Auroville and Cosmopolitan Spirituality

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Abstract

On 28 February, I968, Auroville, the 'City of Dawn', was formally established under The Mother's guidance, while Aurobindo Ghosh's philosophy and writings provided the ideological framework for its genesis. Auroville was envisioned as a "universal town", a "new society", an "experimental township", a "laboratory for the conscious evolution of a city", and "a city of the future on ancient land". Two years later, in 1970, The Mother wrote a set of general guidelines titled "To Be a True Aurovillian". It is an interesting document because it sheds light on how Auroville was discursively imagined, created and brought to life. Drawing on recent research, this paper will attempt to locate Auroville within the modern transnational discourse of Indian spirituality. It will be interesting to see how the categories of the 'spiritual', the 'religious' and the 'secular' were negotiated, especially when they intersected with nationalism. In the process, this paper will also try to unravel how traditional religious concepts of Vedanta came to coexist with modern and secular formulations like Aurobindo's 'supermind' and 'integral yoga', giving rise to the psycho-spiritual revolution of the "Westernized East".

Keywords: Auroville, Aurobindo Ghosh, The Mother, Cosmopolitan Spirituality, Indian spirituality

1. Introduction

When historians of modern India speak of Aurobindo, there is a kind of starkness which characterizes his early and later years. At a young age, he left India to study in London. On his return, he was employed by the Maharaja of Baroda for 13 years and pursued revolutionary action against the British on the side. The Partition of Bengal was a pivotal moment, pulling him into the National Movement as an 'Extremist' leader. It was only in his later years (1910) that he retired from politics and went to Pondicherry to focus entirely on spiritual work. In the next 40 years, he evolved his own formula of spiritual practice called 'Integral Yoga' and beliefs that stemmed from mystical revelations.

Aurobindo's philosophical work *'The Life Divine'* is a rich and detailed exposition of his spiritual ideas and beliefs. He uses the metaphysical-spiritual terminology of the Indian tradition to talk of the Supreme Being, the *Brahman*, as the ultimate ground of the universe. But as he goes further, he breaks with Shankara's life-negating philosophy of *mayavada* and asserts that "individual salvation can have no real sense if existence in the cosmos is itself an illusion" (Aurobindo, 1942, p. 43). Aurobindo assigns importance to the individual as the driver of his own "supreme good". One of his most important philosophical contributions is that of the 'supermind'. Aurobindo describes it as the intermediary vastness between *sacchidananda* and the divided consciousness of Mind. The former is represented by the phrase "truth, consciousness, bliss" and constitutes the indivisible consciousness that sees no distinctions. *Sacchidananda* (a Vedic concept) is not an innovation of Aurobindo, but the supermind is.

Any assessment of Aurobindo's metaphysical and ontological beliefs must also take reference from the intellectual influence exerted by the developing body of nationalist thought in India at the time. It is interesting to note that he advocates the transformation of the lower consciousness (of the divided Mind) in the light of the higher that is gradually attained in order to reach the Ultimate Reality (*brahman*). It is reminiscent of the Indian intellectual milieu at the turn of the 20th century when the Extremist leadership (Aurobindo being one of the leaders) arrived on the scene and asserted their faith in the masses to achieve 'swaraj' for the country. Their faith in collective action and initiative was in sharp contrast to the "mendicant politics" of the moderates which believed in mild Constitutional agitation and supporting the colonial state in its endeavours. Similarly, Aurobindo's idea of the instrumentality of evil for the evolution of divine life can be seen as a derivative of the opposition created between the colonial British apparatus and the Indian people, causing the latter to develop modern ideas, self-confidence and political agency.

The Life Divine first appeared serially in the monthly review *Arya* between August 1914 and January 1919. It can be assumed that Aurobindo's philosophical ideas were still at a nascent stage of development then. After he died, in the 1960s, Auroville, the 'City of Dawn', was established under the guidance of The Mother, Aurobindo's closest disciple and companion. It was envisioned as a "universal town", a "new society", an "experimental township", a "laboratory for the conscious evolution of a city", and "a city of the future on ancient land". Aurobindo's philosophy and writings provided the ideological framework for its genesis.

Through this paper, an attempt will be made to study a document, titled "To Be a True Aurovillian" in the light of Aurobindo's own ruminations as well as the transnational discourses of modern spirituality. The latter have gained wide social currency in the post-Osho world and involve significant concept processing in order to reach wider audiences. The Auroville document was written by the Mother in 1970, 2 years after Auroville was established and can provide a glimpse into how Auroville was discursively imagined. In the process, several uneasy negotiations among the categories of the spiritual, the religious and the secular come to light.

2. Aurobindo & Modern Discourse of Indian Spirituality

Indian theorists tend to reinforce the cross-currents and fluidity among the Western categories of secular, religious and spiritual when they discuss India's mystical traditions. Many modern spiritual *gurus* claim that theistic religion is not strictly separated from individualized spirituality. Instead, as Ravi Shankar (2020, p. 35) has emphasized, "religion is the skin of the banana and spirituality is the fleshy inner fruit". For them, the rise of spirituality does not signal the erosion of religious faith but implies the deep, personal rooting and internalization of a religiously defined spiritual values and ethical system (Gooptu, 2016).

Some theorists like Vijendra Singh (2019) have argued that, for important national figures like Vivekananda, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan, the domain of the secular often became the domain of realizing the spiritual. For instance, Dr. Radhakrishnan insisted on spiritualizing politics in the light of religion to remedy many modern problems, such as religious bigotry and chauvinistic nationalism (Minor, 1981). According to Singh, Indian spirituality defies the contours of the Western conception of modern secularity, hinging on the differentiation of social and political domains from religion. He relies on Charles Taylor (2007) to make his argument, who

associates secularization with the transformation of the modern social imaginary in the West. It involves the rise of 'exclusive humanism' as a self-sufficient human goal, without reference to transcendental ideas of fullness that characterize the Judeo-Christian tradition, like serving God. A second crucial change involves the dominance of 'imminent frame', where natural order and its laws are understood in their own terms, without any reference to transcendental reality or metaphysics.

In the context of Aurobindo, it is important to highlight his aversion to not only mass movements but also to his teachings taking the form of an organized religion. "Integral Yoga" was one of his most definitive ideological contributions that emphasized spiritual evolution unto perfection through psychological tools and powers of the mind, not asanas. He was concerned with inner reflection, divine work and self-perfection. For Western theorists, Aurobindo is foundational to the New Age in India, or the "Westernized East". But in what terms can Aurobindo's philosophy be understood?

Many Western theorists locate variant discourses of Indian spirituality within the framework of contemporary forms of Hindu nationalism. Travis Webster (2016) takes the example of Aurobindo's integral approach to illustrate this. Based on their understanding of the Upanishads, Advaita Vedanta and Shankara's doctrine of *maya*, Indologists held the view that for the Hindus, all creation is an illusion and that Hinduism is world-negating. Instead of drawing on Shankara's understanding of *maya* to counter the Orientalist view, Aurobindo attempted to portray the world in terms of spiritual evolution and thereby suggested that Indian spirituality does not deny the reality of the world but is rather world-affirming. He talked of spiritual intuition in the form of a "supermind" as the creative power in the universe that manifests itself gradually as individuals open themselves up to altered states of consciousness and expand their intuitive capacity. In Aurobindo's formulation, the endpoint of this process is the 'divinization of humanity', which he sees as the "spiritual destiny of humankind".

According to Webster (2016), the translation of indigenous concepts into "spiritual nationalism" involves a significant transformation of Indian traditions. This means that as new discursive traditions are constructed within the rubric of 'Neo-Hinduism', traditional categories of Vedanta are decontextualized. One instance of this is the myriad ways in which Aurobindo "oversimplifies" Shankara and his doctrine of *maya* (Fort, 1990). A second instance concerns the discrepancy in traditional and modern conceptions of "divinization of humanity". According to Eck (1990), the traditional conception is derived from the Vedic axiom (mahāvākya) "you are

that" (tat tvam asi), which functions as a verbal means of knowledge, transmitted in teaching lineages (guru-śiṣya-paramparā) of the Advaita sampradāya. But for Vivekananda and Aurobindo, self-realization inevitably requires some transcendental intuition or superconsciousness.

Some other Western theorists have tried to investigate why modern Hindu religious movements have a tendency to wrestle with the category of the "Hindu" in their rhetoric and practices. Instead of aligning themselves with Hindu religiosity, which is seen as anti-modern, backwards, orthodox, ritualistic, and hierarchical, most modern gurus employ a "universalistic rhetoric" usually derived from Advaita Vedanta and hallmark Vedic maxims. These universalistic philosophies are couched in the language of spirituality but dissociated from the greater context of Hinduism in order to resonate with diverse and disparate audiences (Huffer, 2011). For instance, the head of the Hindu American Foundation famously remarked on the commonplace marketing of Hinduism as spirituality when he said, "our issue is that yoga has thrived, but Hinduism has lost control of the brand" (Vitello, 2010). In the context of Aurobindo and Vivekananda, using universalist rhetoric and neo-Vedantic concepts may have been a nationalist strategy to popularize Hinduism and Indian culture in the West.

Aurobindo is often seen as the kind of foreigner who returned from Europe and discovered his own tradition in Pondicherry and also "retreated from politics into mysticism" in his later years (Masselos, 1972, p. 90). The rhetorical content of his teachings cannot be compared to Vivekananda, whose mission was to present Hinduism as a highly ethical and rational religion to the Western world. To this end, he formulated a Universal Religion inspired by Yoga, marketed Yoga as India's spiritual gift to the world and popularized an eclectic understanding of Advaita Vedanta. However, it is also well known that Aurobindo was heavily influenced by the teachings of Vivekananda and formulated his own ideas in reference to him. In his memoirs, Aurobindo recalls having undergone a "miraculous transformation" at Alipore Jail in Calcutta when Vivekananda came to him in his visions to share his knowledge of the intuitive mentality. Thus, the nationalist and secular content of Vivekananda's philosophy is carried forward in Aurobindo (Purani, 1960, p. 209).

It is widely maintained that the origins of modern spirituality are connected to secularization since both provided desirable alternatives to institutionalized religion in the West in the 19th century. However, many theorists since then have problematized this conception. For instance, Peter van der Veer argues that the rise of spirituality as a universal concept distinguished from the religious and the secular is in fact, contradicted by its deployment in variant nationalist discourses. As shown above, Vivekananda used the Indologists' insistence on

India's spiritual essence to reorient traditional Vedanta (using secular semantics) in order to meet nationalist ends: oversee its diffusion in the West, generate a positive Hindu self-understanding at home through a 'spiritual renaissance', and employ yoga as an emancipatory political tool.

The greatest contribution of Vivekananda and Aurobindo, and later, Ramdev and Ravi Shankar, lies in their ability to comfortably navigate the dichotomy of tradition and secular modernity by replacing it with transcultural modes of religious contact and transfer. They are called "cosmopolitan gurus" by Webster (2016) because they successfully sidestep the "clash of civilizations" and "great divide" discourses on Hinduism, modernity, and Westernization. For instance, routes to highly arousing states of superconscience (of Vivekananda) or supermind (of Aurobindo) lie at the intersection of Western interest in Yoga and Hindu yogis interested in Western sciences of the mind. The emphasis on transcendental intuition represents "cosmopolitan fabrications" that are syncretized with the "Yoga-Vedanta" syntagm manufactured by Vivekananda in order to elevate the purchase of spiritual discourses in the West. Aurobindo's spiritual psychology represents a similar blend of Eastern and Western mysticism.

3. "To be a True Aurovillian" Document

From the foregoing discussion, it becomes clear that the rise of spirituality as a universal concept is a distinctly modern phenomenon. Although it travels globally, "its trajectory differs from place to place as it is inserted into different historical developments" (van der Veer, 2014). Through a reading of the document "To be a True Aurovillian", this essay aims to probe the following questions: What form does spirituality take in the conception of Auroville? How secular and religious is this form?

First, we must address the vital question of who speaks through this document. "To Be a True Aurovillian" was authored by the Mother in 1970, two years after Auroville was founded, to guide the Aurovillians on how to live in the world and for the Divine at the same time. Mira Richard Alfassa, affectionately called The Mother, was Aurobindo's most intimate disciple and companion and was claimed by Aurobindo to be the incarnation of Shakti (the Divine Mother). After Aurobindo's death, it was Alfassa who conceptualized Auroville as an experimental city of the future, with the purpose of hastening the natural evolution towards human perfection. Aurobindo's philosophy and writings provided general theological support for Auroville's creation (Shinn, 1984), while The Mother's obstinate belief that a new divinized world was possible pushed the project forward.

She provided general process guidelines for the project and invigorated it with her vision of a place that belonged to no one particular but humanity as a whole, where non-compulsory education, cooperative work and integral yoga would lead to individual and collective progress towards universal harmony.

Another important consideration relates to how Auroville is understood by those who live and work there. Put differently, how is Auroville assimilated into the imagination of the people? Here, Maurice Bloch's concept of the 'transcendental social' may be immensely useful (Block, 2012, p. 114). His cognitive model seeks to explain how religion and social structure have a "permanence which negates the fluidity of life" and, therefore, possess the ability to transcend it. What we tend to call the transcendental or religious, he argues, is a realm much more solely focused on the idealized roles and groups generated out of the imagination. Thus, "what the transcendental social requires is the ability to live very largely in the imagination" (Bloch, 2008). The cognitive basis for being a "true Aurovillian" can be conceptualized using Maurice Bloch's assertion that for spiritual seekers, it is precisely the "omnipresence of the imaginary in the everyday" that lifts the supermind into the flux of the transcendental social. Spiritual work, rooted in the human cognitive capacity of imagination, is codified in the document under study:

4. Work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery…if one does not put his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. [One should organize one's life] according to an inner consciousness, for if one lets life go on without subjecting it to the control of the higher consciousness, it becomes fickle and inexpressive. (The Mother, 1970)

The ethos of social service has a long history in the subcontinent. *Sewa*, understood as a mode of accreting religious merit, took a more sophisticated form in the colonial period. *Sewa* was undertaken in the service of society, community, and the nation, often in an ascetic modality of self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, and renunciation (Watt, 2005). Ethos of service or *sewa* was central to Vivekananda's Ramakrishna Mission and remains integral to the New Spirituality of Sri Ravi Shankar, as also to modern Sikhism. Work as a secular category is codified with spiritual semantics by cosmopolitan gurus, who promote social work as a form of self-improvement and a source of pleasure, contentment, and spiritual well-being (Gooptu, 2016).

However, the "work" delineated in the document is different from the ethos of sewa. Social service is often tethered to socio-political purposes, undertaken for community reinvigoration or patriotic nation-building

(Fuller, 2009). On the other hand, divine work, as prescribed by the document, must be done in order to inculcate "an inner rhythm in harmony with the Divine Will". This spiritualization of work is especially vital to Auroville because it is a "city-in-the-making" (Savitra, 1975): it relies on the labour, agency and initiative of the Aurovillians to develop itself. Thus, work is seen as a form of evolutionary progress, a means to the end of total transformation of the 'supermind', and not for personal well-being, profit or gain.

What distinguishes Auroville and its philosophy from other New Age movements is its treatment of the individual as a means to an end of spiritual perfection, instead of treating the individual as an end in itself, as secular modernity often demands in the form of 'exclusive humanism' (discussed above). Nandini Gooptu (2016) has shown how modern spiritual gurus like Ramdev and Ravi Shankar emphasize individual agency, personal empowerment, and reliance on one's own 'inner' resources and romanticize the autonomous citizen as the protagonist of a modern and modernizing nation. This simple laicized narrative is tailor-made to resolve modern middle-class problems: spirituality is increasingly marketed as a motivational tool for personality development and affirmative thinking and as a method of stress and anger management, practised by everyone from students to housewives and corporate executives to NGOs working with the disadvantaged (Nanda, 2011). The Auroville document, on the other hand, harkens back to the Orientalist understanding of traditional concepts of the Advaita-Vedanta, preaching self-control and rejection of desire as ingredients of self-discovery:

2. ...freedom must not be a new slavery to the ego, to its desires and ambitions. The fulfillment of one's desires bars the way to inner discovery which can only be achieved in the peace and transparency of perfect disinterestedness. (The Mother, 1970)

Such an understanding is also reminiscent of Buddha's 'Four Noble Truths' that posit desire as the cause of all suffering and call for the *nirodha* (cessation) of this *dukkha* (suffering) by letting go of the *taṇhā* (desires). Much like Buddha's teachings that challenged the Brahmanical obsession with rituals in favour of a strict and self-denying lifestyle in pursuit of spiritual liberation, the document rejects the materialism of the modern capitalist world:

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. (The Mother, 1970)

At Auroville, 'inner discovery' is the chosen recipe for a new utopia. He, who seeks to build something new, must repudiate what is normative so that he may replace it with something new and (in his opinion) better. Here, the insistence on losing the sense of personal possession reflects disapproval of a culturally coded modality of capitalism by reinforcing the concept of *maya*, associated with Sankaradeva (founder of the Advaita school). Interestingly, that is where the similarity ends. Unlike Sankaradeva, the denial of desire and possessions does not imply that there must be a denial of life itself. It actually indicates the intention to reify a new model of thought and way of life. At Auroville, one's station in life is not to be defined by the modern parameter of material prosperity but by how spiritually evolved they are. Similarly, modern insistence on work is maintained, but instead of work as a means to earn money or fulfil a passion, it becomes a means of spiritual actualization. The discursive production of Auroville involves significant concept processing in order to construct a spiritual worldview.

Auroville's outlook does not conform to Charles Taylor's idea of what 'secularism' must constitute. In the document, matter is not explained in the scientific terms of atoms and molecules, instead it insists that matter awaits conscious utilization, so that consciousness permeates everything and the supramental descends upon the world. Scientific evolution is syncretized with Aurobindo's belief in spiritual perfection of mankind. However, the agency to bring about this transformation is vested in the individual and his inner development becomes instrumental to the process. Auroville and the Aurovillian are tied together inextricably, because it is only through the success of one (Aurovillian) that the other (Auroville) can realize its destiny. This concern with the individual's soul (being) is shown in the very beginning of the document:

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 center there is a being, free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active center of our being and our life in Auroville. (The Mother, 1970)

Interestingly, this kind of dialectical tension (between the Aurovillian and Auroville) is similar to the one prescribed by Aurobindo in his writings – that between the Brahman and all forms of evil. According to him, evil (includes aggression, death, incapacity, suffering etc) is necessary for the evolution of divine life. The present incompatibility of the world and Brahman indicates that the world is evolving towards a future spiritual harmony, characterized as "a new heaven and a new earth" (Philips, 1985). Auroville was conceptualized to accelerate this growth towards divine perfection.

Members of Auroville often remark that it is an experimental city based on "inner spirit" rather than social contract. Whether it is a sound framework to build a city on or not is endlessly debated. In his work, Larry Shinn (1984) has shown how Auroville has remained "a disparate collection of settlements embodying social fragmentation, not unity". From the beginning, it has prioritized personal initiative over putting accountability mechanisms in place. In the early years, there was no firm physical or social blueprint for Auroville. Similarly, about the *matrimandir* ("The Soul of Auroville"), it was said that it is "a living and evolving form revealing itself one step at a time, the next step becoming clear, focusing, only when the previous one has been fulfilled." (Savitra, 1975) This promise of novelty and excitement of pioneership is coded in the document:

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. (The Mother, 1970)

This part of the document is interestingly phrased. First, "the whole earth must prepare" indicates that Auroville is a global project. It seeks to transcend regional, national, and even cosmic boundaries by inventing the particular universalism of the supramental being that will one day envelop every atom of every being. Second, the phrase "advent of the new species" indicates the use of hyperbole to signify that a spiritually conscious individual and society would be drastically different, to the point of no recognition by the present one. The use of such language serves to portray the novelty of Auroville. If people believe what is happening at Auroville is unprecedented, it adds to its charisma, appeal and exoticism. Third, "little by little it will be revealed" indicates the dynamism of the Auroville project as something perennially 'in-the-making'.

The most important advantage of a spiritual discourse so laden with possibility is its ability to inspire, engender and invent. It is a discourse that consciously sidesteps the dogmatism and rigidity of religious association. Devotion to the divine, a feature common to all religions of the world, is also found at Auroville, but the divine is not an object of worship or adulation but is an ideal that stems from the perfection of the self's psychic being. All concepts and doctrines, whether borrowed from the Vedanta tradition or otherwise, receive spiritual codification in the document. Amanda J. Huffer (2011) has shown how the "transidiomatic theolinguistic register" of Advaita Vedanta philosophy enables culturally embedded spokespeople to transgress the

particularities of Hindu religiosity in order to speak to global audiences in terms of generalized ethics, morality, and humanism. The primary thrust throughout the document is on the individualistic "Yoga of self-perfection" as a means to herald the dawn of a new species, a new world, and a new life.

It must be emphasized that, although Auroville rejected formal religion, all Aurovilians are required to subscribe to a particular spiritual worldview. For the Mother, "'spiritual' teachings are those that agree with the teaching and evolutionary goals of Aurobindo and the Mother . . . if they do not do so, they are defined as 'religious,' not 'spiritual.'" Robert N Minor (1999) argues that although the Mother swore by spirituality, her definition of spirituality as distinct from religion was ambiguous and self-serving.

4. Conclusion: Westernizing Eastern Discourses

Aurobindo was a product of the Indian Renaissance of the 19th century when modern ideas of humanism, rationality and nationalism began to circulate among the elite sections of society. Many social reformers attempted to reconcile modernity with what they saw as the "traditional Hindu essence". Translation of important ancient religious texts, such as the Upanishads, Bhagwat Gita, etc., into English took place, and attempts were made to show that India had a history, literature and a civilizational conscience.

Vivekananda and Aurobindo were the products of this intellectual milieu and exhibited a zeal to build a bridge between the modern West and the colonial East. Aurobindo and his "supramental yoga" can be understood as a classic example of, what Eugene Taylor has called, an "East-West psycho-spiritual revolution". Instead of focusing on asanas or breathing techniques, the emphasis is on psychological advancement through self-reflection. The suggested approaches – yoga of divine work, integral knowledge, divine love and self-perfection – can take one to supramentalization (i.e. realization of the supermind).

When we compare Aurobindo to Shankara, we see an attempt on the part of the former to revive the ancient philosophical tradition of Advaita Vedanta, first popularized by the latter. However, as a mystic to whom the truth about the universe was gradually revealed, Aurobindo also adds his own concepts and interpretations, not in chaste Sanskrit but in ornate English, in order to earn for Vedanta a place among the modern spiritual movements of the world. When we compare the Auroville document to Aurobindo's philosophy, we can see a significant watering down of complex philosophical concepts and ideas. Although it is true that they both serve

entirely different purposes and have been engineered to achieve particular ends; the Auroville document has much more in common with cosmopolitan spiritual discourses than with Aurobindo's ideas. The emphasis is on spiritually coded secular categories of advancement, such as inner discovery, manual work and renunciation of desire. The use of terms like "divine", "higher consciousness", and "new species" are entirely decontextualized from their roots in the Hindu Vedanta tradition for comprehensibility across transnational populations. Accommodating diverse cultural norms has been a defining characteristic of the spiritual discourses of "Non-Traditional Modern Advaita Gurus" such as Aurobindo and the Mother, especially since the advent of Osho.

The document reads "At the center there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active center of our being and our life". It is clear that the indication is to the 'supermind', the dynamic intermediate quality that can help the individual realize Ultimate reality (*brahman*). However, rather than positing it as a "hypothetical, trans-experiential metaphysical postulate" (Chaudhuri, 1972), it is imagined in terms of a vague instrument of individualized divine purpose and meaning. At another place, reference is made to the discord between the inner and higher consciousness as the cause of life becoming "fickle and inexpressive". Such maxims have the advantage of functioning on various levels – since they can be extended like an umbrella to spiritualize anything from quotidian dissatisfaction (e.g., with work, routine, a distant partner etc), consumerist hollowness and lifestyle readjustments (eg, swearing off alcohol, becoming vegan etc). Thus, when we move from Shankara to Aurobindo, Indic concepts receive spiritualization without complete erasure, i.e. they remain tethered to religious postulates;   however, in the hands of the Mother, there is wholesale decontextualization for ease of adaptability and marketability. What we see is a gradual Westernization of Eastern Discourses.

The "cosmopolitan fabrication" of Aurobindo's supramentalization or inner discovery through higher consciousness is flexible and universal. Since it is so vaguely described and relies heavily on the faculty of imagination and belief, it can be adjusted to any cultural idiom, social reality or progress trajectory. Travis Webster's emphasis on such discourses having elements of Western transpersonal psychology [spirituality] syncretized with derivative forms of traditional Advaita-Vedanta is immensely relevant because it eases the export of spirituality beyond regional or national borders. Auroville's cosmopolitan rhetoric has been apparent since inauguration day, when "persons from 124 nations placed handfuls of earth from their native lands in an urn situated at the centre of Auroville and thereby symbolically codified the goal of human unity and integration

Auroville sought to achieve." (Shinn, 1984) At the same time, it can become dangerously easy to co-opt malleable spiritual discourses. For example, states may find it strategic to project their soft power through global townships like Auroville because they represent the ideals of human unity, peace and harmony.

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Appendix A: To Be a True Aurovillian

Written by The Mother on 13 June 1970, one of the foundational documents of Auroville, she explains how to live in the world and - for the Divine - at the same time. These ideals are what each Aurovilian keeps in one's heart and strives towards.

To be a True Aurovilian:

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.

2. The fulfilment of one's desires bars the way to inner discovery, which can only be achieved in the peace and transparency of perfect disinterestedness. 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 actions 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 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 organize 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 organize one's life not according to outer and artificial rules but according to an organized 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 utilization.

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.

Source: https://auroville.org/page/a-true-aurovilian