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## PHILOSOPHY & RELIGION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Auroville as an intentional spiritual community and the practice of Integral yoga

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses Auroville as an intentional spiritual community in South India and the way facets of Integral yoga are manifested. The existential thinking, aspirations, existential anxieties, daily spiritual experiences and worldview of the residents also called Aurovilians, were studied through a 10-year period. Aurovilians' scores on measures of existential thinking, aspirations, and spiritual experiences were higher and existential anxieties scores were lower than their phase 1 scores. At phase 2, scores on the integrative worldview were higher. In-depth discussions showed an evolution of existential thinking and spiritual inclinations as well as integrative worldview of residents of Auroville as an intentional spiritual commune. Theistic existentialism of Aurovilians is, drawing from Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga, a phenomenological quest for the Absolute. The study is a demonstration of the practical applications of Integral yoga as a world affirming philosophy to qualify the divine quest of humanity, through an intentional community's experiment.

**Subjects:** Development Studies, Environment, Social Work, Urban Studies; Arts; Humanities

**Keywords:** human existence; divine quest; worldview; Integral yoga; Auroville; intentional community; theistic existentialism

## 1. Introduction

Intentional communities are created with a purpose of specific meaning-making in a particular spatial context. Such communities arise due to dissatisfaction with mainstream society, an idealist belief that an alternative life is possible and are differently organized physically as well as ideologically (Van Bueren & Tarlow, 2006; Van Wormer, 2006). There is a willingness to engage

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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper discusses Auroville as an intentional spiritual community in South India and the way facets of Integral yoga are manifested. The residents' or Aurovilians' existential thinking, aspirations, existential anxieties, daily spiritual experiences and worldview were studied through a 10-year period. Results showed an evolution of existential thinking and spiritual inclinations as well as integrative worldview of residents of Auroville as an intentional commune. Theistic existentialism of Auroville and Aurovilians is, drawing from Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga, a phenomenological quest for the Absolute. The study is a demonstration of the practical applications of Integral yoga as a world affirming philosophy to qualify the divine quest of humanity, through an intentional community's experiment.

in a counterhegemonic vision, and intentional communities essentially get involved in a responsive place-making project that is manufactured through the discourse of aspiration and a belief that there is a better way of “being” possible (Reinhalter, 2014). Intentional communities also experiment with integrated community scale solutions to world’s pressing problems such as sustainable development.

Auroville is one such world-renowned globally connected intentional community, which is an experiment of the philosophy of Integral yoga expounded by the philosopher Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and his spiritual collaborator Mirra Alfassa, alias The Mother. The aim is to cultivate a divine life on earth by a transcendence of sorts, believed to be attainable through the Integral yogic lifestyle and corresponding philosophical quests. 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. For the residents, also recognized distinctively as Aurovilians, this is an identity-defining reality, performed through daily life at Auroville. The utopian quest is to attain 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.

In many ways, these are specific existential quests, designed to realize some goals of a differential sort of performativity. What deems closer investigation is the way in which, spatio-temporally, these utopian goals and specifically utopian divine goals in the case of Auroville are realized. Moreover what it means for the existential realities of Aurovilians and how the goal of Integral yoga is transacted, needs to be researched from the standpoint of theistic existentialism in particular.

In this paper I begin with a discussion on theistic existentialism as a premise that can be deployed in the study of spiritual intentional communities. I then give a brief overview of the Integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. This is followed by details of the Auroville experiment from genesis, philosophy and the contemporary picture.

The aim of this paper is to study the various facets of Integral yoga in Auroville as an intentional community through a study of its core residents, the Aurovilians. Phase 1 data was collected from 828 Aurovilians in the year 2007 and phase 2 data was collected from 744 Aurovilians in the year 2017. As the core endeavour of this spiritual community is to seek the divine and attain mastery in the Integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, the researcher sought to study their existential thinking, aspirations, existential anxieties, daily spiritual experiences and worldview. A combination of scale measures and qualitative narratives along these parameters were used at both phases.

Theistic existentialism can be viewed as a guiding premise for communes established for spiritual realization. Theistic existentialism proposes the idea that humans are in a perpetual quest, to attain the perfect being or Godhead. This emerges from the idea of Hegel’s notion of the Absolute and the doctrine that the process of human history is an endeavour in striving towards that attainment. When it is done in a collective sense, this quest for transcendence no longer remains a personal or individual thing, but a collective quest (Okoro, 2013). At the core of this are two further questions: the question of human freedom and the divine will. Theistic existentialism recognizes that whereas humans are essentially free, there is still a striving for the sense of perfection that is embedded in the divine or the Absolute. This striving for perfection, salvation or emancipation, with the divine as the locus, is at the heart of theism and theistic existentialism, which then draws certain boundaries to the notion of human freedom. The contours of these boundaries are defined by the consciousness and knowledge of the Absolute, and the process of this knowing is intensely phenomenological.

Theistic existentialism further rests on the premise of innate conflicts and contradictions that are a part and parcel of this. The episteme of theistic existentialism is hermeneutics, referring to an interpretation of the reality and the Absolute. The method or praxis of theistic existentialism is discerning human existential thinking, quests and related anxieties (Dukor, 2010).

## **2. The philosophy underpinning Auroville: Integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother**

The Integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and The Mother is the philosophy underpinning Auroville. A brief description of the life and works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother is as follows.

Sri Aurobindo was born on 15 August 1872 in Kolkata in a privileged Bengali home and at the age of 7 he was sent to England to study with his two older brothers. During the first 5 years from 1879–1884, he was tutored privately by an English couple and later from 1884–1890, he went to St. Paul's School in London. Thereafter he joined the King's College, Cambridge on a senior classical fellowship to study classics and literature as well as the curriculum of the Indian civil service. He, however, did not graduate there but passed the Tripos in the second year. Further, he did not qualify for the civil services, as he did not attend the horseback-riding exam. In 1893, on his return to India, he entered the state service of the princely state of Baroda and was employed in various administrative positions for 13 years. In 1906, he came to Kolkata as the Principal of the Bengal National College, but resigned soon after and from 1906–1910, he was actively engaged in political activities. He became a leader of nationalism in Bengal, with the agenda of self-rule, boycott and national education. Owing to these activities, he was arrested and sent to the Alipore Jail in 1908 and was acquitted after a year. Later on, this proved to be a fruitful year, for during this period he had intense spiritual experiences, which set him definitely on the path of his future work. After detention for 1 year as an undertrial prisoner in Alipore jail, he came out in May 1909 and for a year he strove for the upkeep of his political activities and hence published *Karmayogin* in English and *Dharma* in Bengali propagating his spiritual-political views. In February 1910, he withdrew to a secret retirement and in the beginning of April sailed for Pondicherry in French India. In the then French colony of Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo began his spiritual work. His arrival there also marked an end of his active involvement in Indian politics and the nationalist movement.

In 1910, he produced a short primer on yoga—the “yogic sadhana,” which he edited and published in 1911 under the pseudonym Uttara Yogi. In 1914, after 4 years of silent yoga, he began the publication of the philosophical monthly *Arya*. Most of his more important works, those published since in book form, the *Isha Upanishad*, the *Essays on the Gita*, and others not yet published, the *Life Divine* and the *Synthesis of Yoga*, appeared serially in *Arya*. He lived in Pondicherry and continued this work until he passed away in 1950 (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2006).

The Mother was born on 21 February 1878 in Paris as Mirra Alfasa to affluent parents in Paris. She is said to have had divine experiences since childhood and often went into a trance. Her initial education was at home and at age 10, she went to a private school. Later on, she undertook art education by an art studio run by Julian academy. In 1897, she got married to a French diplomat Henri Morisset and they had their son Andre. During this time, she also read Indian spiritual writings and the texts such as the *Bhagwad Geeta* introduced to her by an Indian ambassador who told her to “read the Gita and take Krishna as the symbol of the immanent God, the inner Godhead.” In 1906, Mirra Alfasa formed a small group of seekers in Paris called the “Idea.” In 1907 she met Paul Richards while they were ‘fellow seekers in the, “Truth of Existence” cosmic movement. They were married in 1911 just a year after Paul Richards’ first visit to India on an electioneering mission. Between 1911 and 1913, she gave talks to a number of spiritual groups in Paris. She came to Pondicherry on 29 March 1914 with Paul Richards, and met Sri Aurobindo for the first time. She went back then to return in 1920 to settle there permanently. From 1926, Mirra Alfasa, who had herself assumed discipleship of Sri Aurobindo, assumed more responsibility of the yogic guidance of other disciples (the sadhaks) and also of running the retreat centre, the Sri

Aurobindo Ashram. She began collaborating in the publishing of *Arya* and later established the Sri Aurobindo International Centre for Education in 1952 and Auroville in 1968. She continued this work continuously until the year 1973 when she left her mortal body (Basu, 2011).

Integral yoga is the core philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, which discusses the transformative movement of the human spirit towards the divine. The aim of Integral yoga is not to depart out of the world and life into heaven, but at a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental, but as a distinct and central object. This is to be done not as an individual achievement or divine realization for the sake of an individual, but for a larger purpose. The method to attain this is total and integral change also called triple transformation of the psychic, spiritual and supra-cosmic or supra-mental realms (Sanyal & Roy, 2007; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library, 1993). Integral yoga is not a dispassionate and objective search for the abstract truth, but an intense commitment to life (Sarkar, 2002). Here, society is collectively to move from infra-rational stage, to the rational stage and then to the spiritual stage. These are the three stages formulated by Sri Aurobindo, illustrated in his work "The Human Cycle." The infra-rational stage is one in which society lives predominantly in the needs and interests of the physical and vital consciousness. The rational stage is one in which the society is governed by rational ideals of mental consciousness. The supra-rational or the spiritual stage is one in which a society increasingly moulds its life and institutions in the direction of a higher level of spiritual consciousness. Practically this translates into collective and higher levels of existential thinking, intrinsic aspirations, lower existential anxieties, spiritual inclinations and integrative worldviews.

Western parallels of the conceptualisations of Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga as theistic existentialism are found with William James' conception of unification of the divided self and the union or harmonious relation with the higher universe; Assaigoli's unification of the consciousness of the personal self or I with that of the transpersonal self; Carl Jung's healing of the split between the conscious and the unconscious and attaining the psychic wholeness by shifting the centre of gravity from the ego to the self; and Wilber's attaining of the unitary consciousness by overcoming the illusion of the separate self with its illusory sense of the boundary between the self and the not self (Dalal, 2007).

In describing Integral yoga as parallel to integral psychotherapy, that has theism embedded within it, Cortright (2001, pp. 79–82) has described it as an exploration of is-ness which when we have a spiritual aspiration, allows us to penetrate more deeply within in our journey to awaken to the psychic being.

It is a movement that begins with the existential surface of our empirical self and ends with the essential spiritual experience of our central being. In this way integral psychotherapy can be thought of as existential Vedanta (non-dualistic school of Indian philosophy), a psycho-spiritual practice that involves exploring our lived experience so that our physical, vital and mental self is the most coherent, vibrant and fit vehicle for our inner being, more purified and therefore more capable of a whole hearted surrender, more calm and therefore able to hold the peace from above and within, more integrated and unified and so more capable of a single minded aspiration for The Mother and for the Divine. (Cortright, 2001, p. 78)

### **3. The Auroville experiment: human existence, divine quest and integrative worldview**

Auroville was established with the aim to found an ideal society dedicated to human unity. Initially the idea to have such a township was conceived by The Mother in 1965 along with some disciples of Sri Aurobindo and architect Roger Anger, who designed the same. The final plan was set by a committee in Pondicherry as an outcome of a series of world conferences under the aegis of Sri Aurobindo Society. A dedication ceremony where representatives from 124 nations congregated was held on 28 February 1968 at the site, in Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu state in South India. Representatives placed soil from their respective countries into an urn as a symbolic gesture, which was then sealed and placed in the centre of the town. The signing of the Auroville charter that comprised rules and regulations for living in Auroville signified the official commencement of the intentional township. The middle of the township comprises a golden metallic spherical dome called

the Matrimandir, which is the centre for meditation. Four “zones” of the city area emerge from this centre: the residential zone, industrial zone, cultural and educational zone and international zone. Around the areas lies a green belt that is an environmental research and resource area.

Prior to 1980, the Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, legally owned all of the city’s assets. In 1980, the Government of India passed the Auroville Emergency Provision Act 1980, under which it took over the city’s management. A need was then felt to make a lasting arrangement for the long-term management of Auroville. Later that year, the Auroville Foundation Act, 1988 was passed by the Indian Parliament. The Act stipulated the vesting of all movable and immovable assets of the city in a foundation, known as Auroville Foundation and the creation of a three-tier governing system: the Governing Board, the Residents’ Assembly, and the Auroville International Advisory Council. The highest authority is the Governing Board selected by the Government of India. It consists of seven prominent Indians in the fields of education, culture, environment and social service. The second authority is the International Advisory Council whose five members are also selected by the Government. These are chosen from people who have rendered valuable service to humanity in the areas of Auroville’s ideals. The Resident’s Assembly consists of all official residents of the city (Alain, 2000). In terms of funding, initially the money came from the American Foundation for World Education and the Auroville International UK. Subsequently a corpus was created and now managed by a team of Aurovilians under the aegis of Auroville Board of Commerce, which aims at self-sufficiency in finances. Aurovilians, the residents of Auroville, from 49 nations, and presently the population of stands at around 2,500 people, of whom approximately two-thirds are of Indian, French and German nationalities. Aurovilians retain their birth nationalities and religion, but residence in the township and its membership makes them Aurovilians.

Auroville started out as a utopian community and continues to strive towards realizing the same. The core is that Auroville belongs to nobody in particular, but to humanity as a whole. At a metaphysical level, Auroville is about collective living in a community in unity and harmony. Auroville continues to make innovative efforts in developing various eco-friendly techniques of construction, research in organic farming, afforestation and its impact. These actually build into the larger spiritual and philosophical goals of Auroville. While the relationship that Auroville shares with the surrounding villages started off with several complexities and dynamics (Bhatia, 2015; Pillai, 2005), efforts continue to ease out the creases. However, as a utopian experiment of unity and transcendence of human existence, Auroville continues to further develop and work towards sustainability (Miles, 2008).

What needs to be examined is how the Aurovilians have viewed this idea and what it means for this intentional community in terms of existential thinking, aspirations, anxieties, spiritual inclinations and worldviews. In the next section I describe the respondent profile, measures used, qualitative data collected and fieldwork details. Subsequently I discuss each facet of Aurovilians’ community living: existence, aspirations, anxieties, spiritual quest and worldviews to then evolve a longitudinal understanding of divine quest through this-worldly existence as endeavoured by this intentional commune. More specifically, how Integral yoga as a philosophy is translated into practice and the praxis of theistic existentialism is unpacked through the analysis and discourse.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Respondent profile

Table 1 depicts the profile of the respondents at phase 1 and 2 of the study.

### 4.2. Sampling

For the sample identification at phase 1, of the 2021 Aurovilians, a systematic sample of 828 Aurovilians was identified ( $k = 2$ ), with a response rate of 78%. At phase 2, 744 Aurovilians agreed to respond again to the questionnaire. Twenty-two Aurovilians were voluntary participants for the in-depth interview at phase 1 of whom 19 Aurovilians also responded at phase 2.

**Table 1. Respondent profile**

	Phase 1		Phase 2	
	N	%/M (SD)	N	%/M (SD)
<b>Age</b>		32.78 (7.02)		42.74 (7.33)
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	503	60.74	521	70.03
Female	325	39.25	223	29.97
<b>Nationality</b>				
Indian	253	30.55	218	29.30
French	278	33.57	259	34.81
German	152	18.36	128	17.20
Italian	38	4.59	36	4.84
Dutch	18	2.17	18	2.42
British	41	4.95	38	5.11
Belgian	14	1.69	14	1.88
South Korean	7	.84	7	.94
Ukrainian	11	1.33	11	1.48
Spanish	16	1.93	15	2.02
<b>Marital status</b>				
Never married	259	31.28	251	33.74
Currently married	304	36.71	288	38.71
Widowed	187	22.58	167	22.45
Divorced/separated	78	9.42	38	5.11
<b>Religion (birth religion)</b>				
Hindu	219	26.45	203	27.28
Christian	609	73.55	541	72.71
<b>Education</b>				
Bachelors' degree	141	17.03	129	17.34
Postgraduate degree	124	14.97	89	11.96
Professional qualifications	563	67.99	516	69.35
<b>Source of initiation to Auroville</b>				
Friends	304	36.71	288	38.71
Family	524	63.28	456	61.29
<b>Previous association with Auroville</b>				
Student	215	25.97	204	27.42
Visitor	613	74.03	540	72.58
<b>Duration of being an Aurovilian</b>		8.02 (.33)		18.13 (.35)
<b>Living arrangement at Auroville</b>				
With family	304	36.71	288	38.71
Living alone	524	63.28	456	61.29
<b>Core occupation at Auroville</b>				
Organic agriculture	114	13.77	107	14.38
Basic educational research	89	10.74	74	9.95

(Continued)

	Phase 1		Phase 2	
	N	%/M (SD)	N	%/M (SD)
Health care	76	9.18	68	9.14
Appropriate technology	258	31.16	241	32.39
Town planning	149	17.99	131	17.61
Information technology	85	10.26	68	9.14
Cottage industry	57	6.88	55	7.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>744</b>	<b>100.00</b>

#### 4.3. Consent and ethics

Informed consent was sought from all the respondents and participants of the study. There is no registered funder to report for this submission. The author declares that s/he has no conflict of interest. The study is in accordance with the ethical standards of the independent committee on research ethics of the University of Mumbai, India and in compliance with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

#### 4.4. Measures

Basic biographical and demographic data was collected from the respondents at both phases comprising the following details: age, gender, birth nationality, marital status, religion, education, source of initiation to Auroville, previous association with Auroville, duration of being an Aurovillian, living arrangements at Auroville and occupation at Auroville. For the core dimensions of the study, five scales were used at both phases as well as open-ended qualitative questions. Details of the scales are as follows:

The scale for existential thinking (SET) developed initially by Shearer (2006) is a 11-item scale to measure existential thinking, which is defined as the tendency to explore the fundamental concerns of human existence and the capacity to engage in a meaning-making process that locates oneself in respect to these issues. Some examples of questions in the SET include: do you ever reflect on your purpose in life? Do you think about ideas such as eternity, truth, justice and goodness? Do you ever think about a “grand plan” or process that human beings are a part of? Have you ever reflected on the nature of reality or the universe? Items are rated on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 = never to 5 = all the time. Few previously published studies have validated the SET in different cultural contexts and with cross-section of population groups, and concluded acceptable psychometric properties including internal and external construct validity, reliability and convergent validity (e.g. Allan & Shearer, 2012; Narasimhan, Bhaskar, & Prakhya, 2010). The SET score is a summation of all the responses on the 11 items and ranges from 11–55, with higher scores indicating a greater inclination and capacity for existential thinking. For the present study, Cronbach  $\alpha$  = .93, item-scale intercorrelation = .89, Pearson’s  $r$  = .92.

The aspirations index (AI) developed by Kasser and Ryan (1996) measures intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations. The six categories of aspirations usually measured include the extrinsic aspirations of wealth, fame and image, and intrinsic aspirations of meaningful relationships, personal growth and community contributions. There are five specific questions within each category. On a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = not at all to 7 = very, participants rate: (1) the importance to themselves of each aspiration, (2) their beliefs about the likelihood of attaining each and (3) the degree to which they have already attained each. Research has revealed that having strong relative aspirations for extrinsic outcomes was negatively associated with mental health indicators; whereas, placing more importance on intrinsic aspirations was found to be positively associated with mental health indicators (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996).

Few previously published studies have validated the AI in different cultural contexts such as France, Spain, Korea and China as well as with cross-section of population groups, and concluded acceptable psychometric properties including internal and external construct validity, reliability and convergent validity (e.g. Grouzet et al., 2005; Nishimura & Suzuki, 2016; Utvær, Hammervold, & Haugan, 2014). For the present study, the three categories of intrinsic aspirations—meaningful relationships, personal growth and community contributions and the five specific questions within the same, have been used from the original Kasser-Ryan version. Scores for the AI (intrinsic aspirations) (AI-IA) ranged from 15–105, with higher scores indicating higher intrinsic aspirations. For AI-IA with respect to the present study: Cronbach  $\alpha = .92$ ; item-scale intercorrelation = .91; Pearson's  $r = .91$ .

The Existential Anxiety Questionnaire, (EAQ) (Weems, Costa, Dehon, & Berman, 2004), was designed to measure levels of existential anxiety. The EAQ is a self-report measure comprised of 13 items that are rated using the responses of either “True” or “False.” Seven items are reverse coded (e.g. I am not worried nor think about being guilty, I know that life has meaning). Six items (e.g. I often feel anxious because I am worried that life might have no meaning, I often think that things that were once important in life are now empty) also comprise the short form (EAQ-SF). Few previously published studies have validated the EAQ in different cultural contexts (e.g. Norway, China and Iran) as well as with cross-section of population groups (such as clinical and non-clinical samples), and concluded acceptable psychometric properties including internal and external construct validity, reliability and convergent validity (e.g. Berman, Weems, & Stickle, 2006; Etemad, Manshadi, & Mozafari, 2017). Scores for the short form (EAQ-SF) ranged from 0–6 (every true item is checked with 1 point and false item is checked with 0 point) with higher scores indicating greater existential anxiety. For the EAQ-SF used in the present study: Cronbach  $\alpha = .92$ ; item-scale intercorrelation = .91; Pearson's  $r = .88$ .

The daily spiritual experiences scale (DSES) developed by Underwood and Teresi (2002) A 16-item self-report measure of spiritual experience. It specifically aims to measure ordinary, or daily, spiritual experiences—not mystical experiences (e.g. hearing voices)—and how they are an every-day part of the individual's life. The first 15 items of the questionnaire are measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale: many times a day, every day, most days, some days, once in a while, and never or almost never. Item 16 (In general, how close do you feel to God?) is measured on a 4-point scale: not close at all, somewhat close, very close, as close as possible. Studies have validated the DSES in different cultural contexts as well as with cross-section of (such as clinical and non-clinical samples), and concluded acceptable psychometric properties including internal and external construct validity, reliability and convergent validity (e.g. Choudhary & Madnawat, 2017; George & Park, 2017; Kim, Martin, & Nolty, 2016; Scherer, Allen, & Harp, 2016; Tong, 2017). Scores range from 16–94, with higher scores indicating greater propensity and inclination for spiritual experiences in daily living. For the present study: Cronbach  $\alpha = .93$ ; item-scale intercorrelation = .89; Pearson's  $r = .88$ .

The Worldview Scale (WS) developed by Hedlund-de Witt (2013a, 2013b) is based on the Integrative Worldview Framework, which operationalizes the concept of worldview through distinguishing between five different aspects of worldviews: ontology (metaphysics, values of nature, origin of life); epistemology (role of science, impact of science and technology, what has authority); axiology (most important in my life, central values, central ethics, preferred lifestyle); anthropology (self-identity, human nature relationship, interference in nature, nature of suffering, end of life); and, societal vision (individual-society relationship, societal aims), as well as four different categories of worldviews: traditional, modern, postmodern, and integrative. Using these five aspects and four categories of worldviews, the scale has 76 statements subdivided into 19 sets of 4 statements each. Each set formulates four qualitatively different perspectives, thereby representing the four different worldviews. For example, for the topic of metaphysics, which is part of the aspect of ontology, the following are the four statements: 1. God stands far above life on earth (traditional) 2. The universe is governed by mechanical, natural laws

(modern) 3. People look at the world from different perspectives, which are all equally valid (postmodern) 4. Reality is complex: it is both scientific and spiritual at the same time (integrative). Some studies have validated the WS with American and Dutch speaking population and concluded acceptable psychometric properties including internal and external construct validity, reliability and convergent validity (e.g. De Witt, Boer, Hedlund, & Osseweijer, 2016; De Witt, Osseweijer, & Pierce, 2015; Hedlund-de Witt, 2014a, 2014b). For the scoring, respondents are asked to check the items they most agreed with and least agreed with, the best-worst scaling approach. Since each worldview has 19 statements, worldview-specific scores ranged from 0–19 with higher scores indicating respondents' affinity to that specific worldview. For this research, at both the phases, the highest average score of a particular worldview was taken as a parameter for comparison. For the present study, Cronbach  $\alpha = .92$ ; item-scale intercorrelation = .88; Pearson's  $r = .91$ .

#### **4.5. Open-ended questions**

For the qualitative part of the investigation, five open-ended questions were posed to the respondents at both the phases, which are as follows: 1) what do you think about life and existence, 2) what are your aspirations, 3) what are your fears and anxieties, 4) describe any spiritual experiences that you have and how close do you feel to God, and 5) what is your understanding of the present day world?

#### **4.6. Fieldwork**

Phase 1 fieldwork was done over a period of 3 months from April–June 2007. At phase 1, data were conducted with 828 Aurovilians using the schedule and in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 Aurovilains. The participants for the detailed discourse were identified from the initial interviews and by mutual and shared consent. In-depth interviews lasted for over two hours, with participants narrating their views on each of the five core questions. Phase 2 fieldwork was done over a period of 3 months from April–June 2017. At phase 2, data were collected from 744 Aurovilians using the schedule and in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 of the same 22 Aurovilians who were spoken to at phase 1. The sample attrition at phase 2 for the in-depth interviews was due to unavailability at Auroville during that phase due to personal travel (three respondents). For the survey, the sample attrition of 84 respondents from phase 1 to phase 2 was due to two main reasons: unavailability due to personal travel or other business (76) and ill-health/ailment (8). Table 2 details of the profile of in-depth interview participants at both the phases.

#### **4.7. Statistical methods**

Phase 1 and 2 scores on the scales were analysed and compared using two-sample *t*-tests. Significant effects of independent predictor variables on the measures have been examined through non-parametric testing (Kruskal–Wallis). Bonferroni's adjusted alpha levels, Roy's largest root and Pillai's trace statistics have been used to examine the independent pair-wise and combined effects of independent predictors on outcome measures at phase 2.

#### **4.8. Qualitative data analysis**

The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions have been manually coded to develop themes. Based on the responses obtained, two cycles of manual coding were done. In the first cycle in-vivo coding was done to attune to participant language, perspectives and worldviews. In the second cycle, the similarly coded segments were collected to do pattern coding, that is, inferential codes pulling together material meaningfully and parsimoniously into meta codes (Saldana, 2009). Objectivity was maintained by cross-checking codes with responses at both levels of coding.

### **5. Results**

The analyses comprise phase 1 scores of 828 Aurovilians on the scales and phase 2 scores of 744 Aurovilians. *Post hoc* analyses examine the within-group differences in scale scores at both phases and two-sample *t*-tests were used for comparison. Multivariate analysis of phase 2 scores on the outcome measures examines the significant independent predictors.

**Table 2. In-depth interviews' participant profile**

	<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Phase 2</b>
	<b>N/M (SD)</b>	<b>N/M(SD)</b>
<b>Age</b>	33.02 (5.88)	44.01 (4.56)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	15	13
Female	7	6
<b>Nationality</b>		
Indian	8	7
French	11	9
German	1	1
Italian	1	1
British	1	1
<b>Marital status</b>		
Never married	9	8
Currently married	7	6
Widowed	4	3
Divorced/separated	2	2
<b>Religion (birth religion)</b>		
Hindu	7	6
Christian	15	13
<b>Education</b>		
Bachelors' degree	6	4
Postgraduate degree	2	2
Professional qualifications	14	13
<b>Source of initiation to Auroville</b>		
Friends	8	6
Family	14	13
<b>Previous association with Auroville</b>		
Student	6	4
Visitor	16	15
<b>Duration of being an Aurovilian</b>	8.34 (.41)	18.46 (.32)
<b>Living arrangement at Auroville</b>		
With family	7	6
Living alone	15	13
<b>Core occupation at Auroville</b>		
Organic agriculture	2	2
Basic educational research	1	1
Health care	1	1
Appropriate technology	11	9
Town planning	3	2
Information technology	1	1
Cottage industry	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>

Qualitative data has been analysed in terms of themes and narratives to study the nuances of the evolving thought of Aurovilians on critical titans of Integral yoga: existence, aspirations, existential anxieties, spiritual experiences and worldviews.

### 5.1. SET

The average phase 1 SET score of the Aurovilians was 24.58 ( $SD = 4.03$ ). The effects of gender and nationality were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for significance indicated that the phase 1 SET scores were higher for women vis-à-vis men and for Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationality vis-à-vis those from other nations.

The average phase 2 SET score of the Aurovilians was 41.28 ( $SD = 5.62$ ). The effects of gender and core occupation at Auroville were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for significance indicated that the phase 2 SET scores were higher for women vis-à-vis men and for Aurovilians working in organic agriculture and appropriate technology fields vis-à-vis other occupations.

### 5.2. AI—intrinsic aspirations (AI-IA)

The average phase 1 AI-IA score of the Aurovilians was 65.08 ( $SD = 6.89$ ). The effects of gender, nationality and marital status were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 1 AI-IA scores were higher for women vis-à-vis men, for Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationality vis-à-vis those from other nations, and for single Aurovilians (i.e. never married, widowed and divorced) vis-à-vis currently married Aurovilians.

The average phase 2 AI-IA score of the Aurovilians was 91.03 ( $SD = 7.82$ ). The effects of gender, nationality and core occupation at Auroville were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 2 AI-IA scores were higher for women vis-à-vis men, for Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationality vis-à-vis those from other nations, and for Aurovilians working in organic agriculture and appropriate technology fields vis-à-vis other occupations.

### 5.3. EAQ

The average phase 1 EAQ score of the Aurovilians was 4.58 ( $SD = .88$ ). The effects of gender, marital status and living arrangements were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 1 EAQ scores were higher for men vis-à-vis women, for single Aurovilians (i.e. never married, widowed and divorced) vis-à-vis currently married Aurovilians, and for those who lived alone vis-à-vis with family.

The average phase 2 EAQ score of the Aurovilians was 1.88 ( $SD = .89$ ). The effects of gender and living arrangements were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 2 EAQ scores were lower for women vis-à-vis men and those who lived alone vis-à-vis with family.

### 5.4. DSES

The average phase 1 DSES score of the Aurovilians was 42.48 ( $SD = 5.68$ ). The effects of gender, nationality, marital status and living arrangements were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 1 DSES scores were higher for women vis-à-vis men, for Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationality vis-à-vis those from other nations, for single Aurovilians (i.e. never married, widowed and divorced) vis-à-vis currently married Aurovilians, and for those who lived alone vis-à-vis with family.

The average phase 2 DSES score of the Aurovilians was 72.31 ( $SD = 7.78$ ). The effects of gender and nationality were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for

significance indicated that the phase 2 DSES scores were higher for women vis-à-vis men and for Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationality vis-à-vis those from other nations.

### 5.5. Worldview scale (WS)

The highest average WS score of the Aurovilians at phase 1 was of the postmodern worldview ( $M = 14.08, SD = 3.02$ ). The effects of gender, nationality, and marital status were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for significance indicated that the phase 1 WS scores (postmodern worldview) were higher for women vis-à-vis men, for Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationality vis-à-vis those from other nations and for single Aurovilians vis-à-vis those currently married.

The highest average WS score of the Aurovilians at phase 2 was of the integrative worldview ( $M = 15.21, SD = 3.06$ ). The effects of gender, nationality, marital status and core occupation at Auroville were significant. *Post hoc* analyses using Scheffe's *post hoc* criterion for significance indicated that the phase 2 WS scores (integrative worldview) were higher for women vis-à-vis men, for Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationality vis-à-vis those from other nations, for single Aurovilians vis-à-vis those currently married, and for Aurovilians working in organic agriculture and appropriate technology fields vis-à-vis other occupations.

### 5.6. Comparison of phase 1 and 2 scores

Table 3 compares the phase 1 and 2 scores of the Aurovilians on the various outcome measures. Phase 2 scores on existential thinking, intrinsic aspirations, and spiritual experiences of the Aurovilians were higher than their phase 1 scores. Phase 2 existential anxieties were lower than phase 1. At phase 1, postmodern worldview scores of the Aurovilians were higher and at phase 2, integrative worldview scores were higher.

### 5.7. Multivariate analysis of phase 2 scores

Phase 2 scores of the Aurovilians on the five outcome measures were further subjected to a MANOVA with eleven independent variables: age, gender, nationality, marital status, religion, education, source of initiation at Auroville, previous association with Auroville, duration of being an Aurovilian, living arrangements at Auroville and core occupation at Auroville. Significant associations of independent and moderator variables on the outcome measures were examined further by non-parametric testing (Kruskal-Wallis). All independent and moderator variables had significant effects on the outcomes. The interaction effects between the following independent and moderator variables further effected the outcomes: gender and core occupation at Auroville (Roy's largest root = 0.0876,  $F(6, 1569) = 63.17, p = 0.01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.42$ ); nationality and core occupation at Auroville (Roy's largest root = 0.07833,  $F(54, 1569) = 52.31, p = 0.01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.48$ ); education and core occupation at Auroville (Roy's largest root = 0.08441,  $F(12, 1569) = 51.16, p = 0.01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.44$ ); and, previous association with Auroville and core occupation at Auroville (Roy's largest root = 0.07994,  $F(6, 1569) = 51.28, p < 0.001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.53$ ).

**Table 3. Comparison of phase 1 and 2 scores of the Aurovilians on SET, AI-IA, EAQ, DSES and WS**

	Phase 1		Phase 2		Comparison of phase 1 and 2 scores*		
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	d
SET	24.58	4.03	41.28	5.62	29.03	.01	.41
AI-IA	65.08	6.89	91.03	7.82	31.44	.01	.43
EAQ	4.58	.88	1.88	.89	-11.03	.001	.52
DSES	42.48	5.68	72.31	7.78	18.76	.02	.54
WS (PWxIW)#	14.08	3.02	15.21	3.06	23.14	.01	.61

\*df = 1570

#PW = postmodern worldview, IW = integrative worldview

Tests were further conducted using Bonferroni’s adjusted alpha levels at .0045 per test (.05/11). The independent and moderator variables remained significantly effective as well as the pair-wise effects of significantly interacting moderators remained significant. The phase 2 SET, AI-IA, DSES and WS (PW) scores were higher and EAQ scores were lower under the combined effects of all significant independent and moderator variables (i.e. for Aurovilians in mid-40s, women, of Indian, French and German nationalities, single, Christians by birth, those with professional qualifications, initiated into Auroville by their family members, associated previously with Auroville as visitors, having a long association with Auroville, living alone in Auroville and engaged in organic agriculture and alternative technology as the core occupation) vis-à-vis under less significant independent and moderator variables (younger Aurovilians, men, of Italian, Dutch, British, Belgian, South Korean, Ukrainian and Spanish nationalities, currently married, Hindus by birth, having a bachelors’ degree or postgraduate degree, initiated by friends, previously associated with Auroville as students, having a comparatively shorter association with Auroville, living with family and engaged in other occupations such as education, healthcare, town planning, information technology and cottage industries). Table 4 depicts the significant multivariate effects on the phase 2 scores of Aurovilians.

**5.8. Existential thinking, aspirations, anxieties, spiritual quest and worldview: voices of the Aurovilians**

To understand the various dimensions and nuances of Aurovilians existential thinking, aspirations, anxieties, spiritual experiences and worldviews, in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 Aurovilians at phase 1 and 19 Aurovilians at phase 2. I illustrate here the various themes that emerged through the interviews.

**5.9. Existential thinking**

At phase 1, to the questions on their ideas of life and existence, Aurovilians discussed their existential thinking through the following core themes: purpose of life, reading about philosophies

**Table 4. Significant multivariate effects on the phase 2 SET, AI-IA, EAQ, DSES and WS scores of Aurovilians**

Variable(s)	Pillai’s trace	F	df	Error df
Age	.112	51.29	1	1570
Gender	.107	34.88	1	1570
Nationality	.215	29.81	9	1570
Marital status	.221	32.16	3	1570
Religion	.109	28.03	1	1570
Education	.089	19.32	2	1570
Source of initiation to Auroville	.110	31.76	1	1570
Previous association with Auroville	.103	28.93	1	1570
Duration of being an Aurovilian	.214	41.02	1	1570
Living arrangement at Auroville	.099	33.09	1	1570
Core occupation at Auroville	.094	21.61	6	1570
Gender * core occupation at Auroville	.108	19.22	6	1569
Nationality * core occupation at Auroville	.116	18.21	54	1569
Education * core occupation at Auroville	.101	20.38	12	1569
Previous association with Auroville * core occupation at Auroville	.204	18.09	6	1569
Age * gender * nationality * marital status * religion * education * source of initiation to Auroville * previous association with Auroville * duration of being an Aurovilian * living arrangement at Auroville * core occupation at Auroville	.221	11.23	324	1560

and beliefs, having a philosophy of life that helps manage stress and make important decisions, meditation, prayer and reflecting on the mysteries of life, and ideas beyond the “here and now” of daily life.

On the theme of purpose of life, an Aurovilian said:

My idea about life and existence gets clearer when I ruminates on the purpose of life, in solitude. What am I here for and what am I here to do? These are the questions that I ask. (Auroville: May 2007)

Aurovilians’ existential thinking was contingent on and derived from their readings on philosophies and beliefs:

Ideas on life and existence get clearer when one reads on the writings of Sri Aurobindo, The Mother and several other philosophers like Sartre and Ramana Maharshi, who build our thinking on what is life and human existence. (Auroville: April 2007)

Existential thinking was also qualified as having a philosophy of life that helps manage stress and make important decisions:

To think existentially is to have a philosophy and guiding norm of living a peaceful life and calm mind and soul, that then helps make right decisions. (Auroville: May 2007).

One important dimension of existential thinking of Aurovilians came from meditation, prayer and reflecting on the mysteries of life:

The best thoughts on life and existence come when one sits and concentrates, in deep meditation, prayer and consecration. That is when the mysteries of life unfold. (Auroville: June 2007)

Another core theme within the existential narrative was to have ideas beyond the immediate:

The essence of thinking about existence is to have ideas beyond the ‘here and now’. That means not to get preoccupied in nitty-gritties of mundane existence, but to have a larger vision. (Auroville: July 2007)

At phase 2, Aurovilians ideas on existential thinking revealed the following themes: thinking about human spirit and what happens to life after death, thinking about ideas such as eternity, truth, justice and goodness, probing deeply into the meaning of life, thinking about a grand plan or process that human beings are a part of, life’s big questions, and reflections on the nature of reality or the universe.

Aurovilians at phase 2 considered existential thinking as ruminating on the human spirit and post-life:

Existential thinking means thinking about the human core, which is the spirit and specifically on what happens to humans after the end of life. (Auroville: April 2017)

Some other themes on existential thinking that emerged at the second phase were around ethics and aesthetics, thoughts about eternity, truth, justice and goodness. Specifically some Aurovilians talked about a deep probe into life’s meaning, thinking about a grand plan that humans are a part of, life’s big questions, and reflections on the nature of reality or the universe.

To think about life is to think about beauty, delve deep into ideas of what is life, what is human existence for, asking those bigger questions, and focusing one’s attention on what this universe is. (Auroville: May 2017).

### **5.10. Intrinsic aspirations**

At phase 1, Aurovilians discussed their intrinsic aspirations through the following core themes: to grow and learn new things, to have good friends I can count on, to work for the betterment of society, to be physically and mentally healthy, to share my life with someone I love, to choose what I do, instead of being pushed along by life, to have committed, intimate relationships, and to know and accept who I really am.

As narrated by an Aurovilian:

What I aspire for is to continue learning and educating myself, to have good friends and share my life with someone I deeply love, to have a satisfaction that I am working for the greater common good of society at large, and to enjoy good health. (Auroville: May 2007)

Another participant narrated the following:

What one would want for in life is to choose what one wants to do, to have good support of people around you, and to know who you really are. (Auroville: July 2007)

At phase 2, Aurovilians discussed their intrinsic aspirations through the following core themes: at the end of my life, to be able to look back on my life as meaningful and complete, to work to make the world a better place, to gain increasing insight into why I do the things I do, and to have deep enduring relationships with significant others and the divine.

In the words of an Aurovilian:

The core aspiration is to be able to look back on life with a sense of satisfaction, but even more integral to that is to have dedicated a life for the betterment of the world. (Auroville: May 2017)

To quote another Aurovilian:

The purpose of life is to have an insight, an insight into why one is there on this earth and doing what one is doing, to have that insight is an aspiration. To have deep and long lasting relationships with those who mean a lot to you and with the divine is equally or possibly more important. (Auroville: July 2017)

### **5.11. Existential anxieties**

Certain existential anxieties were pronounced at phase 1, and visibly diminished at phase 2. At phase 1, some core themes revealing existential anxieties of the Aurovilians were: anxiety about life's meaning, anxiety related to a sense of possible emptiness, and anxieties related to the possibility of fate overruling life.

To quote an Aurovilian:

We do have worries, for instant, I do worry about my sense of purpose in life and the possibility of feeling a sense of ennui or how really to cope with ideas of space and nothingness. Though we eulogize the concept of space, sometimes the very notion of space can also make us feel empty, ...so that's a point of anxiety. (Auroville: May 2007)

In the words of another Aurovilian:

Whatever we do in life and our spiritual quests apart, there is always a sense that destiny or fate will overrule, there is a sense of uncertainty because of that. Its difficult to overcome this sense very easily, and that becomes a point of anxiety. (Auroville: April 2007).

At phase 2, though Aurovilians were more reassured and less anxious, one theme still prevailed that concerned having a continuous and consistent sense of meaning and purpose in life.

To narrate from an Aurovilian's discussion:

While one is on the spiritual path, and there are no worries as such because we believe in the idea of complete surrender to the divine, what cannot be always surmounted is the anxiety of life's meaning. While the purpose of life is to attain the divine, the pathway of sadhana or consecration is not an easy one. To not be able to meet the norms, or to get lost on the way, which could be a possibility, sometimes leads to anxieties, but definitely such instances are sporadic. (Auroville: May 2017)

### **5.12. Spiritual experiences and inclinations**

At phase 1, Aurovilians discussed their spiritual experiences and inclinations through the following themes: feeling of God's presence, experiencing a connection with the divine and nature, and, being spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.

In the words of an Aurovilian:

When you ask me about my spiritual experiences, my personal spirituality, all I can say is that I feel God's presence always. That is a beautiful feeling. (Auroville: April 2007)

To quote another Aurovilian:

Nature is beautiful because nature creates and creation is beautiful. My spirituality is experiencing a connection with nature and the divine. I am touched...i feel overwhelmed, with the beauty of creation. (Auroville: July, 2007)

At phase 2, Aurovilians discussed their spiritual experiences and inclinations through two core themes: feeling of deep inner peace and harmony and immense proximity to the Absolute or divine.

The following is an excerpt from a narration by an Aurovilian:

Spiritual experiences are innate...immensely personal. But what we do, that matters in terms of how our spirituality is shaped. For me, I feel a deep sense of peace, a sense of harmony, closeness to The Mother. When I sit for meditation at Matrimandir, I feel peace descending in my heart and soul. Every vibration echoes peace and harmony. Then I feel one with the divine. That is a spiritual experience. (Auroville: May 2017)

### **5.13. Worldviews**

Worldviews of the Aurovilians at the two phases revealed two distinctive paradigms. The phase 1 worldview of the Aurovilians was predominantly postmodern as reflected in the ontological constructions, episteme, axiology, anthropology and societal vision. The phase 2 worldview of the Aurovilians was predominantly integrative. To the question on "what is your understanding of the present day world?", the following are the excerpts from the narrations of the Aurovilians at both phases.

At phase 1, Aurovilians narrated as follows:

There are multiple perspectives in this world and what we see has many dimensions to it (*reality is plural, discontinuous and fragmented*). There is no one reality, there are many facets and dimensions to it (*pluralism*). What we know of this world is only what we see, what we don't see we don't know, but that does not mean it does not exist (*reality is constructed by the knower*). Every individual in this world is unique, and the way he or she understands the world is also unique (*self-expression, self-direction*). Nature needs to be

preserved so that there is a harmony of humans with nature, currently all human action for development is in conflict with nature, that destroys the environment (*humans to have a cautious relationship with nature*). The main purpose of human existence is to ensure a balance and harmony between humans and nature, so that injustices are transcended and there is a better state of existence than the present one (*post-industrial society*). (Auroville: April-July, 2007; *thematic emphasis in italics added*)

At phase 2, narrative of Aurovilians revealed a higher sense of integration and thereby an integrative worldview:

While there are multiple perspectives, there is a possibility of unity in diversity, as seen in the way Auroville has developed in harmony with humans from diverse backgrounds and nature (*holism/integralism*). Science and spirituality both are required to understand this world, both have their unique value (*critical realism and pragmatism*). But the main thing that is non-negotiable is for humans, for all of us, to have a harmonious relationship with nature. That is the only way to reach the divine (*self-transcendence and universal morality*). Today's need for the world is for humanity to be in unity and synergy with nature. For that, the only way is to really think seriously about sustainable development and find amicable solutions to societal and environmental problems (*integrative vision*). Integral yoga has all the components to give us good food for thought on this. (Auroville: April-July 2017; *thematic emphasis in italics added*)

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

Results of this study on Aurovilians' existential thinking, aspirations, anxieties, spiritual experiences and worldviews over two distinctive phases, have revealed the following. Phase 2 scores of the Aurovilians on measures of existential thinking, aspirations, and spiritual experiences were higher and existential anxieties scores were lower than phase 1 scores. At phase 1, Aurovilians had higher average scores on postmodern worldview vis-à-vis traditional, modern and integrative worldview. At phase 2, scores on the integrative worldview were higher.

On the measures for existential thinking, intrinsic aspirations and spiritual experiences, at phase 1, women, Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationalities and single Aurovilians, scored higher. Existential anxieties were higher for men and single Aurovilians at phase 1. But at phase 2, existential anxieties were lower for women and those who lived alone. At phase 2, women, Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationalities and Aurovilians working in organic agriculture and appropriate technology fields scored higher on existential thinking, intrinsic aspirations and spiritual experiences.

Multivariate analyses of phase 2 scores showed that all independent and moderator variables significantly influenced the outcome measures. Women, Aurovilians with Indian, French and German nationalities, those with professional qualifications and previously associated with Auroville as visitors, were more likely to be engaged in organic agriculture and appropriate technology fields. At phase 2, scores on existential thinking, intrinsic aspirations, spiritual experiences, and postmodern worldview scores were higher and existential anxiety scores were lower for Aurovilians in mid-40s, women, of Indian, French and German nationalities, single, Christians by birth, those with professional qualifications, initiated into Auroville by their family members, associated previously with Auroville as visitors, having a long association with Auroville, living alone in Auroville and engaged in organic agriculture and alternative technology as the core occupation.

At phase 1, Aurovilians' ideas on existential thinking were centered around themes of purpose of life, reading about philosophies and beliefs, having a philosophy of life that helps manage stress and make important decisions, meditation, prayer and reflecting on the mysteries of life, and ideas beyond the "here and now" of daily life. Intrinsic aspirations at phase 1 were to grow and learn new things, to have good friends I can count on, to work for the betterment of society, to be physically and mentally healthy, to share my life with someone I love, to choose what I do, instead of being pushed along by life, to have committed, intimate relationships, and to know and accept

who I really am. Spiritual inclinations were revealed through feeling of God's presence, experiencing a connection with the divine and nature, and, being spiritually touched by the beauty of creation. Existential anxieties at phase 1 were about anxiety about life's meaning, sense of possible emptiness, and possibility of fate overruling life. Phase 1 worldview was predominantly postmodern and pluralistic.

At phase 2, Aurovilians' existential thinking was about human spirit and what happens to life after death, eternity, truth, justice and goodness, meaning of life, thinking about a grand plan or process that human beings are a part of, life's big questions, and reflections on the nature of reality or the universe. Intrinsic aspirations were to find meaning to life and a strengthened relational consciousness with significant others and nature. Spiritual inclinations were revealed through a feeling of deep inner peace and harmony and immense proximity to the Absolute or divine. Anxieties were less pronounced but around one core theme, which was to have a consistent sense of meaning and purpose in life. The phase 2 worldview of the Aurovilians was predominantly integrative, critical realist and pragmatic.

The present study hence demonstrates the evolution of existential thinking and spiritual inclinations as well as integrative worldviews of Auroville as an intentional commune. The specific meaning-making is to promote a theistic existential and integrative worldview drawing from Sri Aurobindo's Integral yoga. In tune with literature on intentional communes (e.g. Van Bueren & Tarlow, 2006; Van Wormer, 2006), Auroville as a community and Aurovilians nurture the idealist belief that an alternative life is possible. This is reflected in differential organizing of the commune as well as nuanced and evolved notions and perspectives on existential thinking, aspirations and spiritual inclinations. Drawing from Jaya Reinhalter (2014), it can be said that Aurovilians engage in a divine counter-hegemony of sorts, with an indicative move from postmodern to integrative worldview. The discourse of aspirations is built through pragmatic and scalable vision, collective aspiration for the divine through nature proximity, alternative lifestyle and abiding by norms of sustainable development. Theistic existentialism of Auroville and Aurovilians is, as discussed in literature, a phenomenological quest for the Absolute (Okoro, 2013), the additional element is through an integrative, naturalistic, and pragmatic worldview.

This 10-year study has some of the following limitations. Data were collected at two distinctive phases, which does not take into account nuances and iterative alterations in existential issues, anxieties, aspirations, spiritual experiences and worldviews. An investigation with a shorter gap between phases or a stage-wise exploration would thus be required. Further, the two datasets can also be interactively correlated with each other, in a further research. Critical and intervening life course events that could impact the outcome measures and worldviews also need to be taken into account. Some other moderators such as participants' mental health and wellbeing and mediators, such as occupational satisfaction within the intentional community milieu and related dynamics, also need to be investigated. The present study is intentional commune-specific as well as has subjective dimensions, thereby posing limits to generalizability. To examine whether and how philosophical tenets of theistic existentialism actually translate across sites and international religious and spiritual intentional settlements, a comparative investigation is required.

The study is a demonstration of the practical applications of Integral yoga as a world affirming philosophy to qualify the divine quest of humanity, through an intentional community's experiment. Within the remit of post "modernity," how exactly spirituality is infused into daily existence of humans and the way it is performed, was explicated through this enterprise.

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