Auroville, the city of Nature's Yoga: material, spiritual and sustainable architecture and urbanism

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to reflect on ongoing research that investigates cosmopolitical and spiritual practices in Auroville, an urban experience in southern India that emerged from the teachings of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), creator of Integral Yoga, philosopher, yogi, poet and icon of the nationalist struggle. This city adopts sustainable urban planning and architecture techniques that seek to be an example for the creation of a new human being integrated into the cosmos, living a collective life centered on the Yoga of Nature. Auroville aims to be "the city the world needs" and to inspire other cities towards sustainable practices, enabling a transformation in the world. The city center is a temple dedicated to concentration and meditation, but not linked to any religion. Ecological and spiritual practices act as guidelines for a more balanced and natural collective life, enabling an integration of material-spiritual architecture and urbanism with nature. The methodology used included in-depth interviews and participant observation during the field visit. The one-month experience in Auroville showed that, despite its many positive aspects, the contradictions inherent in such an experience are inevitable. The concentration of national and international resources, the recovery of the soil and forest, the solutions to guarantee drinking water supplies, roads, paths and infrastructure in general have changed the entire region. Spiritual tourism and commercial migration have contributed to a process of micro-regional real estate speculation. An internal conflict over the direction of the city and its surroundings, over the very integration of city-nature, is worrying Aurovillians today.

KEYWORDS: Auroville. Yoga. Nature

1 INTRODUCTION

In the Indian territory, where since the beginning its society has sought self-knowledge and awakening of consciousness through the creation, improvement and experience of techniques related to these principles, arises Auroville, the city of dawn, as it is also known. According to its official portal, it is the first and only internationally certified settlement for the integration of beings, expansion of the level of consciousness and directions for sustainability (BRITTO, 2018).

What does this new integration of beings mean? What will the transition be like? And how does Auroville participate in this process of transformation of beings and their levels of consciousness? Fassbender (2011, p. 11) adds that: "Auroville aims at becoming a model of the 'city of the future', or 'the city the Earth needs'." A city that seeks to integrate with its surroundings, recover the soil and enhance cosmopolitical relations[1] in order to inspire other cities and other beings to achieve other ways of living and occupying the territory. That is why it aims to be the city of the future so that the process of destruction can be mitigated and transformed into regeneration, materializing the sustainability that the Earth needs.

Located near the Indian coastline on the Gulf of Bengal, it lies almost entirely in a circular area 5 km in diameter, in the outskirts of the city of Pondicherry in southeast India. It is a blend of experiences that revolve around the teachings of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), philosopher, yogi, guru, poet and one of the icons of the nationalist struggle, who in 1926 founded his Ashram, school of Integral Yoga, a philosophical matrix that generated the principles and the very conception of Auroville.

The Integral Yoga school later gave birth to Auroville, and these principles are experienced as

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[1] "Cosmos in cosmopolitics resists the tendency to understand politics as a 'give and take' in an exclusively human club. The presence of politics in cosmopolitics resists the tendency to understand the cosmos as a finite list of entities to be taken into account" (LATOUR, 2004, p. 454).

one of the spiritual dimensions in this city with the search for the divine in matter. Through this practical philosophy, the teachings of Sri Aurobindo have been perpetuated in the daily life of Auroville from its inauguration until the present day. Spiritual principles underpin ecological practices and integration with all beings and natural elements, experiencing the complementarity between the environment and beings.

Founded in 1968, "through a ritual in which representatives of various localities (124 Countries and all Indian States) were present and deposited some land (from their regions)" (SILVA, 2018, p. 117)[2]. It thus demonstrates, since its foundation, the importance that the union and integration between peoples have in this community, also as a centrality, due to the fact that these lands are deposited "in an urn currently seen in the amphitheater which is part of the central gardens". (IDEM). At the center of the Peace Area is the Matrimandir, the famous golden spheric building located near the amphitheater: "A temple dedicated to the Mother (a much more universal concept of Mother Earth, not Mirra Alfassa[3]) and an amphitheater in lush green environments to be used for community meditation sessions. It was not a religious place, there were to be no rules or rituals associated with it." (BHATIA, 2014, p. 02).

2 AUROVILLE

"Auroville is a model community – a place-based facilitation of ecological, social and personal transformation. The idea is to demonstrate a "lived alternative" that can be both experienced and observed. (PANDYA, 2018, p. 02)". Through this demonstration of another reality under construction, it inspires other communities to be created and enhances existing ones, a concrete and experimental utopia[4]. "Auroville was established with the aim to found an ideal society dedicated to human unity". (PANDYA, 2018, p. 04). What would human unity be? How would it be possible to unify human beings? And if we think not only of human beings, what would integration with all natural beings and elements be like?

Human unity, in the case of Auroville, is based on the principles that guide its formation and maintenance as a utopian city. "Auroville adheres to the larger universal ideal of utopia – non ownership of land, abolition of the power of money, centralized dining hall, rotational community work to avoid boredom, unending education etc". (BHATIA, 2014, p. 01). And according to the author some of these specificities are unique to Auroville.

The intention of Auroville, as an urban experimentation, is based on the goal of transforming consciousness to attain a socio-spatial configuration that would concretely generate other economic, sociological, environmental and cultural relations with the aim of experiencing life as a spiritual practice. (FASSBENDER, 2011).

Inspired by a vision of Mirra Alfassa (The Mother, as she is known in Auroville) and founded after the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, the Universal City – Auroville – joined the Ecovillage Movement in 1990.

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[2] All citations from Brazilian authors were translated from Portuguese by the article translator.

[3] Mirra Alfassa was Sri Aurobindo's spiritual companion who managed his ashram and, after his death, conceived and promoted the creation of Auroville.

[4] Ernst Bloch (2006), Arno Münster (1993) and Michael Löwy (2016) discuss the idea of 'concrete utopia', while Henri Lefebvre (1999, 2006) proposes thinking about 'experimental utopias'; Monte-Mór (2018) combined the two concepts.

With a focus on spirituality and ecology, it was designed for 50,000 inhabitants, within 20 km², by Roger Anger, a French architect and urban planner. "The proposal of a circular form with lines of force from the center to the edges". (SILVA, 2018, p. 112 and 113). In this way, Auroville is inspired by the cosmos, with the galaxy-shaped project, composed of forests, gardens and buildings, based on the principles of sacred geometry, and thus seeks to sacralize the living space and inspire residents and visitors to a transformation in their lives, seeking the best versions of themselves, through the techniques of concentration, contemplation and harmony with themselves and with nature.

This idea of universality is also associated with the cosmopolitical notion of integration among all beings, with a spiritual and environmental perspective. Silva (2018, p. 116) adds that: "The hypothesis with which we work here is that the field of experimentation represented by Auroville is only an effective possibility of transformation because it is anchored in intuition regarding a spiritual dimension". This spiritual dimension guides the principles, the practices, the experiences. By being aware of the spirituality materialized in the living space, the being has the possibility to see more than his eyes can see, having a critical view of himself, of life, of the world, and thus seeking integration with nature through sustainable urban and architectural practices.

3 MATRIMANDIR: THE SOUL OF AUROVILLE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

In the central area, called Peace Area, is located the Matrimandir, the golden spherical building that seems to be inspired by the sun "with a reinforced concrete structure and golden metal plate closures, the result of the instigating lapidary geometry." (SILVA, 2018, p. 121). A form of reverence to the sun, as a center, as in our solar system. Like Yoga, which has a practice of asanas, unblocking and self-perception positions, the greeting to the sun which is called Surya Namaskar reveres the king-star, the cosmic elements and nature as a semiotic of the enlightenment of consciousness – Samadhi – the main search through the practice of Yoga.

Since the central area is the space for concentration and meditation, the territoriality of Auroville is structured from this spiritual practice, having this inner and outer look as centrality in the experiences of the place. Mandir means temple and Matri is related to the matriarchal idea, temple of Mother Earth, and is considered the soul or spirit of Auroville. In this way, a city that has a soul can be considered a living organism, just like Gaia, the Mother Earth, also a living organism. An interaction between living organisms that communicate, relate and exchange on many levels.

Inspired by nature, the petals[5] around the Matrimandir function as concentration rooms and refer to the spiritual architecture of nature, seeming to sprout from the ground like a lotus flower. The Matrimandir is situated next to the Banyan Tree, the fig tree of India, chosen as the center of Auroville, being a temple of nature, and combines sacred geometry with the process of transformation, expansion and cosmic harmony as a manifested spirituality and connection with nature. The Peace Area, the central

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[5] Inside the petals, there are twelve meditation rooms, each named after an attribute of the Divine Mother and painted in the corresponding color. Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Kindness, Generosity, Equality, Peace.

region of Auroville, brings together the Matrimandir, the petals, the amphitheater, the gardens[6], as well as the surrounding lake.
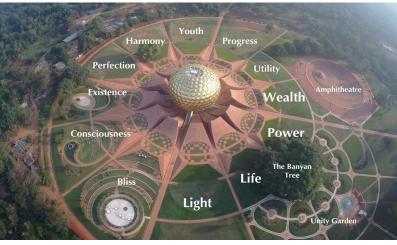
Photo 1 - 12 Gardens around the Matrimandir:

Source: https://matrimandir.org/gardens

Auroville was initially proposed according to mono-functional zones, in accordance with the urban planning canons of the time[7]. "Four 'zones' of the city area emerge from this center [the Peace Area]: the residential zone, the industrial zone, the cultural and educational zone and the international zone. Around the areas lies a green belt that is an environmental research and resource area". (PANDYA, 2018, p. 04 and 05). Regarding the zones of the initial project, Silva (2018, p. 113) states that:

> In Auroville, right from the start, this perspective of mono-functional zones and even more of the construction of large structures has already been relaxed, replacing them with a more diffuse occupation and relatively small buildings (except for some institutional buildings and buildings of up to four floors made in recent years) and maintaining, in general, strips only predominantly related to certain functions - thus, there is the International Zone, with institutional buildings, but with some services and commerce (in the Visitor Center), and those originally understood as work and residential zones have diversified their functions and are currently perceived as a compound of housing and uses associated with both production and institutions aimed at education and healing, as well as services and some commerce.

Each Zone in Auroville serves as an example of the practical philosophy being experienced. The industrial zone seeks alternative sustainable technologies; the residential zone is not just a place to live, but a place to integrate with nature and all beings; the international zone, with its pavilions from various countries, demonstrates different ways of life around the world; and the cultural zone is treated as a permanent educational process with the aim of empowering residents and visitors in the search for human

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[6] Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Light, Life, Power, Wealth, Utility, Progress, Youth, Harmony, Perfection. They seem to represent what She called "the twelve powers of the Mother manifested for Her work"; and Sri Aurobindo wrote that these "12 powers are the vibrations necessary for complete manifestation".

[7] According to Silva (2018), the architect Roger Anger was inspired by Le Corbusier, a famous Swiss architect and urban planner.

and cosmopolitical unity, with the experimental intention of achieving the ideal of Auroville, the whole life being Integral Yoga as proposed by Sri Aurobindo.

4 MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY AND NATURE

What are the possible integrations between the forest and the city? This is the main question that is plaguing Auroville and became clear during the field visit that was carried out between July and August 2022. There is a perspective that aims to accelerate growth to increase the number of Aurovillians, according to the original design of the city, and another that aims at the holistic and gradual growth of the city favoring the intense reforestation that has been implemented not only in the green belt but in the inner area of the city. These two points of view have generated an internal division in the city that seeks unity in diversity.

Auroville grows surrounded by villages (just like the Indian context where most of the population lives in villages) that interact with the city through their inhabitants, practices and daily relationships. From the interviews, the last information states that Auroville has 3700 Aurovillians, but the relationships with the surroundings, volunteers, students involve almost 30, 40 thousand people.

> Through its Master Plan, Auroville wants to break new ground in settlement planning in such a way as to help other cities, both in India and abroad, which are experiencing high urbanization trends. Auroville also hopes to demonstrate how 'urban' and 'rural' areas can complementarily develop in an integral and holistic way for their mutual benefit and well-being. We talk about an 'integrated' masterplan, implying here that both city and environment are integrally planned for, since Auroville has come to care for its 'hinterland'. (Auroville.org)[8]

The process that has been taking place for some time in most territories of the world is the transition of people from rural areas to cities, which in some cases results in the estrangement of nature, of the natural environment. How is it possible to make cities and nature, forests, integrated by natural elements, by their characteristics and sustainable practices? Thus, resulting in a forest-city or a city-forest, in which a balance occurs as well as spirit and matter, reason and emotion, feminine and masculine polarities.

> Beyond the Master Plan, the infrastructure, the urban systems and networks and principles in this case that combine to form the urban fabric of any city, lies a very strong underlying force of the people that reside there, their interactions, engagement with and reactions to the city fabric primarily shape what the city becomes. It is this very layer that prevents Auroville from becoming the ideal utopia it set out to become. (BHATIA, 2014, p. 08).

Can Aurovillians, visitors, villagers, in their multiple relationships be considered what prevents Auroville from becoming the ideal utopia it has set out to be? Or is the perspective of an experiment, a process that is ongoing and moving one day at a time towards its goal? The process of building a new human society in integration with itself, with nature and with the universe seems to be more important

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[8] Website: https://auroville.org/page/planning-the-city - Accessed on 28/02/2023.

than the result itself, as it may inspire other realities around the world.

The Auroville Master Plan aims for a larger land occupation than is experienced today in Auroville, with most of the land still being forest (a decades-long land reclamation process). How to achieve a middle ground between the project and the forest, so that it serves as an inspiration for the whole world? How can these internal Auroville issues be resolved?

> "Auroville Bio-region Development Activities - Auroville Strives to Bring Change: For 50 years Auroville and the villages in the bioregion have grown and developed together. Auroville started on a severely degraded land in what was called a "most backward area in need of development" by the Tamil Nadu Government. What we call "outreach work" in Auroville is actually an organic sprouting of autonomous projects that have been initiated by inspired individuals who have seen a need and acted on it. Some of these projects concentrate on a specific activity e.g. dental health, while others attempt to work out models for what we refer to as integral rural development. Some concentrate their efforts within the township boundaries of Auroville, while others are pioneering models for living in rural India and the world. It is our aspiration that co-creating and learning from within and without in the spirit of experimentation will result in the emergence of an equitable and sustainable earth where justice and compassion prevail. There are 13 villages in the immediate area of Auroville, comprising about 40,000 people, and bio-regional area. altogether approximately 40 villages in the larger". (Plate in Auroville, during field work).

The aim of the city of Auroville is to reach 50,000 inhabitants, but it is worth noting that there is a population that is already nearby, in and around its territory, but that is not considered Aurovillean. However, with these practices and experiments in and around Auroville, could these populations be incorporated into the city? Would Auroville overflow its boundaries to incorporate these populations into its integrated life?

> Until recently, urban growth was considered undesirable, and all policies emphasised how migration from rural areas could be checked. However, these policies have not succeeded, with the result that urban areas are becoming more and more degraded. Presently, both national and international opinion is in favour of urbanisation, as they have become engines of development, and emphasise policies that promote it. Taken too far, these policies may also become untenable, because of the heavy toll urban areas impose on limited natural resources. They may also disrupt the food security of the entire nation. This is why planners today are talking of establishing rural-urban linkages. (Auroville.org).

It is not only a question of rural-urban integration, but also of a sense of belonging to the Aurovillian community, of adopting the principles that imply rights and duties proper to community life. There are thus limits and potentialities that are not yet very clear, but which can be transformed along the process. In fact, Auroville's concern with its surroundings, which has been happening intensively and gradually, has already appeared since its creation and is still maintained.

> Over 6,000 of Auroville's neighbors commute to Auroville daily for education and employment, with over 700 who have joined this international township as residents. In the early days of Auroville, the pioneering community depended heavily on the wisdom and site-specific knowledge of the local communities. It was with their help that the indigenous forest and rainwater harvesting

in communal tanks were revived. The Mother, founder of Auroville, was particularly attentive to local people as she stressed that the relationship between Auroville and the surrounding communities should be one of fraternity. It has been in this spirit, that as Auroville grew, so did the number of projects and services shared between Auroville and its neighbors. The unfolding of this region's intricate social fabric has been one of collaboration and co-development. Today, there are over 50 bio-regional community development initiatives, some of which are exhibited here. These initiatives are spread in the fields of environment, education, health, social enterprise, financial inclusion, infrastructure, capacity building, leadership and cultural preservation. The aim of this exhibition is to make this invisible work visible. [...] The Auroville experiment has been accepted and embraced by our neighbors and India at large. At the occasion of Auroville's 50th anniversary, we renew our impetus for this work to intensify, this dream to spread in India and the World. (Plate in Auroville).

The perspective of rural-urban integration is in line with the concept of urban-natural[9] in Monte-Mór (2018), which provides for an extensive naturalization, extending nature to the living space, to the daily life and actions and practices of all inhabitants of the territory. However, this nature transformed into living space will only be effective when a process of extensive ecological spiritualization occurs, understanding this spiritualization as the integration between matter and spirit in balance. Nature will regain its place or at least integrate into the city when it is possible to understand that for a balance to exist all beings must experience constant integration. The processes of inequality are not restricted to the human sphere, cosmopolitical inequalities are also developed while non-human beings and elements are being exploited, subjugated so that they can give way to city comfort that in many cases is associated with, for example, soil sealing, estrangement from nature, among other practices.

The recovery of nature in the territory has been one of the most beneficial aspects of Auroville to date, however the (re)creation of the forest has also brought negative aspects to the city and the surrounding population. Bhatia (2014, p. 04) states that:

> The biggest success of this settlement has been its contribution to the ecology of the area - The conversion of inhospitable land with infertile soil, lack of ground water, uncultivated and salt water intrusions with only stretches of red desert in sight to a lush green forest with over a two million trees planted in three decades. Unfortunately, this has resulted in private developers, eager to benefit from Auroville's growth and attraction to international visitors, exploiting the non-Auroville owned adjoining lands and turning them into resorts and retirement homes. In the last ten years the real estate prices within the Auroville township have increased by almost 500%. This is largely due to Auroville's close proximity to Pondicherry, one of India's fastest growing cities but also Auroville's development from a small community to a larger township. Restaurants, guesthouses, massage centers and shops have mushroomed on Auroville's edge on essential pieces within the Green Belt which were reserved for environment conservation and water resource management.

It was a barren land, and nature could generate a process of real estate speculation, increasing land values, often driving out the villagers who lived there.

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[9] Monte-Mór, (2018) suggested that an urban-natural fabric should overlap with, and redefine, the currently dominant urban-industrial fabric.

> While much of the land is still to be acquired, Auroville presently manages over 80% of the total acreage within the town area. The situation in the Green Belt is less advanced, with a far smaller portion of the area currently belonging to Auroville. The present 'community' of Auroville consists of some 120 settlements of varying size, interspersed with and surrounded by lands owned by Auroville, by surrounding villages and by some temples. (Auroville.org)[10].

Auroville is a city that seeks to live without money, however these dualities appear in the territory and in everyday life; it is said that they have not yet reached this experimental stage, it is a goal. It is still necessary to buy land to complete its area referring to the city's master plan.

> As stated by Dr. Karan Singh in his message to the Auroville community, "…every month that is lost means that the price of the land is rising and the dangers of commercial interest intruding into Auroville steadily growing…In the final analysis, if do not get the land we will not be able to build the city." It is essential that Auroville purchases this land before further encroachment to join existing parcels of forest and organic community farms to fulfill its goal of self-sufficiency in food supplies and harmony in bioregion within the area. (BHATIA, 2014, p. 04).

The process of real estate speculation relates to these issues of land appropriation and use, focusing only on its exchange value and not taking into account the use value. The goal of Auroville is not a utilitarian perspective of the territory, but a perspective that values the natural elements and beings that live there, which can be considered a cosmopolitical and spiritual perspective understanding the importance of each being and each element for the balance and harmony in the relationships in that life space. This integration is also done with the surrounding villages. Bhatia (2014, p. 07) states that:

> The city also provides an alternative to migration to urban centers for the rural youth allowing them to stay in their villages yet reap the benefits of an urban lifestyle. Auroville has consciously taken initiatives to improve healthcare of the villagers, raise their standard of living through vocational training and self-employment, and providing education to rural children and provides employment to more than 5000 people. Auroville's popularity as a tourist and spiritual destination has also benefited the villages, as most rent out a portion of their homes to students and volunteers of Auroville or set up small retail shops and restaurants, thereby earning extra income. The style of housing in these villages often depicts the models of housing in Auroville.

What does spiritual tourism mean exactly? Could we say a tourism process that is based on spiritual practices and activities related to these practices? How to visit or experience spirituality? Spirituality for some philosophies is found on the spiritual plane, for others it is immersed in matter, but how would it be possible to visit this spirituality? The trend of spiritual tourism, as well as some contemporary practices, is based on ancient principles and philosophies, but in some cases, they may distort or superficialize this knowledge with a greater focus on profit and monetary issues. Thus, a critical sense is needed to analyze these practices, this relationship between tourism, spirituality and nature. The entire structure and programming of spiritual tourism in Auroville seeks to promote this integration, from the preparation for the visitation of the Matrimandir, as an immersion ritual in which it gradually deepens,

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[10] https://auroville.org/page/planning-and-architecture - Accessed: 28/02/2023

until the possible immersion within the Matrimandir and its petals, to the dispersion of the spaces built in the surrounding nature, partially revered as a territory also sacralized.

The most evident perspective is that spirituality is found in the built-up area of Auroville with the Matrimandir, its petals, the gardens, the waters, the amphitheater and the Indian fig tree itself integrating into the Peace Area. However, spirituality also permeates nature, seeing forests as sanctuaries, resulting in an attempt to sacralize the life space. These living spaces combine to articulate the integration of the material and spiritual architecture of city and nature.

5 ECOLOGICAL ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN PLANNING PRACTICES

"Auroville will be a place of material and spiritual research for a living embodiment of real human unity."
Auroville Charter (Auroville.org)

"Auroville wants to be a field of constant research into architectural expressions, manifesting a new spirit through new forms". Mirra Alfassa (1968). Auroville inspires other ways of experiencing architecture and urbanism to transform consciousness in order to promote other ways of living in the territory. One of the ways in which Auroville is thought of is from a Master Plan, drawn up in 2001 and having as horizon the year 2025. (AUROVILLE FOUNDATION, 2001). The Master Plan contains goals and perspectives to be achieved by 2025 aiming at the sustainable development of the municipality and its surroundings, including villages and contiguous spaces.

However, development is an issue to be problematized, even more so when associated with the idea of sustainability, where development tends to an idea of growth without limits and sustainability has an idea of harmony with nature, therefore being difficult ideas to be associated. The processes of awareness are inspired by the ways of life in Auroville, being associated with the differentiated processes in relation to architecture and urbanism that are experienced in the city. From these relationships Nunes (2020, p. 18) complements that:

> The meaning of life and ecological issues were the daily life of the Aurovillians from the earliest times. Little water, few natural resources, immense hardship and reverence for the sacred made them close to Mother Earth and inspired the community to create a simpler, more spiritualized way of life, which almost everyone adopted. In Auroville, research into alternatives to everything brought "green" technologies before the world talked about such things.

This way of life, in which life space is sacralized and architectural and urbanistic techniques are used in harmony with the natural elements, permeates the residents and life in Auroville. Bhatia, (2014, p. 04) states that: "The innovation of various ecofriendly techniques of construction, its research in organic farming, afforestation, its impact and the upliftment of the surrounding villages is commendable". The first practices in the territory were in search of recovering the soil and green areas, since the area had been degraded during years of inadequate management. The biome located there is called tropical evergreen forest with a dry climate (semi-arid), whose origin is in the plains of the state of Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka (SILVA, 2018).

> The Project is largely endorsed by UNESCO and the Government of India and receives special privileges like tax exemptions. Individuals working here engage in collective endeavors, working in small groups on various projects such as land reclamation and reforestation, women's rights, sustainable architecture and various commercial units. (BHATIA. 2014, p. 03).

A green belt was planned for land reclamation, reforestation, absorption of impacts, containment of city expansion in order to achieve the intended density without diminishing contact with nature in Auroville. (FASSBENDER, 2011). Other techniques used in the city are shown in Anu Majumdar's TEDxChennai:

> Overlapping zones for planned multiple use / Lines of force to balance density and prevent urban sprawl / Integrate 50% green space in the city area / Largely pedestrian, for non-polluting and non-motorized traffic / Aimed at alternative energies / Green Belt for food sufficiency and ecological balance / Necessarily beautiful and artistic / Not one more city, but a new unified life. (Source: Auroville: A Test Run for the Future[11]).

These practices carried out in Auroville enhance other ways to relate with other beings and natural elements, enabling more integrative ways of experiencing existence, having a cosmopolitical and spiritualist bias. Bhatia (2014) adds that another recognition made by UNESCO concerns its composition for the creation of educational devices to enhance a new relationship between East and West based on a process of integration between them.

Due to its pioneering techniques, philosophies and practices, Auroville has a global influence, as it provides the experience of a cosmopolitan city perspective, in the middle of India, not by the hegemony of globalized structures, but for its alternative cultural and technological sustainable approaches. Among them, experiences in buildings with ecological principles; solar energy supplies part of the city's energy demand; organic cultivation, afforestation and its impacts; water purification techniques using a vortex; recycling programs, among others that are aligned with the spiritual ecological dimension and the philosophical objectives of Auroville. (ROCHA, 2017; NUNES, 2020; PANDYA, 2018). Associated with these processes, the way of building in Auroville is encouraged by the recent proposal of an experimental construction site, in which the intention is the association between training and spiritual transformation, which can be noticed in the area called Sacred Groves. (SILVA, 2018).

One of the ways in which this spiritual transformation is enhanced in Auroville is: "A spirit of experimentation and a search for new ways of being in all aspects of life, both individual and collective, are part of Auroville's very "raison d'être" (FASSBENDER, 2011, p. 36). In this way, it is clear that the intention in Auroville is based on the transformation of beings and natural elements seeking a process of awakening consciousness, from the process of soil recovery to new constructions. The author adds that "[…] architecture in Auroville aims at promoting research, experimentation, creativity and harmony, as well as a functionally integrated development". (IDEM). This harmony includes constructive, urban, philosophical and practical aspects. Fassbender (2011, p. 36) concludes: "its goal is to be in harmony with

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[11] Accessed on 18/04/2022 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv875PK5V8w&t=706s&ab_channel=TEDxTalks

nature and to follow a sustainable model taking into account the prevalent climatic and sociological conditions of the region".

6 INTEGRAL YOGA OF SRI AUROBINDO, LIFE IN AUROVILLE AND THE YOGA OF NATURE

A possible ecological and spiritual revolution is mostly based on the rescuing of nature and spirituality, which are the same substance but manifest themselves as different aspects of reality. Spirituality is materialized by nature and nature manifests spirituality. The space and the way of life that are attuned to spirituality and nature tend to improve the flow of energies by balancing bodies, spaces and times. "But the normal action of Nature in us is an integral movement in which the full complexity of all our elements is affected by and affects all our environments. The whole of life is the Yoga of Nature" (SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST, 2004, p. 07).

Traditional Indian Yoga arose from the observation of nature, with breathing techniques, positions and rituals inspired by animals, plants and stars. The sages of ancient India, living in tune with nature, created these techniques as a way of integrating and revering the natural elements, passing them on from generation to generation through the transmission of teachings.

Nature experiences Yoga in its way of existing, and beings when integrating with nature experience their life as Yoga, attuned to the Yoga of Nature. The natural environment is not only the surroundings, it is all aspects of internal and external life. Nature, the living organism of planet Earth and the universe, through its cycles, phases, expansions and contractions breathe, just as each being and each natural element by its way of living experience their Yoga. Yoga and its infinite manifestations are expressions of life as a whole that are tuned and aligned through breaths, positions, and conscious actions of practical philosophy.

This spiritual awareness and Integral Yoga as a way of life aim to be the philosophical and practical bases for the transformation of beings and everyday life in Auroville. Aurovillians, by deciding to walk together with other beings in search of a transformation and a life in integration with themselves, with nature and the universe, embrace a spiritualized ecology based on practical action, in which the body and spirit are seen as reciprocal dimensions and with the same weight and value.

These exchanges and learnings experienced in everyday life, through the integration between different cultures and ways of life, make it possible to know the world and oneself in different ways, having the possibility to transform the reality around them and also the internal processes in search of an integral life. Yoga means union, and in this integral union, the being has the opportunity to awaken self-knowledge and awareness in various ways in everyday life.

A further investigation is the way in which, space-temporally, these utopian goals and specifically utopian divine goals, in the case of Auroville, are perceived. "The utopian quest is to achieve divinity, or more specifically to create circumstances whereby the divine ideal life descends within the premises of the intentional community first and then spreads outside." (PANDYA, 2018, p. 02). With this intention of expanding the knowledges and ecological spirituality experienced in Auroville, as if Auroville were the center of a new world, the construction of a new being, the integral being, is sought. "For the residents, also recognized distinctively as Aurovillians, this is an identity-defining reality, performed through daily life

at Auroville" (IDEM). Auroville, therefore, expresses one of the contemporary utopian concrete experimentations that seek other ways of life, of relationship with nature, with spirituality and integration with the universe.

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