroville and of the childhood which is bound up in familial relations with other Aurovilians of that time.
family, this then signifies a lifelong connection to the community, irrespective of whether one stays in Auroville or leaves at some future time.

More than simply familial relationships, however, the concept of ‘human unity’ links Aurovilian ideology to residents’ affective commitment to the community and each other. It demands that they strive to recognise themselves in each other, despite their deep individualism. After first stating that as a guest he is unqualified to comment on such matters, Patrick, a guest who had become very active in the community, told me that according to his understanding, human unity means,

... that people live with each other almost on a more familial level where you approach every human interaction in fact not only reminding yourself that this person sort of is your brother, or your sister, but that this person is really you, and is really part of the divine, and is part of some thing that we are really the same. Not the same in the sense that Rebecca, deep down, will, you know, respond to certain stimuli like the death of her daughter or whatever, in the same way I will feel that she has feelings, I can empathise with her, I can sympathise with her or whatever, but in some ways Rebecca is me. That we are somehow connected. So in this way we are together, and we live in this way and so if something happens where I need to interface with you for some reason, then I’m approaching it from a standpoint where it’s all going to work out because after all, we are really one and we are really made of the same goals and etcetera.

While I have written much about the individualism of people who live in Auroville in previous chapters, Joseph, who had lived in Auroville ten years, told me that the concept of ‘human unity’ means each person’s wellbeing in Auroville is dependent upon the others precisely because of the value placed on the individual. “For me,” he says,

... the value is truly in discovering how, not that we are the same or we are the mirror of each other, not so much that, but the fact that we really work together, we are absolutely interdependent. And not only are we interdependent, but we are also made of exactly the same stuff. [...] And that is really in Auroville. [...] everywhere [else] there is a filter, that, you know, there is a society, there is something that is being put there, that smothers it,
right? [...] it’s very, very rarely that I can meet someone and I can sit down and talk about it, how they feel about that and how I feel about that and how we can, you know, make it something that we work with, that becomes, you know, a creation. And that’s what, that’s why Auroville has sense for me, because here I meet those people.

Kerryn also spoke of human unity in terms of dependency in the community when I asked her to elaborate on the sense of community she feels in Auroville. “You know, you can’t have human unity as long as you think of yourself as not interdependent,” she told me,

We are, I mean the reality of it is if you start looking around, we wouldn’t be sitting here today if there wasn’t somebody who made this place and prepared the food and everything, we wouldn’t have come, we would be struggling to build a fire to live, you know, so, maybe that’s kind of a half-baked expression, but it’s some form of deep bodily recognition, emotional, psychic recognition, that we’re part of this whole dance of, of energy.

Aurovilians see themselves and their community as different to the places from which they came. It is geographically far from the ‘homelands’ of its non-Indian members, and it is culturally far from its Indian members,’ making it remote and, to some degree, isolated from ‘ordinariness’ or ‘normalcy’ for all of its inhabitants, except those who have been raised there. Paul, for example, told me “my life in France has nothing to do with my life in Auroville.” Likewise in the description Chrissie gave in Chapter 3 of her love of Auroville, that it has given her the opportunity to “start in a new way” without the barrier of the metaphorical “walls” of German society, we see a complete break from her life outside of Auroville.

We have already seen that people think of the ‘outside,’ that is all places that are not Auroville, as ‘the structure’ they disapprove of, while within Auroville there is a concerted effort, despite its failings, to attempt something new, the ‘divine anarchy’ anticipated by the Mother. It is considered a ‘safe’ community of people concerned for
each other’s welfare. Trouble, when it arises, is attributed to ‘outsiders,’ tourists and villagers, against whom the Auroville ‘family’ has to protect itself. For example, on my first visit to Auroville in 2003 I was walking along the side of the road towards the Town Hall and offered a lift on the back of a motorbike, when I declined the male rider said to me “it’s okay, I’m safe, I’m Aurovillian.”

Additionally, by disregarding qualifications and posts, Auroville strips of its members any artificial professional hierarchy. Its system of governance, which requires volunteers to self-nominate for a fixed term on various organising committees and gives equal voice to all adult members of the community in decision making via the Residents’ Assembly attempts to remove the possibility of political hierarchy. Added to this, the spiritual goal of many Aurovilians is to actively participate in the coming of a new species or life order. For its residents, Auroville therefore constitutes a “world between worlds,” as Renfro-Sargent (2002, p. 91) terms borderlands, that is, places that “represent the struggle for identity and distinction.”

For Kanter (1972), ‘group cohesion,’ what I have termed affective commitment, refers to processes of renunciation and communion, observable in liminal societies where, as Lucy Jayne Kamau (2002, p. 19) writes, “individuals are reborn as something different to what they were before. They are levelled and stripped of their old identities and they are joined together in commonality.” Despite its porous borders and the fluidity of its links to the outside, which Mohanty (2008, pp. 150-151) argues makes it only weakly liminal, even with the strong sense of communitas within, I believe Auroville is experienced by its members as a tightly bound collective and extremely liminal. In fact, Aurovilians need to feel that Auroville is liminal, perhaps even more than they recognise that it actually is. Intentional communities result “as individuals come to feel that they should be able to express their capacities, while at the same time finding their lives constricted” (Kamau, 2002, p. 20). In ‘normal’ society people are not free to do as they wish because the rules of society are already written (Kamau, 2002, pp. 18-20). However

101 Though the reality suggests something different, evidenced by regular reports and alerts in the weekly newsletter, and spoken of above and in Chapter 7.

102 In A Dream, reproduced in Appendix 2.3, the Mother wrote “In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organise.”
...in liminal contexts, the constraints of ordinary lives have been removed. The individual no longer need wear a mask. Having been liberated from the constrictions of normal society, a person can be free to express his or her personal interests, preferences, and abilities. Participants are free to be ‘authentic’ – to be ‘themselves.’ (Kamau, 2002, p. 19)

Liminality is something Auroville shares with other intentional communities. Liminal qualities of intentional communities are typically emphasised consciously or subconsciously by leaders and participants to strengthen bonds of commitment, to create a sense of communitas. As in the Christian ISOT community in the United States studied by Gretchen Siegler (2002, p. 64), they “intentionally create and maintain certain social conditions that are amenable to a continuation of communitas values,” they, …continually remind each other to transcend mundane affairs and remember their lifelong commitment to an ultimate objective provided by a higher authority. In this way, communitas is nourished because liminal processes are integrated into the total social process.

For Victor Turner, who famously wrote about the concept, liminality is necessarily a transient stage, a step between one state of being to another. Turner expressly focussed on *rites de passage* “that tend to have well-developed liminal periods,” such as exemplified by initiation rites, for example from boy to man, to refer to the Ndembu rites of passage observed by him, accompanying social maturity or cult membership (Turner, 1967 p. 95). Unlike other communities which intentionally seek to foster a sense of communitas, however, Auroville offers very little in the way of ritual. 103 Just

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103 Turner also counts millenarian movements among his clear examples of liminal communities which demonstrate the fostering of communitas through lifestyle choices (Turner. 1995 [1969], p. 111). While the examples of these choices he gives to demonstrate this claim show that he is concerned principally with the most austere of millenarian movements, they do nonetheless share some characteristics with other intentional communities such as Auroville. These include equality, absence of property, reduction of all to the same status level, minimization of sex distinctions, abolition of rank, humility, unselfishness, and total obedience to the prophet or leader (Turner, 1995 [1969], p. 111). He says they are liminal in that they possess some of the properties of liminality that are also displayed in the tribal ritual of his own studies, and referencing Norman Cohn (1961, cited in Turner 1995 [1969], p. 111), they live “on the margin of society.” Where Auroville diverges from the properties of millenarian communities, such as in the principles of sexual continence or community, suspension of kinship rights and obligations, simplicity of
one event, a pre-dawn bonfire in the amphitheatre, which occurs twice each year, on the 28th February, the anniversary of inauguration, and 15th of August, Sri Aurobindo’s birthday, is experienced in a somewhat ritualistic manner by almost all Aurovillian residents. During these celebrations a large, beautiful arrangement of flower petals and candles adorns the ground surrounding the urn and people gather well before dawn and quietly take a seat in the amphitheatre to watch the fire. The events are silent save the sound of the fire crackling and a recording in French, English, Tamil and Hindi of Auroville’s Charter, the French version the Mother’s voice, replayed as it was heard over loudspeakers on the day of inauguration in 1968. The fire slowly burns to ashes and, after the sun has risen, attendees take the opportunity to catch up with one another and engage with people they have not seen for a while. In a ritualistic sense, attending a dawnfire gives Auroville’s residents a chance to display, simply via their participation, commitment to the community via demonstrable self-reflection and reflection on the ideals of the collective.

This twice-yearly event provides home “with an anchor in time and space” as Hauschild, drawing from the work of Miller, says about festivals such as Christmas in Christian culture. He writes,

Groups of families and friends reunite during these days to have traditional forms of communality, exchange, and mythopoesis-about a bearded old man speech and manners, and acceptance of pain and suffering (Turner, 1995 [1969], p. 111), we must think of degrees of liminality.

Turner does, however, raise the issue of the institutionalisation of liminality, particularly evident in “the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions,” which he sees as an effect of increasing complexity in the social division of labour. “Transition has here,” he says, “become a permanent condition” (Turner, 1995 [1969], p. 107). As exemplified in the Rule of St Benedict, a guide for monasticism in Christianity, which Turner refers to, the monastic life, described by Turner as a state of permanent liminality, “provides for the life of men who wish to live in community and devote themselves entirely to God’s service by self-discipline, prayer, and work” (Turner, 1995 [1969], p. 107). The Sri Aurobindo ashram in Pondicherry can thus be considered an expression of institutionalised liminality, a permanent condition of liminality, as described by Turner, although not Christian.

Also referred to in Auroville as the ‘dawnfire,’ the bonfires may be the only somewhat ritualistic events attracting most Aurovilians attendance at any one time, however a great number of other events occur throughout the year which provide some measure of social glue, or communitas. Examples of such events that I attended or witnessed during my time include cultural performances, parties hosted by Aurovillian cafes, the annual Auroville marathon, and special interest festivals such as an annual festival of bamboo and biennial film festival. In these latter examples, it feels that the entire community gets behind the proceedings with events taking place over several days in a large number of venues across the township. More frequent events include weekly special interest activities such as classes on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, public readings of Savitri, yoga classes, choir singing, art exhibitions, natural therapy workshops, and film screenings in the Town Hall cinema and at Sadhana Forest.
leaving his occult home in the last area on the world that still proves unreachable for globalization, the polar circle, carrying with him gifts and goods that will help to make people feel more at home. (Hauschild, 2001, p. 157)

In the Auroville example, families and friends reunite on the morning of the bonfire in forms of communality, to engage with one another, exchange stories and reflect upon the legacy of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the utopian vision they believed the ‘city of the dawn’ would be able to, eventually, manifest. Events such as the dawfire remind Auroville’s residents of the community’s history and purpose, and, in so doing, rekindle a sense of communitas predicated on a shared history of migration and estrangement described by Ahmed, and built into the fabric of the community through the official goals of ‘human unity,’ transcendence, and on the focus on recognition of the Hindu precept of the Ātma, which in turn fires ongoing affective commitment to the Aurovilian community.

Despite their individuality and individualistic quests for personal authenticity, members of the Auroville community are deeply committed to the project of Auroville and to each other. In speaking of Auroville’s diversity, Yuvan refers to the community as a garden. If “you’re a hibiscus or a tulip, you can’t become a rose,” he says, “but that doesn’t mean you just live hibiscus. You’ve arrived in a garden or a medley, or bouquet!” Leila too uses the garden analogy and points to the essential diversity of Auroville’s population using the example of a garden with only roses in it, it might be beautiful at first glance, but, she says, “the monoculture thing, any famer knows it doesn’t work. A garden needs all kinds of things.” She adds that Auroville does not yet have the ‘unity in diversity’ for which it strives, “but at least we’re trying.”

Despite frequent lamentations of a lack of community feel in Auroville, the deep connection each person felt to the collective as a result of their shared circumstances, personal and mutual goals, and aspirations was stronger than the disappointment of less than expected, or previous experiences of, communal living. While ideological and logistical commitment building mechanisms are clearly evidenced and vital for Auroville’s existence, it is affective commitment which holds the community of Auroville
together. Not infrequently Aurovilians told me that you can be Aurovilian anywhere. So why, I wondered, must they do it in Auroville? The philosophy of Auroville is built upon the recognition of self in other, the Ātma in Hinduism. Aurovilians strive to see themselves in other community members despite the diversity of backgrounds and intentions. People who have decided to make Auroville their home do so because they do not feel as free to be themselves elsewhere. Moreover, there is a pervading sense in Auroville that “we are in this together” and as such must support each other on separate but parallel journeys to something akin to a home.
I don’t even know if I’m Aurovilian. I don’t really give a shit. (Candrika)

Intentional communities are typically viewed as a cultural critique. As I suggested in Chapters 3 and 4, by and large, members join and stay in intentional communities due to some perceived wrong elsewhere. However, people who were born and raised in the community who have not made a conscious and adult decision to join the community as a reaction to life elsewhere require us to rethink this notion. Auroville, as a community, is now fifty years old. It has permanent residents aged between newborn and well into their tenth decade. There is a significant population of second generation Aurovilians, as well as a growing number of third generation Aurovilians. Though it would seem the survival and apparent validity of many intentional communities may depend upon how well subsequent generations of community members adopt the values and intentions of the community in which they were raised as well as negotiate relationships with the world outside of the community, there has been little research on individuals who grow up in such a setting and the lasting impression this has on them into adulthood (Gibson

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The term ‘second generation’ is a loose concept with a number of definitions. For example, the statistical meaning of ‘second generation’ refers to “the children born in the host country to foreign-born parents” (Skrbis et al., 2008, p. 262). However, it may also refer to those who migrated with their parents during early childhood, that is a social definition, or, subjectively, to those who consider themselves second generation (Skrbis et al., 2008, pp. 262-263). Here I use the term subjectively, as it is generally understood in the community. That is, applicable to all those who spent a significant part of their childhoods in Auroville, whether born there or migrated to Auroville in childhood. For example, one of the people I highlight in this chapter came to Auroville as a twelve year old and, as an adult Child of Auroville, is generally considered as much a member of this cohort as are those who were born in Auroville (however, as will be seen later in this chapter, this is not a universal opinion).
In fact the literature on intentional communities tends to view them as rather static entities, bordered in time as well as space.\(^\text{107}\)

According to current census data, children today comprise approximately twenty-four percent of the Auroville population (Auroville, 2018a).\(^\text{108}\) It is not possible to become Aurovilian until the age of eighteen, and so these children, whose parents are Aurovilian, are termed ‘Children of Auroville’ until which point they themselves can apply to officially become Aurovilian. As far as I am aware, records have not been kept on the number of children who do become Aurovilian as adults, nor the number of Aurovilians who lived in the community as children.\(^\text{109}\) However they are a small but influential group.

In previous chapters, I explored Auroville as ‘home’ for people who arrived in the community as adults. In this chapter, I show that the community is undeniably ‘home’ for the Children of Auroville, however their relationship to Auroville as ‘home’ is different to that of their parents and other adult arrivals. Children of Auroville are considered autochthonous to Auroville. That is, while not indigenous to the location of Auroville, born of Auroville’s founding members they are natives of the community (and concept) of Auroville. This gives the adult Children of Auroville (and presumably today’s children in Auroville\(^\text{110}\)) a certain amount of freedom in how they perform their

\(^{106}\) While there is little literature on the generational impact of growing up in an intentional community, aside from the experiences of adults whose childhoods were spent in reclusive spiritual or religious ‘cults,’ there is considerable research on the lives of children in intentional communities. The work of Daniel Greenberg, himself a community member whose PhD research and ongoing field of inquiry is on children growing up in community, is one notable author on this topic (see, for example, Greenberg 1993; and Greenberg, 2002), as is William Smith (1999) whose work is on families in intentional communities. There has been quite a bit more written about the children of religious communities such as, for example, the Hutterites and Amish. A substantial body of literature also exists on children and families in Israel’s kibbutzim.

\(^{107}\) While this is typical, there are scholars whose work on intentional communities suggests a more dynamic view, Pitzer (1997), who has developed and championed the notion of ‘developmental communalism’ being one notable example.

\(^{108}\) September 2018 Census data shows a total population of a 2,953 which includes 2,231 adults and 722 children. These numbers include Aurovilians and Newcomers and their children. See Appendix 6.1.

\(^{109}\) Nor the numbers who leave the community or stay on without Aurovilian status, which is certainly possible for those who have Indian citizenship or Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) status.

\(^{110}\) As stated, in this chapter I discuss only the adult Children of Auroville with foreign-born parents. I make mere passing reference to younger generations whose experiences may be similar but, given the development and increased sized of Auroville, along with greater opportunities available to them as a result of Auroville’s growth and escalating connectivity with the world outside of the community, it is
unequivocal belonging to Auroville, which in turn somewhat complicates the idea of ‘home’ for many of these individuals who do not necessarily share the values and beliefs of their parents and upon which Auroville is based.

Following introductions to three adult Children of Auroville I briefly outline below how Children of Auroville can be compared to both second generation migrants and to ‘Third Culture Kids’ (also referred to as ‘TCKs’). As is explained below, Third Culture Kids, who are not second generation migrants, are individuals who have been raised in a culture which is not the ‘home’ culture of their parents. They are typically understood to be the children of expatriate workers. The worldviews, cultural fluidity and attitudes to the concept of ‘home’ typical of such individuals are reflected in the way the participants of my research talked about Auroville and, for some of them, periods of time living elsewhere. However, unlike most second generation migrants and Third Culture Kids, Children of Auroville also happen to have grown up in an intentional community which has clear and defined borders, is culturally and socially distinct from its surroundings, and has an ideological basis which they have been taught is dissimilar to that of their parents’ homelands and to their surroundings.\textsuperscript{111} That Auroville is located in Southern India and intentionally international means the attitudes of Children of Auroville to life outside of the community, and their ability to settle easily elsewhere is also distinct from those raised in intentional communities elsewhere.\textsuperscript{112}

I next show that due to being raised in Auroville, processes of commitment to the community are quite different for the Children of Auroville compared to those who arrive as adults. However, like other Aurovilian residents, Auroville is, for the Children of

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\textsuperscript{111} I say that they are ‘taught’ Auroville’s ideology is dissimilar to their parents’ homelands because in fact, I believe that Aurovilian ideals can be found and lived elsewhere including in the homelands of those who have migrated to Auroville. Indeed, as previously mentioned, many people told me that it is in fact possible to be Aurovilian, that is to live Aurovilian ideals, outside of Auroville. Speculation suggests this is particularly true in smaller ‘alternative’ communities. The difference is that Auroville is the only place where these ideals and the spiritual philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother comprise the dominant values and are respected (if not always adhered to) by almost all who live in the community.

\textsuperscript{112} For example, the child of Italian parentage growing up in Damanhur in Italy does not have such a physical, ideological or logistical distance to travel in order to integrate into Italian society should they choose not to become a permanent member of Damanhur in adulthood. A similar argument is made for the largely European residents of other intentional communities in Europe, American residents of intentional communities in North America, and so on.
Auroville, the place where they “feel most comfortable in the world,” as told to me by one. This sense of being at ease in Auroville is largely a result of memories they carry of the Auroville of their childhoods and the familial relationships they have with other Aurovilians from that time. As the Children of Auroville show, feeling at ‘home’ is not coterminous with ‘fitting in,’ but ‘home’ is nonetheless described as a safe haven, which, as we have seen previously, is an essential element of subjectively feeling at home, regardless of objectively having a home.

I found the adult Children of Auroville noticeably difficult to gain acceptance from, as a long term guest and researcher. However, serendipitously, I was fortunate to share a house for several months with a popular member of the group who reservedly provided me with an ‘in.’ As a result I became friendly with a number of adult Children of Auroville, was invited to some of their social events and ultimately interviewed ten of them. Obviously I was unable to speak to those who were not living in the community at the time of my fieldwork, however one of the adult Children of Auroville I spoke to was back in Auroville for just a few months when I interviewed her and does not intend to live permanently in Auroville again. All of those I interviewed have at least one biological or adoptive parent who came to Auroville from Europe or North America. For seven it was both parents. All but one have European or North American passports. Several also have Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) status which gives them all the entitlements of an Indian citizen except the right to vote or own agricultural land. The adult Children of Auroville featured in this chapter are all between the ages of thirty and fifty years. Their childhood years in Auroville thus fell during what are termed Auroville’s ‘pioneering days,’ that is from inauguration in 1968 until roughly the end of the 1980s or early 1990s.

I would like to have spoken with adult Children of Auroville from Tamil families. Unfortunately however my path through the community did not facilitate this. As described, I found the people who had grown up in the community to be a relatively difficult group to engage with as an outsider. As with all of my interviews and discussions, I relied upon the social networks I made during the course of living and working in Auroville. In the case of adult Children of Auroville, this contact initially came through connections with one ‘gatekeeper’ whose social circle at the time I lived in the community did not apparently include adult Children of Auroville with Tamil guardians.
As such, particularly in reference to labelling Children of Auroville as a variation of Third Culture Kids, I am referring to those whose parentage is non-Tamil. This is not to say necessarily that the Tamil Children of Auroville do not also share many of the issues I have identified, and more, for non-Tamil Children of Auroville in this chapter.

**Introduction to the family**

Below I introduce three adult Children of Auroville, that is, people who spent what they understand to be their formative years in Auroville. I have selected these particular three individuals in part because each of them talked during our recorded interview about how their relationship to the community is different to adult arrivals, and also because they have each travelled different life paths which led them to be in Auroville at the time of my fieldwork. Theo arrived in Auroville as a young child while AuroAnon and Candrika were born in the community. Except for a short period living in Europe as a young adult, Theo has remained in Auroville while AuroAnon and Candrika left the community as adolescents, ostensibly permanently. Candrika has no intention to live in Auroville again, but returns often for brief visits with friends and family. AuroAnon is again settled in Auroville, apparently for the good of his children. None of the three claim to share the spiritual beliefs or participate in any concerted way in the communal practices on which Auroville was founded and which brought their parents to the community. In this way, they were typical of the majority of adult Children of Auroville I met. They did, nevertheless, hold the general philosophies enshrined in the Auroville Charter and the Mother’s Dream in as much esteem as anyone in the community.

**Theo**

Theo remembers his pre-teen move to Auroville in the 1970s as a difficult time. He struggled to adjust to the austere living conditions of Auroville, made all the more trying by the conflict between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society at the time, sometimes referred to in Auroville as “the war.” Of his initial impressions of the community, his new ‘home,’ Theo told me,
I was shocked! It took me a while to get adjusted here. [...] Because in those days, I mean it was really, I mean pioneer stages, right? I mean the first house we lived in was a shack and the food wasn’t anywhere great, and there’s nothing to do, you know? So yeah, it was tough. And of course then you make a couple of friends and you get into the Auroville life and things, you know, it’s good. In the long run it’s fine.

Despite being “fine in the long run,” Theo mentioned later in the interview that the ‘war’ still plays on his mind today more than thirty years later, and possibly had an impact on his settling into the community as a new arrival. He recounted a conversation he recently had with his mother about that time,

And I said, “Mum, I’m a thirteen year old and I saw people getting beaten up and put into police trucks and stuff and it did leave an impression on me. You know? For sure!” But we don’t talk about it much actually. I brought it up the other day, I don’t know how it came up, but amongst my generation who grew up here and were here at that time also, no, we don’t much speak about it. But yeah, it definitely left an impression.

When asked if he can imagine living elsewhere, Theo told me he did return to Europe as a young adult for one year, but “it didn’t work out,” something he did not elaborate on. In terms of the future he can see himself potentially living in one of India’s bigger and more ‘cosmopolitan’ cities, but also “I feel comfortable, you know, around here, I mean, you get used to a place after 30 years.” I sensed in speaking with Theo that he has stayed in Auroville not for Auroville itself but because, when he was not able to make a home in his ‘home’ country, he now does not know where else to go. When asked if Auroville feels like home, Theo responded,

I would say India feels like home. Auroville, I have a lot of, I don’t know, it’s like a love hate relationship really with the place [...]. There are things you agree with and things you disagree with and the thing is you always go back and think, “would I have settled here? If my parents hadn’t brought me here, would I have
come?” That’s always the question in your mind. And you can’t look at that objectively because, you’ve been here, I’ve grown up here so I don’t know if I would have come here in my thirties or later on, would I have come here and said “wow,” or would I have said “no!” [laughing]

Curious as to whether Theo felt he shared the values of the community, I asked first whether he would call himself spiritual or religious, the most obvious starting point for such a conversation in Auroville. His response was not unlike others of his cohort, demonstrating to some measure his lack of enthusiasm for the overt spiritual foundations of the community and quickly progressing to his feeling of having been cheated by the structure, or lack of, in Auroville’s early years:

No [laughing]. No, not at all actually. I don’t know how that came about but I think it might be a bit of a, not a diversion, but growing up here and having it pumped into you so much, in those days at least, maybe it’s just, you know, turned against it kind of thing, I’m not sure. When we were growing up, I mean when I came there was no school.\(^{113}\) Which, in retrospect was really, really bad. Because a twelve year old, thirteen year old, you tell him you don’t have to go to school, you can hang around and ride your horse and do whatever you wish, obviously you will enjoy that. But then you know, you become eighteen, nineteen, and things turn out differently I guess, but maybe it would have been

\(^{113}\) In ‘A Dream,’ the Mother wrote “children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones...” As a result, many people believed that formal education was part of the ‘old world’ and there was little to no formal schooling for children in Auroville in its early days following the Mother’s passing. The ‘new world’ Aurovilians were trying to create would provide different and more useful education for its children based only on the children’s needs and desires, which would ultimately serve the purposes of the wider community and society at large. Many parents, however, apparently felt differently about their own children’s education and sent their kids to school elsewhere such as the international boarding school in Kodaikanal or the French school in Pondicherry (cf. Greenberg, 2003). According to some of my contacts in Auroville, it was the children themselves who had been secretly buying and studying from textbooks who demanded the community adults provide them with schools in the community. The adult Children of Auroville I spoke to from this era are by and large still resentful of the lack of formal education provided to them as children.

Today Auroville runs more than ten schools and kindergartens for children from the age of 3 to pre-university age from the community and surrounding villages. Schools’ pedagogical scope ranges from completely child-driven to aligned with the national curriculum and with a focus on university admission. Aurovilian schools now have an excellent educational and social reputation.
good if I’d had another path, you know? So I started kind of late, did some correspondence courses, studied with a few teachers here, and then a school, Last School, \textsuperscript{114} started off, and then I sat for my exams and went to Pondicherry, so I have my French degree, but it’s like just 12\textsuperscript{th} standard. And also in those days, we had just come, a lot of kids who were born here and growing up here, they started going off to school in the mountains, Kodi School. \textsuperscript{115} I wasn’t sure whether I would or not, and I didn’t, so I didn’t go off with that batch that went off, and they’re all over the world now, I mean mostly not settled back here.

Regrets in that way sometimes, but then life goes on.

Theo did not go on to obtain a university degree, however many of the adult Children of Auroville I met and spoke to did in fact have university education, including several with one or more higher degrees. Nonetheless, the lack of formal schooling in Auroville in the 1980s in particular has left a marked impression on the children of that era.

Theo has found work that allows him to live in Auroville but also to travel extensively around India and occasionally elsewhere in Asia. It affords him a comfortable lifestyle in Auroville and the ability to fulfil his social needs inside and outside of Auroville. I asked Theo what he tells people outside of Auroville when they ask where he is from. With a knowing smile he answers, “I usually say India,”

If they ask a little more I’ll say South India, Pondicherry. If they’re really interested I will tell them about Auroville, but then that opens up like, a lot of questions and, you know? Yeah. It’s not always easy to answer that. Even in India, because in India, even though Auroville’s been here for a long time, India doesn’t know much about Auroville actually. I mean I see that, I travel around a lot and a lot of people say Auroville, what’s that? People have heard

\textsuperscript{114} Last School is a secondary school in Auroville, one of the first official Aurovilian schools started in the 1980s. Last School offers a child-centred, child-driven curriculum.

\textsuperscript{115} Kodaikanal International School (KIS), or simply ‘Kodi School,’ is located in the hills of Kerala, the southern Indian state neighbouring Tamil Nadu. KIS is a private school hosting boarders and day students and has an excellent academic reputation. It has two fee schedules, one for ‘local’ students of the Indian subcontinent and one for international students. I was told, though cannot confirm, Aurovilian families pay the local fee.
about [Auroville], but they always ask is it like Osho ashram, they have no real idea. And that I think Auroville should work on also, just making sure that, you know, there’s a clear picture out there of what it is. People don’t really care about that sometimes, but it’s also important. Even in Pondicherry people sometimes have a very vague idea about it, what goes on here. Even in Kuilapalayam!\textsuperscript{136}

Aside from contact with his Aurovilian family and friends, and the location of his house on the outskirts of the community, Theo does not actively participate in Aurovilian life. He does not sit on any committees, work for an Aurovilian business unit or attend meetings of the Resident’s Assembly. His status as Aurovilian seems purely circumstantial. For Theo, it appears Auroville is ‘home’ merely due the lack of another, though the familial relationships he has in the community, both his actual family and others who fulfil that role, provide him comfort. Carole Després (1991, p. 102) writes about ‘home’ being a sense of “familiarity and routine.” It is, she says, “more to do with everyday living and doing rather than thinking.” For adult Children of Auroville, the community, despite the not insignificant physical changes over the years, is familiar and for Theo, it is this which seems to keep him in Auroville.

When asked directly, Theo told me that India is home more so than Auroville. This indeterminateness allows Theo to be non-committal to any one place, there is ambiguity in the notion of home, suggesting that it is actually nowhere. I suspect that it is the Indian cultural awareness he acquired as a result of living in Auroville that makes him relatively comfortable elsewhere in the country and the specificity of Auroville that leads him to shy away from committing to the idea of home as attached to this one small location. Yet the familiarity of Auroville causes this place to be where Theo locates himself physically. As he said, “you get used to a place” after a while. Theo was the only Child of Auroville in my sample who considered his family’s move to Auroville from his parents’ perspectives and wondered if he would have made the same decision. Clearly Theo does not think he would have.

\textsuperscript{136} Kuilapalayam is a Tamil village with borders overlapping those of Auroville. Kuilapalayam, located on the busy road between Pondicherry and Auroville, also hosts many Aurovilian residences and businesses. See Appendix 5 for maps of the region.
AuroAnon

AuroAnon and I became acquainted in the months before this interview through my volunteer work in the community. We also regularly ran into each other at social gatherings. As was the case with many of my interviewees, it was AuroAnon who requested active involvement in my research rather than the other way around. However, unlike Theo, AuroAnon struck me as a somewhat ‘prickly’ person. His disdain for people calling themselves Aurovilian in the face of his undeniable Aurovilianness was evident in the answers to my questions. As will be shown, there is a perception in Auroville that Children of Auroville are somehow more Aurovilian than others. Adult Children of Auroville are revered to some extent by other Aurovilians. The Mother suggested that children born in the community were special. I was told on numerous occasions that the soul chooses where in the world it wants to be born, the inference being that those who chose Auroville did so strategically, apparently exemplifying their relatively advanced spiritual evolution. This attitude now encompasses to some degree all those to whom the moniker ‘Children of Auroville’ applies regardless of birthplace. While Children of Auroville feel that in some ways they are more Aurovilian than others, confirming the general perception of their status in the community, they do not necessarily agree with the basis of the veneration bestowed upon them, that is, that it is due to the spiritual conditions which infused their childhood (or even the belief that they are advanced souls as evidenced by their pre-birth choice to be born into a Aurovilian childhood, a decision which only came to others in adulthood).

I sensed AuroAnon found my interest in the community quaint and intrusive in equal measure. Though he was eager that I interview him, he showed little enthusiasm during the interview. Whereas the vast majority of interviews took longer than an hour, an hour and a half being typical, within twenty minutes I had asked AuroAnon all the questions I had prepared as well as a couple more that came to me at the time. I found the tendency for brief answers to my questions specifically about Auroville (though not about almost any other topic) most pronounced in my conversations with adult Children of Auroville. I came to the conclusion that this insistence on being included in my research coupled with apparent antipathy for it was symptomatic of the ownership
these individuals feel towards the community as much as it was evidence of outsider- and research-weariness.

AuroAnon was born in Auroville before the Mother died and was therefore named by The Mother with the prefix ‘Auro’ as were all Children of Auroville at that time. As a Child of Auroville in those early years, AuroAnon is beyond doubt a ‘true Aurovilian,’ with an undisputed sense of belonging to the community. It is a part of his identity and, like others who spent the majority of their early childhood in Auroville during the community’s own formative years, he is recognised as an inalienable part of the fabric of Auroville. However, AuroAnon does not share the values of the community that are required of new applicants. Like many other adult Children of Auroville, he has never read any of Sri Aurobindo or the Mothers’ writings and has no intention of doing so. He is not spiritual and does not subscribe to what he calls the “dogma” of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He asked me if I had encountered resistance from Aurovilians because my research is not specifically about their ‘experiment’ in spirituality, implying his own apparent frustration with what he perceives as Aurovilian narrow-mindedness.

As a teenager AuroAnon spent some time as a boarder in the international school in Kodaikanal, as many Children of Auroville did and still do, and some time living in the West. He says the transition to life in the west was incredibly difficult, referring to the adjustment from living “essentially in the forest and running wild” to living in “the wealthy west.”

AuroAnon stayed ‘out,’ completed postgraduate studies and worked in a corporate environment for some years before returning to Auroville. Despite not sharing many of the values of the community, AuroAnon and his wife, also an adult Child of Auroville who moved to the West for university, believe the life and experiences they can offer their children in Auroville are far better than what they could provide elsewhere. AuroAnon told me he and his wife are a good match for each other because they are both, in a sense, from Auroville and from the West. What they have in common is belonging to two worlds, Auroville and ‘the outside.’ He believes this means they understand each other in a way that others may not. However, despite her having moved to Auroville as a teenager, and him moving out of Auroville as a teenager, he told

117 Female Children of Auroville were given the prefix ‘Aura.’
me “she wasn’t born here and raised here the way I was,” she is not Aurovillian in the same way that he is. “Even someone who moved here twenty years ago, in some ways, gets no respect from me,” he said,

... I mean they’re just not, they’re not as Aurovillian as I am. And that’s really about how different Aurovilians really are from what they, I think if you look at it today from twenty years ago there’s not such a big difference, but back then things were so different in so many ways. In many ways bad, you know, it’s nice that infrastructure is so developed and you can buy as much as you can on the market and you know, the Solar Kitchen exists, you know what I mean.

Though evidently a more comfortable place to live now, AuroAnon told me it is frustrating to see Auroville go in a direction he doesn’t always agree with. He said Auroville is a less interesting place than it was when he was a child.

When I was growing up it was trying to be something different, I don’t feel that way so much anymore. I feel like, especially in terms of like government and stuff, people are just trying to push it into patterns that already exist, and make it the same as everywhere else.

Toward the end of our interview, AuroAnon admitted that he finds it difficult to live in such a small community, even if it is bigger than when he was a child, adding that as a result of its small size, there is “not a lot of newness.” For AuroAnon, benefits of living in Auroville include its literal and metaphorical green credentials, the forest, the space for gardens around each house, and the ability to produce food. He told me that the many new apartment buildings in Auroville that “jam everyone in” are a replication of mistakes made elsewhere.

Unlike Theo, AuroAnon considers himself deeply Aurovillian despite not sharing with adult arrivals a reverence for either Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. Auroville is home and he is an integral part of the community. He has returned to the community for the good of his children who he wants to grow up in a similar environment that he did. For AuroAnon, the beauty of Auroville and his desire to live there has much to do with the community’s embrace of the natural environment. However, presumably AuroAnon and
his family could have joined other ‘tree changers’ in a rural hamlet closer to where they were living previously in order to provide the values he wants for his children. Instead he chose to return to Auroville on the other side of the world for reasons unsaid. This suggests they are drawn by an affiliation to the community based on past connections, familiarity, and shared values beyond environmentalism. It is Auroville’s social values as much as its physical environment in which AuroAnon intends to immerse his children and their understanding of ‘home.’

**Candrika**

Candrika, who I met on one of her annual trips back to Auroville to visit family, was born in Auroville. Like many of the Children of Auroville now in their thirties and forties, she attended a number of schools in Auroville and in nearby Pondicherry, and also like many of her generation, left Auroville for university in Europe in her late teens. While not an expectation, it is not remarkable that Children of Auroville leave the community either temporarily for university or more permanently as adults, as do people anywhere in the world. Sometimes it is to the countries from which their parents came that Children of Auroville travel, due to a perceived level of comfort they may feel there, where they may be able to connect with extended family. However, those who were born in the community or came as very young children may have little or no memories of these places, the previous homes of their parents. According to the stories I heard from this cohort who had returned as well as those who never left, Children of Auroville select their destinations at least as much for where they believe the best opportunities for study or work to be, or where they have the most social contacts in the form of other Children of Auroville, as they do for family connections. The world is a perceptively smaller and less forbidding place for people such as these who have wide ranging social and familial networks as a result of growing up in an environment with close social connections to people holding passports from all around the world.

Unlike other Children of Auroville I spoke to but apparently common among her generation, Candrika has no intention of returning to Auroville to live long term, though she does stay in contact with the community and returns to visit friends and family as often as she can. Candrika told me that she is unsure whether her name is actually on
the Masterlist but considered that irrelevant as she does not see herself living in Auroville again, telling me that she is growing more and more distant from Auroville as time passes.\footnote{If Candrika does decide to move back to Auroville, her Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) status enables her to live in India, and therefore Auroville, without the visa required of other foreign-born guests and residents.} She is nonetheless protective of the community and, like AuroAnon, distinguishes between the undeniable Aurovilianness of Aurovilians who have lived in Auroville since her childhood (or before); more recently arrived Aurovilians; and ‘tourists.’ Those more recently arrived are almost begrudgingly accepted as Aurovillian by Candrika, while ‘tourists’ are people who have not applied and been granted Aurovillian status, including short-term visitors, people like myself who lived in the community for a year, and even people who stay in Auroville for a number of years without applying to become Aurovillian.

When asked if she had any sense that she was growing up in a community that was different to other communities, Candrika said “as a kid I had no concept whatsoever!” Adding, “I guess until I left I didn’t think about it much […] for me it was normal, you know, just to be here.” She later told me,

I guess maybe I started wondering when I was a teenager. But not really asking myself any deep questions, just like, I want to get out of Auroville, I want to go to Europe, I want to go clubbing, I want to go shopping, you know, I had a bit of that drama phase when I was seventeen.

Although Candrika was desperate to leave Auroville and live in Europe when she was a teenager, she told me she wanted to “come home” within six months of her arrival in France at the age of eighteen.

I mean, I guess that okay, when I was here I didn’t really realise that it was different or whatever, because that’s all I knew. But when I got to France I guess that’s when I started realising, ‘cause, I was just different from them, you know? Like of course I look French, or not French, but I look Western, white, whatever, so physically I kind of blend in I guess, but then there were just these small things. I didn’t have any of the same references, I didn’t really know what they were talking about. I guess I didn’t really, I don’t know, I was
just coming from this, you know, mini village where we all know each other so well. And so I guess I was just a bit lost. There was just this kind of gap that I couldn’t really relate to so many people.

Candrika blames some of her initial difficulties in fitting in outside of Auroville on what she calls the typically poor social skills of Aurovilians.

I think that’s one of the problems with Auroville, we don’t acquire many social skills [laughing]. You know? Because we’re kind of, I mean now it’s what? Like 2,000 people, I don’t really know, but back then there was maybe a thousand, or thousand five hundred, and you know, our age group, we were never really confronted with meeting many people.

Candrika also spoke of teenage and youthful rebellion in Auroville being quite different to typical teenage angst elsewhere as she understood it. Where her parents and their age peers had come to Auroville as a rebellious act in opposition to ‘mainstream’ conformity, the Children of Auroville, according to Candrika, actually want the structure, guidance and expectations they think inherent in the societies from which their parents came.

We want to marry, we want to go to school, we want to make money, you know? It’s kind of against everything, in a way. I mean, you know like, people are here, some kids come back and whatever, but they still want to make money, [...] I think there’s quite a few people, not necessarily my age, but a bit older, you know, we’re kind of going back to the structure, the institution [our parents left].

Unlike Theo and AuroAnon, Candrika left the community as a young adult and, aside from one early bout of homesickness noted above, has been largely unwavering in her determination not to live in Auroville permanently again. Candrika’s temporary homesickness shortly after arriving in Europe as a young adult is explained by the sudden absence of a sense of shelter that being raised in a small and tightknit
community gave her, and by the lack of cultural references she shared with her age peers in Europe. Upon returning ‘home’ to Auroville she found herself changed, that now, as she had expected in her teenage desires to leave the community, it was the Auroville community with whom she no longer shared references of importance to her. Auroville is Candrika’s ‘home,’ it is where her parents live and where she returns to for a break between jobs and life’s transitions to recharge and reconnect with herself, her family, and her childhood friends. However, it is not the home of Candrika’s future. She likens herself to other Children of Auroville, even those who do want to live in Auroville, by identifying characteristics in them that she shares, for example the desire to make money, get a recognised formal education, go “back to the structure.” In doing so she grounds herself in a social group of which she sees similarities stronger than obvious differences, arising from shared Aurovillian roots.

All three of these adult Children of Auroville demonstrate different levels of commitment to the community, however the differences between them are less pronounced than the differences between them as a group and those who arrived in Auroville as adults. As second generation migrants, and arguably a variation of Third Culture Kids, about whom there is a growing body of research, Children of Auroville possess a cultural fluidity typical of children who have grown up in a multicultural environment where different cultures are navigated in the home as well as more broadly which renders the concept of ‘home’ even less clear for them than for their parents.

**Children of Auroville and Cultural Fluidity**

Auroville’s emerging culture borrows from the homelands of its residents as well as from the Indian traditions of its environment. Like other children of migrants, adult Children of Auroville are culturally fluid, able to ‘read’ the cultures of their parents’ homelands as well as the surroundings of their childhoods. They are culturally competent, able to participate without obvious difficulty in the social and cultural lives of both the community in which they are raised as well as in their passport countries and those of their diverse social circle. However, also like other second generation migrants, the Children of Auroville feel somewhat marginal in the spaces of both their and their parents’ childhoods (cf. Skrbis et al., 2008, p. 263).
Yet, the experiences of Children of Auroville are distinct from the experiences of many other second generation migrants. For example, second generation migrants referred to in the literature tend to have grown up in “Western developed nations” (Bhimji, 2008, pp. 414-415), regardless of place of their parents’ birth, and, despite often feeling marginal, are expected to “ultimately embrace the norms and institutions of the place where they are raised” (Levitt, 2009, p. 1239). Though Aurovilians must obey the laws of India, they are (intentionally) culturally, ideologically and socially distinct from their surroundings. In Auroville, there is no expectation that second and subsequent generations will eventually in fact assimilate to the culture of their adopted country or have the possibility of living elsewhere in that country.¹¹⁹

Those who grew up in Auroville also share aspects of the identity of Third Culture Kids (cf. Pollock and Van Reken, 2009 [1999], p. xiv). The term ‘third culture’ was coined by John and Ruth Useem about their experiences and observations working as missionaries in India in the 1950s (Cockburn, 2002, p. 476; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009 [1999], p. 14). According to Useem and Useem (1967, p. 131),

... we define as the patterns generic to a community of men who stem from two different societies and who regularly interact as they relate their respective societies, or segments therefrom, within the physical setting of one of the societies.

More clearly, Useem and Useem suggest individuals who have spent a significant period of time in a culture other than their home culture come to represent a ‘third’ culture that is “unique to and shared by all” Third Culture Individuals irrespective of home or host culture (Lyttle et al., 2011, p. 688). By extension, ‘Third Culture Kids’ are the children of these people, children who are simultaneously enculturated into the cultures of their parents while also acculturated to that of their environment. Today, it is the children of expats who are most often described by the term Third Culture Kid (TCK).

One of the most popular definitions of Third Culture Kids is provided by Pollock and Van Reken (2009 [1999], p. 13):

¹¹⁹ Though, anecdotally, a very small number of adult Children of Auroville of non-Indian parents have indeed ended up living permanently elsewhere in India.
A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. (see also Greenholtz and Kim, 2009, p. 392)

Two significant aspects of the lives of TCKs are that they are raised in a genuinely cross-cultural world, and they are raised in a highly mobile world (Polluck and Van Reken, 2009 [1999], p. 17; see also Cockburn, 2002, p. 477). The Children of Auroville easily satisfy these requirements, even if they themselves have never left Auroville. First, their environment is genuinely cross-cultural requiring them to negotiate the diverse cultures of the people they interact with each day. Second, due to the transient nature of the community, there is a constant “coming and going” as the “people in their lives are always changing” (Cockburn, 2002, p. 477). Like the individuals written about in the literature on Third Culture Kids, adult Children of Auroville are also distinct from their locational age peers due to distinct physical differences; an apparently privileged lifestyle; and system identity (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009 [1999], p. 17; see also Cockburn, 2002, p. 477).

However, unlike TCKs previously considered, adult Children of Auroville do not have an expectation of repatriation (Pollack and Van Reken, 2009 [1999], p.17; see also Cockburn, 2002, p.477). This argument, for expected repatriation, distinguishes TCKs from permanent minority migrant populations and prevents them from emotionally connecting the idea of ‘home’ with the places in which they are raised. Unlike, TCKs, the notion of ‘home’ for Children of Auroville is deeply embedded in the idea of Auroville, as we will see below, despite the ambiguous, even tenuous, residency status of most foreign Aurovilians in India. However, to further complicate matters, even with the relatively recent existence of an Overseas Citizen of India status available to those born

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120 As previously stated, in this chapter I am highlighting the experiences of adult Children of Auroville with non-Tamil parentage. However, even Tamil Children of Auroville may be physically identifiable as Aurovillian rather than ‘local’ in the region due to their manner of dress, the company they keep, places they frequent, language abilities and other characteristics.

121 Though many do venture to their passport countries as young adults, or seek to live elsewhere.
in India to parents of foreign citizenship, if the expectation of repatriation is an expectation of the wider society, then this does not distinguish Children of Auroville who are not of Indian ethnicity from Third Culture Kids. For the Children of Auroville I spoke to, their physical distinctiveness in Tamil Nadu means that they are considered non-local and therefore there is an assumption by the general public unfamiliar with Auroville that they will indeed return to the places they are presumed to have come from. This ultimately reduces even further their ability to identify with the land on which they were raised but, unlike their parents, did not choose.

Yet, just as other second generation migrants, and even more so Third Culture Kids, the multicultural environment in which adult Children of Auroville with non-Indian parentage were raised contributes to a certain cultural fluidity. They additionally share with TCKs a global outlook, sometimes considered the domain of the elite, as well as a deep understanding of the local, which, in turn, helps them appear to be able to ‘fit in’ in most places.

Theo, above, told me that the Aurovilian kids of his generation are scattered all over the world. Proficient in multiple languages and having been exposed to so many cultures in their childhoods, most adult Children of Auroville do not, apparently, have a great deal of difficulty fitting in, or finding their place, wherever they go, though they themselves may claim to feel like outsiders everywhere. For example, Candrika’s early feelings of being different in France did not prevent her from making a life outside of Auroville, unlike adult arrivals to Auroville who say feelings of being different sent them away from where they came.

Despite this apparent cultural fluidity, research suggests that among the greatest challenge for TCKs is the task of forming a sense of identity and a sense of belonging (Moore and Barker, 2012, p. 555). As Greenholtz and Kim (2009, p. 392) found, “cultural hybrids profess never to feel ‘at home’ except with others who have the same type of lived experience.” Considering the earlier definition of TCKs from Polluck and Van Reken includes the words, “the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar experience,” ‘home,’ then, is less a place than a set of relationships. This can be seen in Aurovilian kids who profess to feel isolated, in Auroville where they are a minority in numbers and uncomfortably revered by adult arrivals for their circumstantial rather than demonstrable Aurovilianness, but even more so elsewhere.
Demonstrating how some Children of Auroville have dealt with this, Aurore and Kirin enrolled in university courses in Europe targeted at international students. Theo, who himself actually spoke of his difficulty ‘fitting in’ in both his native European country and also in Auroville, told me that being scattered around the world is something that is typical of his generation of Aurovilians. Of those I met in Auroville, five now work in fields that involve frequent travel, where they can fit in in an internationally diverse community and not have to answer too many questions about their background. These types of jobs are also apparently typically attractive to Third Culture Individuals (Hon and Jan, 2004).122

Seeking out others who share similarly fluid cultural identities allows Children of Auroville to evade to some degree the discomfort of being asked “where do you come from?” As Cockburn (2002, p. 479) says of TCKs, their immediate response to this question tends to be “do they want the long or the short story?” Children of Auroville told me of being almost embarrassed to talk about the community they grew up in, as we saw in Theo’s reluctance to explain Auroville to people outside of Auroville. Rita laughed when I brought this topic up with her and said this is because “we have a phobia of being called a sect.” Most Children of Auroville told me they prefer to change or avoid the topic when people ask where they’re from, and only one said she is willing to speak about Auroville when abroad but added she does find it difficult to explain the community without sounding like “a weirdo.” There is an obvious desire among Children of Auroville not to be thought of as ‘weird,’ it is something that all adult Children of Auroville spoke to me about, and, like adult arrivals, it can be a reason to live in or return to Auroville. Benjamin told me,

I don’t talk about Auroville when I go outside. First of all because it’s complicated to explain, you know, without people thinking it’s a cult or whatever[...], I don’t know, everybody has to judge from their own experiences, so you can’t blame people for thinking that. So that’s why I try to

122 Though I cannot confirm with data, anecdotally it seemed to me that many of the adult Children of Auroville who have left the community are now living and working expat style lives around the world. This is also true to some extent of some of the adult Children of Auroville who are currently living in the community, people such as Jishnu and Theo who work for organisations with offices in several cities or countries and who travel extensively for their work. While they may not send their children to international schools now that the schools in Auroville have such high educational standards, the cultural learnings are similar. Children of Auroville and Third Culture Kids are drawn to similar types of work and social circles.
avoid talking about all these things to a lot of people because I don’t see the point. They won’t understand, I’ll be frustrated and nobody’s happy [laughing].

I asked Jishnu what he tells people outside of Auroville of where he is from, to which, like Theo, he replied “normally India.” I then asked him what he would say when people suggest that he does not look Indian. With northern European ancestry, his response demonstrates his refusal to be pigeonholed and level of playfulness with the topic:

For a while my example was that some South Africans don’t look African, do they? I used to muck around with that too, I was from Romania, I was from Japan, it was just for the fun. That’s the great thing about it, you can really make up stories, if you’re in the mood you can be whoever you want!

Jishnu adds he would normally say he was from India, and he met a few people who knew about Auroville,

...which is good and bad. A lot of questions came up and it made a lot of discussion, which is not necessarily what I was so interested in while I was travelling. Because obviously the big questions come up quickly and when you come here for a day it can look pretty colonial and a bit rough in that sense, or sect-like or whatever. I guess it could come across quite easily, this big golden ball in the centre, this meditation thing, Auroville, what’s going on there? If you’re just passing through it’s possible that it’s this weird place. Um, but mostly I didn’t encourage the topic because it’s just long and complicated. If it came out there was no problem, I’d be willing to discuss it and whatever. I was just from India.

Showing his embrace of a Third Culture Kid identity, Jishnu told me that often,

...people just actually assumed that I was another ex-pat kid, which makes it easier. You say Pondicherry and oh, Pondicherry, you’re French, yeah, French, whatever, end of story. So quite simple.
Indicating her feelings about her own identity as much as she highlights how Auroville has not, after almost fifty years, become truly a part of India, Amita, who has lived in Europe, Africa and North America since leaving Auroville for university abroad says of her ethnicity, “Well I’m definitely not Indian and I’m not, I’m nothing. Which is okay. Like, I don’t really feel it bothers me so much.” Mitul told me “I’m not really English, I’m not really German and I’m not Indian either. And maybe, as I said, I haven’t really felt Aurovilian. But I think that’s still the closest I have.” Sumitra, herself a Third Culture Kid (an “army brat” as she calls herself) is drawn to the community for the same reason adult Children of Auroville are drawn to Third Culture Kids and the lifestyles of these individuals. A non-Aurovilian resident from northern India who participates on the periphery of the community, Sumitra believes the adult Children of Auroville have a “strange identity crisis.” Contradicting Amita and Mitul, she tells me “they don’t fully feel Indian, but they are Indian, but they’re also European or wherever their parents came from, so I feel there’s a huge tension in them.”

Perhaps unacknowledged by Sumitra and many other guests in Auroville is the tension adult Children of Auroville also have with the community itself. In the previous chapter I discussed the issue of commitment to the community for adult arrivals in Auroville. In many ways, having been born into, or moved at a young age to, the community, this cohort of Aurovilians cannot be expected to demonstrate commitment to Auroville in the same manner as their parents, a topic I turn to next.

**Commitment and the Children of Auroville**

Rosabeth Kanter (1968, p. 502), whose commitment-building mechanisms were discussed in Chapter 5, uses longevity as a marker of success, with survival of twenty-five years, a generation, or more being a key criteria for a successful community. She

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123 Like many others, I take issue with this idea that longevity is necessarily a marker of success as it fails to recognise the intentions of the community and the community’s members, which may not be contingent of the duration of the community’s survival. In fact, some communities may serve their purpose, or the purpose of joining for individual members, in a relatively short period of time (cf., for example, Sargisson and Sargent, 2004). In the case of Auroville, longevity is not a marker of having been successful, however that it has survived much longer is a type of success that the community rightfully celebrates given its early tumultuous history and its increasing complexity which poses ever more challenges to the shared vision on which it is based.

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points out that intentional communities wishing to survive the lives of their original members have two options, either recruit or breed new members (1972, p. 145). As described in Chapter 5, each of Kanter’s three commitment-building mechanisms comprise two processes, one negative process of detachment signalling a departure from the life one lead prior to joining the community, and one positive process of attachment signalling connection to the community. She does not delve into how these mechanisms translate to second and subsequent generations of community members, however she does write,

In general, the second generation is not necessarily the most reliable source of committed adults to perpetuate the community. Regardless of how well socialized they are, their commitment must be different from that of their first-generation parents. The second generation did not choose to live in the community, like their parents; nor were they converted to a belief in the community’s ideals after weighing the alternatives; nor did they seek the commune because of personal deprivations. For the children, life in the community is a given; it is their base-line experience. Thus, as committed as they may be to the community, their commitment stems from different life experiences from that of their parents. (Kanter, 1972, p. 146)

One can easily see that due to the very fact of being born into the community or taken there by their parents at a young age, the Children of Auroville cannot be required to demonstrate the same detachment processes of sacrifice, renunciation and mortification as their parents had done previously, though attachment processes of investment, communion and transcendence may be at least as important to their sense of belonging to the community (see Kanter, 1972).

This, Kanter writes, is a reason for not giving community children automatic full membership. In her study, Kanter found that second and subsequent generations of community members were typically less committed to the community that they had

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As mentioned previously, in Auroville children of the community are not termed ‘Aurovilian’ but ‘Children of Auroville.’ As in many other intentional communities, people who grew up in the community must make an adult decision to formally join the community if they wish to do so after their eighteenth birthday.
been raised in and with each generation more likely to leave the community, “attracted by the lures of the changing outside world” (Kanter, 1972, p. 146), something we see clearly in Candrika’s reasons for living outside the community.

While little has been written about second generation intentional community members, it is a logical assumption that transmission of community values through the generations is necessary for the survival of such communities, however I found that adult Children of Auroville, by and large, do not share the spiritual values of their parents. Children of Auroville do not actually make a choice to live and ‘belong’ there, they are there due to the choices of their parents. My interactions with Children of Auroville suggested that they are far more ambivalent about the intentions of this intentional community than their parents. Often talked about in Auroville is whether people are sufficiently devoted to the goals of the community to justify membership and how this is assessed. However, the ‘Aurovilianness’ of Children of Auroville is unquestioned, they know that and are very secure in their belonging in Auroville if not to the Auroville of today. This gives Children of Auroville a certain freedom to complain, to agitate and to not follow the rules of demonstrable commitment.

Where adult arrivals in Auroville are likely to be devotees of Sri Aurobindo and/or the Mother, or at least (as it is becoming increasingly common) devotees of the publicised goals of Auroville which have something to do with human unity and individual freedoms, the Children of Auroville told me that, if they are devotees, it is more likely to be of the community values and people than the teachings. AuroAnon and Theo above, for example, were very clear in their ambivalence regarding the spiritual foundations of Auroville. Words such as “rubbish” and “bullshit” were used when talking about the Aurovilian philosophies. Some spoke of the “rhetoric” and “propaganda” delivered to guests and Newcomers, while one said that people coming today seem “too fanatic.”

Like AuroAnon, many children of Auroville have never actually read the texts written by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Aurore, who left Auroville as an adolescent to study in

125 Renfro-Sargent (2002, p. 100) wrote of a similar phenomenon in Oneida community, where “second generations [...] followers, who were the first to be born at Oneida, lacked the zeal of the original converts, their parents.”

126 Notable exceptions include of course celibate intentional communities such as the well-known Shaker communities, which have existed for almost three hundred years, though in sharp decline over the past century.
Europe and returned in her early thirties for reasons unsaid, says she grew up with it but never really gives it any thought, or ever has done. She likens it to being a non-practicing Christian with churchgoing parents, like her non-Aurovilian boyfriend. Candrika demonstrates the lack of seriousness with which adult Children of Auroville typically view the spirituality of Auroville when she jokes about the Auroville Charter in response to a question I asked about what it means to be Aurovilian. “What is it?” she poses while laughing hysterically, “the servitor, the willing, the Divine, what?!” Then she adds, “Yeah, I forget the words, um, pfft, I don’t really know.” Kirin, another person born in Auroville who left to study abroad as a young adult but returned in order to start a business with the community’s support, suggested that believing one hundred percent in the system must be liberating, but he said the Children of Auroville, like himself do not, and so they worry about having backup plans. Though their identity, framed by the label ‘Child of Auroville,’ makes adults who grew up in Auroville very secure in their positions in the community, living in Auroville does not necessarily fulfil all of their ambitions. Auroville is the dream of their parents, not necessarily their own. As a result, Children of Auroville openly work outside of the community for wages and contribute to Auroville financially rather than through volunteer labour. They come and go as they please, consume alcohol and other drugs, and incorporate in their lives aspects of life outside of Auroville that their parents came to Auroville to be free of.

Like other adult Children of Auroville, Theo feels cheated by the education system he experienced. Though all Aurovilians apparently agree that the schools in Auroville today are excellent, this was not always the case. I noted in my time in Auroville that a lot of the adult Children of Auroville I met of this era had gone on in adulthood to complete their formal education and, seemingly quite a large percentage, had also obtained higher degrees. Nonetheless, all seemed to begrudge the community’s haphazard approach to

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127 Technically, Auroville is a dry community and all mind altering substances, alcohol and more illicit drugs, frowned upon and not available for purchase in Auroville. In practice, however, alcohol, which is easily available at bottle shops and restaurants outside of Auroville, is feely consumed in Auroville in private dwellings. It appears that prohibition against the sale of alcohol in Auroville is maintained more as a deterrent to outsiders coming to Auroville to participate in unsocial behaviour than to prevent Aurovilians and long term guests themselves from drinking. I was told several times about a serious drug problem among the youth of Auroville though, save some marijuana use, did not myself witness any evidence of this.

128 Most of the adult Children of Auroville I met and socialised with were over the age of thirty, which meant they experienced and can remember Auroville in the 1980s if not earlier.
their education in the early years and believe that it had been detrimental to their own opportunities in life (cf. Greenberg 2003, p. 677).

In previous chapters I argued that ‘home’ is understood by adult arrivals to the community as a promise by the community for the future due to the opportunities provided by the community for self-development. Adult Children of Auroville, however, see their lack of access to formal (and widely recognised) education as curtailing their future potential and opportunities, thereby limiting their possibilities to the community which represents their past rather than their future. Given so many of the Children of Auroville I met had higher degrees and/or had held successful careers outside of Auroville this may not be actually true, however the perception remains among them that it is.

The Children of Auroville I met and spoke to told me they felt that their childhood experiences in Auroville were far less structured than they would have been elsewhere, which in many ways made this time immeasurably rewarding. However, as adults, they lament the perceived lack of responsibility on the part of their parents and other adult community members for their future security. This is particularly in evidence in their discussions about education, as previously discussed. Feelings of not having a ‘home culture’ were also apparent in my conversations with adult Children of Auroville about their lives today. Shanti Pillai (2005, p. 56) too comments similarly on her interactions with adult Children of Auroville:

While the pressure to be something might be considerably less, the flip side is that some young people seem to lack direction and perseverance and are perceived by some as frittering away time well into adulthood. The fact is, however, that their lives are not so easy. While they may be growing up in India, many do not feel much connection to the surrounding culture, nor do they necessarily feel at home when visiting parents’ native countries. Recreations for Westernized young people are relatively few in the region, although typical diversions such as drugs and alcohol are readily available. Finally, while there are chances to gain hands on experience in many unusual endeavors, opportunities to specialize or receive advanced training in any field are naturally very limited in a community the size of Auroville.
Jagrav says of the Children of Auroville of his generation “We were told so much that we were special, we were the chosen ones. Chosen for what?!” He says that his generation had this “pumped into” them a lot, that they were going to save the future, “but I want to save myself! You know?” He says he now thinks the illusion of power they were given was dangerous. Cockburn (2002, p. 477) could be referring to one key potential source of tension between Children of Auroville and their community when she notes,

Members of specific third culture communities may be more directly conscious than peers at home of representing something greater than themselves – be it their government, their company, or God. The adults’ behaviour, or that of their children, positively reflects the values and standards of the sponsoring agency.

Through anecdote, Candrika expressed the pressure the adult Children of Auroville feel for the responsibility of Auroville’s future, a responsibility they do not necessarily desire. She related part of a conversation she had with a pioneer shortly before our interview:

She had so much hope! She’s like, “oh, the Auroville kids, they’re so great” and you know, “it’s going to be so great when they take over” and I was like “really?!” Like, are they ever going to take over? Like, I feel that we’re, I mean maybe this is just me and I’m extrapolating, but I think me and a few others as well, we’re more disconnected, you know? They have this dream, and they’re still kind of in it, in their own way, but it’s a totally different vibe now.

While I heard often about the reverence people in Auroville have for Children of Auroville, I also heard frustration from members of the second generation about Auroville-specific social barriers to taking on positions of responsibility. For example, Jagrav says in Auroville “you never know when you are actually grown up.” He told me he is still spoken to as a child by people who knew him as a child, even those who know he has an adult son of his own. “I guess in the west you grow up,” he said,
...you go to university, you get a job, you know? Here that doesn’t happen in such a formal order, and so people aren’t given the milestones of aging or even growing up. If you stay here it’s like you’re never taken as an adult.

Jagrav told me that even now people will say to him “oh, you kids of Auroville!” “There’s no initiation into adulthood,” he said. This is compounded by the fact that people rarely ‘act’ their age and “it is difficult to know how old people are” by external markers like it might be elsewhere.

Auroville’s ageing population, and the prospect of the older generation dying, raises another set of concerns for the Children of Auroville. Intriguingly it is those who are still relatively young who seem most concerned about the prospect of dealing with an ageing population. Two expressed to me their concerns about the community of Arka that was intended as a facility for aging community members and those with impaired mobility but has been “hijacked” for other issues. Chandana commented on cultural differences between India and Europe noting that in India elderly people are traditionally cared for by younger generations, a practice she observes is slowly changing as India “modernises” and nuclear families become more common. She notes the cultural make up of Auroville, as well as the circumstances of many of its residents, means Auroville’s ageing residents are less likely to have family supports to care for them in their final years, and hopes the small population and sense of family community members have with one another will be an advantage to creating a change in the opposite direction than is increasingly the norm in wider Indian society.

However, Chandana, an adult Child of Auroville who does participate in a number of ‘Town Hall committees’ and is therefore included in the decision-making processes of Auroville, also expressed her frustration with the older generation saying “the old

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129 Arka is a sub-community of Auroville. Essentially a large multi-purpose building with resident and non-resident members who work in and around the building, Arka hosts a variety of wellness-focused workshops, classes and other activities. My understanding of Arka and the controversy surrounding it is mostly anecdotal. During my time in Auroville I heard mention of it as a place intended to care for Auroville’s ageing population. However, I understand that the definitions of ‘ageing’ and ‘care’ are variously interpreted. While some apparently expected Arka to function as a more traditional aged care facility, in fact it seems Arka is devoted to the activities which promote the sense of ‘staying young.’ Controversy, as I understood it, relates to which is a more necessary function in Auroville today and into the future.
crocodiles don’t move and change, they don’t give room for trying out things differently and things like that.” Echoing Jagrav’s complaint of being infantilised into adulthood, she told me the youth are not given a sense of responsibility by older Aurovilians, but neither do they try to take on any responsibility for the community. It is rare that adult Children of Auroville nominate for service committees or take the lead on key development projects within Auroville, perhaps partially as they are intimidated by the ‘old crocodiles’ as Chandana suggested. One of the few adult Children of Auroville I met who is genuinely passionate about her community and as much a proponent of the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as her parents, Chandana is dismayed by this. She comments that people take advantage of the ease with which responsibility can be avoided, they “don’t recognise the sense of responsibility that comes with being a part of this organisation.” However, she is also hopeful for the future, saying when the pioneers die a vacuum maybe created, into which the youth can take their place.

The adult Children of Auroville who remain or have returned to Auroville are as committed to the community as adult arrivals, but their commitment takes a different shape. Unlike adult arrivals, they are not questioned about their spiritual beliefs and therefore not required to demonstrate, or even share, them with other permanent residents of Auroville. However, Auroville is their home, its history and, for those who remain or return, its future implicated in their own. The commitment Children of Auroville have to the community has to do with the social life and the values it champions, despite its flaws and challenges. In Auroville they can be themselves without explanation. It is their home, the place from which they are most likely to receive shelter. As such, those who I spoke to are very protective of the community.

‘Nothing can take it away from me’: Auroville as a safe haven

Jonathon and Josie, two long term guests in Auroville described the Children of Auroville as “beautiful mongrels.” Josie added “they’re fucking monsters socially, but gorgeous specimens! [...] The kids I see here are bitter, they’re awful people.” I do not necessarily share Josie’s view that Aurovilian children are awful people, but it was

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130 Jonathon and Josie were speaking in particular of the younger, school-aged, generation of Children of Auroville, not those I interviewed aged over 30.
something I heard from a number of non-Aurovilian guests and residents. Identifying strongly with each other but not necessarily sharing the values of others in their surroundings, Children of Auroville form a tight, and sometimes seemingly arrogant unit. It is true the Children of Auroville tend to be quite precocious, something which may be common of children raised in intentional communities (Greenberg, 2002, p. 23). They are culturally fluid and confident, yet their strong identity and sense of belonging in (if not to) the community they live in gives them a sense of entitlement which may make it difficult to relate with sensitivity to others who do not share this identity.

As discussed above, the issue of ageing is clearly a controversial one in Auroville, and there are certainly generational divides. I use the plural, ‘divides’ as it was brought to my attention on several occasions that there is an age divide according to the age of individuals as well as the length of time an individual has been Aurovilian. It was the Children of Auroville who seemed particularly concerned about, or cognisant of, issues regarding such divides, while older and newer Aurovilians spoke more often and with more passion of The Mother’s ageless society131 and the collective effort to create the dream. For example, when I asked AuroAnon about markers of social groups in Auroville he quickly answered “Very much old and new,” highlighting a perceived difference in Aurovilianness between the pioneers who remember Auroville prior to the mid 1990s,132 and those more recently arrived.133 Aurore too told me,

The new people come and they have their own idea, but it’s a very different thing to come to Auroville now and to be here since 70s, you know?

With marked cultural fluidity and competence in a range of settings, adult Children of Auroville, in many ways, have more in common with the highly mobile global elite than with other people who live in the community in which they were raised. Yet Children of

131 Aurovilian marketing material speaks of an ageless society and it is common to hear people say that age is irrelevant, that the Mother was the youngest person associated with Auroville even when in her eighties and nineties, and that many Aurovilians themselves actually get younger as they progress on their spiritual journey.

132 The mid 1990s seems to be a turning point in Auroville’s history. It is arguably around this time that the ‘pioneering’ days came to an end, when life in Auroville became less about day-to-day survival. Around this time Auroville’s population growth also began to increase far more rapidly than previously.

133 For example, a forty year old Aurovilian who has lived in the community for twenty years would be considered ‘old’ in the sense of their Aurovilianness in comparison to a sixty year old Newcomer.
Auroville feel a powerful sense of ownership over the community due to their long association and are somewhat resentful of any suggestion to the contrary. One adult Child of Auroville told me that prior to obtaining OCI status, she was asked to justify to the Working Committee\textsuperscript{134} why she was working for pay outside of the community. She told me that she marched into the meeting and greeted warmly the one or two people she remembered from her childhood before demanding to know who each other person in the room was. In doing so she asserted her Aurovilanness by demonstrating that she had been in Auroville longer than most of the people trying to assert power over her, an implicit statement of her ‘right’ to do as she pleases over their right to control her.

Peter Somerville (1997, p. 229) draws on studies showing that “length of residence” leads to greater attachment to place as ‘home,’ “[a]s these memories accumulate,” he says, “so the significance of the home for the individual increases.” However, Somerville believes that it is more complicated than simply related to the duration of residence. Rather, he says, the relevant factor is “stage in the life cycle” (Somerville (1997, p. 229). Cuba and Hummon (1983, p. 115) also write about the importance of duration of residence “in building sentimental attachment and a sense of home,” saying that it “enhances local social ties” and “provides a temporal context for imbuing place with personal meanings,” which “may be particularly important in linking significant life events to place, providing the individual with a sense of ‘auto biographical insidedness.’” Discussions about Auroville as home I had with adult Children of Auroville suggest that both are important. For them, that they had lived in, and can remember, Auroville during the earlier ‘pioneering’ days gives them a sense of ownership over the community, as it does for their parents’ generation. But, that Auroville’s early years, and the values associated with the hardship and camaraderie inherent of this time, infused their own formative years enmeshes their identities with Auroville’s more so than for those who arrived as adults. Where Saunders calls home the “embodiment of past memories” (cited in Somerville, 1997, p. 229), we can see that both the objective length of these memories as well as the proportion of one’s life they are connected with contribute to feelings of belonging. Importantly, both length of association as well as

\textsuperscript{134} The Auroville Working Committee is a an elected group of seven Aurovilians who act as a liaison between the Auroville Residents Assembly (that is, all adult members of the Auroville community) and the Auroville Secretary, Governing Board and other relevant authorities. As such, the Working Committee is involved in all major decisions and issues regarding governance, judiciary, and the Indian State, including the issuance of visas. For more information about the governance structure of Auroville see Appendix 3.

6. The Paradox of Belonging: Children of Auroville
association at an early “stage in the life cycle” (Somerville, 1997, p. 229) contribute to recognition of belonging by others.

Writing about migration and the notion of home, Sara Ahmed (1999, p. 343) says,

…it is impossible to return to a place that was lived as home, precisely because the home is not exterior to a self, but implicated in it. The movements of selves between places that come to be inhabited as home involve the discontinuities of personal biographies and wrinkles in the skin. The experience of leaving home in migration is hence always about the failure of memory to fully make sense of the place one comes to inhabit, a failure which is experienced in the discomfort of inhabiting a migrant body, a body which feels out of place, which feels uncomfortable in this place. The process of returning home is likewise about the failures of memory, of not being inhabited in the same way by that which appears as familiar.

That the idea of ‘home’ is intrinsic to self, and memory always implicated in the idea of ‘home’ in some way accounts for each individual’s fraught relationship with Auroville as home despite their different attitudes to the community. Thinking about the three adult Children of Auroville detailed above, the “wrinkles in the skin” caused by Auroville may be somewhat deeper for Theo and AuroAnon than for Candrika, yet Candrika too understands Auroville as her home instinctively and without question, demonstrated by her categorisation of herself as ‘Aurovilian’ despite her fleeting visits and not knowing whether her name is on the Masterlist. For all three, childhood memories of Auroville make the community home today in their adulthood. Auroville is not the same as it was then, but neither are the individuals. Refusing to completely accept the disjuncture between his memories of Auroville as child and the reality as he sees it now, AuroAnon has returned to Auroville in order to imbue his children’s conception of home with his own. Devata too told me that she returned to Auroville when her children were very young because she thought it a better environment for them to be raised. Auroville’s raison d’être does not align with their own reasons for being in Auroville, but the memories of their childhoods nonetheless make this an important place for these
individuals and their Aurovilian peers, who share the community’s values if not its beliefs.\textsuperscript{135}

A desert just fifty years ago and now a thriving town set in a forest with a rapidly increasing population, Auroville is changing quickly. For the generation of Children of Auroville I spoke to, Auroville developed, grew up, as it were, with them. In its infancy when they were infants and now apparently coming into its own as they too are adults. ‘Home’ for these Aurovilians is the memory of what Auroville was when they were children rather than what it is and could be. According to Ni Laoire \textit{et al} (2010, p. 157),

\begin{quote}
The concept of ‘home’ has a long association with the ways in which different types of spaces become sites of security, and provide a sense of belonging, which can relate to sites of attachments as diverse as the nation or the locality. Home can be mobilized as a site of nostalgia and romanticism, articulating with postmodern tendencies to locate childhood itself as a source of nostalgia.
\end{quote}

Children of Auroville may seem to belong more than anyone else, and this what their own minds also tell them, but where newer arrivals told me they come because they feel they belong here, adult Children of Auroville told me otherwise. For newer arrivals, the current community of Auroville reflects their personal needs for freedom and recognition. That is, they can see themselves and their own difficulties reflected in the stories and lives of those around them who form the dominant discourse on what it means to be Aurovilian today. However, the adult Children of Auroville, taught to be future-focussed, do not feel they belong to the present community of Auroville but to its past.

Adult Children of Auroville experience a paradox of belonging. To apply to become Aurovilian one must profess devotion to the ideals. But it is impossible to ever be as Aurovilian as the Children of Auroville, some of whom are adamantly not devotees and

\textsuperscript{135} “[F]ailures of memory, of not being inhabited in the same way by that which appears as familiar” are also evident in Theo’s recounting of his difficulty to ‘fit,’ to feel at home, in his native Belgium. I wonder whether Theo’s choice to return to his native ‘home,’ a place in which he lived until the age of twelve and therefore had memories of as it was at that time, rather than to a country with which he had little to no experience in, as is the choice of many Children of Auroville, had an impact on his ability to feel at home. Were his expectations of being able to feel at home challenged more than they would have been in a third country?
openly express sentiments that would prevent anyone else from becoming Aurovilian. One of Auroville’s goals is to create truly multicultural individuals, and in a sense they have done this, however the people who have this irrefutable Aurovilian identity do not necessarily want to participate in the dream envisaged by the Mother. They may applaud the ideals and want to see Auroville succeed, but they often return not due to a particular desire to be a part of the project, but seemingly by default. Auroville is a place where Children of Auroville do not have to explain themselves. Though it may no longer be ‘home,’ it is where home is located.

Children of Auroville are somewhat in awe of what their parents were able to achieve. It was repeated over and over in interviews and in general conversation that it is not as arduous to live in Auroville now as it once was, that new arrivals are not forced to ‘prove’ themselves and their commitment like the pioneers did. It is not just awe, but also certain pride in their parents, and themselves even, for attempting to create not just a new life, but also a new society, no matter how flawed they think the reality is today. Frustration with the community among adult Children of Auroville is reflexive, directed at their own inability to escape (as their parents had been able to do from the world the children of Auroville have tried to return to) rather than at their parents for bringing them there in the first place.

Children of Auroville demonstrate that feeling ‘at home’ is not synonymous with ‘fitting in.’ Neither need it mean freedom or commitment to an ideal, as we saw of adult arrivals in previous chapters. Home can also be a place of familiarity and family, where one’s right to reside and to stay is simply unequivocal. Despite his misgivings about the community, when asked if he feels that Auroville has been taken away from him and other early community members by newer arrivals, AuroAnon says about his memories of home and his place in Auroville now,

> Nothing can take it away from me. And I think that’s a feeling that pretty much all of us who were born here at that time feel, like there’s such a sense of ownership we have of this place which is pretty powerful.

As we have seen, adult Children of Auroville feel quite differently about the community of Auroville to people who arrived as adults. Seemingly contradictorily, they are both
more “disconnected,” as one told me, from the founding philosophies of the community which ostensibly provide the reason for existence, as well as considered (by themselves and others) more Aurovillian than adult arrivals. As second (and subsequent) generation Aurovilians, Children of Auroville are not required to display the same processes of commitment, however, for those who do live in the community, the depth of commitment they have to Auroville is no less significant than for other Aurovilians. AuroAnon told me about his return to Auroville, “In a lot of ways it’s where I feel most comfortable in the world,” in essence surely the very definition of ‘home.’ Children of Auroville stay in Auroville, or come back to Auroville, because they do not feel they belong anywhere else. This is, in fact, not a dissimilar reason to the motivations driving newer arrivals to settle in the community.
7. Auroville, at Home in the Neighbourhood?

Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness. – First line of the Auroville Charter

Auroville could not be anywhere else, the tolerance in India allows it to be here. India is such an open and free society and it’s a spiritual culture, it’s accepted in India that you have these spiritual ideals, in most countries you don’t. (Robert, American Aurovilian)

Absolutely no, I don’t think [Auroville could be anywhere else]. And I think that’s deeply connected to the Indian psyche. It’s one of the freest countries I’ve ever been in. I mean there’s a lot of issues and a lot of problems but I think it’s one of the countries that actually accepts everything. It’ll fight it, but then it’ll accept it. So yeah, for that reason I don’t think so. India is a very, very tolerant country. Extremely tolerant. It’s a true democracy, it really is. (Sumitra, long-term non-Aurovilian resident)

India attracts spiritual tourists from around the world, but they are often disillusioned with the reality of life in India, its extreme social inequality, apparent dirt and chaos. Intriguingly, while a great deal of non-Indian Aurovilians came to India initially in search of promises of enlightenment implied by the public campaigns of the movements noted in Chapter 3, a significant proportion actually settled in Auroville because it is different to the India they have experienced elsewhere, home to a culture and social infrastructure with which they could not feel comfortable. With its green open spaces, relaxed European style cafés and lack of evidence of poverty within the community itself, Auroville seems an oasis (cf. Hutnyk, 1996). Additionally, anything more than a cursory glance, in even the briefest of visits, will show that Auroville is indeed a community based on a certain spirituality, however it is ‘spirituality light’ at first for the foreign guest, with individuals, including permanent residents, able to delve as deeply as
they please into the founding principles. As Richard Sharpley and Priya Sundaram (2005, p. 168) found in their study of ashram tourism, focussed on the Sri Aurobindo ashram in Pondicherry, “for a number of respondents the attraction of Auroville had become the ‘otherness’ of the township compared with their home country and with the rest of India itself” (emphasis added).

Given its obvious uniqueness, I asked most of my interviewees, as well as some others in casual conversations, whether Auroville could be anywhere else. For those who believe Auroville could be nowhere else, at least not yet,\textsuperscript{136} which was the vast majority of people, their reasoning had either to do with their perceived tolerance of the Government of India for allowing such a project to take place in its territory, or for the apparent inherent spirituality of India which encourages such an experiment. Often these two ideas melded, as in the case of Paul who told me government officials in India are deeply spiritual despite it being a secular country, and are therefore accommodating and enthusiastic supporters of the Auroville project, something which would not occur elsewhere. In response to this question, Archan told me “India is really a place where you meet a lot of people who are conditioned to the truth of humanity, the Divine, I would say the Divine Truth, the ultimate, the deepest truth of humanity [...] which is not something which is outside” and so Auroville could not be given the support it needs to exist anywhere other than India.

I asked Sumitra, from northern India, about the ideal ‘Aurovilian’ or if she can think of someone who embodies what it means to be Aurovilian. She replied that because she is a very earthy person she thinks of a farmer type personality,

\[...\text{someone who farms and plays music and lives in an eco-hut or something.} \]
\[\text{Unfortunately I always visualise that as a European person, but I don’t know what that means. I never really imagine Indians as Aurovilians for some} \]
\[\]

\textsuperscript{136} Many Aurovilians also talk about the impossibility of the idea of Auroville, the more important thing being its inhabitants’ desire to work towards the dream if not realise it. Auroville is termed by Aurovilians an ‘experiment,’ they do not, therefore, think it appropriate or likely fruitful, yet, to generate the same mistakes in another location. At the end of ‘A Dream,’ the Mother wrote “The earth is certainly not ready to realize such an idea, for mankind does not yet possess sufficient knowledge to understand and adopt it nor the conscious force that is indispensable in order to execute it; that is why I call it a dream” (Sullivan, 1994, p. 44; see also Auroville, 2017b; Van Vrekham, 2007 [2004], p. 548).
reason. Whenever I think of an Aurovilian I always think of a European type personality. Which I think is kind of sad.

These three observations, that Auroville is so uniquely different to other places in India which attract large numbers of foreign residents and to its surroundings despite apparently porous borders, the conviction of its residents that Auroville could exist nowhere else, and the assumption by so many that Auroville is an enclave of foreigners despite nearly half of its population being Indian, with Sumitra’s remarks above just an example, beg consideration of Auroville’s relationship to its surroundings. Contemplating, then, of markers of ‘home,’ is Auroville as a community at home in Auroville?

In consideration of this question, in this chapter I examine the ways Auroville’s different cultures interact with each other. I start by introducing four Aurovilians who spoke to me about the relationship Auroville has with its neighbours and highlighted some of the tensions within the community surrounding related issues. Using the examples of cosmopolitanism and cultural appropriation, development work and the uncomfortable legacy of colonialism in India as lenses, I then explore relationships of ‘home’ for the community of Auroville in its region of Tamil Nadu. The community’s emerging culture is arguably “heavily influenced by Euro-American traditions” despite its location and large number of Tamil Aurovilians (Mohanty, 2008, pp. 66-67). I therefore focus in particular on these two sometimes competing cultural forces.\footnote{More than forty percent of Aurovilians are Indian nationals. Unfortunately, as far as I am aware, public records are not kept on how many of these people are from the surrounding region and how many are from other Indian states. However, anecdotally, Tamil people make up more than half of this number making them the largest single ethnic group in Auroville.}

As a collective, Auroville does not yet appear to be ‘at home’ in Tamil Nadu. Confusion, misunderstanding and even conflict of various degrees of seriousness between the community and its Tamil village neighbours overrule the feelings of warmth and security suggested by the word ‘home.’ However, like its inhabitants, it cannot be at home anywhere else and so justifies its location with a sense of ‘at homeness’ provided by external measures of support and the promise of a future home.
Based very much in Auroville, I had only limited contact with non-Aurovilian Tamil people sharing the bioregion who were uninvolved in some significant way with Auroville. However, the work of other ethnographers, particularly Jukka Jouhki, confirmed my suspicions of a specific tension between Aurovilians and non-Aurovilian Tamil people and I will draw from this work in my own. Like Jouhki (2006, p. 6) I found that “Europeans of Auroville followed the traditional Orientalist discourse in describing their Tamil neighbours,” emphasising the ‘ancientness’ of their culture as a positive attribute on one hand, while also deriding cultural attributes which were seen as oppositional to ‘western’ qualities such as organisational capabilities. This is partly in evidence in the quotes from Aurovilians which open this chapter. Jouhki wonders whether “the more two cultures begin to resemble each other, the more cultural differences are emphasized?” (Jouhki 2006, pp. 200-201).

“We’ve got some of the European and Western mentality, some of the local thing as well”: Introduction to the Neighbours

The stories of any number of people I encountered in Auroville could have been highlighted below. I selected these particular individuals due to each of them having different backgrounds and associations with Auroville: a Tamil person from the immediate vicinity keen to foster connections between his community of birth and community of choice; a north Indian person and a European who each feel deeply connected to the community of Auroville but not to the surrounding region or its culture; and an adult Child of Auroville who has returned to the community after living abroad for more than a decade. I also selected these people, and these snippets of our conversations, as they show, to some degree, different thoughts about Auroville’s engagement with the surrounding region. All four people choose life in Auroville in

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138 I was made aware also of some tension between Tamil Aurovilian people and non-Aurovilian Tamil people, as much implied in conversations with people in the community (some of this implication evident in interview quotes below), however I feel unqualified to comment to any significant degree on this issue. Jouhki (2006), on the other hand, conducted fieldwork for his doctoral thesis titled Imagining the Other: Orientalism and Occidentalism in Tamil-European Relations in South India in Auroville and nearby Kuilapalayam and spoke to a great number of Tamil people, Aurovilian and non-Aurovilian, about the relationships between Auroville and its neighbours. Though Jouhki’s thesis is dated 2006, it is not outdated as the same discourses existed between Tamil people who live in the villages surrounding Auroville and Aurovilians at the times of Jouhki’s fieldwork and mine (cf. Korpela, 2019, pp. 6-7).
order to practice Sri Aurobindo’s “yoga of self-perfection” (see Gleig and Flores, 2014, p. 44), or, to live more complete, authentic, versions of themselves, echoing the stories of previous chapters, but the interactions each of them have and seek with others in the community are very different.139

Vihaan

Vihaan is the eldest child of a large farming family raised in a village near to, but not bordering Auroville. As the firstborn, and a boy, Vihaan’s education was prioritised over his siblings’ and he attended an Aurovilian school where all meals and clothing were provided by the school community. As a result of his Auroville connections and familiarity with Auroville’s founding principles, Vihaan was easily able to find work in the community after finishing school, but it was not for another ten years that he applied to become a Newcomer. This delay in his application, he said, was in part due to his father’s disapproval. As is typical of Tamil families, Vihaan, a son, was expected by his parents to stay in the family home and take care of his ageing parents and siblings. “I try to find a balance to also support them,” he told me, adding that he himself does not feel that he is separated from his family due to the close physical proximity of Auroville and his frequent visits. Though his parents were happy for their son to benefit from an Aurovilian education, he implies the distance his father laments may in fact be a cultural rather than physical distance not uncommon among Tamil people wary of the rapid cultural change seemingly brought about by the brash foreigners on their doorstep.

When I asked Vihaan about social groups in Auroville, he said,

There is surely a cultural gap. People coming from a Western background and people coming from a local background. Yeah, the understanding is different and many things are different. Yeah, people have many different understandings, there is a gap.

139 I think it important to note that that while the views of each of these individuals recounted here are ‘typical’ within Auroville, they are not universal. That is, not all Tamil Aurovilians encounter family disapproval on joining the community, not all European Aurovilians are as insular as Margot, and so on.
Like other Tamil Aurovilians I spoke to, Vihaan was somewhat guarded in his discussion of the relationships between non-Tamil and Tamil people living in and around Auroville. However, as our conversations progressed, I found he became more open in his criticism of foreigners living in Auroville. This criticism was not meant for the existence of foreigners in Auroville, something inherent in Auroville’s philosophy, but for the attitude of those people towards the indigenous people and cultures of the region, and relationships between them. Yet, as an Aurovilian he maintained his optimism for improved relationships in the future and enthusiasm for the potentiality of Auroville to overcome such difficulties. Also like other Tamil Aurovilians I spoke to, Vihaan had a passion for using the resources and connections available to him as an Aurovilian to help other village people, especially young people, to expand their own horizons particularly through education.

**Asmi**

Asmi, originally from North India, was a successful entrepreneur who first came to Auroville on a business trip, to liaise with an Aurovilian business unit and potential client, approximately fifteen years prior to our meeting. Around this time she had been questioning her life, though theoretically ‘successful’ with a booming business and increasing wealth, Asmi felt unsettled. During her first short visit to Auroville, she encountered some of the texts written by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and quickly decided to change her path and join the Auroville project. Raised a non-practicing Hindu, Asmi is now dedicated to her spiritual journey and a fervent devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Interested in the perspective of someone from a huge and diverse city who had once been an active participant in India’s capitalistic expansion, I asked Asmi about her impressions of Auroville’s relationship with the surrounding region, which given the context of our conversation to that point she chose to answer in terms of ‘development’ undertaken by Auroville and Aurovilians with the local villages and environment:

> If Auroville does not participate in development in the traditional sense it will lose nothing. Auroville’s existence for the sake of humanity is far more important than what we do into the petty level with the material
development, it’s just a different planetary movement, it’s just way beyond. But to feel ourselves good, we must see that we look into the holistic coexistence. That’s for the sake of our feeling good it’s important that we try and exercise possibilities to coexist in holistic development. But the mandatory process of Auroville is way beyond these petty processes, way beyond. I will never compromise that my spiritual journey is equal to growing trees, no way! We should anyway grow a thousand trees, but that is not going to give you enlightenment. A sense of service can maybe help, but only when you are so pure, as Mother Theresa had been, that she really went ahead. Thinking that this is a mandatory process of spiritual growth is egoistic and Auroville has a different mandate to the community at large and should not forget this. The world has to be given some gift and Auroville itself is a gift, the existence of Auroville is a gift to humanity by the masters. And I don’t lose sight of that. Only for the sake of our feeling good we should learn to exist in a harmonious coexistence and cocreation.

Jishnu

Jishnu was born and raised in Auroville. Like so many Aurovilian children of European parents, he left the community for university in Europe after finishing secondary school and then stayed away for more than ten years, returning only occasionally for short holidays to visit family and friends. While ‘out,’ as Aurovilians tend to refer to all places that are not Auroville, Jishnu travelled extensively for work and lived for extended periods of time in North America and Europe. He returned to Auroville in his mid-thirties hoping to participate, and capitalise, in some way in India’s rapid development. He says he is not sure that he will stay in Auroville permanently, but for now it is a good place for him to earn money and live a comfortable life. Jishnu suggested that growing up in Auroville is what gave him community mindedness and concern for social welfare, leading us to joke that if he had grown up elsewhere he may be a proponent of low taxes, small government, long lunches and fast cars. After being asked about the challenges of living in Auroville, Jishnu told me,
The biggest challenge, it’s a little bit of a global thing, but here it comes out a bit stronger, is this endless criticising of people and what people do. We’ve got some of the European and Western mentality, some of the local thing as well, so there’s a lot of tension. Cultural, financial, lifestyle problems. Financially there’s people at all ends of the spectrum, that’s not so much a problem anymore, but the lifestyle clashes quite strongly. You know, just the way people live, and behaviour. A western mind tends to spend more time and money and whatever on food and drink and holidays for example, but a local person would spend more money on investing in land and, I don’t know, on weddings and gifts, different things, and that creates a lot of friction because people don’t understand each other, I mean, can’t understand each other.

The western approach looks much more rich, because to the local if you’re spending all this money on lifestyle it means you’ve got loads of dosh, you’ve already put away for other things. Which is not the case. So there’s all this jealousy that’s really a tough thing in Auroville and somehow some of the western mentality tends to think they know better how things should be done, how one should behave. Although there are advantages of the developed countries and how things operate, especially business-wise. So then the westerner will maybe talk in a particular way which might feel offensive to the local and it escalates this whole type of thing with stereotyping and people thinking like they’re idiots, and it gets bigger and then they say they’re badly behaved, and the Indian is saying “these bloody westerners, they don’t have any respect for our culture,” and then it just becomes big a thing. I really believe that as much as that’s a racial thing, it’s cultural differences that get interpreted as racial. In Auroville I see it happens all the time, maybe some Italian speaking English or something just gets messed up, and maybe from an Indian perspective, it would seem like, “woah!”, you know, it comes across very badly. And I know people aren’t into being politically correct and things like that because it’s a bit of tedious job, but a bit more effort on both sides would be good. You know, this whole thing, this whole divide is... I think when I grew up it was much more together, there weren’t that many differences. Now it’s, the village and Auroville, but we’re also a village! You know? So it’s kind of like us and them, and that’s really a little bit sad. So
that’s really one of the difficulties that Auroville is facing right now, and I hope we can somehow break that.

**Margot**

Margot grew up in a wealthy family in Paris and has been financially stable throughout her life. Seeing no contradiction with her proclaimed deep spirituality, Margot told me she likes the finer things in life and is not ashamed of this, even calling herself “part of the bourgeoisie.” She defines herself as “very French” in this regard. For this reason Margot sometimes struggles with life in rural India. She has little to do with the people or culture of the region, preferring instead to contain her life in India and her concentration on her community. Auroville, and particularly the beautiful architecturally designed house in which she lives, are like sanctuaries for her. She misses the variety and quality of restaurants and cafes in Paris, though she welcomes the sacrifice for what she believes is a higher purpose. After speaking about limited dining out options in Auroville, Margot dismissed her grievances with a grin, commenting,

But it’s okay also, it’s just maintain it with a smile because it’s not very important. I am working on my own attachment, you know, to kind of refine a way of sensing the world through my mouth and my tongue and my stomach. So it’s kind of a little bit of yoga, you know, working on your detachment.

Margot suggested to me one of the difficulties of progressing the goals of Auroville arises due to people’s different cultural backgrounds resulting in varied understandings of the utopian dream of the Mother. And so I asked Margot to describe “Auroville’s particular expression of multiculturalism” as she sees it. Her reply started with an anecdote about a glimpse she had into Tamil family life:

Well! When you have a little hint or a little view on Tamil Aurovilian life, it’s completely different. They keep a good deal of their cultural habits and practices and language and way of looking and things alike. I gave some
assistance to help our amma’s son go to university, so they invited us to their home and so on, so this is definitely a different world. They invited us for dinner, but the tv was on all the time and we had a lunch, we had a meal sitting on the ground and eating on banana leaves and, um... it was very good food.

I asked Margot about Auroville’s relationship with the surrounding villages and raised the proposed initiative of a mutual acquaintance, a Tamil man, to offer homestay opportunities in the local village for non-Indian Aurovilians as a way to help to break down some barriers to understanding and engagement between the two groups. Margot’s response demonstrated some measure of hope, along with spades of doubt. She told me she believes at the moment that the differences between herself and the Tamil population may be too great to overcome, perhaps “a bit of a tedious job” as Jishnu suggested, but also emphasised the importance of integrating Tamil people into Auroville.

...there is a lot of forgetfulness and a lot ignorance and indifference within the community of Auroville. Because it asks a tremendous effort, it’s really, really, phew, time consuming, no, not time consuming, the worst is to overcome one’s cultural solidified ideas, because Tamils speak loud, they are dirty, they do this and that, they are still very much under the pressure of the community, of the family, the women are not liberated, and, and, and, and. Though we have so much realities that are, especially for us westerners, and especially for us women who are kind of evolved women, there’s such a distance and such a, yeah, such a distance to suppress, to be, to feel close to them, that it asks a lot of internal letting go, surrender, acceptance of the other, of otherness. And we plant seeds and this might take off in the future. It has to. It has become a political issue, and if Auroville doesn’t do collectively a real effort to integrate its Indian community, it will split, it will burst, it will fail. It has to integrate.

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140 It is not uncommon for Aurovillian families to provide additional financial assistance to the families of their ammas from time to time for such things as medical expenses, tuition fees for children, or home repairs following monsoonal rains.
Building the city is about integrating people, you can’t think it’s about building houses and buildings, I’m convinced of that.

Each of these four Aurovilians thinks about, and participates in, the relationship Auroville has to its neighbours differently. For example, while Vihaan’s family are wary of the foreigners he chooses to live among and the influence they have over the region and its culture, Vihaan himself sees opportunities for self-directed benefit for local people as a result of the existence of Auroville. Margot feels some obligation to Tamil people as hosts in her new life, though her association with a Tamil family is one of a patron being thanked for financial support. Her comment about the quality of the food, delivered in a manner intended to contrast with her other observations, of eating on the floor with the television on in the background, shows her overall negative impression of this glimpse into Tamil life.

While Asmi came to Auroville to escape a capitalistic life and dedicate herself to personal spiritual development, Jishnu sees the community as uniquely placed, due to its diversity and entrepreneurial principles, at least in a social sense, to benefit from, if not lead in many areas, India’s capital expansion. However, he is frustrated that there are still differences in social and motivational goals within the community which prevent Auroville from moving forward. He believes these differences are more pronounced than they were when he was a child, perhaps due to the increased population, but he is hopeful the spirit of Auroville will prevail and the community will find a way to come together in the future. This, he believes will occur when people make more of an effort to understand each other’s cultures and perceptions from a more emic perspective.

Asmi, on the other hand, came to Auroville from a cosmopolitan urban life. Rather than actively seeking cross-cultural engagement, Asmi sees her life in Auroville providing a platform for introspection and service to the self. Unlike Margot, for Asmi, efforts to engage with the surroundings or participate in outreach programs are unnecessary and only for soothing Aurovilian consciences, which nonetheless, ironically, suggests Asmi’s keen awareness of the material discrepancies between her community and its neighbours.
One of the arguments often cited for the success of Auroville as an experiment in human unity is the ability of such a diverse community to live together in relative harmony and to allow personal expression to flourish. ‘Home’ is where we form our most basic social relationships and learn to engage with others (cf. Saunders and Williams 1988, p. 82), and, in the previous chapter, we saw that people raised in Auroville have a certain cultural fluidity as a result of their multicultural upbringing. However, as we can see above, and hinted at in previous chapters, there are nevertheless different ways of engaging with and responding to other inhabitants and neighbours of the community, some more problematic barriers to group cohesion than others. It is these issues which I examine in the following sections.

**Cultural Diversity and the Space in Between**

At least one morning per week Deepa, one of the ammas in my household, would bring jasmine flowers she had bought from a stall at her local temple on her way to work for me to wear in my hair for the day, just as she and Preethi, the other amma, did each day. On special occasions the jasmine buds would be interspersed with pink roses and bright orange marigold petals. One day, when I had been living in the house a few months, Deepa and Preethi asked me if I had ever worn a sari. I told them I owned one but did not know how to wear it correctly. The following day Preethi brought one of her favourite saris to my room in the morning and she and Deepa set about dressing me in the local style with *sari*, *choli*, a *bindi* on my forehead, and braiding my hair with a flower garland. When satisfied, after much laughter, that they had made me, a pale-skinned red-haired foreigner, resemble a local woman as much as possible, the women insisted on taking photos of the three of us together before parading me around the

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141 *A sari, sometimes spelled saree, is the customary dress of women of the Indian subcontinent. It consists of a length of fabric several metres long and approximately a metre wide draped around the body. As well as differences in the choice of fabric, colours and patterns, saris are tied differently in different regions and, in some cases, to signify social standing of the wearer.*

142 *A choli is the short blouse worn under a sari.*

143 *A bindi is the coloured dot worn in the centre of the forehead by Hindu (and some other religions) women. It represents the ‘third eye,’ or centre of creation. It is also representative of marital status. A bindi is similar but different to a tilaka, a mark worn by women and men in the centre of the forehead, typically made with ash, sandalwood or vermillion paste, or a combination of each, with different designs and intention representing one’s spiritual devotion or position of honour.*
house to show off their handiwork to the gardener and other residents of the house. Preethi asked me to return to my regular clothes before I left the house, but suggested I continue to wear the flowers and *bindi* “like us.”

Towards the end of our stay in Auroville, a Tamil Aurovillian man who we had come to consider a good friend invited my partner and me to his home and place of business on a Friday morning to participate in the weekly *puja* with his staff. Each Friday morning his staff gather around a large tree for incense-filled prayer and offerings to a stone statue of Ganesh. Ash and red *tilaka* powder are dabbed on the foreheads of each person in attendance and handfuls of deep fried chickpeas and sugar eaten by all. The *puja* takes approximately fifteen minutes, is light-hearted and obviously an important part of the working week for the employees. Anyone who happens to be on site at the time is welcome to join in, but Visisht invited us specifically on this day because we had not managed to visit him at work on a Friday morning previously and he seemed to think it either important, or at least interesting for us, that we participate in the *puja* at least once during our stay.

Invitations to participate in some small way in aspects of local culture, such as these, are enthusiastically offered by local people and are actively sought by tourists in India. It gives tourists the feeling of having an ‘authentic’ *experience* of the culture of the country which they are in, rather than of being simple *observers* of culture, and also of acceptance and welcome. Though brief, Deepa and Preethi constructed a moment in which I was allowed to participate in, experience in some small way, aspects of their everyday lives foreign to my own, as did Visisht by inviting me to participate in a commonplace devotional activity of his culture assumed to be previously unknown in a participatory sense to me. In these small acts, each, it felt to me, demonstrated to me their acceptance and enjoyment of my presence in their lives and desire for me to know them more fully.

As can be seen in the reflections on life in Auroville from the four people above, there are many ways to engage with culture in Auroville. Non-Tamil Aurovilians, and many of their guests, adopt customs and practices, outward displays of identity, from the culture of the region, as do local people, both Aurovilian and non-Aurovilian, adopt Western ways of being as a result of their proximity to the large multicultural community in their
midst. Just as adopting an Indian name may signify to oneself and to others a person’s intention to integrate into their new environment, as discussed in Chapter 4, participating in such cultural activities such as puja and personal adornment signifies respect and intentional belonging to the cultural environment. Hindu iconography, particularly as it relates to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but also as practised by the people of the surrounding villages for many generations, is utilised by residents of Auroville to demonstrate cultural competence and belonging to their adopted home.

Kolams, altars, floral garlands and bindis are highly visible and attractive ways of expressing Hindu culture’s religiosity. In Auroville, these outward displays of devotion borrowed from the local traditions serve as expressions of a measure of cultural competence in non-Indian residents’ adopted home as well as projection of a spiritual identity. This includes prominent displays of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in almost all homes and places of business, often adorned with fresh jasmine and other flowers, and sticks of incense. Margot, above, who otherwise does not apparently concern herself with Indian culture, too presents offerings of flowers each morning to images of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother displayed in her house alongside much smaller sized photos of her family.

Tamil people from the surrounding region are also influenced by the proximity of their neighbouring large multicultural community and its residents in the manner with which they dress and conduct themselves. All over India, particularly in the bigger cities and in areas popular with tourists, western style of dress and behaviour mark people as worldly and ‘modern.’ When Jouhki interviewed people from Kuilapalayam about cultural change as a result of the existence of Auroville, one of the more common responses he received was the example that many people in the village now wore jeans. Men too, he

144 In Tamil Nadu, it is very common to see kolams drawn at the entrance to houses and other buildings. Though beautiful, the intention of kolams, which are intricately made by women each morning with coloured powdered rice, is more than merely decorative. Kolams invite positivity into the house and ward off evil. On special occasions, such as religious festivals, weddings, births or other momentous occasions in the life of the household, the kolam drawn will be especially elaborate.

145 In most homes and many places of business, it is also the norm to find an altar to the family’s, or business proprietor’s, god or gods. Often included are pictures or statues, or both, of the god or gods, incense, candles and offerings of food and flowers. The altar is typically in a prominent place within the building and will be the location of daily puja for household residents.
was told, were wearing shorts, something not done in villages even only as far away as fifteen or twenty kilometres (Jouhki, 2006, pp. 97-100).

Additionally, it appears that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have been added to the pantheon of Hindu gods and are likewise revered by Indian people sympathetic to Auroville (or to the Sri Aurobindo ashram in Pondicherry), whether Aurovilian or not, as well as foreigners asserting their own belonging to Indian land through their commitment to the Aurovilian community.

When I asked what it is about the community that gives her the immense sense of freedom she feels in Auroville, Sumitra, from a previous chapter, told me “I think first of all, they all come from such diverse backgrounds, it’s very cosmopolitan, and with that comes openness to other people and their view and their lifestyle choices.” For Sumitra, and presumably many others, referring to Auroville as ‘cosmopolitan’ acknowledges the diversity of its inhabitants. Perhaps more importantly, it also attests to the acceptance, even enthusiasm, Auroville’s inhabitants have for that diversity and each other.

“‘Cosmopolitanism’ is a fashionable word”, as Mari Korpela (2014a, p. 92) remarks, however its meaning is contested in academic literature and often only vaguely understood in everyday language. For example, “not all those who practise cosmopolitan sociability claim a cosmopolitan identity” (Glick Schiller et al 2011, p. 404). Though Sumitra called it so, when I asked many of its members if they thought Auroville was cosmopolitan most laughed and said “no.” Larger cities, particularly Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore were cited as cosmopolitan cities, Pondicherry increasingly so but still lagging behind other bigger cities. In Auroville, as elsewhere, cosmopolitanism in everyday language tends to imply fast paced, globally interconnected, café culture. With its forest-dwellers, dirt roads and generally laid back lifestyle Auroville hardly conjures images of the cosmopolitan metropolis. However, cosmopolitanism suggests, at its heart, the possibility of a shared global ethics, oneness and openness (Woodward and Skrbis, 2012, p. 130), cornerstones of the Aurovilian ideology.

And yet, in Auroville we find Indian people expected to understand westerners and have some competency in western cultural norms as defined and selected by westerners, that is, people “representative of European cultural heritage” (Hottola, 2014, p. 44), but westerners do not need the same competency in Indian culture and may pick and
choose as they like as if in a “supermarket” (cf. Korpela, 2014a). In Auroville it is possible in many respects to live in the community for many years and rarely engage with the culture and customs of India let alone Tamil Nadu, as has Margot, above. Yet, as we saw above, Margot comments without apparent irony that Tamil people in Auroville keep some of their “cultural habits.” Asmi, from North India, 146 talks about learning to coexist harmoniously with people from the district only to feel good but demonstrates her intentional insularity in her personal quest for spiritual development. Auroville is, she believes, a gift, and this is more important than any work community members may do on relationship-building. While Jishnu is evidently aware of and troubled by sometimes strained relationships between Auroville and its neighbours, having lived in several other countries for study, work and pleasure, and now due to his background able to draw an income which enables him to live more comfortably in Auroville than anywhere else while also affording frequent European holidays, he is also emblematic of the differences in access to resources between Aurovilians of non-Indian parentage and Tamil people.

Claire, who has taken Tamil language classes since moving to Auroville, gave the particular example of language abilities, drawing attention to the fact that even people who had lived in Auroville for decades could not speak the language of their host community. She told me,

...even I don’t speak as good as I would like to, but every time I hear something new and okay, I’m afraid to speak and people laugh at me, but if you look especially at the older generations, they don’t speak [Tamil]! You know, it’s surprising. You live in a country and you have your life here and without these villagers you would not even be here and you don’t even care to learn just three words, you know, of their language. I think it should be compulsory.

The global dominance of the English language, especially among ex-English colonies means those who speak English are able to travel freely without other language abilities in a way that those who do not speak English cannot. In Auroville, English, French, Tamil

146 In Auroville, Aurovilians originally from north India are typically considered as culturally distinct from Tamil people as Westerners.
and Sanskrit are ‘official’ languages, however English is the lingua franca and proficiency is a requirement of joining the Auroville project. Within the community there is no need to speak another language, and the legacy of colonialism which has made English commonly spoken all over India means there is no pressing need for people to learn the local language, Tamil, in order to participate in a minimal sense in life outside of Auroville. Anushka told me that she would “not bother” learning Tamil, calling it a “stupid language” due to it only being useful in this one part of the world, unlike European languages such as English, French or Spanish, or even her native Hindi which is widely spoken all over India.

While Deepa, Preethi and Visisht invited me to experience something of their culture, it was quite clear to all involved that these were optional and fun experiences for me and that I was not expected to continue with the practices of puja or sari wearing, or even speaking Tamil, in order to live side by side with them. In fact, as I pointed out near the beginning of this chapter when I explained my dependency on the work of Jukka Jouhki for the village perspective, I did not even have to have much contact with Tamil people in order to live among them. Like many non-Indian people who live in Auroville, I was able to observe and participate as much or as little as I pleased in the culture and customs of the region, and to do so as an entertaining diversion from my everyday activities. In this I admit my complicity in the troubled expression of Auroville’s cosmopolitanism.

The opportunity to constitute one’s own life, “come into his or her own,” by selecting only the particular idiosyncrasies that are appealing to the ‘cosmopolitan’ is a choice exceedingly more available to the Aurovilians and their guests whose passports were issued outside of Tamil Nadu. Furthering an argument she made about foreigners living in Varanasi (Korpela, 2010), in her recent study of the children of lifestyle migrants in Goa, Mari Korpela (2014a) demonstrates that, contrary to expectations given their multicultural environment, the ability to pick and choose which aspects of the cultural identity of their surroundings they wish to incorporate into their own lives, means their ‘cosmopolitanism’ is in fact limited. Expanding on what Anne-Meike Fechtter (2016 [2008]) describes as “internationally-oriented” or “Western international,” Korpela (2014a, p. 110) uses the term “cosmopolitan on Western terms” to describe the cosmopolitanism of her research participants. They are, she says, willing to engage with
the ‘other,’ in this case the local Indian population, only so long as local people are “open to their views and ways” (Korpela, 2014a, p. 103). Cosmopolitanism, she argues, is therefore demanded of Indian people but a choice for westerners. Where “cosmopolitans are able to imagine the world from “an other’s” perspective and are able to envision the possibility of a borderless world of cultural plurality,” there is not much interest among Goa’s lifestyle migrants, according to Korpela, in understanding “the others’” perspective (Korpela, 2014a, pp. 103-104). While foreigners may adopt Indian modes of cultural expression in order to project the authenticity, perhaps, of their Indian experience, they pick and choose which Indian ‘traditions’ they’d like to adopt according to their own terms and preferences and level of comfort. Similarly, “Most tourists, migrants, exiles and expatriates are not cosmopolitans due to a lack of interest or competence in participating or translating difference” says Anthony D’Andrea (2007, p. 15), a quote also used by Graeme MacRae (2016, p. 27) to explain ‘cosmopolitanism’ in Ubud, Bali.

Anne Kershan (2009, p. ix) states it is a misconception that “by making the decision to migrate and create a new, and better, life elsewhere, the migrants will want to become part of the local community.” Writing the preface to an edited collection of lifestyle migration studies, she points to the stories of British migrants saying “the migrants’ Britishness is reinforced as ‘British communities’ are constructed by those who, having left family and friends behind, seek to create networks and support systems to compensate” (Kershan, 2009, p. ix). In the same volume and drawing on various migration studies, Nudrali and O’Reilly (2009, p. 147) state,

Britons in Turkey are not trying to create a “corner of a foreign field that is forever England.” Their identities are transnational in the sense Taras et al. express with the pun: They are neither “be longing” for the motherland, nor “belonging” to the host country. Theirs is the space of the in between, where travelling and dwelling become intermingled. (see also Scott, 2006p. 1111; Taras et al., 2004, p. 835)

Margot is an example of this. Uncertain in her new cultural environment, Margot seeks to “make the most of it” and find ways to recreate, either through familiar European cultural experiences or through finding what she perceives to be compatible in other
cultures with the familiarity of her upper class Frenchness. Like any other Aurovilian who believes that pursuing a path of Indian spirituality can be achieved in Auroville, she is seeking a more authentic version of herself, but she chooses to do so via a more familiar cultural practice. Nonetheless, she says her years living in India have made her feel awkward and somewhat out of place on her annual visits back to France.

O’Reilly and Benson (2009, p. 9), state “Past lives are not left behind in migration, despite claims to the contrary; lifestyle migrants are and continue to be structurally located with a global elite.” Despite outward adoption, or embracement, of an identity which fits the locality, a racial hierarchy is nonetheless played out. Harkin (1995, p. 652) argues “‘third world’ tourism expresses a nostalgia for colonialism.” The legacy of the colonial era continues to influence how tourists and lifestyle migrants – and thus many Aurovilians – imagine and experience India. As O’Reilly and Benson (2009, p. 7) state, the destinations of lifestyle migrants tend to “have culturally specific meanings derived from long histories – for example, Florence as a destination on the Grand Tour […], and India due to colonialism […]– which imply the privilege underlying these particular manifestations of lifestyle migration.”

Like Margot, Westerners in Auroville often describe Tamil people, especially women, as imprisoned by their culture, that if they could they would all escape it for the freedom that they (Westerners) themselves experience, and they believe the existence of Auroville gives local people an example, perhaps an avenue, of this escape. Westerners lament that apparently ‘all’ Tamil people want freedom, but as a collective seem unable to change things for themselves (cf. Jouhki, 2006, pp. 184-187).

Tamil people, on the other hand, see Westerners as morally deficient and lazy as a result of excessive wealth (cf. Jouhki, 2006). Questionable morals are most often explained by Tamil people in what they see as provocative clothing choices, particularly by women who, in Tamil culture, do not display the skin of their shoulders, chest or legs (cf. Jouhki, 2006). In contrast, Tamil people see many western women dress in shorts and singlets, as is understood by those women to be appropriate and comfortable in Tamil Nadu’s heat. On more than one occasion Tamil people also told me of the importance of monogamy in their culture, and that people marry just one time, “unlike your people” one man alleged.
The issue of cultural change in and as a result of Auroville is clearly factious. As we saw above, there are many local people, non-Aurovilians, who lament what they may see as another invasion of a dominant, Western, ‘other’ and deplore their young people apparently turning their back on their culture in order to fit in or appear ‘modern.’

Brunk and Young (2009, pp. 101-102) explain it is people from a culture such as this, “already under serious threat of extinction from the pressures of the dominant culture in which it struggles to maintain itself,” whether this is in fact the case or merely felt to be so, that struggle with the appropriation of expressions of their culture from the dominant other. Here, they say, “the right to freedom of conscience runs up against another right – that of the right of persons to their cultural identity” (Brunk and Young, 2009, p. 101). Young and Haley use the analogy of complaints of squatters moving in next door and disturbing the neighbours with loud music. The annoyance of the noise created could be avoided, they say, but the “real problem is that the outsiders squatted next door” (Young and Haley, 2009, pp. 279-280). In the Auroville context this analogy smacks of the accusation of neo-colonialism. While Robert and Sumitra, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, extol India’s tolerance, perhaps rather than tolerance it is the history and legacy of invasion and servility, as well as local searches for escape from crippling poverty, which has paved the way for the easy establishment of Auroville in its social environment. Local people did not ask for Auroville to be built, nor did they have a say in how it would be built or what their involvement would be.

Auroville is located in Tamil Nadu, not Pondicherry, yet the city of Pondicherry is the closest large centre and, in effect, the commercial, cultural and political hub of the region. At the time of Auroville’s inauguration in 1968, Pondicherry had been free of colonial rule for little more than a decade. The colonial relationship and events leading to decolonisation in the region were therefore recent memory and continued to

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147 However, it is actually hard to gauge how much influence Auroville is in fact having on the changing culture of the villages surrounding it (Jouhki, 2006, p. 159). The influence of Pondicherry in terms of cultural change, as well as other nearby large cities such as Chennai and Madurai cannot be discounted. All over India the country’s rapid ‘development’ is having an effect on the way people live and interact with each other and the world. Cable television, including international news and Hollywood (as well as Bollywood and Kollywood!), has reached village homes where even running water may still be scarce and electricity unreliable.

148 British colonial rule ended in India in 1947. However, the French maintained control over their much smaller Indian colonies scattered around coastal areas of the subcontinent, with Pondicherry as the French capital, until 1954.
affect relationships between locals and foreigners living among them at the time the first Aurovilians moved out of the ashram. Arguably, the legacy of colonialism continues to impact work and relationships in Auroville today.

**Development and the Legacy of Colonialism**

Auroville actively participates in the development of the region through its environmental and social programs. As a result of these programs, and the mere existence of Auroville which has resulted in greater tourism and other financial investment in the region, there is much evidence that the Tamil people of the surrounding region are significantly better off, financially, socially and environmentally, than people of rural villages further away.

As well as social opportunities, such as the much lauded Aurovilian-run schools in the district, the existence of Auroville has provided local people with a source of income other than farming which until the 1970s was the primary source of livelihood in the district. The region was dependent on an unpredictable annual harvest, an unreliable water supply and the whims of government regulation concerning farming. Families lived off the land and rarely possessed or dealt in cash. Children rarely attended school and most people remained illiterate into adulthood (Jouhki, 2006, p. 93). When Aurovilians first arrived they were able to acquire the then largely unproductive land from locals willing to earn quick cash where farming had provided little. Aurovilians also bought produce from village markets and eventually employed village people to help maintain properties and run Aurovilian businesses. Villagers were employed by the community as construction workers, still a significant source of employment today, and also on Aurovilian farms. Few Aurovilians in the early years had any farming expertise, especially not given the local environmental conditions, and so they were initially very much reliant on local knowledge. Recounting her recollections of early years of labouring and relationships between newly arrived Europeans and local people, an

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149 Between 1825 and the 1950s almost all of the lush forest that had lived in the area where Auroville is now located was destroyed thanks to government policy. At first this was in order to drive away tigers, then for farming, and finally for timber (Auroville, 2016b).
Aurovilian who arrived in the late 1960s told me, “back then we really worked shoulder to shoulder as equals.”

Today Auroville employs between five and ten thousand Tamil people from the surrounding region and runs a number of outreach programs in the villages. Many, but not all, of the outreach initiatives fall under the auspices of the Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG), often simply referred to in Auroville as “Village Action.” AVAG was established in 1983 to build relationships between Auroville and the surrounding villages and to provide assistance in order that the villages may “make improvements in their lives, their children's education, and in the village itself” (AVAG, n.d.). In partnership with more than four thousand people from men’s and women’s village self-help groups, AVAG has a small team of Aurovilian and non-Aurovilian staff and volunteer workers, including interns and students, whose mission is to “collaborate with rural communities to reveal their innate wisdom and ability to collectively determine and manifest their fullest potential” by

...foster[ing] participatory village transformation through:

- community development
- economic development
- capacity building
- psychosocial support

with rural communities in the Auroville bioregion. (AVAG, 2017).

150 This figure is vague due to the wide variation in estimates provided by different, mostly anecdotal, sources. There is no official record that I am aware of.

151 According to its website (AVAG, n.d.), AVAG...

...is an NGO committed to grass roots community building with the villages neighboring Auroville – a pioneering social experiment in Villipuram district, rural Tamil Nadu, South India, which aims to realize human unity. Since its inception, AVAG has developed into a solid and reputable organisation for positive social change that fosters the integral development of civil society, democracy building and social advocacy, including gender equity and caste equality— the foundation stones for building a sustainable and healthy co-operative Indian society.

In response to the complex set of conditions that results in gender inequity, poverty and limited access to resources for development, AVAG has refined a unique and multifaceted community development program, executed through a structure of Self Help Group’s (SHG) and Federations, of micro credit, community service, social enterprise development and education.

AVAG’s activities are all designed to empower the rural communities to organise themselves for their own personal and communal empowerment.

Information regarding the Auroville Village Action Group can be found on their own independent website and on the Auroville website (AVAG, n.d.; Auroville, 2016a).
The activities of AVAG, encompassing development programs in the key areas of gender equality, education, health, microfinance, waste management and town planning, represent the most tangible and easily recognised ‘development’ activities in the region and attract volunteer services from Aurovilians as well as short and long term international guests.

AVAG receives generally wide support from within Auroville. For example, Marcus, who in a previous chapter expressed considerable misgivings about the Tamil people’s understanding of Auroville’s ideals and their motivations for joining Auroville, thinks AVAG is among the most ‘Aurovillian’ of organisations, espousing the ideals of unity upon which Auroville is based. When asked to describe a person or organisation which embodies what it means to be Aurovilian, he told me in his characteristic lackadaisical manner,

...the whole Village Action concept and smoothly and harmoniously coexisting, or at least trying to do so, of Auroville with the surrounding villages and so that of course has something to do with Auroville’s vision and ah, the people there do try, whether they always succeed or not is another story, but that I find also a pretty useful activity.

Other local development initiatives include a great deal focussed on environmental work, with Auroville widely known for its reforestation work, and skills training programs. It operates schools in local villages, staffed by Aurovilian and non-Aurovilian teachers, adult education centres which include language lessons, women’s empowerment groups, water and sanitation projects and health promotion initiatives.

Local people are financially better off due to the existence of Auroville as a result of their ability to capitalise on the community and its guests as well as the programs run by AVAG and other development organisations. However, this wealth has not been equally shared. The most obvious example of this is in comparing the different villages around Auroville. The East Coast Road (more commonly simply known as the ‘ECR’) is the main highway from Chennai in the north to Tuticorin in the south of Tamil Nadu. The vast
majority of traffic to and from Auroville travels the road between the ECR and Auroville through Periyarmudaliarchavadi or, more likely, Kuilapalayam. As a result, townsfolk in these villages have capitalised on this traffic with a large number of guesthouses catering to foreign tourists, restaurants, cafes, tailors and gift shops selling trinkets from all over India. Auroville too operates several community sponsored business in each of these towns. Due to its location, on the way to Pondicherry (and the Sri Aurobindo ashram), Kuilapalayam hosted some of Auroville’s first settlements in the 1960s and continues to be a central hub of Aurovilian activity with several residential settlements. The Auroville Medical Centre, a branch of Financial Services, the Auroville supermarket (‘Pour Tous’), Auroville Bakery, at least two schools, several guesthouses, and many other businesses located there. This has meant that Kuilapalayam especially has ostensibly benefitted significantly more in a financial sense more from the existence of Auroville than other neighbouring such as Edayanchavadi and Kottakarai which don’t receive this through traffic.152

Another issue of contention in the Auroville region is the issue of land acquisition, a particularly injurious wound which continues to fester, impacting upon the ability of the Auroville community to form truly cooperative partnerships with its Tamil village neighbours. From the mid-1960s local farmers were encouraged to sell their land to the Auroville project. The land, as already described, was difficult, to say the least, to make a living from and so impoverished families were easily persuaded to sell their landholdings. At the time, those who sold their land did so for immediate financial benefit and appeared to give up little due to the poor quality of the land they held. However, this left them both landless and unemployed, dependent upon Auroville for future employment (cf. Jouhki, 2006, p. 105; Leard, 2011, p. 17; Namakkal, 2012, p. 76).153

152 See Appendix 5 for maps of the Auroville region including surrounding villages.

153 The concerted effort of the Auroville community to rejuvenate the land, one of its most successful projects, has resulted in the productivity and value of the land far surpassing the possible foresight of anyone, leaving villagers who readily sold their land to early Auroville and now witness the benefits being received largely exclusively by the Auroville community feeling cheated and resentful. However, the community owns just fifty percent of the land assigned on maps as ‘Auroville.’ The rest is owned either by the government of India, by local people, is temple land, or, increasingly, is owned by developers and land speculators, wealthy business people and corporations from nearby Chennai eager to profit from the increasing endowment of value the existence of Auroville injects into the land. Ironically, as land speculation becomes a thriving industry in the area, Auroville now finds itself in a position almost as
One side effect of the unequal distribution in wealth is increasing violence in the villages neighbouring Auroville. Officially, there is no police presence in Auroville. It is deemed that people trying to be the best versions of themselves possible ought to be able to look after themselves and others without such intrusion. However, the threat of violence, particularly by non-Aurovilians in and around Auroville is a very real concern. Auroville does have a ‘Safety and Security Team’ (AVSST) who monitor and document issues of concern, provide escorts during the evening and night, and liaise with Aurovilians and guests and the police should an incident require police registration or intervention. While I lived in Auroville, the community also engaged private security firm to stand guard on several intersections around Auroville (with varying levels of support from individual Aurovilians who may or may not have seen this as a proxy police force, perhaps antithetical to the intentions of the Mother). During a return visit I made to Auroville in 2013 I was surprised to see actual uniformed police and police vehicles inside of Auroville where previously there had been security guards. In this short visit I was unable to find much information about this, but was given various explanation from my Aurovilian friends which included whispers of corruption surround the security force and its hiring and increasing levels of violence and theft requiring the presence and involvement of the official state police force. Also surprising to me was the apparent support this measure appeared to receive from Aurovilians (at least those I engaged with about this issue in this short visit) where previously there was some discontent with the presence of uniformed security.

Shanti Pillai (2005, pp. 360-363) and Jukka Jouhki (2006) refer to escalating violence, particularly in Kuilapalayam, in their work, which, they suggest, is evidently a result of the existence of Auroville and the tension created by the wealth and power it appears to wield. Some is apparent gang violence contained within the village, but Aurovilians too are targeted at times and there has been at least one murder in Auroville. It is, however, difficult to find people in Auroville willing to speak about this particular village based violence. Seemingly people would prefer not to draw attention to it, perhaps for fear of it tainting the reputation of the community.
According to Gyan, a long term Aurovilian originally from northern India, who had no such qualms,

...[a] flip side [of increased wealth in the district] is there is such an obvious, ah, difference in the standard of living between Auroville and just the villages outside, which we’re also deeply resented for that. So, it’s led to a lot of social tension. For instance, this gangsterism that resulted in an Aurovilian getting murdered seven or eight years ago, you don’t get that in the normal villages. You don’t get two gangs in a normal small village [...]. So um, I mean there’s a lot of bad habits taught to the natives by ‘us.’

On everyday instances of violence directed at Auroville it is less difficult to find information and warnings. The apparent wealth of Auroville makes Aurovilians and their guests a target for people seeking to access some of that perceived wealth, legally or illegally. Theft is extremely common, and various kinds of assault and intimidation, especially gender based, reported with frequency.¹⁵⁴

About gender-based culture clashes and misunderstandings leading to violence, Jouhki (2006, p. 122) writes,

As village women were covered with their saris and were expected to behave with chastity, Western Aurovillian women conveyed a wholly different message to the villagers. Western women riding motorbikes while wearing tank tops and shorts with their hair loose may have been a provocative spectacle. To maintain an image of a highly spiritual community is rather difficult when the community members present themselves as obscene people.

¹⁵⁴ Within two weeks of arriving in Auroville I had my handbag stolen from the handle bars of my bicycle as I rode it along a major road between Auroville and Kualapalayam. Like many guests, I soon discovered, I suffered from a false sense of security in my early days in Auroville based on the apparent friendliness I had encountered to that point and what I knew of Aurovillian ideology. It took approximately six months of weekly visits to the local police station to obtain a police report for insurance purposes (police corruption in the region is another matter for which there is little space to delve here), during which time I heard many, many stories from guests, Aurovilians and local people of theft and assault far worse than what I had experienced.
This is not a phenomenon unique to Auroville. In fact women all over India, whether foreign or local, have their freedoms curtailed every day, however the sheer number of foreign women scantily-clad in and around Auroville makes this tension somewhat more noticeable or comment-worthy.\textsuperscript{155} “White women” says Pillai (2005, p. 362), “are commonly regarded by Indian men as sexually available, they are often the victims of unpleasant verbal ‘teasing’ and, more seriously, physical molestation, even on public roadways in Auroville in broad daylight.”\textsuperscript{156} That Auroville is known as having a large number of white women residents possibly increases the likelihood of it being a destination for perpetrators of such violence against women.\textsuperscript{157} The result of such incidents is that Auroville is more interested in creating partnerships with its village neighbours (Pillai, 2005, p. 362), but social tensions between even Tamil Aurovilians and the villages present obstacles to effective progress in this area.

The work of AVAG and other organisations tries to address some of the wrongs of the past, today likely to be along the lines of skills training, empowerment and microfinance rather than gifts of cash and other resources. Most people working on outreach programs and relationship-building in Auroville now apparently recognise the value of cooperation and potential damage of the types of assistance given in the past, as is the case in the development sector around the world. Margie, one of the coordinators at AVAG, told me her view of ‘development’ is that it is “NGOs and government bodies going in and helping people who have less to achieve their goals, in a way that is not exploitative,” but believes this is different to the relationships Auroville must build in the region due to the fact that they are permanent neighbours rather than mere short term aid workers. She says development in and around Auroville must

\textsuperscript{155} In the wake of several highly publicised incidents, India has recently been named the most dangerous country for women. See the Thomson Reuters Foundation website for more information regarding the survey which reached this conclusion (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2018).

\textsuperscript{156} For discussion of some of the potential reasons for this perception of white women among Indian men see, among others, Hottola (2002a; 2002b).

\textsuperscript{157} I think it important to note here that while dressing appropriately or not in India is certainly a concern which contributes to the issue of gender-based harassment, it is not only women dressed in shorts and tank tops, as Jouhki describes, who are assaulted and intimidated. I believe it is extremely problematic in India, just as it is in the West, to participate in victim blaming on issues of gender violence, though this issue is rather more complex in India for the foreign guest. The controversial term ‘eve-teasing’ is used in everyday language in India to refer to almost all forms of sexual harassment and assault. For more information about this issue, including brief explanation of the controversy of the term as well as intimation of the association with ‘westernisation,’ see Misri (2017).
...[have] to do with dialogue and trying to understand what the growth potential and interests of the local communities are, and kind of support them in realising their goals as well, that it’s not a paternalistic relationship, but it’s one of empowerment, and one of kind of helping also support the cultivation of the qualities and values and possibilities for many, and being healthy. I think health is a part of it, not just body health but environmental and community health to grow in a way that’s integral and sustainable.

Margie’s motives are undoubtedly admirable, she desires nothing more than to see local people fulfil their hopes and potential, and she devotes her working life to assisting them to do so. As previously discussed, one of the purposes of Auroville is to create the conditions in which people can realise their potential, or true selves. In so doing, it is believed, people can consciously engage in evolution and therefore expedite the process. Margie understands her purpose, as an Aurovillian, to be facilitating this process for others who live in the region of Auroville. However, the effects of relationships built in the past linger and present themselves in the work of the many good-intentioned Margies.

As described above, local people do benefit financially from the existence of Auroville and are agents of change within their communities, however, global structures of inequality persist and Aurovilians from abroad dominate despite being a numerical minority. From certain angles a strong whiff of neo-colonialism can be detected about Auroville. It is this feature of Auroville which attracts most criticism from guests and other observers and that Aurovilians are keen to dispel, though in private will quietly and uncomfortably, admit. For some Aurovilians, this issue is a matter of obvious and deep personal discomfort.

After mentioning some of the development work in Auroville that she was aware of, Claire, who had lived in Auroville for ten years, told me she believes interactions between non-Tamil Aurovilians and villagers are in fact very limited except in the context of employers and workers. Showing her discomfort with the topic by lowering her voice to a whisper, even though we were alone in her house, Claire told me,
...it’s still very um, that was a word I didn’t want to use, yeah, it’s this colonial attitude I find towards workers, be it an amma or gardener or things like that, I don’t know, these local people working for a bunch, a small bunch of western people, it’s, you know? And for such low wages, it’s, it’s, yeah, it’s, you know, contributing to economical development again for these people, so if you, you know, if you want to call that contributing to the villages then yes, I guess it is, it’s a way to do it. But so much more can be done. […]

Jonathon, a fellow anthropologist, told me one of the reasons he and his wife do not like Auroville and have no intention or desire to stay longer than they originally intended is because “… I really don’t like the colonialist aspect here. That pisses me off!” He mentions the refutation on the Auroville website of colonialism saying the reason given, development work in the surrounding villages carried out by the AVAG, “is in and of itself inherently racist, and a colonialist attitude.”

In her article ‘European Dreams, Tamil Land’ about early relationships between Auroville and its neighbours, Jessica Namakkal (2012, p. 61) explores links between utopianism and colonial ideology, arguing that this “experiment grounded in the liberatory ideals of anticapitalism, antinationalism, and anticolonialism [became] a microcosm of capitalist neo-colonialism.” “Instead of an international utopia free from the colonial past,” she writes, “Auroville quickly became a colony of foreigners who faced challenges of assimilation and integration similar to those faced by European colonizers throughout the previous centuries of expansion” (Namakkal, 2012, p. 61). In particular, Namakkal explores the early years of Auroville’s existence and maintains that despite this being the period of decolonisation and strong anti-colonial rhetoric espoused by Auroville’s founders, it was in fact a neo-colonial mindset which enabled Auroville’s creation. She argues “the original Aurovilians failed to communicate and collaborate effectively with the local Tamil communities, causing their utopian experiment to resemble a neo-colonial settlement, a postcolonial extension of the colonial ‘civilizing mission’” (Namakkal, 2012, p. 61). The most often cited arguments refuting these accusations relate to the development of the region as a result of Auroville’s existence and the undeniable increase in wealth in villages surrounding Auroville since 1968.
Auroville’s founders, including the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, considered themselves fervently anti-colonial. Indeed, Sri Aurobindo is famous throughout India for his role in India’s independence movement as much as he is for his spiritual quest. The Mother, was “a French national who considered her spiritual studies and practices in India to be explicitly anticolonial” (Namakkal, 2012, p. 62). Together they argued repeatedly that Indian people are spiritually evolved, the Mother claiming “a simple and ignorant [Indian] peasant was closer to the divine than the intellectuals of Europe” (Alfassa, 1972, p. 251; see also Namakkal, 2012, p. 61; Mohanty, 2008, p. 224;). To cure the ills of humanity, believe Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and their devotees, we must change what we are not who we are. To do this, they sought to harmoniously combine “western rationality” with “Indian spirituality,” generalising and essentialising aspects of two very broad perspectives, to further the path of human evolution that neither reveres scientific materialism nor renunciation, as was also a key feature of India’s nationalist movement (cf. Korpela, 2017, 169).158

It was Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s intention to equalise western and eastern thought through Integral Yoga, enabling individuals to seek their own Truth, with the primary goal of furthering the evolution of humanity. However, according to Namakkal (2012, p. 69), “centuries of orientalism” along with “the realities of a postcolonial India” resulted instead in the perception of Integral Yoga as a means to necessary spiritual and material awakening of “the indigenous Tamil population as an underdeveloped, backward people,” Even in a recent publication from Auroville, the community is described as “Born upon impoverished earth in a backward area of south India, yet straining towards the highest ideals [...]” (Auroville, 2011, p. 5, emphasis added).

Despite early forced closeness and cooperation between Aurovilians and village people, on the day of inauguration a section of the viewing area was cordoned off for spectators from the region, which indicates a separation of the local people from the very beginning, refuting perhaps the idea that shared and equal labour amounted to the equality an informant quoted earlier suggested.

As Europeans and Indians from the north descended on this Tamil land to embark on a self-proclaimed utopian experiment, which espoused a new age

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158 See Gleig and Flores (2014) for a concise overview of Integral Yoga. See also Appendices 2.1 and 2.2.
Promotional materials on Auroville from the 1960s and 1970s refer to it as a place “wherein individuals could leave both the past and the present behind, and head toward the future” (Namakkal, 2012, p. 70). However, Namakkal argues, this emphasis on the future, a spiritual harmony in diversity, “was to the detriment of understandings of the past.” A place, especially in post-colonial India, where the past and the present can be left behind is an impossibility, the suggestion of which not only a utopian dream, but also demonstrative of an insensitive arrogance on the part of those who espoused this as a possibility. In Auroville, Tamil people appear to the Western Aurovillian or guest to represent an ancient past, while non-Tamil people bring modernity and the future. In this way, Auroville has “transformed the indigenous Tamil population into an ‘Other’ on their own land” (Namakkal, 2012, p. 79). Though hailed the “first Aurovilians” (Pillai, 2005, p. 355), as they continue to be called today, Tamil people from the region were, and, it is argued by those who accuse Auroville of neo-colonialism, continue to be, largely excluded from Auroville (Namakkal, 2012, p. 61), literally and figuratively “fenced off” from the community as they were on the day of inauguration.

The anticolonial ideology that all people, irrespective of nationality or ethnicity, have equal intellectual capacity and desires fails to recognise unequal access to power and therefore ability to determine their futures. Namakkal (2012, pp. 65-68) labels this kind of anti-imperialism “anticolonial colonialism.” It is, she says “an anticolonialism that denied the key claims of imperial ideology, particularly claims to Western superiority and the inability of non-Western nations to practice self-rule,” however, when put into practice, as in the case of Auroville, “reinserts itself into the anticolonial mission of self-rule and self-determination” (Namakkal, 2012, pp. 68-69).

AVAG, perhaps considered to be one of the primary vehicles for Auroville directed ‘modernisation’ of the region, is declared one of the “worst things to happen to Auroville” by one of Joukhi’s North Indian informants, a man called Basim. It existed, he said, only to give Aurovilians the feeling “We are doing something for the villages!”, to
soothe western consciences (Jouhki, 2006, p. 172), perhaps fulfilling the role that Asmi, above, thought a necessary burden irrelevant to the higher purpose of the community and community members.

Chandana, an adult child of Auroville who herself lives solely on the Auroville maintenance of 6,000 rupees per month, expressed her belief that the villagers “know best how to work things out for themselves and they should realise that.” Chandana’s comments demonstrate both the sometimes somewhat paternalistic view of the region held by Aurovilians and highlight the tension between Auroville and the villages based on the type of assistance Auroville has given in the past. When asked about Auroville’s relationship with the region, Chandana illustrates some of the grievances of both the local communities and Auroville in her answer,

I think we have done a lot in education and environmental work and things like that, but on the other hand I guess also, I mean it’s very obvious now, there’s a growing frustration in the local population, well, they want to have the kind of lifestyle that we do. I mean especially younger generations. They see how most of us live here and they want that too and I think that’s why there’s a lot of frustration. They want to have a better life and they demand that from us. And in the past we’ve given a lot actually and I think that maybe it was a bit of a mistake in that we just gave the money and gave and gave and gave. And whenever we’ve asked them well, why don’t you go and help out, no, you have to give everything.

**An Uneasy Relationship**

Aurovilians do not intend to create offence or tension between themselves and their neighbours. In fact, the cultural fluidity of Auroville’s residents, particularly its children, enabled by the diversity of cultures represented in the community and respect for each other that Auroville’s founding documents demand is cited by Aurovilians as demonstrative of the community’s potential for reaching its goal of human unity. The spirituality of the Indian nation, ‘tolerance’ of the Indian government and its people, and reverence of its members of parliament for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are cited by Aurovilians as reasons for the continued support Auroville receives from the highest
levels of power in the country. Community members believe the objectives of their experiment in human unity represent a greater good rendering any difficulties in getting along with the neighbours simply misunderstandings (on the part of the neighbours) and short term trivial hindrances.

For Hannah, living in Auroville has connected her to the world. She comments,

... I feel that Auroville provides a very unique set of conditions whereby I can experience sort of myself through this global dimension, you know, I feel like Auroville, it’s opened my global eyes because certainly growing up in Australia I often had the sense of even wondering was there really a world out there or was it just on television and you know, someone was fabricating all these images, but I was really drawn to see, but you know, you travel and you’re England or you’re in Germany or France or whatever, but it’s still this, to be in a place that has so much of the world’s people represented here or something just felt so exciting for me and you know, it just felt like it gave me a chance to connect with something bigger than me or Australia or these sort of things, so yeah, it’s something that I find very important and exciting about Auroville.

Hannah’s description of a feeling of global connectedness as a result of her Aurovilian life harks back to the idea of the ‘citizen of the world.’ Aurovilians still identify with the places from which they have come before moving to the community,\textsuperscript{159} more closely with the multicultural community of Auroville, and through it seek a broader, more global, sense of belonging such as described by Hannah.

Jessica Namakkal states “both colonialism and utopianism imagined many non-Western lands as empty and available for their experiments” (Namakkal, 2012, pp. 69-70) and that, “Despite countless allusions to the ‘deserted’ land, there was a sizeable local population that watched curiously as Westerners and north Indians descended on their

\textsuperscript{159} This is evidenced bureaucratically by the way Aurovilians are categorised by passport nationality in census data, but also socially by the way people introduce each other, the many organised language groups and activities and by participation in workshops such as ‘Soul of Nations’ which was popular when I was living in Auroville. This workshop run by two people based in Germany who have had lengthy association with Auroville claims to allow “transformation and healing of those parts of you that are shaped by both the essence and the shadow of your country of origin” (Future Now Network Foundation, n.d.).
land” (Namakkal, 2012, p. 75). Indeed, as can be clearly seen on any map of the region, including those produced by Auroville for the benefit of guests,\textsuperscript{160} the area referred to at the time of Auroville’s inauguration as a “barren wasteland” and “unfit for human habitation”\textsuperscript{161} actually overlaps several pre-existing Tamil villages. The notion then that it was uninhabited is reminiscent of colonialists’ misrepresentation of the Australian continent at the time of Europeans’ arrival there.\textsuperscript{162} As is the case in Australia and other colonised lands, early Aurovilians did know people were already living on the land designated for their future township, in fact they depended upon those people’s knowledge of the land in order to survive in those early years. In speaking of the physical development of Auroville, Mohanty (2008, p. 3) highlights the community’s impressive feats in creating basic but comfortable infrastructure and all the services required for a functioning town within a few decades, with an emphasis wherever possible on environmental responsibility and innovation. She also, however, notes that the availability of cheap labour from the surrounding area for a large proportion of the manual labour needs of Auroville has enabled much of the physical development of Auroville (Mohanty, 2008, pp. 3-4).

Tellingly, Margot, above, expressed her desire that Tamil people be integrated into Auroville, not giving thought to the possibility that it is non-Tamil residents who may in fact need integrating into Tamil Nadu. In so doing she highlighted Western cultural dominance in Auroville, despite living on Tamil land among a numerical Tamil majority. Writing about migration and identity, Ralph and Staeheli (2011, p. 524) argue,

> Individual migrants often fail to meet normative expectations of behaviour, language, appearance, dress, eating habits, and countless other materialities and context-dependent etiquettes, and are in consequence perceived and discursively constructed as a group as being different to dominant others.

\textsuperscript{160} See Appendix 5 for a map of Auroville and surrounding villages.

\textsuperscript{161} A brief history of Auroville is available on the Auroville website (Auroville, n.d.-b) and in Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{162} When Captain Cook arrived on the eastern coast of what is now Australia, he declared it uninhabited, or \textit{terra nullius} (‘unowned land’), in order to claim possession of the land for England under English law. Clearly this was not the case.
Not only did early Aurovilians fail to recognise the lingering social effects of the region’s colonial past and identify themselves as representing yet another group of outsiders asserting control of the physical and social landscape, they also failed to recognise diversity *within* the Tamil population. Nor, as argued by Namakkal (2012, p. 62), did they recognise Tamil people’s “struggles for autonomy throughout their history, and the political realities at the core of their efforts to avoid assimilating into Auroville.”

Paradoxically we see Tamil people considered ‘migrants’ in Auroville. Though expressly an international community, Auroville tends to suffer from a similar type of xenophobia exhibited in the debates surrounding immigration policies in other nations, a fear of being ‘overrun’ by potentially financially motivated migrants with questionable morals, motives and desires. This becomes even more uncomfortable in Auroville where it is expressed by the host country’s long term guests against citizens of the state in which they reside. Like ‘first nations’ people elsewhere in the world, this moniker does not mean that Tamil people are not discriminated against on their own land.

Nonetheless, an outcome of the ready availability of employment in Auroville for women from the surrounding villages means women and girls are not as economically dependent on men as they once were and are able to demand a degree of social independence and certain legal rights that had previously been ignored or actively denied (Jouhki, 2006, pp. 97-100), as had Bhumi, Chetana, and Dakini, whose stories we touched on in previous chapters. These women spoke of the possibility not only to earn a wage higher than they would be able to do in the village, but also in Bhumi’s case the possibility to support herself and her children as a single woman, something which would have been unheard of, perhaps impossible, in the past or in a place without such opportunities as provided by Auroville. One Aurovilian told me of a study done approximately fifteen years prior which showed mean household incomes of villagers around Auroville were, on average, two thousand rupees per month higher than the household incomes from villages further afield. Unfortunately I was not able to find the data on which this study was based, or the final report, however the increased wealth in the region as a result of the activities of AVAG and other similar organisations based in Auroville, which is clear to see, is cited frequently as evidence of the benefits to the local people of the existence of Auroville.
In this chapter I have largely highlighted tensions between Aurovilians and their closest neighbours, or hosts, as serious and troubling shadow issues to the proclaimed celebration of diversity which is a large part of Auroville’s reason for being as extolled by the community’s promotional material and enthusiastic residents. Though Tamil Aurovilians make up the largest ethnic group, the fact remains that European Aurovilians are the most visible group in the community and they hold the most power.

As a result of this uneasy relationship with its neighbours, Auroville, as a collective, does not appear to be completely ‘at home’ in Tamil Nadu. Like its individual members, Auroville can probably fit comfortably nowhere else. It is a Utopian dream, at home in what it imagines its surroundings to be (romanticising the Indian tradition) rather than what it actually experiences. It finds a sense of ‘at homeness’ as a collective with a cosmopolitan mix of cultures and values, and ‘tolerance’ from its benevolent government who continue to provide the conditions for Auroville’s fumblings.
8. In the Eye of the Storm

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias. (Oscar Wilde, 1987, pp. 28-29)

So it is quite a unique experiment, it is just about working. I think in general terms it’s continuing its path, it’s zigzagging. So, now the overall question, can we live as a unit? It’s an open question, in a hundred years from now, where will Auroville be? Who knows, and who cares, really? (Mateo, Aurovilian)

This thesis considered the ways in which members of Auroville, an international intentional community in Southern India, think about the idea of ‘home’ and create for themselves a sense being ‘at home’ in Auroville. However, this was not my original intention. As a graduate of Development Studies, at the outset of my fieldwork in Auroville I was interested in the idea of ‘development’ and how people in this relatively privileged international community located in an impoverished part of India understand, engage with, and even initiate and manage ‘development’ activities in the region. While living as an active member of the Auroville community I found my interest in the lives and motivations of my fellow community members took a different direction. In part this was due to the lack of interest or willingness I found people had in speaking to me about ‘development.’ In hindsight, it is easy to see that topics related to economic and opportunity-based disparity between Aurovilians and their Tamil neighbours are sensitive, and discussion of such needs to be approached cautiously. Accusations of neo-colonialism and exploitation directed at Auroville and its residents by short-term guests and international media agencies are not uncommon and, understandably, uncomfortably received by Aurovilians who believe rightly or wrongly that the work they are doing in Auroville will ultimately make the world a better place. Just as significant for many of the Aurovilians I met, I found the lines of economic disparity not as clear as I had assumed prior to living in the community. Moreover, for Aurovilians, ‘development’
is more about personal endeavours to reach a collective goal of ‘human unity’ by living as authentically as possible, that is, working on their *sadhana*, in order to consciously participate in expediting the evolutionary process.

While mentally struggling with these issues, I became consumed, as anthropologists do, with becoming an active *member* of the Auroville community rather than ‘just a guest.’ Though beautiful and a potentially relaxing and entertaining place to holiday, Auroville is a challenging place to live. It is oppressively hot most of the year and endures fierce monsoonal rains. While Aurovilians have created an inviting and lush forest environment which offers much respite from the climate, and have made impressive advancements in terms of sustainable technologies, the community still experiences unreliable electricity supply and water shortages; constant battles are waged between Aurovilians and local authorities regarding pollution and other environmental management issues; there is a vague but unrelenting awareness of potential physical danger; and arguably, for non-Indian residents, suspicion that their legal status in the county is at the mercy of the whims of unknown officials in the Government of India who have their own pressures to deal with in relation to the politics of this international community.

As a result of my desire to find my place within the community and the broader challenges associated with living in Auroville, rather than ‘development,’ the idea of ‘home’ emerged as an ongoing preoccupation. That is, what makes a place, *this* place, a home? More specifically I wondered why people voluntarily leave one home in search of another. How do people make for themselves a sense of home in unfamiliar and diverse surroundings? What does Auroville give to its residents that they were not able to find in their previous places of residence, or indeed in any other place? How do Auroville’s very individualistic residents form a community? And, is the sense of belonging associated with being a recognised part of a community enough to feel ‘at home’? In time, I also began to ponder how second and subsequent generations of Aurovilians interpret their parents’ idea of ‘home’ and make one for themselves. Finally, in many ways linking back to my original research interests, I further considered how non-Aurovilians, including the many indigenous Tamil people who live in and around Auroville, relate to Auroville and its assertions of ‘home’ on their land.
Research on the idea of ‘home’ is by no means novel. A vast number of scholars from varied disciplines including geography, architecture, gender studies, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, among others, have thoroughly considered the concept in the past. Despite this considerable attention, the meaning of ‘home’ remains ambiguous and contested. Thomas Doucet (2013, p. 253) called home “the eye in the storm,” a place to feel grounded, to seek calm from outside turbulence, and I found that this is true more or less of how most of Auroville’s residents feel about the community. Though it has its challenges, some not insignificant, it is where the people I spoke to told me they feel most mentally and emotionally secure, supported and free to be or find themselves while places outside of Auroville cause turmoil and confusion for them.

Easily understood as related to the house or neighbourhood in which we live, ‘home’ is “implicitly constructed” as a place of unthinking comfort and ease (Ahmed, 1999, p. 339). Instinctively, we want ‘home’ to represent safety, warmth and other only positive attributes. However, this description of ‘home’ is not comprehensive nor indisputable. In order to highlight the complexity of the concept, in Chapter 2 I borrowed Rybczynski’s (1986, p. 230) analogy of peeling the layers of an onion which he used to describe the word ‘comfort’ and applied it to the idea of ‘home.’ Much like the elephant described by the six blind men which introduced this thesis, the identity of a place, of a ‘home,’ sometimes intangible and always subjective, “must be constructed and negotiated” (Mallett, 2004, p. 70).

Usually linked to a geographical location, ‘home’ is where our sense of self is located. However, ‘home’ is also a much more expansive concept related to ideas of place, shelter and identity. It is the place from which we learn to perform basic social relationships and is associated with memory; it is the location of family and familiarity, a source of comfort and security. While ‘home’ has an identity, it is also where we find our identity (cf. Dovey, 1985, p. 41). Saunders and Williams (1988, p. 82) argued that the ‘home’ is “a medium through which class differentiation, ethnic inequality, the status order and even distinctive regional national cultures and identities are reproduced.” ‘Home’ is not fixed, nor is it rigid. Journeys away from home may see the idea of home expand, or result in a new home. For some, therefore, the idea of home is manifold. Additionally, while we tend to think of ‘home’ in terms of public–private dialectic with home belonging to the private sphere and all other places public, this is an
historically inaccurate assumption. So too is the assumption that home is a place of warmth and security. In fact, the experiences of many people, particularly women and refugees, suggest the opposite.

Some people identify against places as much as, or more than, they do with places. Both forced and voluntary migration often involve a search for a new ‘home,’ a place which will nourish individual identity, a place where one can feel authentic. “Home is the realization of ideas” wrote Mary Douglas (1991, p. 290). Aviezer Tucker (1994, p. 184) argued that “most people spend their lives in search of home, at the gap between the natural home and the particular ideal home where they would be fully fulfilled” (see also Mallett, 2004, p. 69). In such statements, the potentially utopian aspect of ‘home’ is highlighted. It may indeed be something to which one aspires, even perhaps without clear spatial definition or lived experience.

Intentional communities, such as Auroville, offer an interesting and relatively unexplored setting for an inquiry into the idea of ‘home.’ Auroville fulfils the basic objective of ‘home’ in providing shelter and relative comfort and, more importantly perhaps, is a home that is chosen to both align with and inform residents’ identity. However, I argue in this thesis that Auroville may not in fact be ‘home’ for many of the people who choose to live there. As an intentional community, Auroville offers an alternative to the ‘mainstream,’ it has a vision to create an ideal society dedicated to personal growth and authenticity, and, for many Aurovilians, evolutionary progress. It is a utopian ideal, one for which community members strive with full consciousness of the impossibility of realising, a conundrum characteristic of intentional community residents (Sargisson and Sargent, 2017, p. 22). Paul, for example, told me,

Auroville is impossible. Auroville was impossible from day one! Which is why we are doing it. The program of Auroville is the ideal society, this is what the point of Auroville is. And nobody is taking up the idea of the ideal society anywhere in the world because there can be no ideal society. As long as human consciousness is the way it is then there cannot be an ideal society. So it is the most ambitious project on earth. We can’t succeed but we are trying.
Though this means that Auroville may not now provide the familiarity and security we tend to assume people want to associate with the idea of ‘home,’ for those who choose to live there it is the place they perceive most likely to offer the conditions of ‘home.’ Auroville’s residents settle for a feeling of ‘at homeness,’ a sense of belonging which comes from living in a community which aligns with their self-identity.

People come to Auroville for any number of reasons. Some are already devotees of the Mother and/or Sri Aurobindo and so come to Auroville in order to participate in the creation of the city being built according to the Mothers’ dream, of which they are already familiar. However, I found that rather than necessarily identifying with Auroville, many people living in Auroville identify against the places from which they came.

In Chapter 3 I referred to Auroville’s residents as ‘lifestyle migrants,’ a label typically reserved for ‘sea changers,’ ‘tree changers,’ retirees and those who migrate in order to realise a more relaxing, nurturing or creative way of life, rather than people who move to an intentional community located in a harsh climate with unreliable basic facilities such as electricity and running water, and a focus on productive work. However, though Auroville’s residents gave me a huge range of reasons for coming to live in the community, like other lifestyle migrants, I believe people who have chosen to live in Auroville do so for the lifestyle Auroville permits. They are there in order to escape an unsatisfactory future imagined unavoidable in the places from which they came (see O'Reilly and Benson, 2009, p. 4). Though not many of the long term residents of Auroville would call themselves “spiritual tourists,” the word ‘tourist’ in Auroville used almost as an insult implying “not one of us,” most of Auroville’s residents share the belief that “western life is inherently unhealthy,” an assertion that Alex Norman (2011, p. 41) writes is typical of spiritual tourists. Chrissie in Chapter 3, for example, told me about being surrounded by metaphorical “walls” acting as barriers to her self-discovery and happiness in Germany; Claire, in Chapter 4, spoke about being able to avoid the “structure that’s laid out for you and you’re expected to follow” inherent in life in Europe; and Robert spoke of the difficulty of living his environmental values in America. However, people from non-western backgrounds also choose to make a home in Auroville for many of the same reasons, which suggests that these lifestyle migrants believe expectations to conform to a certain life trajectory and value system regardless
of cultural origin are inherently unhealthy. Chetana, for example, from a nearby village relished the opportunity to define her life on her terms which had nothing to do with finding a husband and being a ‘good’ wife, something she told me is inherently a part of Tamil gender expectations.

Long term residents of Auroville, Aurovilian and non-Aurovilian, also had a variety of reasons for staying in the community. Answers to questions about what Auroville gave to them or what kept them in Auroville ranged from the ubiquitous ‘freedom’ to suggestions of refuge and even semblances of feeling captured or entrapped by Auroville. Common to all of these accounts was the perception of being able to live authentically unlike what was possible in the places from where they came. Unlike lifestyle migrants written about elsewhere, people in Auroville do not speak of freedom from life’s responsibilities (Nepstad, 2004, p. 44), but of freedom from expectations, again contrasting the freedom they experience in Auroville with places they lived previously.

Where, typically, a destination is sought for its perceived authenticity, that is, how it represents the local culture, Auroville is understood to be a place where one finds who they really are. With ‘freedom’ the most common answer to questions about the benefits of Auroville, I noted in Chapter 4 some definitions of the term, coming to the conclusion at the end of the chapter that in Auroville freedom may refer to the ability to keep rectitude for its own sake. Sumitra, for example, who has decided not to become Aurovilian but is able to live as a community member indefinitely due to her financial independence and Indian citizenship, told me that Auroville gives her the “mental freedom” required to express herself as an Indian woman with western values in a way that she feels unavailable to her in other parts of India. Anjali also talked about freedom provided by Auroville in terms of her Indian culture but, unlike Sumitra, said that living among non-Indian people gives her the chance to feel truly Indian. Pippa and Chrissie, told me that Auroville permits, perhaps even encourages, experimentation, childishness and creativity, unlike allowed by the structure of their passport countries.

In Chapter 5 I wrote about commitment to Auroville in as much as it ensures the ongoing survival of the community. Following Rosabeth Kanter (1972), I outlined three commitment types which I labelled ideological, logistical, and affective commitment. Though not all members of the community are devotees of its founders or would even
call themselves spiritual, I found that they are united in their ideological commitment to the basic principles and values of Auroville enshrined in the Auroville Charter and the Mother’s dream. Some Aurovilians entangled their desire to live in Auroville with a prescribed destiny designed by a higher power. For example Paul and Hannah used metaphors of entrapment to express the importance of living in Auroville to them. Many others spoke of being only partially in control of their lives, arguing that the Mother, or some other higher power, led them to Auroville and continues to control to some degree their path through life. For devotees, this guidance, surrender as it were, is reassuring. Liz, for example, told me that she no longer asks why she is in Auroville and just accepts that she is and must be. Estelle says she would like to leave the community, however it is where she needs to be in order to improve herself and that this is why the Mother does not allow her to leave. Conversely, it is a common belief that if someone is not supposed to be in Auroville the Mother, or other higher power, will lead them away. This belief is held even by people without a strong spiritual conviction or affection for the Mother, such as Claire who pondered why the Mother allows her to stay despite her differences of opinion with so many Aurovilians.

Logistical commitment to Auroville comes from the community’s financial and labour demands of its members. Permanent members are required upon application to become Aurovillian to provide financial investment to the community sufficient to cover their own housing costs. Aurovilians who have no independent means of support receive a ‘maintenance,’ that is, an allowance sufficient to support a basic lifestyle in Auroville. For guests and those with independent means of support a daily fee payable to the Central Fund is requested. In addition, all permanent members of the community as well as long term guests (and, to some degree short-term guests as well) are expected to contribute a minimum labour requirement. A strong work ethic was enshrined in the culture of Auroville from its very inception when the Mother wrote in ‘A Dream,’

...work would not be a way to earn one’s living but a way to express oneself and to develop one’s capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole...
Work is seen as a path to self-improvement, self-expression, identity and service which renders it as important for the individual resident of Auroville as for the community as a whole.

That Auroville is a community of self-defined misfits seems an oxymoron, one not lost on its residents, many of whom pointed out to me the irony of attempting to create a unified community based on individuality. Indeed, with a focus on authenticity and individuality plenty of opportunity is provided for misunderstandings and animosity. When I asked people what holds the community together (despite their passionate individuality) many laughed or in some other way expressed the opinion that perhaps community cohesion is somewhat lacking. However, the evident disappointment in these remarks, as well as the obvious warmth and affection I observed between community members as I lived and worked among them, demonstrated to me the importance of the community to each of its members as well as the possibilities it provides to each individual. In Chapter 5 I therefore argued that while ideological and logistical commitment-building mechanisms are abundantly apparent in Auroville, it is actually affective community which holds the community together.

Arguably, many Aurovilians connect over a shared lack of home, rather than the home not quite (yet) found in Auroville. As argued by Sara Ahmed (1999), for some migrants, shared “lack of a home” creates a sense of connection. This is particularly relevant in the sense of a utopian vision. That Auroville does not necessarily provide for them the familiarity and security we tend to think of as associated with ‘home’ due in part to its insistence on constant change and reminders of the intention to create something more, does not diminish its residents’ belief that Auroville is nonetheless where the conditions of ‘home’ are most likely to be realised for them as individuals as well as for society generally.

Auroville’s community members are repeatedly reminded that they are on a path towards something greater and that Auroville is physically, socially, culturally and ideologically distinct from the ‘outside’ due to the conscious engagement each of its members have in one way or another with the ideals of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, even if not devotees. There is a clear sense in Auroville of “we’re all in this together.” Aurovilians often refer to the community as a family and, just as in a family, this does not mean that everyone needs, or even wants, to get along all of the time.
While those who come to Auroville as adults contrast their lives in Auroville with the places previously identified as ‘home,’ those born into the community (or taken there at a young age) have a different relationship to Auroville and to the idea of ‘home.’ The adult Children of Auroville I spoke to diverge from their first generation friends and family in terms of their commitment to the community as a whole as well as their cultural identity.

Though the idea of ‘home’ has been given much consideration in reference to migration generally, this thesis highlights the importance of consideration of this concept in relation to lifestyle migration and to intentional communities more specifically. In particular, I believe more research on second generation intentional community residents would address a gap in the literature on both intentional communities and the idea of ‘home.’ Though it is a logical assumption that second, and subsequent, generations are not expected to show the same level of commitment as previous generations, there is little empirical understanding of how people who have grown up in intentional communities do engage with their communities, the values of their parents, and broader society. Identity and a sense of belonging are implicit in the meaning of ‘home,’ and lifestyle migrants who choose to live in an intentional community do so not just for the lifestyle it permits but also because the values of the community align with and inform their own. How these people’s children identify themselves in contrast with their parents is of import to all those who grow up in a culture dissimilar to that of their parents,’ but perhaps particularly to those whose parents’ values or beliefs also diverge significantly from those of the dominant culture of their surroundings.

Like other second generation migrants and ‘Third Culture Kids,’ Children of Auroville grow up as cultural hybrids, they possess a cultural fluidity which enables them to appear to fit in wherever they go, but may in fact act as a barrier to feeling at home anywhere. Like other Third Culture Kids, Children of Auroville also reported feeling embarrassed when asked questions from people unfamiliar with Auroville about where they are from. Not necessarily wanting to stay in Auroville, they find comfort in finding others like them, which may involve remaining or returning to Auroville by default. According to reports from those I met, many adult Children of Auroville also find work in multicultural environments and live in expat communities scattered around the world.
Having grown up in the community, adult Children of Auroville are not requested to show the same devotion to the ideals of Auroville as new arrivals in order to become Aurovilian. It is assumed that these values are ingrained in them, and to a certain extent they are. However Children of Auroville are, by and large, not only not devotees of the Aurovilian brand of spirituality, with a few exceptions, the adult Children of Auroville I spoke to were also openly disdainful of Auroville’s spirituality. Some even used words such as “dogma” and “bullshit” in describing the devotion newer arrivals have to the spiritual side of the community.

Yet the Aurovilianness of Children of Auroville is not questioned, despite their ambivalence. The Mother said that the children born in Auroville were special, and this characteristic is now extended to all those who spent a considerable period of their childhood in Auroville. There is a perception that they chose to be born into the situation of being raised in Auroville and that this is evidence of being more evolved. For most Aurovilians, the Children of Auroville are representative, in theory if not practice, of the future.

The adult Children of Auroville I engaged with demonstrate that feeling at home is not coterminous with fitting in. Despite their different attitudes towards the community compared to adult arrivals, Children of Auroville do feel deeply that Auroville is home. It is where they take comfort from familiarity, where they feel secure in their position and where they feel recognised and understood. Ultimately, the reasons why Children of Auroville stay in, or return to, the community are the same as for those who arrive as adults. It is where, as one told me, they feel “most comfortable in the world.”

Most of my interviews were conducted in cafés in Auroville. Listening back to the recordings it strikes me how cosmopolitan the community appears. A common feature of the recordings is the sound of voices and laughter in the background, intermingled with birdsong and other café noises such as the sound of the coffee machine and cluttering cutlery. The background voices are in a variety of languages. That people in Auroville speak so many languages is not given much consideration in Auroville, though it is strikingly apparent upon reflection from outside of Auroville where even in a multicultural city such as Melbourne, such diversity of languages is not apparent in all places, certainly not in any given café would one easily hear up to six different languages being spoken in any six conversations, oftentimes multiple languages in a single
conversation. This linguistic diversity is just one element, though a very obvious one, of Auroville’s multiplicity.

The Mother envisaged, and Aurovilians are trying to create, “a universal town where [according to the Auroville Charter] men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities.” Auroville is, as I described in the introduction to this thesis, a multinational, multicultural community comprised of permanent residents holding passports from roughly fifty different countries. Elements of many of these cultures are easy to find in the community, including in the very obvious French influence seen in the names of communities and businesses, Tibetan festivals, weekly tango dancing classes, and German bread easily available in the Auroville bakery, as well as elements of the pre-existing Tamil culture, all of which give the community an undeniably multicultural flavour appreciated by residents and guests.

Residents themselves rarely describe the community as cosmopolitan (Sumitra, in Chapter 7, being one notable exception). In everyday usage of the word, ‘cosmopolitan’ implies fast-paced city life, perhaps broad appreciation and involvement with the arts, and active social life as an ongoing concern. Though Auroville is intended to be a city of fifty thousand people, today’s two and a half thousand official residents relish the small town feel, where they know most other community members (by sight and possibly name if not intimately) yet are respected in their identity choices.

Many Aurovilians reminisce about the ‘good ol’ days’ when (non-Tamil) Aurovilians and (Tamil) villagers worked together to create the ‘city of the future.’ However, that Bhumi, from Chapter 2, and presumably other villagers with daily social connections to Auroville, remained unaware of the reasons for the sudden influx of foreigners in their midst, nor did they understand the motives for construction of the Matrimandir, an unusual and extremely expensive building in which they enjoyed the “quiet peacefulness,” makes it possible to surmise that there have always been communication breakdowns between Aurovilians and their immediate neighbours, perhaps with little interest or effort on either side to resolve any lack of understanding of the other.

Auroville is said to have porous borders, and it is true that a good deal of non-Aurovilians live and work in the community, as do Aurovilians live and work outside of
the community. Additionally, there is much social connection between Auroville and the ‘outside’ due to the personal connections people have with their passport countries and surrounding communities (especially Pondicherry) and professional interactions of Aurovilian businesses. Yet Auroville’s physical and symbolic borders are very apparent.

In Chapter 7 I showed that today, some migrants living in Auroville seek to become a part of the culture of the region of their adopted home, however others remain aloof from the India they find outside of Auroville’s borders. A part of their demand or ‘freedom,’ to be a more authentic version of oneself includes the ‘cosmopolitan’ ability to adopt practices which one feels symbolic of their own inner drives, regardless of the origins of those practices (cf. Rapport, 2012, p. 106). While many foreign Aurovilians, such as Margot, state their interest in the community extends in only a very limited way to the host communities and they contain their activities as much as possible to within Auroville’s physical and social borders, others actively try to incorporate Indian, or more specifically Tamil, cultural life into their own. In Auroville however, where Western Aurovilians are able to select which aspects of the cultures surrounding they wish to incorporate (or not) into their own identity, as if in a ‘supermarket,’ Tamil people are expected to gain competence in Western culture in order to ‘fit in’ in Auroville. Mari Korpela (2014a, p. 110) termed this phenomenon “cosmopolitan on Western terms” to describe the cosmopolitanism of her research participants. More than anything else, ‘home’ for Auroville’s long-term residents is a matter of belonging, and of recognition of that belonging. Yet, by claiming this patch of land as the location of their home (no matter how unrealised), Aurovilians unwittingly complicate the issue of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ for those who lived there previously. Auroville exists due to the legacy of colonialism in the region (Namakkal, 2012) and, despite the best intentions of its members, Auroville as a collective cannot be fully at home in Tamil Nadu. Yet, neither can it be anywhere else.

Though physically challenging, Auroville particularly provides comfort to community members in that here, unlike other places they have lived, they do not feel like a ‘misfit.’ The community’s values, which are based on the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother but have evolved to incorporate consideration of the physical setting of Auroville and the values of each new member since 1968, also say something about those who choose to call themselves Aurovilian. These values encompass concern for
the natural environment, a strong work ethic, and respect for difference. Auroville is often referred to by its residents as the “city of the future,” and with its underlining evolutionary ideals, Aurovilians are also future-focussed and intent on personal development.

When I asked Jagrv, an adult Child of Auroville, what holds the community together, he told me,

The idea is great. That’s what holds it together. The idea of human unity, the idea of one world and progress and becoming... it’s all fairytale and people like fairytales.

In so saying, Jagrv touches on the fantasy-like ideal of Auroville and appeals to the notion of impossibility that Auroville presents. He also demonstrates the consciousness with which people in Auroville participate in their own subterfuge. The frequent reference to Auroville’s impossibility from its residents gives them flexibility to experiment, an excuse to fail and justification for Auroville not meeting their own, let alone anyone else’s, expectations.

Auroville is a utopian dream. Lifestyle migration represents a beginning, not an end (O’Reilly and Benson, 2009, p. 2), and especially in the case of Auroville, migrants are required to keep asking of their chosen home the same questions that led them away from their previous homes. For a lot of Auroville’s residents, their ‘ideal home’ is not found in the community. Rather, it is the promise of approximating or realising their ideal home that keeps them there (Tucker, 1994, p. 184). In fact, for many Aurovilians, ‘home’ is a dynamic, tripartite notion, referencing the places from which they came, Auroville today, and the future society they wish to create.

For Ruth Levitas (2007, p. 304),

...utopia at its best, is a necessary failure, but will fail us less than its absence. Of this kind of failure, there is unfortunately too little at the moment. (cf. Sargisson and Sargent, 2017)
While there are obvious problems, some of which I have highlighted, especially in Chapter 7, the general undiminished goodwill in this still growing community suggests that in a world of conflict and distrust there may be something to be gained from understanding the psychology and sociology of those who can live together in relative harmony, who find ‘home’ in utopia. Hannah told me of the people who live in Auroville, “I think we’re all dreamers at heart,” but who has not, at some point, wanted a different life, wanted more control over their life, wanted to feel their life contribute to something greater than themselves, and wanted their life to represent what they believe is their True self? This is what Aurovilians are trying to achieve, whether or not they believe in the spiritual philosophies of Sri Aurobindo. I asked Bhumi if this works. “It almost works,” she answered quietly, “almost, but it has to take some time also.”
Appendices
Appendix 1: The Mother and Sri Aurobindo

1.1 The Mother

The following brief biography of the Mother is taken from the Auroville website (Auroville, 2014h). Many more comprehensive biographies of the Mother have been written, most notably one by Georges van Vrekhem (Van Vrekhem, 2007 [2004]), an Aurovilian who lived first in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where he became personally acquainted with the Mother and then in Auroville until his death in 2012.

The Mother - a brief sketch of her life and work

It was the Mother who was the driving force behind the manifestation of Auroville. Under the shaping influence of the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo's dual philosophies, Auroville emerges as a unique, multi-cultural confluence where matter and spirit, the individual and the collective meet in the search for a higher consciousness.

Early Years

Mirra Alfassa (1878 – 1973) was born as the second child of an Egyptian mother and a Turkish father, a few months after her parents had settled in France. An extraordinarily gifted child, who became an accomplished painter and musician, she had many inner experiences from early childhood on. In her twenties she studied occultism in Algeria with Max Theon and his English wife Alma, who was a highly developed medium. After her return to Paris, the Mother worked with several different groups of spiritual seekers.

Meeting Sri Aurobindo
She first heard of Sri Aurobindo from her second husband Paul Richard, who had visited him in Pondicherry in 1910; and in 1914, along with her husband, she was able to travel to Pondicherry and meet him in person. There, she immediately recognised him as a mentor she had encountered in earlier visions, and knew that her future work was at his side. Although she had to leave India after the outbreak of the First World War, first returning to France, and then accompanying Richard to an official post in Japan, in April 1920 she returned to join Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry and never left again. Sri Aurobindo recognised in her an embodiment of the dynamic expressive aspect of evolutionary, creative Force, in India traditionally known and approached as the 'Supreme Mother.'

Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville
It was the Mother who organised the growing group of followers around Sri Aurobindo into the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from November 1926 onwards, and who in 1952, after his passing in 1950, created the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education to fulfil his wish to provide a new kind of education for Indian youth. In 1968 she founded the international township project of Auroville as a yet wider field for practical attempts to implement Sri Aurobindo's vision of new forms of individual and collective life, preparing the way towards a brighter future for the whole earth.

*Humanity is not the last rung of the terrestrial creation. Evolution continues and man will be surpassed. It is for each individual to know whether he wants to participate in the advent of this new species.*

*For those who are satisfied with the world as it is, Auroville obviously has no reason to exist.*

The Mother, 1966

Consciousness beyond Mind
Both Sri Aurobindo and The Mother worked all their lives for the manifestation of a mode of consciousness beyond mind, which Sri Aurobindo named "Supermind" or "The Supramental." The full expression of this consciousness on earth would result not only in a new species, as far beyond the human, as human race is beyond the animals, but also in a modification of the whole terrestrial creation, even more complete than the change brought about by the entrance on the world scene of the human race.

Between humanity and the fully Supramental species there would have to be one or several transitional steps, represented by transitional beings, born in the human way, but able to contact and express the higher consciousness. These transitional beings would prepare the way for the advent of the Supramental Race by establishing suitable conditions.

Transformation
After Sri Aurobindo's passing, the Mother continued his work of psychological and physical transformation with the help of the new force. An account of her
experiences in the course of this work is given in *The Mother’s Agenda*, an intimate record of the last 18 years of her life.

Their work continues.

### 1.2 Sri Aurobindo

As is the case with the Mother, a great number of biographies have been written on Sri Aurobindo, many of them by his devotees and quite a number in Sri Aurobindo’s own words, compilations of his vast writings from his activist days through to his final years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. One of the biographies most often referred to was written by one of the Mother’s closest devotees, Satprem ([Satprem, 2008](#)). However, the following brief biography of Sri Aurobindo is taken from the Auroville website ([Auroville, 2016c](#)).

**Sri Aurobindo: his vision made Auroville possible**

Brilliant scholar, revolutionary, spiritual visionary – Sri Aurobindo’s world-view gives each individual a meaningful place in a progressive cosmic unfolding and casts our understanding of human endeavour in a new and purposeful perspective.

**Western education**

Aravind Ghose, born in Calcutta on 15th August 1872, lived 78 years. He passed from this life in Pondicherry on 5th December, 1950.

Wholly educated in England along with his two brothers, he was given an entirely Western education by their Anglophile father. After infant schooling at a convent in Darjeeling, they were taken to England to live with a clergyman’s family in Manchester. From there they joined St. Paul’s public school in West London, and
later went on to Cambridge University. There Sri Aurobindo was a brilliant scholar, winning record marks in the Classical Tripos examination. But he had already been touched by a will for the Independence of India, and did not wish to become an official of the colonial administration - the position his father and his education had marked him out for. He managed to disqualify himself by failing to take the mandatory riding test, and instead returned to India in 1893 in the service of the Indian princely State of Baroda, where he remained up to 1906.

**Nationalist leader**

In that year he returned to his birthplace, Calcutta, as the first Principal of the new Bengal National College. He resigned that post because of his increasingly active involvement in the Nationalist Movement. Sri Aurobindo was the first of the Nationalist leaders to insist on full independence for India as the goal of the movement, and for several years he lent all his considerable abilities and energies to this struggle. This led to him being arrested on a charge of treason and being kept in solitary confinement for almost a year as an 'under trial' prisoner in Alipore jail. During this time he had a number of fundamental spiritual experiences which convinced him of the truth of the "Sanatana Dharma" - the ancient spiritual knowledge and practice of India.

**Pondicherry**

After he was acquitted and released, this spiritual awareness led him to take refuge from continuing pursuit by the British authorities in Pondicherry, then part of French India, where he devoted himself intensively to the exploration of the new possibilities it opened up to him. Supported by his spiritual collaborator, the Mother, and using his new-found spiritual capacities, he continued to work tirelessly for the upliftment of India and the world. When India gained its Independence on 15.8.1947, he responded to the request for a message to his countrymen by speaking of five dreams that he had worked for, and which he now saw on the way to fulfilment.

**Five Dreams**

These five Dreams were:

1. "... a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India."
2. "... the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilization."
3. "... a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all ...[people]."
4. "... the spiritual gift of India to the world."
5. "... a step in evolution which would raise ...[humans] to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed [...them] since [...they] first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society."
Optimistic and dynamic world-view

The great originality of Sri Aurobindo is to have fused the modern scientific concept of evolution with the perennial gnostic experience of an all-pervading divine consciousness supporting all phenomenal existence. His synthesis was not a philosophic construct, but a realisation stemming from direct spiritual experience. The unfolding of more and more complex forms and higher levels of consciousness out of an original total material inconscience is seen as the gradual return to self-awareness and the diverse self-expression of involved Spirit. This process is evidently not complete, and the evolution of higher levels of consciousness and less unconscious forms of expression are to be expected. But with the development of Mind, individual human beings can, if they choose, use their will and intelligence to begin to participate consciously in this process of self-discovery and self-exploration. This knowledge founds an optimistic and dynamic world-view, which gives each individual a meaningful place in a progressive cosmic unfolding, and casts our understanding of human endeavour, whether individual or collective, in a new and purposeful perspective. Many facets of this world-view are elaborated in the 35 volumes of Sri Aurobindo’s Collected Works.
Appendix 2: Philosophy and Founding Documents

2.1 The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

The following, written by Sri Aurobindo himself following a short introduction by one of his (unnamed) devotees, appears on the Auroville website and provides an overview of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo, 1934). Though brief (the entire catalogue of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual writings runs thousands of pages), this summary highlights the importance of the individual, all-encompassing sadhana, focus on evolution, and rejection of organised religion.

Sri Aurobindo’s teaching and spiritual method

Sri Aurobindo's advanced world vision, the backbone of Auroville, takes one up in wider areas of self, of life, of other. The spiritual path - or sadhana - as developed by him, works with a combination of a voluntarily adopted psychological discipline and various yogic practices. Already a century ago he declared "All life is Yoga". The text here below was written by Sri Aurobindo himself, in 1934.

**Sri Aurobindo's teaching and method of Sadhana**

The teaching of Sri Aurobindo starts from that of the ancient sages of India that behind the appearances of the universe there is the Reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us and all.

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

But while the former steps in evolution were taken by Nature without a conscious will in the plant and animal life, in man Nature becomes able to evolve by a conscious will in the instrument. It is not, however, by the mental will in man that this can be wholly done, for the mind goes only to a certain point and after that can only move in a circle. A conversion has to be made, a turning of the consciousness by which mind has to change into the higher principle. This method is to be found through the ancient psychological discipline and practice of Yoga. In the past, it has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a
disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit. Sri Aurobindo teaches that a
descent of the higher principle is possible which will not merely release the
spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world, replace the mind's
ignorance or its very limited knowledge by a supramental Truth-Consciousness
which will be a sufficient instrument of the inner Self and make it possible for the
human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his
still animal humanity into a diviner race. The psychological discipline of Yoga can
be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or
transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed
supramental principle.

This, however, cannot be done at once or in a short time or by any rapid or
miraculous transformation. Many steps have to be taken by the seeker before the
supramental descent is possible. Man lives mostly in his surface mind, life and
body, but there is an inner being within him with greater possibilities to which he
has to awake - for it is only a very restricted influence from it that he receives now
and that pushes him to a constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power
and knowledge. The first process of Yoga is therefore to open the ranges of this
inner being and to live from there outward, governing his outward life by an inner
light and force. In doing so he discovers in himself his true soul which is not this
outer mixture of mental, vital and physical elements but something of the Reality
behind them, a spark from the one Divine Fire. He has to learn to live in his soul
and purify and orientate by its drive towards the Truth the rest of the nature.
There can follow afterwards an opening upward and descent of a higher principle
of the Being. But even then it is not at once the full supramental Light and Force.
For there are several ranges of consciousness between the ordinary human mind
and the supramental Truth-Consciousness. These intervening ranges have to be
opened up and their power brought down into the mind, life and body. Only
afterwards can the full power of the Truth-Consciousness work in the nature. The
process of this self-discipline or Sadhana is therefore long and difficult, but even a
little of it is so much gained because it makes the ultimate release and perfection
more possible.

There are many things belonging to older systems that are necessary on the way -
an opening of the mind to a greater wideness and to the sense of the Self and the
Infinite, an emergence into what has been called the cosmic consciousness,
mastery over the desires and passions; an outward asceticism is not essential, but
the conquest of desire and attachment and a control over the body and its needs,
greeds and instincts are indispensable. There is a combination of the principles of
the old systems, the way of knowledge through the mind's discernment between
Reality and the appearance, the heart's way of devotion, love and surrender and
the way of works turning the will away from motives of self-interest to the Truth
and the service of a greater Reality than the ego. For the whole being has to be
trained so that it can respond and be transformed when it is possible for that
greater Light and Force to work in the nature.

In this discipline, the inspiration of the Master, and in the difficult stages his
control and his presence are indispensable - for it would be impossible otherwise
to go through it without much stumbling and error which would prevent all chance
of success. The Master is one who has risen to a higher consciousness and being
and he is often regarded as its manifestation or representative. He not only helps
by his teaching and still more by his influence and example but by a power to communicate his own experience to others.

This is Sri Aurobindo's teaching and method of practice. It is not his object to develop any one religion or to amalgamate the older religions or to found any new religion - for any of these things would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature.

Sri Aurobindo, August, 1934
Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library
Vol. 26, "Sri Aurobindo on Himself",
pp. 95-97.
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2.2 Integral Yoga

Also found on Auroville’s website is the following overview of Integral Yoga, written again by Sri Aurobindo but with definitions added by Aurovilian for the purpose of explaining the community to non-devotees (Auroville, 2017d). This text has been sourced by Auroville from a compilation of Sri Aurobindo’s writing edited by M.P. Pandit (Ghose, 2013), a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and personal secretary to the Mother (Integral Knowledge Study Centre, n.d.).

Central purpose of the Integral Yoga
Transformation of our superficial, narrow and fragmentary human way of thinking, seeing, feeling and being into a deep and wide spiritual consciousness and an integrated inner and outer existence and of our ordinary human living into the divine way of life.

Integral yoga
This yoga accepts the value of cosmic existence and holds it to be a reality; its object is to enter into a higher Truth-Consciousness or Divine Supramental Consciousness in which action and creation are the expression not of ignorance and imperfection, but of the Truth, the Light, the Divine Ananda (Bliss). But for that, the surrender of the mortal mind, life and body to the Higher Consciousness is indispensable, since it is too difficult for the mortal human being to pass by its own effort beyond mind to a Supramental Consciousness in which the dynamism is no longer mental but of quite another power. Only those who can accept the call to such a change should enter into this yoga.

Sâdhanâ of the Integral Yoga
The Sâdhanâ [practice] of the Integral Yoga does not proceed through any set mental teaching or prescribed forms of meditation, mantras or others, but by aspiration, by a self-concentration inwards or upwards, by a self-opening to an Influence, to the Divine Power above us and its workings, to the Divine Presence in the heart and by the rejection of all that is foreign to these things. It is only by faith, aspiration and surrender that this self-opening can come.

Integral method
The method we have to pursue is to put our whole conscious being into relation and contact with the Divine and to call Him in to transform our entire being into His, so that in a sense God Himself, the real Person in us, becomes the sâdhaka of the sâdhana* as well as the Master of the Yoga by whom the lower personality is used as the centre of a divine transfiguration and the instrument of its own perfection. In effect, the pressure of the Tapas, the force of consciousness in us...
dwelling in the Idea of the divine Nature upon that which we are in our entirety, produces its own realisation. The divine and all-knowing and all-effecting descends upon the limited and obscure, progressively illumines and energises the whole lower nature and substitutes its own action for all the terms of the inferior human light and mortal activity.

* Sādhana, the practice by which perfection, siddhi, is attained; Sādhaka, the Yogin who seeks by that practice the siddhi.

**Aim of the Integral Yoga**

It is not merely to rise out of the ordinary ignorant world-consciousness into the divine consciousness, but to bring the supramental power of that divine consciousness down into the ignorance of mind, life and body, to transform them, to manifest the Divine here and create a divine life in Matter.

**Conditions of the Integral Yoga**

This yoga can only be done to the end by those who are in total earnest about it and ready to abolish their little human ego and its demands in order to find themselves in the Divine. It cannot be done in a spirit of levity or laxity; the work is too high and difficult, the adverse powers in the lower Nature too ready to take advantage of the least sanction or the smallest opening, the aspiration and tapasyâ (concentration of the will) needed too constant and intense.

**Method in the Integral Yoga**

To concentrate, preferably in the heart and call the presence and power of the Mother to take up the being and by the workings of her force transform the consciousness. One can concentrate also in the head or between the eye-brows, but for many this is a too difficult opening. When the mind falls quiet and the concentration becomes strong and the aspiration intense, then there is the beginning of experience. The more the faith, the more rapid the result is likely to be. For the rest one must not depend on one's own efforts only, but succeed in establishing a contact with the Divine and a receptivity to the Mother’s Power and Presence.

**KEY-METHODS**

**The way to devotion and surrender.**

It is the psychic movement that brings the constant and pure devotion and the removal of the ego that makes it possible to surrender.

**The way to knowledge**

Meditation in the head by which there comes the opening above, the quietude or silence of the mind and the descent of peace etc. of the higher consciousness generally till it envelops the being and fills the body and begins to take up all the movements.
Yoga by works

Separation of the Purusha from the Prakriti, the inner silent being from the outer active one, so that one has two consciousness or a double consciousness, one behind watching and observing and finally controlling and changing the other which is active in front. The other way of beginning the yoga of works is by doing them for the Divine, for the Mother, and not for oneself, consecrating and dedicating them till one concretely feels the Divine Force taking up the activities and doing them for one.

Object of the Integral Yoga

The object of the Integral Yoga is to enter into and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to love the Divine for the Divine's sake alone, to be tuned in our nature into the nature of the Divine, and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine.

Principle of the Integral Yoga

The whole principle of Integral Yoga is to give oneself entirely to the Divine alone and to nobody else, and to bring down into ourselves by union with the Divine Mother all the transcendent light, power, wideness, peace, purity, truth-consciousness and Ananda of the Supramental Divine.

Fundamental realisations of the Integral Yoga

The psychic change so that a complete devotion can be the main motive of the heart and the ruler of thought, life and action in constant union with the Mother and in her Presence. The descent of the Peace, Power, Light etc. of the Higher Consciousness through the head and heart into the whole being, occupying the very cells of the body. The perception of the One and Divine infinitely everywhere, the Mother everywhere and living in that infinite consciousness.
2.3 The Dream

In August 1954 the Mother had the following ‘dream’ published (Auroville, 2017b; Van Vrekhem, 2007 [2004], pp. 548-549). This, as well as the Auroville Charter, forms guiding principles, or ideological foundations, of Auroville.

A Dream

There should be somewhere on earth a place which no nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment.

In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones. In this place, titles and positions would be replaced by opportunities to serve and organise; the bodily needs of each one would be equally provided for, and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority would be expressed in the general organisation not by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life but by increased duties and responsibilities.

Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social or financial position.

For in this ideal place money would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual worth would have a far greater importance than that of material wealth and social standing. There, work would not be a way to earn one’s living but a way to express oneself and to develop one’s capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual’s subsistence and sphere of action.

In short, it would be a place where human relationships, which are normally based almost exclusively on competition and strife, would be replaced by relationships of emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real brotherhood.

The Earth is certainly not ready to realize such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess the necessary knowledge to understand and accept it or the indispensable conscious force to execute it. That is why I call it a dream.

Yet, this dream is on the way to becoming a reality...
2.4 The Auroville Charter

In the mid-1960s the Mother wrote the Auroville Charter for Auroville’s inauguration ceremony on 28th February 1986 (Auroville, 2017e; Van Vrekhem, 2007 [2004], p. 553). This, as well as The Dream, forms guiding principles, or ideological foundations, of Auroville.

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

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

3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.
2.5 To be a True Aurovilian

Prior to the reading of the Auroville Charter on the occasion of Auroville’s inauguration in February 1968, the Mother said ‘Greetings to all men of goodwill. Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life’ (Van Vrekhem, 2007 [2004], p. 554). In addition, within a few years of Auroville’s inauguration the Mother wrote the following guidelines ‘to be a True Aurovilian’ (Alfassa, 2017 [1971]):

1. The first necessity is the inner discovery in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the centre there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville. The fulfilment of one’s desires bars the way to the inner discovery which can only be achieved in the peace and transparency of perfect disinterestedness.

2. One lives in Auroville in order to be free from moral and social conventions; but this freedom must not be a new slavery to the ego, to its desires and ambitions.

3. The Aurovilian should lose the sense of personal possession. For our passage in the material world, what is indispensable to our life and to our action is put at our disposal according to the place we must occupy. The more we are consciously in contact with our inner being, the more are the exact means given to us.

4. Work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not put his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let the consciousness organise a bit of matter by means of one’s body is very good. To establish order around oneself helps to bring order within oneself. One should organise one’s life not according to outer and artificial rules, but according to an organised inner consciousness, for if one lets life go on without subjecting it to the control of the higher consciousness, it becomes fickle and inexpressive. It is to waste one’s time in the sense that matter remains without any conscious utilisation.

5. The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to work consciously to hasten this advent.

6. Little by little it will be revealed to us what this new species must be, and meanwhile the best course is to consecrate oneself entirely to the Divine.

[When this was to be published at the end of 1971, Mother added:]  
The only true freedom is the one obtained by union with the Divine. One can unite with the Divine only by mastering one’s ego.
Appendix 3: Governance

Organisation is a discipline of action, but for Auroville we aspire to go beyond arbitrary and artificial organisation. We want an organisation that is the expression of a higher consciousness working to manifest the truth of the future. An organisation is needed for the work to be done - but the organisation itself must remain flexible and plastic in order to progress continually and to modify itself according to the need. (The Mother, cited in Auroville, 2014g)

The Mother called the system of governance she envisioned for Auroville ‘divine anarchy.’ However, in keeping with her assertion that the world is not ready for the ideal of Auroville, it can be surmised that the Mother would not be surprised to find her devotees and other residents of Auroville as it is now debating what exactly ‘divine anarchy’ means and finding themselves in need of more bureaucratic forms of governance today and for the foreseeable future.

In order to end the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the 1970s, the Government of India stepped in (at the request of several Aurovilians) to settle the dispute. As a result the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act of 1980 placed all assets and management of Auroville placed under the jurisdiction of the central government (Manupatra, 2018). In 1988 the Auroville Foundation Act,

... provided, in the public interest, for the acquisition of all assets and undertakings relatable to Auroville without payment of compensation. These assets, which till then were managed by the Administrator under the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act, were temporarily transferred to the Government of India, with the aim of ultimately vesting them in a body corporate established for the purpose, the Auroville Foundation. The Auroville Foundation came into existence in January 1991. The assets were vested in the Foundation on April 1st, 1992. (Auroville, 2014f)

The Act provides the governance structure of Auroville.
The text and diagram below, taken from the Auroville website (Auroville, 2018f), explain each of the entities charged with governing Auroville as per the Auroville Foundation Act 1988.

**The Auroville Foundation**

- **Auroville Foundation**
- **International Advisory Council**
- **Governing Board**
- **Residents Assembly**
- **Secretary**
- **Working Committee**

### The structure of Auroville Foundation

The Auroville Foundation Act created a separate legal entity, the Auroville Foundation, with three authorities: the Governing Board, the International Advisory Council and the Residents Assembly.

The Governing Board has overall responsibility for the ongoing development of Auroville in keeping with its aims and ideals. It is composed of a number of eminent individuals, mostly Indian nationals, as well as ex-officio Indian Government officers.

The International Advisory Council has the function of advising the Governing Board on matters relating to management and development of the township. It is normally composed of five outstanding individuals of high international repute, usually from different nations.

The Residents Assembly comprises all residents of Auroville on the Master List over the age of 18. This body monitors the various activities of Auroville, decides on the terms of its membership, and is responsible for evolving and implementing a Master Plan for Auroville’s future development in consultation with the Governing Board. It selects a Working Committee as interface with the Governing Board, the Secretary, and the other groups of collective service to Auroville.
There is also a Secretary to the Foundation, appointed by the Government of India, who resides and has an office with supporting staff in Auroville.

**Structure of the units of the Auroville Foundation**

The Auroville Foundation consists of research, educational, service and commercial units dedicated to the promotion of the ideals of Auroville and of units dedicated to the uplifting of the population living in the villages surrounding Auroville.

The Auroville Foundation has separated these activities. All commercial activities are carried out in business trusts. The service units are integral parts of the Auroville Foundation. The units dedicated to village work are also organised in separate trusts. These trusts are recognised as non-governmental organisations.

**Appraisal of the Auroville Foundation**

After a period of over 10 years, and having passed through the difficulties of accepting a Governing Board and its Secretary who hold the 'legal' powers, Auroville has come to terms with the Auroville Foundation. The Governing Board is now seen as one other instrument to promote the development of Auroville. The creation of the Auroville Foundation is generally judged as positive, and many Aurovilians are grateful that the Indian Government has passed this special Act for Auroville. The Foundation has given a clear uniform legal status to Auroville. The unique income tax exempt status and a special visa policy are examples of the type of advantages that the Foundation has brought.

**Auroville Foundation Accounts**

The accounts of the Foundation are audited by the Controller and Auditor General of India.

**Income Tax Exemption:**

Auroville Foundation has been approved:

(ii) 80G for the period 01.04.2005-2010
(iii) 10(23C) applied for renewal from 01.04.2003 onwards
(iv) 35(1),(ii) & (iii) applied for renewal from 01.04.2006 onwards

**Auroville Foundation Rules**

The Central Government has notified the Auroville Foundation Rules for carrying out the provisions of the Auroville Foundation Act.
Appendix 4: How one joins Auroville

How future Aurovilians are selected to become members of the community does not explain individual motivations for joining. Yet an understanding of the bureaucratic processes of membership provides some insight into the determinedness of community members’ migratory choices. It is also helps to contextualise the reasons why some community members choose not to formalise their membership or are unable to do so.

4.1 Auroville Entry Service, a Short History

While the Mother was alive she personally approved all new members of the Auroville community. However, all things became somewhat uncertain immediately following Mother’s death in 1973. Old Aurovilians told me that some experienced a sense of betrayal at her departure. How to select new arrivals was just one of many issues left without an overseer, or even hint at direction. In the first couple of decades, priority was given to actually building a city. A process of natural selection took over; people who stayed were physically and mentally tough, able to cope with the hard living conditions presented by the environment and circumstances. People seeking an easy and comfortable life were not encouraged to join Auroville, but neither were these people likely to be attracted to Auroville. Without running water, electricity, housing or shade, and now without even the lure of a charismatic living guru, numbers of aspiring Aurovilians dwindled. The task of selecting new members was not an arduous one for the permanent residents of Auroville’s first two decades.

In time, the pioneers overcame the pressing concerns of liveability by creating a fully connected modern township surrounded by lush forest, and with it the immediate logistical barriers to living in Auroville were overcome. With this, numbers of interested potential residents again increased and skills required by the growing township became less specific to the physical labour of construction. The issue of faithfulness to the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and a desire to contribute to the realisation of those goals rose again to the surface of discussion regarding continued growth of Auroville. It was decided some sort of control was needed to vet and monitor arrivals of intentional permanent residents in order to protect the integrity of the Dream, the intentionality of Auroville.
The committee now called the Entry Service, tasked with receiving applications to join Auroville and approving or denying such requests. Some Aurovilians believe the Entry Service is not strict enough in who it lets into the community, others believe it is too strict, some think it should be a welcoming committee with a mandate to more actively facilitate people’s integration in the community, while others believe it ought to play more of a role in facilitating people’s exit from the community. In any case, the Entry Service is a controversial entity in Auroville, and, reportedly, one of the committees people are least willing to become involved in.

Officially, as stated in the current Entry Policy, to become Aurovilian, one should (Auroville, 2017g):

- Be inspired by the Auroville “Charter” and aspire to realize the ideals of Auroville, as expressed in The Mother’s guidelines and such documents as “The Dream” and “To be a true Aurovilian”;
- Be willing to further the manifestation of the ideals of Auroville according to his/her capacity;
- Be willing to contribute to the collective welfare through work, offerings in kind or with money;
- Agree not to use Auroville as a platform for personal gain. For example, using the name and symbol of Auroville as well as its facilities, immoveable assets and services for personal / private or sectarian activities;
- Abstain from any form of violence;
- Not engage in national politics by standing for elections or belonging to a political party;
- Abide by the laws of India

The Entry Service weighs considerations of why people wish to join the community with its founding goals and immediate logistical needs. The latter include housing and financial security. Here a policy dilemma is evident. According to an entry Service member I spoke to, Newcomers least likely to be a drain on the resources of the existing community are deemed by the Entry Service to be those who have the means to cover their own accommodation and living expenses as well as independent means of ongoing financial
However, Newcomers deemed most desirable for the city’s growth and most conducive to the spiritual as well as logistical goals of the ‘city of the future’ are young, enthusiastic and energetic people from around the world with the ability and desire to “get their hands dirty,” people who predict their greatest achievements yet to be realised and likely without independent means of financial support.\textsuperscript{163} Two dissimilar groups of people. And herein lays a problem and just one part, but perhaps the most obvious, of the ongoing debate surrounding role of the Entry Service.

Another recurring complaint levelled at the Entry Service concerns the rigidity to which ‘rules’ are applied in this city intended to be free of rules. One example of this resulted in the official creation of a new category of Aurovilian resident. A category of Newcomer called ‘Returning Aurovilian’ has been created, abolished and reintroduced in the past fifteen years to enable Aurovilians who leave the community for more than five years\textsuperscript{164} to return to Auroville without being placed on a lengthy probation as per other Newcomers.\textsuperscript{165} This measure, though welcomed by those who demanded the change, results in even more consternation from those who despair at increasingly bureaucratic processes in the community.

The Entry Service also manages applications from Indian nationals, however, as visas are not required, this is merely a formality legitimising social inclusion and enabling access to benefits provided to Aurovilians by the community. In spite of some people’s often loudly vocalised fears, Auroville is not inundated with Indian people who seek to become Aurovilian but have been rejected by the official gatekeepers. Nor is Auroville burdened by large numbers of Indian people without independent means of support.

\textsuperscript{163} As told to me by an Entry Service member. Similar was also said by others in the community.

\textsuperscript{164} Aurovilians are allowed to leave the community for up to five years before their names are removed from the Masterlist.

\textsuperscript{165} These people include children of Auroville who have moved abroad, often to study, and decide some time later to return to Auroville permanently. It is a small group of such people, now in their late thirties, who refused to fill in the standard application form and submit to the probation of other Newcomers who insisted on the creation of this category. Despite not necessarily all fitting the written criteria of ‘Aurovilian,’ the children who were raised in Auroville identify as Aurovilian more than they do any nationality, irrespective of their passports. For them, Aurovilian is their nationality. To be denied this for bureaucratic reasons is highly insulting. These people may indeed want some kind of official gatekeeper to protect the community from unwanted new arrivals, but at the same time, the few I spoke to tend to take delight in ridiculing the Entry Service, regardless of reason, due to their own personal encounters with the committee.
Despite residents’ concerns of who can join and who should leave Auroville, in fact a type of natural selection process still exists, as it did in the 1970s and 1980s. During my time in Auroville I was told several times that the Mother must have wanted me there for me to have come. This thought from the more fervent devotees became the basis on which I was accepted into the community, with the Mother’s blessings. Though physically deceased, the Mother is believed to still direct proceedings and have the final say on all matters. In the opinion of many, it is she, therefore, not the Entry Service, who ultimately decides who will become Aurovilian. Auroville is not for everyone, and even a significant proportion of people who go through the application process eventually decide of their own accord not to remain for a variety of reasons including harsh living conditions and disillusionment with the community’s goals.

More detailed information about the process of joining Auroville can be found on the Auroville website (Auroville, n.d.-a): https://www.auroville.org/categories/45
4.2 Auroville Entry Policy

Below is the Auroville Entry Policy 2017 (Auroville, 2017).

The Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation has promulgated the Auroville Foundation (Admission and Termination of persons in the Register of Residents) Regulations, 2017 (hereinafter called ‘the Regulations’). In accordance with these Regulations, the Residents’ Assembly has created this Auroville Entry Policy 2017.

The Entry Policy 2017

This policy may be called the Auroville Entry Policy. It shall come into effect on the date it has been approved by the Residents’ Assembly of the Auroville Foundation. Following The Mother’s wish that Auroville’s organization be evolutionary and experimental in character, the Residents’ Assembly, via its mandated bodies, may amend this Auroville Entry Policy.

Definitions

All words and expressions in this Entry Policy have the meanings as assigned in the Regulations and the Auroville Foundation Act, 1988 (54 of 1988). In this document, unless otherwise specified:

- Entry Service means Admission Service;
- Entry Board means Admission Committee
Criteria Applicable to all Applicants

The following criteria apply to all applicants who wish to join Auroville under one of the categories / statuses specified in the annexes of this policy.

“Greetings from Auroville to all men of goodwill! Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life.” - The Mother

To join Auroville, one should:

1. Be inspired by the Auroville “Charter” and aspire to realize the ideals of Auroville, as expressed in The Mother’s guidelines and such documents as “The Dream” and “To be a true Aurovilian” (refer to Annex A);
2. Be willing to further the manifestation of the ideals of Auroville according to his/her capacity;
3. Be willing to contribute to the collective welfare through work, offerings in kind or with money;
4. Agree not to use Auroville as a platform for personal gain. For example, using the name and symbol of Auroville as well as its facilities, immoveable assets and services for personal/private or sectarian activities;
5. Abstain from any form of violence;
6. Not engage in national politics by standing for elections or belonging to a political party;
7. Abide by the laws of India

The Entry Service

The Entry Service consists of three parts:

1. The Entry Board,
2. The Entry Secretariat,
3. The Mentor Pool.

1. The Entry Board

The constitution and mandate of the Entry Board are as described in the Regulations for the Admission Committee. The relevant paragraphs are copied below:

With reference to regulation 3. of the Regulations -

Constitution of the Admission Committee. -

(1) The Resident’s Assembly shall constitute an Admission Committee whose members shall be appointed directly by the Resident’s Assembly or by a committee constituted by it for this purpose.
The Admission Committee shall consist of nine members, at least six of whom have been resident of Auroville for a minimum period of five years.

The Resident's Assembly or such other committee constituted by it for this purpose shall ensure that, -

(i) the 'Admission Committee' is composed of residents of different ages and nationalities and that there is a gender balance; and

(ii) the members are qualified for the assigned work as per the mandate provided in regulation 4 and that they have required communication and organisational skills.

The members of the Admission Committee shall hold office for a period of three years but on expiration of every year three members shall retire and three new members shall be appointed in their place. Outgoing members shall be eligible for re-appointment after a gap of two years.

The Resident's Assembly, at any time, shall have the right to remove any of the members of the Admission Committee and replace them with other persons as members if it considers that it is in the larger interest of the community of Auroville.

Any vacancy arising in the Admission Committee either by way of resignation, expiry of term of office, or otherwise, shall be filled by the Resident's Assembly or the committee constituted by it for the purpose.

With reference to regulation 4. of the Regulations -

Mandate of the Admission Committee.

(1) The Admission Committee shall have the following mandate, namely: -

(i) to welcome, register and assist any applicant seeking admission to Auroville;

(ii) to accept or reject an applicant in accordance with these regulations;

(iii) where applicable, to request the Secretary to recommend the appropriate visa for an applicant and his or her descendants or wards;

(iv) to recommend to the Secretary that the name of an applicant may be entered in the Register of Residents.

Method of working of the Entry Board:

The Entry Board is to function as a Participatory Working Group (PWG), and is to be selected in a similar manner as described in the PWG document approved by the Residents’ Assembly.

The members of the Entry Board:

1. Will review and approve applications for all statuses (e.g. Newcomer / Aurovilian, Friend of Auroville, Associate, etc) as described in the various annexes of this Entry Policy.
2. Will listen in depth to the applicants and provide relevant advice / information for their settling in Auroville, such as regarding the purpose of the Mentor system and the Mentor Pool,
3. Are accountable to the community,
4. Will not deal with anonymous objections against applicants,
5. Will inform the concerned applicant of confidential objections, but may decide not to disclose the name of the objector,
6. Will make minutes of all official meetings accessible to the Residents. However, the Entry Board may decide not to give access to its minutes, after having obtained the opinion of the Working Committee, if it considers that that would adversely affect the interests of Auroville, an individual or the person concerned or if it is covered by a confidentiality agreement,
7. Will process feedback from the community based on the “Criteria Applicable to all Applicants” as defined in this Entry Policy,
8. Will cancel the process of an applicant as enumerated in the annexes in this Entry Policy,
9. Will oversee the good functioning of the Entry Secretariat,
10. Will make regular reports to the Auroville Council together with the Mentor Pool on the functioning of this Entry Policy and, if necessary, suggest improvements.

Term and removal of members of the Entry Board:

The term and removal of members of the Entry Board will happen as described in the ratified version of the PWG document. Relevant paragraphs from the PWG (March 2016) document are copied here for quick reference:

Term, Mandate And Turnover

- Members are selected for a period of 3 years unless the Working Group mandate states differently.
- Having completed 3 years, Members can be selected by nomination or self-nomination for a second term through open participation in the 3-Day Selection Process. After 2 terms there has to be a time lapse of 2 years before a Member can again nominate her/himself or be nominated for membership in the same working group.
- There will be a yearly selection process in November when approximately a third of the Members of a working group will be replaced. This will ensure continuity in the Working Groups with a system of staggered turnover.
- In the beginning of September together with the initiating of the yearly selection process, the working group informs the community via the Residents’ Assembly Service through News & Notes and Auronet which Members will be replaced and which skills are needed from the new-to-be Members.
- For Working Groups not yet acquainted with it the staggered membership process. It is proposed to keep on 2 Members from the earlier group for one year only. For the second year
the shift can happen naturally by Members choosing to resign. If this is not the case, the working group team will make the decision, if needed in collaboration with the community through the Residents’ Assembly Service. After this period of transit, the staggering will take place naturally. (Some of the mandates of the Working Groups may have to be adjusted in order to function this way.)

**Resignation Of Members**

- When a Member wants to resign during the term, s/he is requested to stay on until November and to make a proper handover of all her/his tasks. If this is not possible, the working group can ask a suitable individual from within the Resource Pool or the community at large to join as an interim solution and fill the role as a Member but without decision-making powers.
- The interim person will stay on till the yearly selection process in November and can, if so wished, nominate her/himself or be nominated for the selection process.

**Removal Of Members During The Term**

To be Member of a working group implies effective participation, conscientious presence and teamwork. Members who are not executing their work as assigned by the group and/or turn out to be ill-matched with the team, can – after all attempts of integration have failed – be asked by the Working Group to step out. For specific tasks they can serve the Group as a Resource Person. In a case like this, it will to be announced in the monthly working group report and through the RAS in a transparent, open way.

**Decision-making and the Entry Board:**

1. A minimum of seven Entry Board members constitutes a quorum in order to arrive at a decision,
2. The Entry Board will involve the Mentors of the applicant, and the applicant, before arriving at a decision,
3. In the case that an applicant or Newcomer needs to leave Auroville (from 1 to 3 months at a time) for personal reasons, the Entry Board together with the Mentors will put the Newcomer process on hold. The duration of time that the Newcomer has been out will then be added to the Newcomer period upon the Newcomer’s return.
   3.1. In the case that an applicant is absent for more than 3 months, the Entry Board together with the Mentors may decide to either cancel his / her Newcomer process or choose to further extend it.
4. After a discussion with the applicant, the Entry Board, together with the Mentors, may decide that the applicant is better suited for another category / status to join Auroville and will recommend the same to the applicant. The Entry Secretariat will then guide the applicant through the relevant administrative process,
5. One member of the Entry Secretariat shall attend the Entry Board meetings, but shall not participate in its decisions,

2. **The Entry Secretariat**

The Entry Secretariat is the administrative body that performs the daily operations and is accountable to the Entry Board.

**Joining and leaving the Entry Secretariat**

The Auroville Council together with the Working Committee will approve appointments/re-appointments/replacements or removal of members of the Entry Secretariat, after consulting with the Entry Board. Members of the Entry Secretariat are required to have good communication and computer skills and to be open to participate in relevant trainings.

**Responsibilities and tasks of the Entry Secretariat**

The Entry Secretariat shall:

1. Welcome applicants, provide relevant information, register applicants for Welcome Talks, information programmes and
2. Verify that applicants have attended these programmes
3. Welcome and register all applicants for each of the categories or statuses mentioned in this Entry Policy and assist Newcomers, Returning Aurovilians, Students, Spouses / Partners, Friends, Children of and Associates of Auroville with their admission into Auroville,
4. Make application forms available in hard copies and through the Entry Service website,
5. Maintain and update a list of Mentors in the Mentor Pool
6. Verify that Mentors have undergone the Mentor Trainings,
7. Function on a full-time basis,
8. Publish regular updates in Auroville’s weekly bulletin, “News and Notes”, and on Auronet;
9. Maintain proper files, data, statistics and notes of interviews and meetings,
10. Ensure that one of its members attend the Entry Board meetings to maintain the flow of information, to take notes and to minute its meetings,
11. Ensure the timely submission to the Auroville Council of reports made by the Entry Board together with the Mentor Pool on the functioning and suggested improvements of this Entry Policy. The reports will be on a quarterly basis in the first year, and on an annual basis in subsequent years,
12. Assure confidentiality of all information handled by the Entry Secretariat.
3. The Mentor Pool

The Mentor Pool is a group of committed and informed Residents of Auroville (already registered in the Register of Residents) with a minimum three (3) years Auroville experience and aged 21 or above, who wish to assist the entry process.

The Mentor Pool is an integral part of the Entry Service (along with the Entry Secretariat and the Entry Board). Mentors will be responsible for supporting applicants and Newcomers by helping them integrate into the life of the community. The Mentors will be the bridge between Newcomers and the Entry Secretariat, the Entry Board.

Joining and leaving the Mentor Pool

1. A Mentor is an Aurovilian who is preferably registered in the Register of Residents for 3 years or more and resides in Auroville. Exceptions can be made by the Entry Board.
2. To join/rejoin the Mentor Pool, the resident may register with the Entry Secretariat in person, via an online form, or by email.
3. Alternatively, a Mentor can be chosen by an applicant from the community at large, who agrees to participate in Mentor trainings.
4. A Mentor is free to leave the pool at any time, unless he/she is mentoring a Newcomer. However, the former Mentor is welcome to re-join the Mentor Pool at any time.
5. If a Mentor is inactive for more than three (3) months and/or absent for six (6) months, he/she may be removed from the Mentor Pool by the Entry Secretariat after approval of the Entry Board.
6. The Entry Board may remove any Mentor, at any time, from the Mentor Pool if the Mentor behaves in contradiction to the ideals of Auroville.
7. No more than five (5) applicants, at any given moment, can be mentored by one Mentor.

Commitment of each Mentor of the Mentor Pool

1. A Mentor agrees to go through a mentor training, for which the Entry Secretariat will provide information and verify that the training has been attended.
2. A Mentor agrees to support the Newcomer during the entire Newcomer period and agrees to support and to report to the Entry Secretariat periodically and as requested by the Entry Board.
3. How much time a Mentor commits to the Newcomer is entirely up to the Mentor and the Newcomer. However, if a Mentor feels he is offering too little time, or if the Newcomer feels he needs more guidance, the Entry Secretariat may assign a new Mentor to the Newcomer as a replacement.
4. No Mentor shall be a relative or employer of the applicant.
Responsibilities and tasks of a Mentor

1. To assist a Newcomer through the Newcomer period, offering guidance, support, and to be a solid link to the community,
2. To discuss feedback with the Newcomer and to assist the Newcomer in resolving difficulties, if necessary, in consultation with the Entry Board,
3. To offer as much assistance as possible to the Newcomer in helping to find answers to the Newcomer's questions,
4. To communicate about the Newcomer as often as needed with the Entry Board and the Entry Secretariat and with the other assigned Mentors, and to provide the information needed for the administrative process,
5. To be a part of the decision-making process, together with the Entry Board as outlined in this Entry Policy for the approval of the Newcomer and Aurovillian status.

Decision-making

1. A decision should be arrived at within the stipulated time as outlined in this policy,
2. At any time during the Newcomer period, if both Mentors, together with the applicant, believe that the applicant is not ready for Auroville, they will inform the Entry Board, and together with the Entry Board, may extend or cancel the Newcomer process. The applicant will be informed in writing as well as in person, with the reasons explained,
3. In the case that an applicant or Newcomer needs to leave Auroville (from 1 to 3 months at a time) for personal reasons, the Entry Board together with the Mentors will put the Newcomer process on hold. The duration of time that the Newcomer has been out will then be added to the Newcomer period upon the Newcomer's return.
   3.1. In the case that an applicant is absent for more than 3 months, the Entry Board together with the Mentors may decide to either cancel his / her Newcomer process or choose to further extend it.
4. Alternatively, the Mentors, together with the Entry Board, may decide that the applicant is better suited for another category to join Auroville and will recommend the same to the applicant. The Entry Secretariat will then guide the applicant through the relevant administrative process,
5. The Mentors of the applicant will be involved in the decision-making with the Entry Board.

Guideline for Implementing the Entry Policy

In implementing this Policy, the Entry Service (the Entry Board, the Entry Secretariat and the Mentor Pool) agrees to embody the above mentioned “Criteria applicable to all Applicants” and will do its best to ensure that all decisions are made with sincerity, all information gathered is factual, all help provided to applicants is done in a welcoming spirit,
and that the Auroville community is well informed and included, as described in the Participatory Working Groups (PWG) guidelines.
Appendix 5: Maps of Auroville and Surrounds

This map is produced by Auroville and appears in a short introductory book about the community aimed at visitors and guests. It shows most of Auroville’s communities, the Visitors’ Centre and Matrimandir, as well as townships bordering or overlapping Auroville. These include Kottakarai in the north-west, Edayanchavadi in the south-west, and Kuilapalayam in the south-east.

Other significant villages not marked on this map (but on satellite maps on the following pages) include Periyamudaliyarchavadi located east of Kuilapalayam on the East Coast Road (ECR); Irumbai to the west of the Auroville Visitors’ Centre and Sanjeevani Nagar to the north west of Auroville.

This map also shows the ‘Green Belt’ and ‘City Area.’

At the time I lived in Auroville, the main roads marked in bold from the East Coast Road, through Kuillapalayam, Edayanchavadi and Kottakarai, as well as the road from Certitude Corner to the Visitors’ Centre, were the only paved roads.

This is the map I used to find my way around the community while I lived in Auroville.

Source: (Auroville, 2007, pp. 20-21)
This satellite image, from Google Maps (GoogleMaps, 2018a), shows the building and forest density of Auroville in contrast with the bordering farming district and more sparse forest outside of Auroville.
This satellite image, from Google Maps (GoogleMaps, 2018b), shows the location of Auroville (the red pin) in relation to the south of India, with Pondicherry (Puducherry) just ten kilometres to the south and Chennai (formerly Madras), the capital of Tamil Nadu, to the north.
Appendix 6: Population

6.1 Census Data 2018

Auroville publishes census data on the website several times per year. The following graphs depicting population by nationality (or, passport country), gender, age, and year of arrival are at September 2018 (Auroville, 2018b).
Appendix 6: Population

Auroville Residents Service
Breakdown by nationality
Sep 3, 2018 9:28 AM

This report includes: Aurovilians, Newcomers, To be Newcomer, and their children.

Summary:

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### Appendix 6: Population

#### Auroville Residents

**Birth's Year Breakdown**

- **Average Resident's Age:** 39.7
- **Average Adult's Age:** 47.7
- **Average Youth's Age:** 9.7

![Age Distribution Chart]

- **Year:** 2018 - 2020
- **Age Distribution:**
  - 0-5: 14, 24, 30, 24, 18, 11, 4
  - 6-10: 13, 23, 24, 28, 25, 16, 5
  - 11-15: 12, 22, 25, 22, 12, 4
  - 16-20: 11, 21, 25, 21, 11, 3
  - 21-25: 10, 20, 24, 20, 10, 2
  - 26-30: 9, 19, 23, 19, 9, 1
  - 31-35: 8, 18, 18, 18, 8, 1
  - 36-40: 7, 17, 17, 17, 7, 1
  - 41-45: 6, 16, 16, 16, 6, 1
  - 46-50: 5, 15, 15, 15, 5, 1
  - 51-55: 4, 14, 14, 14, 4, 1
  - 56-60: 3, 13, 13, 13, 3, 1
  - 61-65: 2, 12, 12, 12, 2, 1
  - 66-70: 1, 11, 11, 11, 1, 1
  - 71-75: 1, 10, 10, 10, 1, 1
  - 76-80: 1, 9, 9, 9, 1, 1
  - 81-85: 1, 8, 8, 8, 1, 1

This chart shows the age distribution of Auroville Residents from 2018 to 2020.
6.2 Population Growth

This final graph depicting population growth in Auroville since 1968 shows escalation in the number of people making their home in Auroville since the 1990s (Auroville, 2018b).
References


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