Introduction

"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... 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..."

These excerpts from "A Dream" by the Mother are, for many Aurovilians, ideals to be fulfilled. How to evolve an economy where money is no longer the driving force? A significant step in this direction is the fact that fixed assets in Auroville do not belong to individuals, even to those who have invested money in creating them, but are collectively held by the community. Secondly, the community has always been trying to evolve a non-monetary internal economy. In this issue of Auroville Today we publish excerpts from a speech of Dr. Kireet Joshi on this topic, as well as an overview of Auroville's attempts to come to a more "kind" economic system.

Towards a spiritualised economy

On August 17th, Dr. Kireet Joshi made a passionate plea to a small group of Aurovilians to manifest the economic model in the light of the guidelines that The Mother has given for Auroville. Some excerpts of his talk:

"During the past thirty years, Auroville has made remarkable steps developing an internal economy of its own, and I would like to congratulate Auroville for the dedication and the work done in this field by individual Aurovilians. I also would like to express my appreciation to the commercial unit holders for the contributions they are making towards Auroville's collective economy.

Auroville has, in the thirty years of its existence, not yet been able to manifest the ideal of an internal non-monetary economy. We all know that the Mother has said that there should be no exchange of money within Auroville, and that Auroville should only have money transactions with the outside. It is my firm conviction that now the time for this next step has come. For we have reached a critical point. Already now, to make this change will be difficult. To make it in a few years, will be even more difficult. For if Auroville continues as it does, it will develop into another capitalististic society where one has to work to earn a living. If it continues as it does, it will not realise Mother's ideals. We have to change it, for Auroville is a site of constant progress.

Auroville aims to become a spiritual society. It is the society to which Sri Aurobindo's words, as written in the Human Cycle, should apply. These words are as follows:

"A spiritualised society would treat in its sociology the individual, from the saint to the criminal, not as units of a social problem to be passed through some skilfully devised machinery and either flattened into the social mould or crushed out of it, but as souls suffering and entangled in a net and to be rescued, souls growing and to be encouraged to grow, souls drawn by the lesser spirits who are not yet adult. The aim of its economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the co-operative kind, but to give to men - not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure - the joy of work according to their own nature and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simply rich and beautiful life for all.""
**ECONOMY**

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who do not produce wealth for the community. I have often heard that business managers live more comfortable lifestyles than other Aurovilians. I believe it is obvious that these people cater to the natural advantage. Those who live near the riverbank can enjoy fresh water while those who live at a longer distance cannot. Individuals in an enlightened society should not envy them - if they feel the strong need to enjoy the natural advantages, they too should move towards the riverbank - start a unit by themselves.

The other side of the coin is that those who bring wealth into Auroville should do that in the spirit of true stewardship and should give as much as they can to the community and its collectiveness. This, of course, is not to be done in the spirit of philanthropy, which, as Sri Aurobindo said, is nothing more than the stirring of the conscience of a giver. Those who do not have such a concern are not individualism and collectivism on a spiritual basis. And this ideal can necessarily come in? I would like to share with you my request. Let's look at Auroville's strong points: we ask of people who are willing to serve the common good.

Auroville has developed a financial system where the exchange of money is done through a cashless "bank account" system, and those people who have no means of their own and work for the community receive a maintenance. This system, while eliminating the exchange of currency notes, has allowed for a true sense of community. Individuals are led to save to feel secure, and the motivation is still on a lower plane. But you are not here to work in order to earn, but to contribute to the Divine Community so that you work to earn in order to live. In order to earn is not a spiritual view. This should change.

I believe that it is a false illusion that individuals can live independently against the current. History has shown us over and again that individuals can lose their accumulated wealth in a moment. But I believe that security can be had if we live self-supporting. Auroville stands for a capitalistic society where individuals work for a living and live to earn. He also offers a solution to deal with the trust that exists between those who generate money and those who believe they are "parasites" on the back of the community. This perspective has for many years been the basis for moving towards a more collective economy. The distrust would only increase if the community were to offer each Aurovilian a free basic maintenance packet without stressing the need for each individual's participation. Dr. Kireet Joshi envisages a pro-active stance by the community towards those who do not participate in work he suggests that those who do not work should be contacted and helped to find a place of action. This would be a dramatic change, as at present, individuals are left to themselves and are not asked to explain to the community the reasons for their non-participation.

A second reason is that the centralised provision of a "free basic packet" would, to an important extent, do away with the need for internal money transactions. The Mother was very specific that money should not be used in Auroville's internal dealings stating that "Auroville should only have money relations with the outside world." It is hoped that the centralised provision of a "free basic packet" would promote the growth of a spiritualised society as envisioned in the Mother's "Dream."

How can a centralised system be introduced?

In Auroville's present economic system, Aurovilians receive their maintenance from the unit for which they work or from the Central Fund. Self-supporting individuals have their own sources of income. A centralised system for the provision of basic maintenance would necessitate that each unit executive and self-supporting individual would make transfers: one transfer to the Central Fund for basic Auroville maintenance, and a second transfer to the individual's account for the extra maintenance he or she requires. The Central Fund, in its turn, would provide each and every Aurovilian with the basic needs.

While such a system would centralise the provision of a basic maintenance packet, it would not help to provide more maintenance to those who need it. For that, extra funds have to be found. At present Auroville's commercial units provide funds to a limited extent, which enables the Central Fund to provide additional maintenance to a specific group of Aurovilians in view of their commitment and work for Auroville. If commercial units could donate more and if self-supporting individuals could also help, for example by transferring to the Central Fund not only the amount due for their own basic maintenance packet but rather whatever they can, then more Aurovilians could be supported.

The immediate effects of the implementation of a centralised system will be mainly psychological. An initial result would be that the link between the individual working in a unit and the maintenance provided would start to fade. But a more important consequence would be that the community would develop the sense of taking care and the self-supporting individuals would take care of each other. It would be a small but decisive step towards a different type of economy.

Auroville is a "giving society." Many are the examples of individuals who spontaneously and sometimes anonymously extend support to other Aurovilians, often to a large extent. A centralised system as proposed by Dr. Kireet Joshi would make this underlying fraternity more manifest.


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**Going forward: What’s being done?**

An overview of collective and individual attempts

**Collective Attempts**

The Central Fund was started in 1989 as a system to collectively support Auroville's services and other collective responsibilities. Its income is generated from commercial units, which contribute varying percentages of their profits; from contributions from guests; from donations by individual Aurovilians; from the Rs 900 scheme, under which each unit pays Rs 900 a month for each Aurovilian working for that unit; and from interest on deposits with the Central Fund and of individual accounts. Since July 1995, the Central Fund has successfully increased its income by asking Aurovilians to transfer the amounts they had in low-interest-generating bank accounts to their Central Fund's disbursement account, and to forgo interests on these accounts. This has resulted at present in a total capital of over 100 crores (approx. US$ 95,000). The Central Fund disbursements account provides for administering this Fund.

The Financial Service introduced a new accounting system that allows Auroville's internal and external economy to be studied separately.

**The Economy Group**

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* Auroville is the Mother's "Dream," where She explicitly mentions that "the community...would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action." Dr. Kireet Joshi takes this literally, and explains that doing this would promote a capitalistic society where individuals work for a living and live to earn. He offers a solution to deal with the trust that exists between those who generate money and those who believe they are "parasites" on the back of the community. This perspective has for many years been the basis for moving towards a more collective economy. The distrust would only increase if the community were to offer each Aurovilian a free basic maintenance packet without stressing the need for each individual's participation. Dr. Kireet Joshi envisages a pro-active stance by the community towards those who do not participate in work he suggests that those who do not work should be contacted and helped to find a place of action. This would be a dramatic change, as at present, individuals are left to themselves and are not asked to explain to the community the reasons for their non-participation.

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Cultivating Auroville’s Culture

When I was raising my kids in the US, we lived in a big house with lots of friends around all the time, and besides our family of six, we often had other people who lived with us. Every member of the family had jobs they had to do, from setting the table, cooking, washing dishes, cleaning the bathroom, shopping, to children learning how to run the washing machine when they were old enough to fold their own clothes and put them away. It was important to me that my children take responsibility for what they were able to do and become aware of the time and energy it takes to care for the everyday things in life. Learning to care for others and ourselves begins when we are children. What I see in Auroville is a generation of children who are growing up with an "amma" (housemaid) who does most, if not all, of the work in the house. What messages are we giving our children about the Tamil people we share this land with? Are they our servants and the ones who do all the dirty work? The question of culture is a big one because our values are reflected not only by what we do, but also by what we don’t do. For example, we do not yet have any designated No Smoking zones here in Auroville. By allowing smoking in all of our public places, we inadvertently give our societal approval.

As my grandmother used to say, children are our wealth and our future. The energy and time we give our children, what we provide for them, and the influences around them, are all forces that are shaping the Auroville of tomorrow. In USA there was a group of Native Americans called the Iroquois Federation. Before the white man came, when their nation was strong, they had a process of decision-making where they tried to extrapolate the consequences of their actions seven generations into the future. In light of this, it is important to ask: What are our values as a community? What kinds of things are important to us? What kind of culture is developing here Auroville and are we happy with the way it is going?

(ABBey, an American, first came to Auroville as a visiting teacher at Last School. But last year she joined Auroville, and at present, teaches in Transition School.)

Human Unity in Auroville

One of the principal aims of Auroville is to create a living embodiment of human unity. Auroville, as such, is meant to be a beacon of hope to a chaotic world; a world where technological progress outstrips our spiritual growth, and our capacity to manage the consequences of our creations is increasingly in doubt. Auroville’s aim is consequently more relevant today than it was when Auroville was first envisaged and, there is a greater urgency to explore processes that may lead to greater human unity.

But how? This is a perplexing and complicated question. More so, because Auroville does not make a concerted effort to define and redefine what it means by unity. It has not laid down principles of unity; it has not systematically attempted to consider the manifestations such principles should imply. And consequently it has not been able to fairly evaluate its progress toward its ideal. Without an evaluation, mistakes more easily fester, successes are more easily missed, and there is no serious consideration of lessons learned. Most importantly, the concept of unity remains underdeveloped, vague, and offers little practical direction.

Aurovilians might argue that the definitions are there in Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s writings. Have Aurovilians so internalized these teachings that there is no value in bringing them out? Lay them before the community of Auroville. Let the community agree that they, and perhaps other concepts, should form both the basis of unity in Auroville and the means to develop a process of evaluation. One might argue that Auroville is an organic community that defies definition. But, definitions are meant to be reviewed, questioned and refined; the concept of unity itself must be redefined as Auroville grows. One could say that human unity must be approached from a distinctly spiritual process wherein definitions have no place. But, Auroville is meant to work out the problem of human unity materialistically as well as spiritually. There is a double action at work. Our spiritual progress is reflected in our material intercourse and our material decisions impact our spiritual movements.

To what extent is Auroville achieving its aim of human unity? There are probably more opinions on the matter than there are Aurovilians. Unfortunately, many of these opinions integrate facts in a biased way to reflect personal ideals of unity and not necessarily community aspirations. The first step toward achieving greater unity is to develop common understandings and approaches toward it. If Auroville can revisit the understandings, refine them, and progress. Until now, with occasional exception, our fractious world has muddled through; but muddling is an increasingly unsafe approach to solving the world’s problems. Can Auroville demonstrate a more powerful, more cogent approach? Or will it too muddle through?

(Lyle, an American married to an Aurovillian, is a long-term guest who has been associated with Auroville for many years. Lyle has been working in a rural development programme in Leslie for the last ten years now but hopes to move to Auroville soon.)

The sentiment of unity is not sufficient to create unity. We require also the practice of unity.

Sri Aurobindo

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