

CHAPTER 5TH

EXPLORATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE ASPECTS OF FAITH

In order to study 'faith' of individuals, our study construed it with two main connotations. First, faith is an undoubting, deep psychological personal characteristic in the ideals or words of the Masters. Faith of an individual plays a key role in her or his own development that is, 'change and perfection' one wants to bring about in oneself. Second, faith is 'reflected' in engagements with rituals or practices performed by a social group or by an individual. Faith is a personal and inner quality of an individual but manifested in the outer action rituals, practices and various ideas like prayers, display of pictures, quoting from the words of the Masters. The chapter navigates through the most conspicuous examples of faith observed in the field: starting with the names of houses and individuals to more abstract expressions such as rituals.

Various practices were prevalent in the schools, which indicated deepest aspirations and beliefs of the participants. For example Higher ideals behind the physical symbols like *the Samadhi*, *Matrimandir*, photos of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, symbols of Masters (see: Annexure 1.2) and practices like recitation of the prayers, mediating with the music, quotations from the works of the Masters to name a few.

Participants' involvement in the practices and their connotation was at times critical. Participants reflected on their own views about and over their relation with the Ashram or moving out to Aurovillian their interviews. Data also indicated that the collective forms of 'life' emerged out of individual 'faith', which reflected in their family patterns and volunteering in the Ashram or Auroville; which was a 'glimpse' to faith as personal quality reflected in their choices of life. Eventually, all themes discussed in the chapter act as 'imagery' of faith in action both individual and collective.

Naming the Houses and Communities

Naming is a unique human behavior associated closely with language and symbolism of the meaning behind the name. The act of naming reflected the linguistic symbolism of Faith ideals and the meaning behind those names. Faith in values of Integral Yoga led individuals to find ways to name their houses and name their children; Names were those qualities, which Integral Yoga view ascertained as the basis of human growth. The act of Naming

signifies the adherence to and belief of individuals to those qualities and therefore, the worldview.

Names of the houses and the communities became important to study since the houses associated with the Ashram or Auroville stood out against the general naming pattern of houses and streets at Pondichéry. A closer look at the houses one could differentiate many Ashram related houses with other houses because of the names the slabs outside the houses. The names of the streets in Pondichéry bear the names of the French consulates during the colonization period. Others bear the name of important people of Pondichéry, *Ranagapillai*, to even Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Nation (Indian state). The architecture of the houses on the eastern side of the canal is mainly French now slowly taking its modern shape, with new constructions. There are also houses with traditional Tamil architecture, which are mostly old and dilapidated. On the western side, the houses are largely of traditional Tamil architecture but the new urban multiplexes style is also overpowering in many re constructions. Most of the people who are related with the Ashram for long and deal with people 'connectedⁱ' with the Ashram, walked down the lanes and could identifying which house belonged to the Ashram or to the Ashram connected people mainly because of the names they had instead of the name of an individual.

Moving in the lanes especially in the 'white' or eastern part of the town one came across houses which had names like *félicité*, *serenité*, *quietude*, *à toi*ⁱⁱ etc. The names bestowed upon the house represent the qualities the Mother often described in her writings for individuals to cultivate in them. The practice was a legacy of what the Mother used to do. She used to give names to certain houses, several other properties and even individuals (the participants shared several anecdotal references for this). Some of the house had slabs outside the walls, which bear the name in the facsimile of the Mother's handwriting. There were individuals who had chosen the names in the facsimile handwriting of the Mother on their own. When I asked an ex-student, that if the Mother had given the name of their house, which I read on the slab on the outside wall of their house, s/he replied:

"...*Oh! the Mother did not give the name but we have chosen it, in her (facsimile) writing.*"

At Auroville the houses in cohorts have names which are the quality they identified with in Sanskrit, French, English or even other languages. For example, *Courage*, *Yantra*, *Dehashakti*, *Arc-en-ciel*, *Aspiration*, *Mir* to name a few. The address of an individual would

usually be the community he/she lived in. There would be two three families or individuals residing in that community. One had to just enter the community and asked for the person by his/ her name to whom one wanted to meet. There were no house numbers only names! Naming the community was a sign of identification of the houses with higher aspiration or quality reflected in the name. My personal visit to the two communities and stay at one of the houses in Yantra community, revealed the values of living in these communities. To quote an episode from the Adventure community:

I entered the small and quiet and forested community with my friend who is also from Auroville. The place was green and a little away from the main tar road. We went there to meet our friend, who had recently been blessed a baby girl. A small house made with bricks welcomed me (she had earlier shared pictures of her house with me), it was full of plants and trees, and in a corner a windmill was running quietly pulling out water from the well. We met the couple and their little daughter, they had just finished lunch. The baby was lying spread on a simple rug with a few toys, the house had bare minimum furniture and utensils in the kitchen. The husband and the wife broke into a discussion that if we need electricity to survive and how much we need. (this was in contrast to life lived in the cities) the wife commented that she did not need so much but only those who needed their laptops. She looked at her husband and smiled. She told me that her house was yogic with not much of the technology hassles. She asked me where I was living. I told her Pondichery, she lamented that how I survive in the pee pee (she intended that Pondichery town is full of noise and pollution). (We talked about other things).....

Int/Obs Dec 2010/ Adventure/ researcher and other Aurovillians

The episode highlights the views of the residents who demarcate from the world 'outside' based on choices of lifestyle. Another visit to the same community was at night, to be part of a bonfire party, where the participants interacted about the experiments in the community.

This was my second visit to the community but to another house, it was night we (I and another Ashram inmate) reached there without any lights and a boy and girl navigated through the dark path, with dogs. It was a little colder than Pondichery due to the tress. (on the way had been told that there used to be several small bylanes to reach Auroville two decades back and not so many houses as they had come along the highway now). I got down and met the owner of the house, the conversation began with the owner of the house about his experiment of making the house entirely on solar energy that is, solar water heater, using bamboo for scaffolds and another alternative material to make the house instead of concrete and iron, and other experiments in the community.

Int/ObsFeb2011/Adventure, Auroville/ Several ex-students of SAICE.

The name and the aspiration of the persons who had chosen to build the house in this community matched in these two cases. In case of these communities, the idea was 'adventure' of an alternative lifestyle to live with the bare minimum, ecologically sound objects and material in the community.

Names of the individuals (or even shops, organizations like publications, printing press, and study circles to name a few) were insights about the individual's relation with values of the worldview.

Naming Individuals

Individuals often wanted to share the story or meaning of their names. They told that the Mother used to name the individuals and often individuals mainly the inmates of the Ashram requested for a new name from the Mother. However, in two separate incidents two individuals shared that their stories of not accepting the names by the Mother.

After narrating the story of his journey from his native place to this, The Ashram inmate added- "when I came here, the Mother suggested a name for me (other than this present name). I had a dream where the Mother addressed me with 'the name she has given me'. - "But I never liked that name. I kept my name what it is."

The interaction went on about the life at the Ashram, stating the decision the individual accepted the place and values but not the name the Mother gave.

Int/March 2011/ On a Walk with Ashram Inmate

The participants shared incidents and anecdotes about each other, on one such occasion a teacher narrated a story that how and his friend wanted to change the name but decided otherwise.

Sagar wanted to change his name as everyone used to tease him because of it. So he went one day to the Mother, realizing that she was giving new names to individuals. He stood in the queue only to realize that he did not like the names being given and decided to quietly go away from that place. He is still known with his name Sagar.

Int/June 2011/ Ashram School, Researcher and other Ashram Inmates

These two episodes indicated that to give new names was part of the culture, which may not be in continuation in the same form today. However, children at SAICE and a few at Auroville had names, which were unique and reflected association with the Masters. Naming the child was not the focus of the study but the practice of naming the children with prefix or suffix of 'Auro' or joining it to their surname (or the family name) made it imperative to study the practice of 'naming'. Researcher interviewed three individuals: two boys and one girl who had the word 'Auro' (either in name or surname). We asked that 'who named them?' and 'what does their name mean?' the responses revealed a deeper link with *Sadhaks* and the individuals. Sometimes *Sadhaks* were in their family relations, but not in all the cases. In many cases *Sadhaks*ⁱⁱⁱ were involved in giving such names upon meditation or impromptu, which the parents accepted. It reflected the interactions and proximity of relations between the *Sadhaks*, school and families. The children also had names after the characters in Sri Aurobindo's play or the titles of his poems- *Ahana*, *Savitri*, *Satyavaan*, or Sanskratized names *Divij*, *Ritarpan*. In one of the cases, it was a sheer resemblance with the name of a person, whom the brother liked and named his sibling after that person. In general names mostly had origin in Sanskrit or Regional Indian languages- Oriya, Bengali, Gujarati to name a few.

Sometimes naming was effect of the multicultural life style at Auroville than an issue of faith. At LB the names of children were *Indianized* or *Americanized*. 'Satyamayi', 'Tara', 'Narayan', 'Pooja' were names of a few children who were not Indians but had been living at Auroville and had Indian names. Not everyone changed his or her names; therefore, one could conclude that this was not an absolute rule or tradition. It was a personal choice of individuals or their families and sometimes more for convenience.

At the AID children had traditional Tamil names for example: *Indumathi, Parthipan*. In terms of names, the children there carried or preserved their regional identities to the schools. As a result, for volunteers from Europe at The AID it was a challenge to pronounce their Indian names, with their accent, which often left children laughing, or gave them an opportunity to crack a joke on the pronunciations of the Western teachers.

Naming and changing of names was a creative aspect in linguistics as per one of the experts^{iv} in Indian languages. There is no research in the mainstream academia on this in India especially with reference to child development that researcher could come across. Data indicated that in the field, names as a linguistic form were the first conspicuous symbolism of faith. It indicated that the individuals belonged to a group or a culture. The words of explanations of belief about their names came later on.

Concluding from both the sections on naming we can say that it was a conscious attempt to render the individual and the abode with some meaning, which was likely an 'aspiration'. After explaining a practice of naming, which is individualistic, we now move on to discuss the practices, which are more collectivist.

Defining School Culture: Rituals and Practices

Thapan (1991), Sibia (2006) and Stambach (2010) studied the school culture in their respective fields and their rituals and practices. All three highlighted the role and involvement of participants with the rituals and its importance to understand the 'school culture'^v. Rituals had standard patterns and were regular in time and space. Standardization involved regularization of a practice and would mean nearly same steps of practice for all individuals. In this strict sense, the 'March Past' was a ritual in the field; but there were other rituals, which had flexibility to an extent for an individual to reciprocate and practice it. Rituals are those practices that are likely to involve 'the collective' in an outright and upfront manner. Rituals especially in case of innovative or faith based schools were signs of collectivity and passing on the ideas or values of the world-view over the generations. They also symbolized the tradition and vision of the school. Rituals of the schools helped study that how 'immortality' of values was sought in the schools. Rituals do not mean that they are religious in nature and not meaningless repeated actions by the participants. Rather for the present study, rituals are the ways by which the participants share their identity of the schooling process (an idea, vision or truth implied behind the same). The practice of the

rituals made schooling more than what happened in classrooms and teaching-learning process.

The three schools in the study had well formulated and also new formulating practices or rituals that reflected values of the schools. Few rituals had history while others were on the path of making history and were in the process to be formalized.

It was noteworthy to see the similarity of a few rituals and practices across the three schools and formulation of new or opposite of existing rituals sometimes. Oldest practices were most likely to be those that were started in initial years of the Ashram by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo or during their presence by certain individuals. For example, (going to picnics and excursions at SAICE being one such and the urn fire meditation on *Darshan* days at Auroville is another example. While new practices were, which the students or individuals of the Ashram or Auroville were starting in harmony with the spirit and values of the Integral Worldview. The two examples of upcoming practices were- annual visit of students who are passing out from SAICE to Auroville (which was yet to pick be regularized and involve all the students) and another was the participation in the 'Golden Chain'^{vi} activities- which was formed by a group of ex-students of SAICE.

In terms of participation, rituals and practices had certain restriction and freedom that allowed certain individuals and barred the rest. Many of the rituals were open to public and anyone could take part in the same. There were practices like March Past which were restricted to the participants who were the Ashramites, Ashram students, and non-members (who were almost like an Ashramite or an Ashramite but not part of his age group), while spectators participated in the special sense and added meaning to the act of March Past.

Samadhi – Silence, Surrender and Prayer

The Samadhi of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is where they are laid to rest after they left their physical bodies. It is situated in the main building of the Ashram where the Masters spent the last years of their lives. The main building, where the Samadhi is, also housed many Ashram inmates and offices. There was usually a gatekeeper (a local Tamil man in his middle adulthood) at the brown wooden door, guiding or restricting the visitors, and as one entered there were Ashram inmates or more volunteers to guide and instruct- "switch off the mobile" (softly hushed in Hindi, English and Tamil) usually indicated with gestures to switch off mobiles. The small wooden gate had the symbol of the Mother displayed above the gate

(this was quite popular for visitors to stand and get photographed, most likely as a souvenir that they have been to Pondichéry).

Upon entering the gate, there were steps with rockery (exhibited with huge cactus, other plants and lilies) on either side. The steps led to the building, which housed a bookstore on the ground floor. The path in between the rockery and the Ashram building is mainly used for exit. The concrete path in between the outer boundary of the building and the rockery led towards the Samadhi. A public convenience was on the left side, the entrance to which was managed by flowerpots. Beautiful flowerpots were also displayed against the walls. These were changed regularly. As one turned right, in front one could see the Samadhi. A huge copper pod tree, referred as the Service tree (significance given by the Mother), grew close to the Samadhi, with its branches spread over the Samadhi.

Silence was a virtue in the Ashram. Most actions around the Samadhi were managed with Silence. One could observe and experience Silence and its effect on the self, even when one was around the Ashram. A small white placard hung on one of the pillars around the Samadhi, in the Mother's facsimile handwriting in blue 'Silence' (which is spelt almost similar in English and French). The place and activities (practices) associated with the same held importance not only for individuals from the Ashram but for all the individuals connected with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Pranam: bowing down to the Masters

"Offering *pranam*" (to the Masters) or offering one's respect implies surrendering oneself at *Samadhi* was essential for most of the children. There was no time or indication from the school to go to *Samadhi* but it became part of a student's everyday life. These were times early in the morning, or when school or physical education program known as Group finished, or most likely late night for older children. Parents or caretakers accompanied young children, but as they grew old, they became independent in their visit to the *Samadhi* and offering their *pranam*.

The teachers, the students, the parents, and many visitors went to the *Samadhi* at different times of the day. They bowed down on Samadhi with knees bent and head on the Samadhi, some folded hands, others just looked at, it was a thread that tied each of them, while they were all connected to the Samadhi in their meditations, prayers, reflections or might be

something else. During the fieldwork, I never found any teacher or family insisting upon the same, but sometimes it was suggestive:

The two students Sujay and Raghav were new to the school, they joined SAICE last year. They and two senior students of SAICE are interacting with me. Sujay said that he had been to the center at his native place, (that implies where devotees form a group to do various activities and readings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo) he told us that he went to the Samadhi daily, while he mentioned that his friend Raghav was not going. I was with another senior student, who happen to knew Raghav's family. The senior student suggested to Raghav that he should go the Samadhi. He did not react and just listened.

On later occasions we just asked the Raghav whether he had gone to the Samadhi or not. but since this was a personal choice to practice and he was a teenager, asking further seemed contradicting his freedom. This was not the subject further in the meetings I was part of.

During the fieldwork Raghav used to visit the Samadhi with his friends. On another occasion I saw him passing on a bicycle, slowing down to stop in front of the Ashram, he looked at the Ashram (may be the Mother's room) and closed his eyes. This was a change that happened in him.

IntObsMar2011/Corner House/ researcher, one senior student & two new students at SAICE
There were different ways of exhibiting reverence around the Samadhi and different opinion about the ways. For example, people looked up at the room of the Mother, touched their hand on forehead and throat, a gesture of seeking pardon or giving respect. The first time I observed these individual gestures keenly and asked a friend about these practices.

A friend who had recently become an Aurovillian, had been associated with the Integral thought since her childhood, I told her with surprise when I observed that many individuals offered pranam to the Mother's room or offered incense's smoke as gesture of Aarti. and asked her, "do you also do all this?" She replied, "No I never do that!" (she visited the Samadhi whenever she went to Pondichéry from Auroville) but she said, "to each one his own, if that (action) gives them something so it is for him or her to perform". But personally she did not believe in the same (Since in her view the Mother and Sri Aurobindo never encouraged the same). We concluded 'to each his own way of reverence.' And we smiled with some deep understanding as she spoke and I listened in agreement with her.

Disc/Int/ Oct 2009/ AV/ Researcher and Aurovillian

A possibility of challenging aspect for human mind is to comprehend this place. As there is nothing codified and individuals held critical and many times contrary view of any practice.

Life around the Samadhi

The observations sketched the view of the Samadhi. There were other activities coupled with the space around the Samadhi in the main Ashram building. Few of the activities were conspicuous and two of them, which I could observe were open to participation of others apart from *pranam*. These were: burning of the incense sticks around the Samadhi and meditation in the evening (except on Sundays and Thursdays). Early morning and in the evening there was distribution of the incense sticks for those who visited the Samadhi, a nice metal stand was kept with flame inside and each person (who wanted to light the incense) would go take an incense stick, light it and place it in on a huge vertical stand. The ritual of *pranam*, lighting incense happened in the atmosphere of silence, while several other routine activities happened around as well. The Bulletin^{vii} office was open, where often free Bulletins were distributed or one could go and read them there. The visitors came and went away during the visiting hours. They were told politely: to form queues, not to sit around Samadhi, to switch off the cellphones; crows were chased away sometimes with a catapult, the floor was cleaned off falling leaves or birds' excreta. The gardeners worked around the Samadhi to arrange flowerpots or took care of the Service tree: providing support, cleaning it from any infections or parasites etc.

On the left was the display area of information. Many notices remained the same or were permanent. Few notices were regularly changed. These were the ones about competitions, cultural programs by visiting artists or professors, medical check-ups, about Auroville visits, instructions to PED members^{viii}. Children from the school and others like me came to see the notices especially on Saturdays to check the movie notice^{ix} or during the 'competition seasons' to check the information about teams and events.

Life around the Samadhi brought the atmosphere of silence, reverence or love for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo amidst the other activities carried around quietly. Students experienced a deeper inner discipline of observing or experiencing the silence. Outer intrusions of noise were there even at the Samadhi as Ashram's scattered plan (refer chapter 4) led to outside activities to cross paths with Ashram activities. At times even some late night concert would be blaring full volume on, and the noise would reach the Ashram but the activities of the

individuals remained undisturbed. *Pranams*, *agarbattis*, sitting quietly, smiles or peace on the faces remained the same.

The Matrimandir –Beauty, Meditations and Aspirations

Many visitors referred to the Matrimandir as the ‘Golden globe’ or the ‘Golden Earth’. Its history of origin and conception hold much of its symbolic and instrumental value (See Annexure 5.1). This has much restricted access for the outsiders, visitors at Auroville new comers and even to Aurovillians, than the Ashram. It had enough visitors, which was beyond the limit of what volunteers could handle. Matrimandir official staff asked a question to the visitors, ‘*Do you really want to go there?*’ As a question, it challenged the understanding of visitors who thought that places like these should have free access for the public. Among many of them, there might have just been the curiosity to visit this great piece of architecture but there were also individuals who had an ardent desire to experience it and meditate inside it. To share an example, I used to take the bus^x that took visitors from Pondichéry to Matrimandir. Sometimes, the visitors going to Auroville or to the Ashram for the first time had curious enquiries. For example:

On one such visit to Auroville early morning, a European woman in her late adulthood was enquiring her co passengers about the Matrimandir. She wanted to know if she could go inside. I listened to her interaction and then spoke to her. She told me she had planned this trip from Europe and had been checking the website. She added that she was suggested through email to do the booking for ‘inside chamber’ to meditate after she would arrived at Auroville; which was not able to do. She had a few days to be here and was really concerned that if they (Matrimandir staff) would allow her to meditate there. I explained the process and told her if she could tell the volunteers there, they would allow her for an inside meditation^{xi}. She was very concerned but a deep silence and calm enveloped her in her desire to go inside and meditate.

Int Sept2011/Bus going to Auroville/ Researcher, an old woman from Europe and a third person connected with Auroville.

Rules to gain the entry to Matrimandir and its geographical distance from the place of residence and place of work of many Aurovillians, made it challenging for most of them and the researcher to visit it daily. An Aurovillian insisted upon going to Matrimandir daily. But during the fieldwork, the limited group of friends from Auroville were not a regular visitor unlike the Samadhi at the Ashram, except the individuals who worked at the Matrimandir.

Many friends from Auroville reported an inclination to visit the Samadhi at the Ashram than to visit the Matrimandir. An Aurovillian shared similar insight:

Mahi exclaimed looking at me, "so you are here!" - (that is Pondichéry),. She enquired that where I am staying. I smiled and said here (that means Pondichéry). She pointed towards the Ashram and remarked this is our center. Then she narrated a very personal incident she had with one of the very senior Sadhaks at the Ashram from the time of Sri Aurobindo.^{xiii} She told that in her initial days at Auroville she would rush every day from there to be at the Samadhi and spend hours here. Once the senior Sadhak who would often go to the Matrimandir was with her and commented that how he wished to be at this beautiful place referring to the Matrimandir (he himself used to live in the Ashram premises). She told me that the Sadhak's comment changed her view and made her feel how special she was to be at the Matrimandir.

She left me smiling with the sweet feeling and retrospect on the relation many individuals share with the Ashram and the Samadhi- a fact shared by another Auroville friend who said that he still tried to be at the Samadhi every day.

Int Mar 2011/in front of the Ashram/M an old Aurovillian and researcher

Learning Environment at the Matrimandir

Teachers at the AID reported to take the children there but it did not happen during the fieldwork. At LB, the teachers used the environment at the Matrimandir in a creative manner. The teacher undertook the project during 2011 and reported the details in an interaction with the researcher later.

One of the teachers at LB working with eight years old shared her project with me. She took the children to the Matrimandir to look into the vital education of children that is emotions. She told that the project was experiential and based on individual experience of the same feeling. As per her Matrimandir gave silent atmosphere where the children could look at emotions and observe them quietly.

Int/September 2012/ LB/ teacher and the researcher

Matrimandir for younger children was not therefore a mere place to visit as part of a ritual. They experienced silence in order to look into a theme in relation with the 'self'.

Once even, I took the children from LB to Matrimandir. Visit to the Matrimandir to relate the verses of *Kabeer (the Indian saint)* with inner experiences of Divine feeling and experience at Matrimandir-

<i>This was the oldest group of children at LB, and during a language class, the group discussed Kabeer and his mystic poetry, students reported to feel the same at the Matrimandir; so for some similar mystique experience, the children suggested to visit the Matrimandir.</i>
<i>The Matrimandir staff added that there were students from other schools of Auroville, to help them maintain the activities or to observe the gardens and have other valuable experiences there. They suggested if we would like to take this up as well.</i>
Int/ Aug2011/Matrimandir/ Researcher & Students of LB

In both the projects, Matrimandir acted as relevant and conducive environment to elicit a certain experience in the students. ‘Volunteer work’ was another concrete value, which was a relevant feature of children’s life at the Ashram and Auroville (to be discussed later in the chapter).

Visiting the Masters’ Rooms

Darshan means to have a vision or glimpse of the Truth. It also means that one has a glimpse of or sights of the Truth or the Brahman in the revered individuals. The practice of ‘*Darshan*’ started during the time of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It implied visiting the Masters on important days of the Ashram (see: Annexure 5.2) and it is still continues on these days.

In present times, one needed a special permission to visit the room on *Darshan* days and on the individual’s birthday. An authorized person was responsible to issue the permit card for the visit, with the person’s name on it. Visit to the Master’s room implied to have the *Darshan* of the Master or pay one’s reverence to them. *Darshan* therefore gained importance other than the stipulated *Darshan* days. On certain occasions when children were supposed to go to Sri Aurobindo’s room other than *Darshan* and individual birthdays. These were the days for example, when they recovered from long illness, or a family member died. If there was some special program or some excursion, the group went to Sri Aurobindo’s room.

In all the visits, they went upstairs (as Sri Aurobindo’s room is on first floor in the Ashram building), sat silently for around 10 to 15 min, took the packet of blessings^{xiii} and bunch of flowers available in the local environment. In case of young students, the teachers simply

expected them to visit Sri Aurobindo's room especially on their birthdays. In the case of children till Delafon they were to be accompanied by elders.

The parent of a child could not turn up to accompany the child to the Ashram for her birthday. The teacher was perplexed that how could the parents forget her birthday. She was more concerned that the child should make in time. She reminded others and suggested that one of them should take the child. Others agreed and she offered it to other teachers to take her to room since it was an opportunity to go to Sri Aurobindo's room. (other) Teachers insisted that she should take the child and she told me that she had to rush with the child to the Ashram to make in time for her visit to Sri Aurobindo's room. Before leaving she added that she had to ask others since it was a chance even for an adult to visit the Master's room with the child.

Obs-Int/Jun 2011/Delafon/Children and teachers.

The incident reflected the concern of the teachers over the importance of visiting Sri Aurobindo's room on birthdays^{xiv}. This was never part of the said or written order, but an unsaid expectation and a more important aspect of the school's culture. Students grew up with the relevance of the practice of Darshan.

For some Darshan days at the Ashram, there was huge number of visitors and the students volunteered as per their available free time and choice, to manage the crowds. Another important day was the New Year in the Ashram, when visitors and devotees came in large numbers to visit the Ashram (not the room). To share an episode:

I can't recall how but I was drawn to help in managing (the crowd in between 50s and 100s of number) with two students of the school, this was my first close interaction with the students at an informal session, the two young girls in their late teens, helped me give directions to the crowd. There was a long queue of visitors to the Ashram in the balcony street (presently Rue Saint Gilles) like a snake's coiled movement with four or five bends. We were supposed to manage the crowd by giving them directions to turn the queue, asking them to be silent, and switch off their mobiles- in English and in Tamil. The visitors were full of reverence and in deep silence. Just then a visitor after finishing his pranam inside the Ashram came to us, as were guiding them find directions as they made the exit.. she had smile on the face, eyes bright, was full of gratitude and said, "Thank you for creating such a beautiful environment for us.", to one of the students who was working with me. She reciprocated with silence and sweet smile.

Obs/Int Jan2011/Ashram Balcony lane/ Researcher & Other school students of SAICE

Not only the Master's room but even a visit in the Ashram premises for bowing down at the Samadhi held importance for visitors as it is evident this episode. Individuals experienced a delight and bliss.

The students from Auroville schools also made visits on Darshan days to the Masters' room or on their birthdays. They did not mention it like the children from SAICE but many of the students interacted during the fieldwork at LB that they had been for Darshan to the Ashram. The parents also acknowledged that going to the Samadhi and for Darshan was important for them and introducing the same to their children. While Darshan visits held special importance among the individuals who held faith and reverence for the Masters, as an urgency, an attachment, a binding, or may be just a practice to be done. However, it had a different meaning for the schools in the three places. The difference was most likely because of the physical, historical and ideological proximity the three shared with this practice. SAICE was closest in all three aspects that is, physically it was part of the Ashram; and the value of the practice that had been going on, and it had an immediate bearing on the Ashram and SAICE but not on Auroville. It carried the historical significance of the practice, which individuals from other places as devotees liked to participate.

The participants shared their views on these visits and the views reflected 'detaching', 'denouncing' and 'rephrasing' of the practice among the participants. To share an example of apparent who has just settled at Auroville

Ashima is the mother of two children who study at AV school, she makes it a point to go to the Samadhi on Darshan or other important days. If the children wants to come she would take them, arrange for the vehicle or passes. Since children were teenager she left it to them to explore.

Int-Obs/ Nov 2012/Auroville: a parents' house/ researcher & parent

As an individual parent reported, it was a matter of belief to go and visit the Masters, while for the children it only acted as guidance. A parent's detached view of the practices was relevant to facilitate the child's growth and freedom. The Auroville Schools did not observe any celebrations or holidays on the four Darshan or other important days. Therefore, there was no expectation to go and visit the room of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother.

Exploration of the practice by the individuals who had 'migrated' in last few years to this place resulted in different usage of the terms 'Darshan' than official announcement of the

days by Ashram. Therefore, going to the Masters' room became 'Darshan' in sync with the traditional meaning of the term- that is to pay reverence to the Master (mostly Sri Aurobindo's room).

One of the teachers mentioned that she would like to go for Darshan, I enquired that what do Darshan means. She told that there were four important days on which the Mother and Sri Aurobindo used to give Darshan (and) they are known as the Darshan days, rest of the days were important days (I shared the facts and history from the Ashram website). The teacher then added that for Indians Darshan means going and visiting the master. I agreed with her and we realized to each one his/her own.

Int/Dec 2012/Place- Office room, LB/Participants- teachers & staff, LB & researcher.

This was a clear example that how over time participants rephrased Darshan and it had become generic in the understanding of the participants who joined later. Or it could be that a more colloquial understanding of Darshan- as in visiting the Masters to have a glimpse and offer respect.

However, there were incidents like the following episode where a participant questioned its relevance:

I told my friend that I wanted to go to Sri Aurobindo's room for the Darshan. He replied that you are interested in these chakram (a word referring to religious visit or circumambulation). He added, "I have stopped doing this" (he was inquisitive and purposely questioning the importance of the practice.) I replied, "You had done all this and it is time for us to outgrow it". (as a student he has been doing all this)

Int/April 2011/AV/Participants- A friend Aurovillian(an ex-student) and researcher

Interaction was rhetoric from a friend indicating at the values of these practices. At the same time, there was a deeper implication in the remark questioning the importance and relevance of rituals like visiting the Master's room. Interaction hinted at denouncing the whole practice leading to detachment with the practice by the participants. While on other occasions, the same participant talked of its importance to the others. In the personal development of faith, there were various processes that an individual participant might undergo, but might not do the same practice over the time. The data revealed the same about several other participants in different contexts.

Reminiscences of the Masters: Living in their presence

The faith in the Ashram had its foundation on the phrase that 'the Masters are there'. It is an often argued upon issue was that how people continued their *sadhna* when the masters were not physically there. The faith was 'rock solid' that participant tried to do everything being conscious of their 'presence'. There were anecdotes which indicated that participants adherence and belief in the idea. The idea was also indicated while offering to the Masters, "a student was asked by the teacher *to offer his/ her performance to the Mother*; a coach told the children the same after the group activity, the food many ate was offered to the Mother and they told *the Mother to take care.*"

Apart from the dynamic role of the rituals, there were several other ways in daily life, which were signs of the Masters' presence. For example, one was recounting the anecdotes, the display of the photographs; remembrance in the form of prayers written by them (if not for them- which were songs or prayers written for them by the devotees and were often recited by the participants. This section mentions only the prayers written by the Mother); the strongest, organized and most regulated one was the March Past. Photographs of the Mother were central to any of the schools or buildings. The local restaurants and shops adorned the photographs of the Masters with the local Hindu deities. Many of the participants recounted or narrated anecdotes about the Mother with love, this phenomenon formed part of the Ashram and the Auroville environment. There were primary sources, the *Sadhaks*, or individuals who witnessed the episode (which has become anecdote now) and there were secondary sources people who heard from those *Sadhaks* or individuals who has witnesses it.

March Past

March Past at SAICE is a major and one of the oldest rituals with a much 'deeper' symbolism and significance of collective identification. It was an event, that took place at the Play Ground for Darshan (and other important days) and at the Sports Ground for competition seasons and on December 2nd-Physical Demonstration Program held annually at SAICE. The act was regularized by rule that the individuals who would participate in the competition seasons or for the annual program on 2nd December would participate in the March Past at the Sports Ground. Therefore, it was not open to all the students or the Ashram inmates especially during competition seasons. The March Past implied certain symbols of collectivity for example, uniforms, groups, marching, the captains and flags.

Students decked in their white shirts and group shorts (neatly ironed) with PT shoes arrived in the ground. Other Ashram inmates also assembled at the Playground or the Sports ground. Many of the captains were busy in checking the badges (symbol of the Mother) of the students. Before the signal (a whistle was blown) for march past to begin, everyone was talking, interacting, and seemed to be socializing (I could only watch it from a distance), after the whistle everyone assembled in their groups, it appeared as if all the shorts of similar color would start assembling. The captains wore the military green uniform and assembled in a group in front of all the other groups. The groups arranged with their flag bearers (each group had its flag in a different color with the Mother's symbol) and captains in front of each group. March Past at Playground on important days of the Ashram did not have flags of respective groups in the lead.

The March Past began and everyone in the spectator wing would stand as a mark of respect. The band would play in the center in Sports Ground and on a terrace in Play Ground. The Ashram inmates who played band were in white uniform. The Mother's chair was put at SG on a platform (that platform is always marked with a placard that reads 'please do not stand here') and in front of the undivided map of India. the March Past groups passed in front of the chair, the captains saluting (a conscious surrender) with right hand on the chest and then diagonal up with the face might lifted up towards the left towards the Mother's chair. The captains gave the commands while passing in front of the chair to turn towards the chair as a mark of respect. After the march past finished, the groups found their placement in the ground to facing the Mother's chair.

The flags during the competition season were placed on a wall above the seating gallery... while the crowd observed in deep silence almost holding the breath.

Obs/ 2nd, Jan 2011, April 2011, August, 2011, Sep, 2011, Nov, 2011, Dec 2011^{xv}/SAICE-Ashram Inmates & Students at SAICE

The idea one got is that, "*the Mother was there, she was present.*" Each time placing her chair at the Play Ground in front of India's map or at the Sports Ground for the March past, it was marked with the reverence for the Mother and indicating '*she was watching*'. Ashramites not only shared the act of March past at present times but also shared its description from the old time or meeting of the Mother at the playground as anecdotes, when she in person took the salute of the March Past.

To conclude, the Ashram inmates shared memories of their meetings with the Mother at Playground in the evening after the sports programs for various groups were finished or the enthusiasm and the sheer joy they experienced in these meetings. Ashramites also recounted happily that the Mother used to hold the ribbon for them to finish the race (or some time recounted what the senior Ashramites had told younger generation of Ashramites.) The legacy continued with strong vibrations, which was strong enough to engulf the individuals who joined the Ashram recently. To quote:

And in present times the one who joined the Ashram recently mentioned that it was a great joy for him/her to perform in front of the Mother or say 'Victoire à la Douce Mère!'.

Int/Dec2011/ Sports Ground/ a recent entry as Ashram inmates & researcher

The confidence the person held for saying the slogan, (trans. Victory to the Sweet Mother), summarized the substantial essence of her faith and meaning of the same to her existence.

Role of the prayers

Praying and 'offering' were two values that held the faith of individuals. The participants recited the Prayers, which the Mother or Sri Aurobindo wrote. Prayers were also a simple invocation recited on various occasions: in the classroom, a program presentation on certain days in the school or in the class. During one of the function of a (children's) boarding at the Ashram, children recited the prayers, which their teachers wrote. Students were also supposed to remember few prayers: *la prière du Samadhi, prière pour les enfants* (Annexure 5.3)

A few students who passed out few years back from Ashram school recollected-All of them were sent by a particular teacher (I never knew the teacher, but students recalled the same) to go to the Samadhi and write down the prayer and remember it by heart. All the students found it good exercise to build the memory; the students never shared though that they still recite it or not. The prayer had an immense importance for them.

Int/Jan2011/Researchers' house/Ex-students of SAICE & Researcher

Even I was drawn into learning the prayers and realized their importance for the participants.

To quote:

When I started learning French with one of the senior Ashram inmates, I was told by the teacher to remember the prayers of the Mother by heart. Since I was working on education I was told to remember the prayers which appeared on the notebooks of SAICE. I was corrected and often reprimanded for my intonation, pronunciation, rise and fall of sounds in the beginning and of the sentences.

Int/ Pers Exp-ref/Feb Mar2011/ Sadhak's house/ researcher & old Sadhak

Prayer therefore, was the first initiation for me and for many individuals those who came to the Ashram for the first time in the world of faith. Prayers symbolized- devotion, connection, and a deep existential meaning of connection with the community, with the Masters and with the Divine^{xvi}.

Prayers, invocation, and music

Use of music for morning assembly was common in all the three schools. Schools held morning assembly in small groups of each class or groups of classes in a building with the use of music, which was mainly 'the New Year's music'^{xvii} of Sunil da (the Composer as he is referred in the community) or the organ music by the Mother^{xviii}.

Apart from these, at LB other classical music pieces (Indian and Western) were also played. The playing of music meant that all the individuals became 'quiet' and experienced it. The idea was to relax and calm down body/ mind and concentrate. The children were not told daily by anyone to do the same but they observed and learnt this. This a phenomenon Sibia (2006) also reported at *Mirambika*. To quote an observation:

At early morning in the kindergarten the teachers just sat quietly and allowed the children to be 'quiet'. I was also supposed to join them. the incense was burnt and the room was filled with fragrance. The silence was deep and soothing, something the children got used to and learned to function with. Even amid noises from outside: honking, screaming, motor bikes or pungent smell of garbage etc the silence within that atmosphere was deeply and strongly held.

Obs/ Dec 2009/ KG/ children and teachers

Prayers also travelled like a legacy to Auroville schools but the schools also formed their own variations. The children at the AID broke into *Prière des enfants* after the morning meditation with music, while at LB there was practice of chanting Sanskrit *shlokas*.

Learning Sanskrit only with shlokas was practiced at SAICE in days when the Sanskrit Curriculum was not as in its present form, reported an old Sadhak. He added that a book by Poojalalji (one of the Ashram Sadhak) of Sanskrit shlokas was the example of same. He added, "we never had Sanskrit the way it is now taught in the schools." (Now there are textbooks and games with focus on aural and oral skill of the language)

Int Oct 2011/ Sadhak's house/ Sadhak and Researcher.

While at LB another Aurovillian came to practice chanting with the students.

After the morning music was played, a person came to chant shlokas with the students at LB. Students were from different parts of the world and yet most of them knew the sholkas, they closed the eyes and chanted after the person recited and stressed on voice intonations. Few new students were not able to follow, the person told, "if you don't want to please don't disturb others and go in another room." The student did not respond. The person asked another student politely if the student can understand English. The person added that if the student who was not responding could not understand, the student might leave if he/she does not want to be here. The student did not move, nor recited and the chanting continued. It was not clear whether the student understood the same or not. It was also not clear whether student was interested in reciting the shlokas. But the decision was of the student.

Obs Oct 2010/ LB Morning Assembly- teachers, students and researcher

Prayers were an important part of learning in all the three schools; at SAICE it was a form of training that all the students recalled undergoing or many were undergoing. At LB and the AID it was also part of learning, an extension of the same practice at SAICE. However, new students at all the three schools might have accepted or rejected this. Alternatively, even if could not reject it, they had choice to express their obscurity about it, like the description in the last episode. The student had the freedom to walk out. It could mean a teacher's disapproval but this was not seen in any of the episodes. Most of the teachers accepted in case a child did not like to recite a prayer.

Concluding from our discussion about rituals and practices, we can say that overt practices that were ritualistic implied that they were performed at a particular time and space like physical demonstration on December 2nd and march past, and these were followed with a deep silence and consciousness. An individual could hold a deep reverence and love while performing the rituals. It was not so easy to analyze or probe upon the participants due to the esoteric nature of experiences but it was easy to 'identify' with the descriptions and experiences of individuals.

Growth of the Faith

Apart from the standard practices, each classroom and teacher developed their own ways for the children to identify or simply saying 'introducing to' or relate with the Masters. These were the ways teachers mostly identified with the Master and passed on the relation to the students. Young children imagined to talk to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in a very simple manner without any authority conveyed by the teachers.

A teacher shared that there is no punishment but at times it was simple 'time out' and would often mean going and sitting in front of the picture of the Masters. The teacher laughed and told me that 4 to 6 years old often talk to them. In one case, she observed the saying, "Sri Aurobindo, I have not done anything" Indicating for which he has been punished.

Int/Jun2009/KG-SAICE/ teacher & researcher

Apart from that there were presentation of programs on the birthdays of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo by each section, as an offering. There was a display of interactions of children with the Masters. The students learned to write their prayers to the Mother asking for various 'qualities' and values.

On August 15, children were asked to write messages to Sri Aurobindo; as I entered the classroom the following week, I saw the display with cards, on closer look I realized these were written by the ten year olds as prayers or messages to Sri Aurobindo on his birthday. Most of them were personal prayers more than messages to grant them a quality: grace, peace, get rid of mischief or some concrete gift on the special occasion.

Obs Aug15, 2011/Delafor/ Progres 1

Writing to the Mother or in many cases to Sri Aurobindo had been a practice at the Ashram^{xix}. 'Imagination' of teachers and the children played a key role in developing a living

relation with the Masters. Imagination could appear to be extremely irrational, but during the observations nothing of irrationality or of blind faith was reported, since the children did all the things as had been going on, the young children never objected to what the teachers told and continued to do the same. The older children offered their vehement denial (may be to an outsider like me) for certain practices but without questioning the essential values and the faith they held for the Ashram and the Masters:

Today the crowd(students, teachers, the ashram inmates and visitors like me) was gathered in the Hall of Harmony, it was one of those times when visitors or Ashram-related people could join the program at the school. One of the senior Ashram Sadhaks recounted the importance of Sri Aurobindo's and then the Mother's coming to Pondichéry. The talk lasted for 30 minutes. The students sat there, youngest ones in front and oldest and adults like me in the last. While the adults maintained a silence to listen, a few of the older students fretted, or were restless. No effort was made to hush them, apart from the individuals who sat next to them. However, as I shared glances, few adolescent students reported that how these talks made them feel inundated with information and, but all of them were steadfast believer of the Masters and the life of the Ashram.

Obs/April 2011/ SAICE- hall of Harmony/ SAICE students, teachers, few visitors.

These talks were organized and were helpful to people who came to the Ashram for the first time. One never discussed the relevance of these talks for the students. The students who had been studying here since childhood reported it was of no use for them since they had been undergoing this on several occasions. Nevertheless, the critical view never affected their belief in the way of life and values. A safe interpretation could be that the students criticized the practice but not the values.

Faith in Collective Living and Development

One of the important aspects of community life was volunteer work symbolizing self-less work, joy of work and learning while doing the job. Rituals and practices also involved community participation and collective work. Research views the symbolic aspect of different volunteer practices, which reflected these values and connoted them as faith of individuals in the lifestyle at the two places. These values were the feature of certain regular practices. Following episodes throw light on student's involvement and meaning- making of the whole act of packing cakes at Bakery section of Ashram for Christmas celebrations.

While it was learning for students it was also an act of teamwork, fun and memories to cherish being part of it.

I entered the small gate of the bakery, I thronged often there, the smell of bread or fermenting dough usually welcomed you, today it as different, it was the laughter of children, lot of action, as I made my way with another senior Ashram inmate, I settled in between the rows of children of different age groups. I was asked to make bows of ribbon (crepe paper strips) and then to give it to other children who were sticking it into the rubber band that tied the cake in a neat plastic bag. The icing was already over, the children talked loudly and discussed their work, teachers and at the same time worked with pace in order to finish and get some more work. There were remarks, jokes and laughter. I am with S (the ashram inmate), he told a student(intended joke), " aeyi! You are not working, go away from here " the student replied to the joke as if armed with reply, "heyi! You go away, you have not been working properly". Students entered and left, especially elders who left if they had a class, and returned and worked when they had time. The younger children were brought by their teachers to the bakery, and they left the bakery with their teachers after they helped. Each age group had work ensuring the individual and their age capacity, like older boys and girls could pack and shift the boxes packed with the cakes, while younger lot and even younger would just pact it neatly in butter paper bags, stick them with cello tapes, slip them in a transparent plastic bag, tie them with rubber bands and stick a ribbon paper bow in between the rubber band. While segregation was there, it involved a lot of mixed age group work on the same activity. So the age range roughly varied from 10 to 60 year olds doing any one of the steps of packing the cakes.

Obs/ Part[Dec 2010]; ashram bakery; /children, teachers, ashram inmates, Bakery workers.

Cake making, icing and packing was a ritual, which the participants had been going practicing for many years. It could be a practice but since it had a history to the inception of Christmas^{xx} celebrations and had sustained even after several years, it qualified as a ritual. It had broadly remained the same except the rules for children's involvement changing every year- in terms of time, leaving the classes and going back.

Rituals or practices like these could be simple or complex; linked with Ashram or Auroville or could have originated at the school. One of the very simple exercises at the AID was to

clean the school on one particular day that is, to pick up all the plastic and other stuff strewn over the ground in classes.

Wednesday afternoon before the sports activities, the teachers and students went around the school. The teacher told me that they had to clean the building's premises with plastic bags, wrappers and papers strewn in the school campus. As teachers led others including me with a bucket to collect the waste, students followed them. The teachers also participated as they guided the children. Most of the children did not like it, there were complaints, running or hiding away to avoid the task but there were handful who participated in it. I helped clean the strewn plastic stuff along with the teacher and other students. The teacher simply and politely mentioned to those who did not want to do it that we have to do it and continued with the act without getting much bothered or reacting to the students who were not doing. It was over in ten minutes and we got ready for sports.

Obs/ Jun 2009/ the Aid; teachers, students at new building

This was one ritual that was particular to the AID, I did not find it as a regular activity in the other two schools. However, there were other practices of similar nature; especially during the cyclone of 2011 and 2012, the other two schools were also part of such cleaning activities on a large scale. Children made teams to clear the fallen trees, damaged objects and clean the school premises. Doing team work for the community was common to three schools, these kinds of rituals originated as and when required during the year. This was the insight into the communities' conceptualization of various rituals. The participants created and sustained rituals and practices in many cases, reflecting about the social learning aspect in a community. A community, which identified with the cognitive aspect of certain acts and could think collectively, created rituals centered on certain ideas and values.

Rituals did not become regular or come in practice so easily; they took their time, conviction and unanimity to a considerable extent before they regularized in time and space. The regularization was also beyond the usual time and space, in case of 'diffusion' to another school. As a result, the values remained free of time and space the participants at other two schools adapted the form of a practice (example: role of uniforms and commands chapter 7).

Networking: Over Generations, Work and Lifestyles

Relations and networking among the participants were important for collective identification. Networking was with the individuals, Spaces and the Ashram and Auroville. This section

explains networking of individuals as family members and explicates that how individuals related with the two institutions.

Family relations, near or distant, were an important part of the conversations, especially when the participants used to introduce himself/ herself, or a third person from the Ashram. The participants as part of their introduction mentioned their relation with other Ashramites or Ashram related persons, or mentioned their houses or shops around (assuming that I may know the same). It gave the Ashram and 'Ashram related' spaces, buildings, shops, houses its geographical boundary, which did not exist otherwise and gave the Ashram appearance of a 'cohort'. Auroville also stood out from the rest of the villages in term of lifestyle and nature of work. However, the villages and Auroville like the Ashram and the Pondichéry town co-existed.

Networking or relations are an important aspect of any community life and is crucial to sustenance of any community. It is relevant for a community, which views the human development as perfection, progress since the individuals choose to come here and grow with this idea. Volunteer work becomes an opportunity to participate in such activities.

Longer the stay of individual in the field, networking among them formed a pattern.

Individuals at the Ashram and Auroville discovered about various places, by word of mouth, they usually had a story about their arrival, migration and final settlement. Gradually family members and other acquaintances arrived, if a participant was the first to come; else joined the family members who had been residing before him/her.

I narrate here a story of one such arrival. A mother who was married to an ex-student and her daughter was studying at SAICE. I knew her daughter, but we conversed in the adult education class that we both were attending. She narrated about herself and experience of life here:

She told me she had settled at Pondichéry with her husband. She had never heard about the Ashram and grew up all over India, since her father had a touring job. It was the decision of her husband to be here for the education of their daughter. She was the only daughter and she sounded satisfied as a mother that her daughter was happy here. I validated the fact, since I had been with the child and found her happy. Her husband worked and they had a house in Pondichéry. She used to work but then had to give up since she felt she could not take care of the child. She told me, "you know children here have to attend so many classes, and move to different places," so she felt she needed to be there for the child. She worked from home now. She liked being here and was thrilled by the happiness her child received, but could not take the difference of this world and the 'outside' world in which she grew up.

She mentioned, "yahan sab kuch achcha hai, par sab kuch achcha hurdam achcha nahinhota! Aap to janati hain aapbahar se aayi hain" she found everything and everyone nice here or rather happy, which she liked for the child but yet perplexed for thinking is it real? Or would her child be able to cope when she grows up?

Int May2011/ near Ashram/ researcher and the mother of a student

The mother liked the fact that her child was happy here. She had to give up her job in order to take care of the child. However, she shared her doubt of being in a protected environment like the Ashram, where everything was good and everyone was happy, as per her this was not the story 'otherwise'; of the world without the Ashram.

Volunteering

Migration and volunteering took place hand-in-hand for individual parents that they migrated and started voluntary work. In case of the Ashram the networking/ connection of individuals with the Ashram was more based on family than volunteer work. In case of Auroville, it was work, lifestyle, or faith that the participants experienced and that 'called' them to be at Auroville. The field thrived on networking (connection or sharing) of ideas and volunteer work, there was substantial data for this, and therefore in order to study the same, the research interviewed the participants on few simple questions. Few of them are analyzed here

- Do you volunteer in the Ashram or society (Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondichéry) or Auroville?
- The reason for joining or serving at the Ashram as volunteer – or the reason of NOT joining or giving any service to the Ashram?

There were 23 responses to each question. The participants include the students who studied at SAICE.

- **Do you volunteer in the Ashram or society or Auroville?**

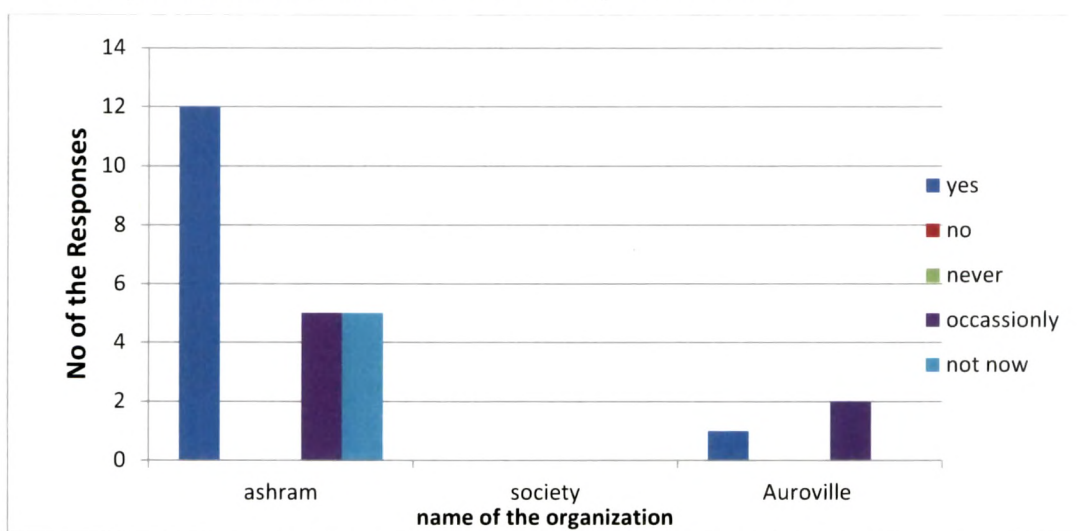


Fig- 5.1 Volunteer Work N= 23 note : multiple responses

Volunteer work was an important part of both the institutions. The volunteers or full time inmates gave all these services and worked without money, except in the case of an Aurovillian where Auroville committee gave a minimal maintenance amount. The table shows responses of ex-students, which include the Ashram inmates and Aurovillians. Everyone **in the sample** who had studied at the Ashram school but had also volunteered in any of the organizations. However, this included population at Pondichéry, the individuals who emigrated might have a different story to tell. Twelve out of twenty three gave regular services in the Ashram- six served for full time for six hours as the Ashram inmates and others (who were not the Ashram inmates) as part time for three hours. Two of them also occasionally helped in Auroville, and one was a full time Aurovillian. Five individuals did not volunteer at the time of the interview but had volunteered earlier. They also reported to volunteer whenever they had chance. Sometimes on special days like Darshan to manage the crowd. The data also include individuals who did not like to mention about the occasional

help they offered, since it was part of their everyday life and to mention was true to the spirit of service they were giving. The nature of volunteer activity varied from manual labor like cleaning, serving, to provide professional help in teaching and in the research department at Ashram.

- **The reason for joining or serving at the ashram as volunteer or the reason of NOT joining or giving any service to the Ashram?**

The section uses two tables, first reason for joining the Ashram or Auroville, second reason for **choosing the outside world**. Since this was open ended interview item, the responses were precise to narrative and in few cases were left empty as well. The crux of the response in case of long narrative responses was taken as central and clubbed with other similar responses.



Fig 5.2 Joining the Ashram N= 6 (both male & females) note- multiple responses

Fig 5.2 shows that six individuals who were inmates of the Ashram gave different reasons for joining the Ashram. One individual reported that he knew it was choice of lifestyle to be here, where he could be what he wanted to or give maximum of his self. He added that he knew that he had to come back to the Ashram even when he went out to work for a short time. This was supported by another female as full time Ashram inmate, who said, “if there is life it is here.” Two Ashram inmates reported that it was a spiritual reason that motivated them to join the Ashram, while they wanted to serve the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Three individuals asked to leave it empty since it is spiritual therefore it could not be discussed or explained. There was an acceptance, dedication and commitment of the participants in such a

decision explanation of which could be difficult in words. (The research is a humble attempt to get the glimpse of the world and experiences of participants and it is not an attempt to judge or analyze these experiences.)

These responses were helpful in two ways, even if they were only on the surface of the deep reality, choice and logic behind the choices of individuals, which the questions were able to scratch. First, the responses defined development in life-long perspective in the institutions like Auroville and the Ashram, which followed a world-view of human development and nature of our existence. Second, it argued for the ideals of life available directly or indirectly to the students who were studying here. This was a formal way of asking them these choices, but on informal occasions, the adolescent also asked similar questions. To quote:

Student- Your parents never asked you to get married.

Ashram Inmate- Yes! My mother did... she did 'haaaan... hunnnnn' (indicating mother's disapproval of the fact that son wanted to join the Ashram) but then she would have grumbled on her daughter-in-law (tongue in cheek). It's good that she is not doing so (he smiled). My father was all right, he never had problem. Then my uncle is an Ashram inmate, I have my family here. so it is ok.

Int Sept2011/ SG/ Researcher, Ashram Inmate and Ashram School Student

The Ashram inmates and their interaction with students offer an estuary of School and Ashram life. The student's query was the most natural an individual would have to face before joining the Ashram.

In addition, most students in the recent times were likely to choose the life other than Ashram. Fig 5.3 shows report of 17 individuals who did not join Ashram and one can say choose the 'outside' world or the 'other' world.

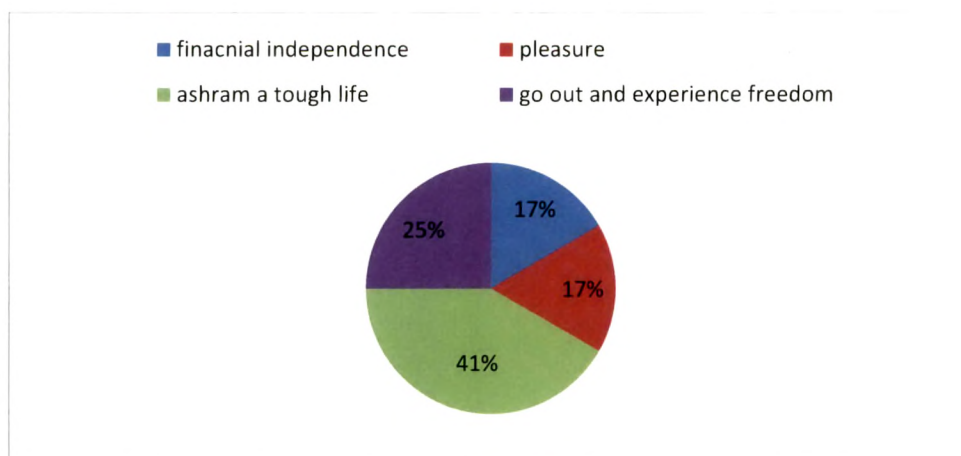


Fig 5.3 Choosing the ‘Outside’ World N= 17.

Most of them went to study further or took a job, but in and around Pondichéry. Two of them reported financial independence as the main reason that they chose instead of life at the Ashram where one had to serve without money (and the Ashram took care of their basic needs). Seven responses mostly of youngsters felt the Ashram life was tough and did not give those pleasures like sex, money and party, which they wanted. Few individuals said that they wanted to experience the ‘outside world’. The question was to know the reason for not joining or serving at the Ashram, which viewed in the field as the choice of the ‘outside world’. Individuals had not chosen the Ashram but were residing at Pondichéry at the time of the interview.

Three ex-students, who studied at the Ashram school but joined Auroville, were clear that they wanted to be near the Ashram but wanted a more challenging life of Auroville. In one case, one of the Ashram teachers inspired the student to join Auroville. The ex-student was married and lived with his family. One of the students, who had not married but had his mother and cousins residing at the Ashram; a cousin was an Ashram inmate. He decided to join Auroville, after he finished his schooling at SAICE because he found a job and he felt he was also near to his family.

Responses in the pie charts also show the challenge of existential conflict or complexity that these individuals lived through, yet most of them would like to serve if given a choice or have the time to do so. An example of this was that most of the ex-students of the Ashram had their ex-student passes^{xxi} which allowed them to be at certain places mostly Sports

Ground or visits to the Masters' rooms on Special days, since the Ashram was a restricted place not meant for public.

Family Patterns

In order to explain the macro-substantive nature of the field we highlight family relations of two ex-students who are living at Pondichéry. Family patterns give a view about organization of the participants. Central node of the family was the parents who had studied here. Their children were studying at the schools during the fieldwork or had finished their schooling. The parents were directly interviewed or through their children. I state the two families' profiles here

- Family C where both the parents studied at SAICE and had two children, one just finished SAICE and another was finishing. It was the choice of the family to be near the Ashram at Pondichéry. Both the parents gave volunteer service at the Ashram, they replied it was an act of giving back, what they got from the Ashram.

- Another family G, both the parents studied at SAICE but moved from Pondichéry to Delhi. They were not permanently settled there and both their sons studied here. One of the sons had joined the Ashram and another was working. The parents also had distant relatives settled here at the Ashram.

In case of LB and AID, not such proximal involvement in terms of volunteer work due to one's faith was observed, but there was another kind of networking. The AID school had one of the grandmothers working as *chinamma*- as help to keep the school clean. Parents of a few children also worked with Auroville as paid laborers. However, parents were invited to visit the schools on open houses and could access the school otherwise as well. Few parents had shops running near the temple or around Auroville.

Parents at the AID were involved with Auroville is clear from this interaction-

I came across a couple who told me that they lived near the school X in Auroville. when they were selling incense sticks, the brand name caught my attention and we started talking, I-Where have you come from?

Parent: Auroville.

I- where exactly?

Parent- father- Near X school (for village children) we live near to it.

I- What do you know about the school?

Parent/ father- I worked in the school. My children studied there. I have a guesthouse there. I worked with the school and then from there went to the Ashram to learn how to make incense for thirty years, now I make my own and sell. (the Ashram has units that make incense sticks)

I-(curious) what are your children doing now? (I shared that I have been to Auroville).

Parent- All are married. I have a guesthouse near the school. You can stay there, when you come next.

I parted with buying few incense sticks from the man, while his wife smiled back.

Int/ Sep 2010/ Delhi, during crafts fair / Researcher & Parents of children who studied at AID

In the LB school, parents related with school at different levels, the classification could be: Parents who worked there full time and were Aurovillians, others were volunteers-guests, friends or Aurovillians. Some parents who were not directly involved in teaching at a regular basis but had offered their knowledge sometimes by conducting workshop at the school.

One of the parents offered to work with a group of children on film making for one week. After the request was followed up in a meeting, with the teacher ; and then the teacher followed up with the students, the 8 and 9 years old who were ready for the workshop.

Obs/ Sep 2011/ LB/Filmmaking workshop with children, teacher & parent as resource person, researcher as participant

The other such instances were, where the parents , the French natives offered French teaching learning programs for adults and children in the school; and another was when parents came up with the idea of implementing Permaculture in the school. A parent volunteered to make a

plan for Permaculture in the school where the rest of the teachers and students could be involved in different activities.

Conclusion: A Faith System

We can summarize that the two aspects of faith as an inner quality of personal belief and as a growth and individual's relation with rituals and practices are an extension of the self into the collective. The inner aspect also has its reliance on or need of outer physical symbols or rituals and practices. Research sees the two aspects as interactive. Existence of faith as an individual quality and identification by an individual with symbolism can be addressed as a 'faith system' in the most acceptable manner. A system would be organized, systematized but not with rigid rules and fundamentalism. A faith-system has certain identifiable patterns due to the presence of physical symbols, life styles, certain rules and individual experiences all these patterns. Participants in the 'faith system' formed a social group or cohort, popularly referred as 'family' around the Ashram. Auroville formed its cohort with different labels (guests, new comers, friends) for those who were linked with it primarily for work, were the residents and considered to be fully involved as *Aurovillians*. The social groups had several imageries of collective identification of individuals with faith ideals manifested in rituals or practices and family relations. An individual's movement to the Ashram or Auroville would mean involvement of the family members.

One of the important aspects is that faith in our study is different from the way faith is studied in researches in the West (Kemper & Robert, 2006; Hefferan & Fogarty, 2010) Our field shares a few important aspects with the FBOs of the West such as, philanthropic work, networking and working for the community. In present case it is a relatively closed community both the Ashram and Auroville do not work for people *en masse* but mainly focus on the work as perfection or raise the consciousness of *raison d'être* of an individual. The latter happens when an individual begins to observe his/her behavior or thoughts. Data revealed a very personal aspect of faith reflected in individuals mainly in the adults' choice of the place, work and devotion in rituals or practices.

Children were part of most of the rituals and were put in relation to the Masters and their words in an interactive manner by the adults. Many visitors also learnt the ways of the Ashram and Auroville as they tried to be part of this system and culture. There difference of opinions especially on ideas were likely as the next two chapters would reveal. Faith does not

stop here with the words or physical symbols or rituals and practices, it continues in every day actions and ideas like designing a learning program.

Endnotes

ⁱ A colloquial term used in Ashram lingo- he is Ashram connected. These were the individuals who volunteered in the Ashram but were not *Sadhaks* or the Ashram inmates.

ⁱⁱ Translation: Felicity, Serenity, Quietness, To Thee

ⁱⁱⁱ The *Sadhaks*, individuals reported were no longer alive, therefore the phenomenon is secondary data and could not be observed any one at present naming their children in consultation with *Sadhaks*.

^{iv} personal communication and referencing with Dr Arshad Ikram Ahmad, 2012- a language expert and sociologist.

^v School Management and Organization also considered rituals as important part of schooling culture. Nelly (2008) describes school culture as what were the daily lives of participants in schools and what were the rituals as part of school culture that brought students together, this could be dress, morning assembly, ceremonies, songs.

^{vi} For details please visit Golden Chain website- <http://www.goldenchain.in/saice/>

^{vii} Bulletin is the Ashram's publication on four important Darshan days for the Ashram inmates. It has been one of the longest publications of the Ashram, focusing on readings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and the activities of Physical Education incorporating the School.

^{viii} Notice on one of the Ashram inmate being expelled from the PED of Ashram, banning sea swimming signed, importance of uniform, parking of vehicles to name a few by *Pranab da*, director of PED, Ashram were the notices dated few years back but were still displayed there.

^{ix} The Ashram had facility of screening movie on each Saturday especially for the students, the Ashram inmates since going to theater to watch a movie was not allowed to Ashram inmates especially children.

^x The bus is an effort by Auroville transport committee to connect people for the Ashram and Auroville. People used the bus for reaching to either of the place, it has its fixed timings, which are displayed in Auroville news and notes or could be reached on telephone.

^{xi} Exception to the rules is made in some cases and despite the strict rules, we were told to try and state the need, if it happened it was good enough!

^{xii} This is a reference of time that is made often in the Ashram that how long an individual and his family has been living here, from the time of the Mother or from the time of Sri Aurobindo.

^{xiii} A small packet with the Mother's photo on it; inside the packet are dried flower petals which are most likely from the room of the Mother or Sri Aurobindo

^{xiv} Birthdays have special significance, which the Mother has mentioned to several *Sadhaks* and is often quoted.

^{xv} I make the sense of this practice over several observations where I have quietly observed the crowd before the march past, during the practice and then afterwards. Ashram *Sadhaks* also made a reference to the same.

^{xvi} In the words of Sri Aurobindo one finds the relevance of prayer that was held in the field

'A Prayer, a master act, a king idea.

Can link man to transcendent Force. * Savitri, p 20

^{xvii} The composer Sunil da as he is fondly remembered used to compose Music every Jan 1st and the Ashram inmates and the visitors meditated on that music.

^{xviii} The music played by the Mother and music composed by Sunil (music composer in the Ashram) are two music productions that are widely used in Ashram and most of the other centers or places for meditation. These are not for sale but passed on personally.

^{xix} See The Mother on Education (2002) page 339-445 for correspondence and conversations of the Mother with various participants. See: the Publishers Note on Letters on Yoga Vol 28, 2012 elaborates on the nature of correspondences Sri Aurobindo had with the disciples.

^{xx} Christmas was an occasion in which the Ashram required children's help since the celebrations attracted participation of huge number of visitors. A family 'connected' with the Ashram started the Christmas celebrations at the Ashram when the Mother was there.

^{xxi} In order to ensure some regulations for entering the Ashram and visiting its complexes, Ashram authority issues passes for the students who had finished their course from SAICE.