

SAIIR Annual Report – Vidyamandir

Reporting period: 2021-22

1. Name of sub-unit: Vidyamandir Auroville

2. Sub-unit executives: Aravinda, Radhika and Deven

3. Report writer: Deven

4. Introduction:

A few sentences. Why does the sub-unit exist, what are its aims? Where there any special goals this year?

To enliven Sanskrit language and offer learning programs and tools based on Indic Knowledge Systems, in the context of Auroville's vision and Integral Yoga.

5. Enrollment/beneficiaries:

For schools: number of students in each grade.

For other sub-units: who were the beneficiaries and how many people participated?

More than 200 residents of Auroville and some from Pondicherry and bioregion attended our workshops/activities organized between April 2021 and March 2022.

6. Activities of the year:

In general and/or highlights. Who, what, when...

Presently our activities can be broadly divided into the following categories:

- 1) **Learning Sanskrit language** (*with an intention to realize unity and oneness.*)
- 2) **Rediscovering ancient texts** (*like Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, Dhammapada etc.*)
- 3) **Practical application of timeless wisdom** (*through everyday life in the present context.*)
- 4) **Sacred Celebrations** (*invoking Divine presence and holding space for unity.*)

We explored a range of learning formats like chanting and music, study circles and classes, guest lectures, theatre, stories, silence, experiential workshops and more.

These words from Sri Aurobindo summarizes the spirit and guiding force behind our work:

From Sri Aurobindo's message for India's Independence Day which was broadcasted on All India Radio:

"...the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the

disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.”

From Sri Aurobindo on The Renaissance in India:

“The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is its first, most essential work; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of the Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult.”

Its success on these three lines will be the measure of its help to the future of humanity.

Here are some details of activities from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022.

1. **Learning Sanskrit language** *(with an intention to realize unity and oneness.)*

a) **Sanskrit Immersion with Dr Anuradha Choudry**

A group of Auroville residents were together learning Sanskrit through classes we had organized at Auroville Language Lab based on the video lectures by Dr Anuradha Choudry. To aid the learning we had organized a 5-day immersive program with her in person in Auroville in May 2021 but due to Covid guidelines changing we had to convert the course into live online sessions (even though she had already arrived in Pondicherry) spread over 9 days. While the online sessions cannot replace the depth of in-person sessions, it still ended up being an extremely enriching learning experience.

Date: Monday 10th May to Monday 18th May

Time: 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Venue: Online

b) **Sanskrit Conversation with Ojasi Sukhtankar**

After we organized a talk by Ojasi on learning Sanskrit through Gita, a group of Auroville residents expressed an intention to learn Sanskrit from her and we organized online Sanskrit conversation classes once a week which ran for around one year and participants found it very enriching.

Date: April 2021 to April 2022

Time: Every Wednesday from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Venue: Online

c) **Sanskrit Basics with Aravinda**

A small group of Auroville residents wanted to learn Sanskrit language starting from the very basics of the alphabet and its sound. Aravinda started a batch at Language Lab.

Start Date: 3rd March, 2022

Time: Every Thursday, 2:30 to 4:30 pm

Venue: Auroville Language Lab

d) Presentation to Auroville School Board

We made a presentation to the Auroville School Board in November 2021 about our work and offered support to schools in integrating Sanskrit and key elements from the Indic Knowledge Systems. We are interacting with some school members who are interested in this and are exploring ways to integrate this in academic year 2022-23.

2. Rediscovering ancient texts (like Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, Dhammapada etc.)

After exploring several texts from ancient Indian traditions last year what emerged was a deep aspiration to dive deeper and wider into the Bhagavad Gita. As the Mother referred to Auroville as a place for 'Karmayoga' and with Sri Aurobindo's 150th birthday approaching, we wholeheartedly embarked on a collective yajnya to dive deeper into the Gita. There was also an interest to explore Natyashastra and continue the study of Vedas and Upanishads.

a) Bhagavad Gita

Here are the various activities that are part of the Bhagavad Gita Yajnya:

- i. Weekly Study Circle on Sri Aurobindo's Essays on the Gita – Every Friday, 4-5 pm
- ii. Weekly chanting of Bhagavad Gita shlokas – Every Friday, 5-6 pm
- iii. Beginner's Gita chanting classes – Every Mon-Wed-Fri, 7-8 am
- iv. Word by word meaning of Gita Shlokas – A 4-week pilot program conducted by Shraddha from Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- v. Sanskrit Grammar through Gita – Jeanyves conducts these sessions at Last School and some of our team members attend it.
- vi. Chapter by chapter study – Sessions with Dr Sampadananda Mishra on insights from a chapter of Gita at a time along with subtler meanings of key Sanskrit terms in that chapter.
- vii. Audio Resources – we started creating audio files with Sanskrit chanting of the shlokas along with Sri Aurobindo's commentaries in English.
- viii. Annual chanting of the full Bhagavad Gita on the Gita day.

b) Mundaka Upanishad

We also continued our exploration of Vedas and Upanishads. In June 2021 we concluded the study session of Mundaka Upanishad with Dr Sampadananda Mishra that had started last year. Reflections on key verses related to Para and Apra Vidya, Jivatma and Parmatma (analogy of two birds) and Satyameva Jayate were specifically explored in this session.

c) Natyashastra

We organized a weekly study circle on Natyashastra, which is often referred as the

fifth Veda and one of the most essential texts of drama, dance, music, arts and fine arts. The Rasa theory given by Bharat Muni in Natyashastra is the basis on which many artistic disciplines have evolved over the course of Indian history.

We referred to some videos and an online course on Natyashastra by Dr Bharat Gupta, developed by the Center of Indic Studies at the Indus University. This course introduced the participants to the origin of Natyashastra, the performance of Natya, kinds of theatre, ancient Indian theatre, elements of play, the Natya Karanas described in the Natyashastra, the date of Natyashastra, the performance before the play, the most important concept of Rasa, the various Bhavas, and the commentary of various commentators, classical and modern. Our study circle was facilitated by Yogini Gandhi, Rekha Tandon and Aravinda Maheshwari and attended by various artists and enthusiasts in Auroville.

Date: August 2021 to January 2022

Time: 2:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Venue: Bhumika Hall, Bharat Nivas

In 2022-23 we intend to continue this learning journey by inviting experts on this subject in Auroville to conduct experiential workshops and also by co-creating a community project that integrates different elements of the Natyashastra.

3. **Practical application of timeless wisdom** (*through everyday life in the present context.*)

a) **Swadheena Swasthya Mahavidya**

After the transformative workshop in March 2021 with over 38 Auroville residents participating, we continued to the learning and practice through weekly circles and also organized a community kitchen project in collaboration with Anandi of Satchidananda Kitchen (KOFPU). We also offered our suggestions to the Solar Kitchen team on food that would nourish all parts of the being. In 2022-23, we intend to offer more spaces where residents of Auroville can learn from the Sanskrit texts of Ayurveda and Swadheena Swasthya Mahaavidya with English translations and also apply simple and practical therapies using five elements of ether, air, sun (fire), water, and earth. And also 'eat' the recommended food prepared in a sacred kitchen to experience health benefits.

b) **Naada Yoga**

Continuing from last year's deeply enriching experience, Mandar and Dakshayani from Baithak Foundation visited Auroville again from November 2021 to February 2022 and offered workshops and regular classes on Nadayoga in Auroville. There was a deepening in the understanding and experience of how sounds affect our health and we are also exploring collaboration with Svaram.

c) **Gurukulam**

One of our core team members visited Dharma Gurukulam near Palani run by Anaadi Foundation. He stayed there for a week to get an immersive experience of a life in a Gurukulam. We then invited the founders of Dharma Gurukulam – Adi Narayanan and Smrithi Adinarayanan to visit Auroville and organized the following 3 sessions that were very well received. Each of them were attended with around 50 participants:

i. **Mahabharata and Human Unity**

Date: Sunday, November 14, 2021

Venue: Progress Hall, Bharat Nivas

Time: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

Mahabharata provides us with a powerful narrative exploring the complexities of life and a framework of Dharma (among other concepts) that helps resolve the apparent conflicts and contradictions of modern-day existence. This important part of the Indian Itihaasa, which includes a massive "war" and Lord Krishna's guidance to Arjuna in the form of "Bhagavad Gita" has timeless wisdom that would inspire humanity to live a life rooted in Dharma and move towards peace and unity.

This workshop provided an opportunity to reflect deeply into one's life, gain clarity, deepen relationships and evolve a vision for self, family and community in an engaging way. It was an inward journey into oneself with Vyasa Maharishi's Mahabharata as the backdrop.

ii. **Gurukulam based on Indic Knowledge System**

Date: Monday, November 15, 2021

Venue: Bhumika Hall, Bharat Nivas

Time: 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm

Dharma Gurukulam is experimenting with a "living curriculum" that synthesises eternal wisdom from ancient spiritual texts along with modern scientific discoveries. Concepts from mainstream subjects like Maths, Science, History, Geography etc. are taught in Sanskrit and English through subjects like Ganitha, Vijnana, Itihaasa, Ayurveda, Yoga, Nakshatra vidya etc. It is not a fixed curriculum but something that evolves with life and acknowledges the interplay of spirit and matter.

In this session, they some fundamental reasons behind the learning approach in their ashram/gurukulam and key insights from their experiences. As Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's Integral Yoga focuses on transformation of consciousness and divinising matter, we also explored areas of collaboration and mutual sharing.

We are holding an intention of setting up a "Shishyakul" in Auroville.

iii. **Yogic Neuroscience and First Person Research**

Date: Monday, November 15, 2021

Venue: Bhumika Hall, Bharat Nivas

Time: 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm

While Neuroscience deals with an understanding of how the brain functions, most of the research in this field is based on a third person perspective. Yogic Sciences take a more holistic view based on the Panchakosha model of Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya, Anandamaya Kosha (often translated in English as five sheaths - Physical, Vital, Mental, Supramental, Spiritual) and is based on first person experiences. In this session we explored a transdisciplinary approach to research involving Neuroscience, Epigenetics and Yogic Sciences.

Many of us are exploring deeper collaboration with Anaadi Foundation and Deepanam School is also working with them to bring some aspects of their curriculum on Indian Knowledge Systems to their students.

4. **Sacred Celebrations** (invoking Divine presence and holding space for unity)

We organized various group chanting practice sessions to prepare for celebrating various special occasions that include the following:

- a) **Sri Aurobindo's birthday** (August 15) at Matrimandir
- b) **Indian Independence Day** (August 15) at Bharat Nivas
- c) **Republic Day** (January 26) at Bharat Nivas
- d) **Sanskrit Day** (August 22) at Bharat Nivas

5. **Other projects:**

a) **The Mother's 12 Qualities**

Dr. Anuradha Choudry translated the Mother's 12 Qualities along with excerpts for each of them from the writings of The Mother in Sanskrit with support from a few members of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry and Samskritam Auroville team.

b) **National Book Trust**

We supported the organizing of a 3-day workshop conducted by Dr Sampadananda Mishra on behalf of the National Book Trust (NBT), New Delhi for translating children's book in Sanskrit. 15 participants from across the country came together to translate 25 children's book from English/Hindi into Sanskrit under the guidance of Dr Mishra. This workshop was held from September 28-30 at Bharat Nivas, Auroville.

c) vidya.auroville.org website

We continue to build the website with an intention to launch it on August 15, 2022.

d) Usha and the dawns to come – From Vedas to Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri

Aryamani is directing this theatre project to be performed on Sri Aurobindo’s 150th birthday – 15th August 2022 and the practice began in August 2021. Two of the core team members of Samskritam Auroville team are part of this project and are also supporting how Sanskrit can be incorporated in it.

e) Brahma Muhurta

In ancient Indian texts there is an important concept of ब्रह्म मुहूर्त - Brahma Muhurta. One muhurta is a period of 48 minutes, with a whole night consisting of 15 muhurtas. Brahmamuhurta is the 14th muhurta kala of the night. The time of sunrise varies each day, according to geographic location and time of year, and the time of the Brahmamuhurta varies with it. For example, if sunrise happens at 6:00am, the brahmamuhurta begins at 4:24 am and ends at 5:12am. It is considered a very auspicious time for regular yogic practices and experience of many of us reinforces that. We created awareness on this and also formed a group with all those who are interested to come together during brahma muhurta to inwardly connect in the spirit of collective yoga. Here are a couple of reflections that were shared when we started coming together:

“Many years I have been getting up at 5 a m every day. Now, I shifted to a little bit earlier. The experience was even more intense, because I felt that I joined a collective aspiration, meditation and concentration. I was not alone but felt the presence and force of this collective. Heartfelt thanks for initiating this.”

“Thank you all for this initiative. I have been wanting for some time to shift my precious time from late evening to early morning. Despite going to sleep late last night again, this morning I woke up rather early, kept trying to sleep, but it didn't work, so I stood up and it was just before 5. So I took Savitri and sat down. When I opened it to read, I saw a note I had scribbled on p. 367 during one of the classes: "the meaning of the name Savitri - the Sun before it rises on the horizon - the pre-dawn". Indeed the time to connect with it. Gratitude.”

7. Outcomes:

What was created; how did participants benefit?

A good range of learning programs has got created based on the requests made by Auroville residents and schools. Participants are finding the process of learning very enriching and joyful. At a subtler level, Psychic discovery and becoming better servitors of the Divine Consciousness is at the core of all our work. The joy and peace we witness in the participants during and after attending our programs is the most precious reward that keeps us going.

8. Research highlights:

Please describe anything done in the last year which was especially research-oriented or innovative. What did you find out, and will you take it further?

We began with a brief exploration of researching how the sound of Sanskrit shlokas and mantras affect a human being and transforms consciousness. We also tried to understand the nuances of the difference in state of consciousness when mere listening to them and how it changes when one starts chanting them in a particular meter (chandas) with the right intonations. At an individual level we experienced widening and heightening of consciousness while chanting the Sanskrit Shlokas (especially from the Bhagavad Gita) but as the changes are so subtle and experiential, we are not sure how to put them into words and in a research report format. We are studying the principles and methodology for 'First Person Research' created by Indian Psychology Institute in Pondicherry. We also met one of their team members and it looks like that the methodology that they have created for First Person Research can be used in our research work. We intend to continue this exploration next year.

9. Reflections:

What was most meaningful this year? What was challenging and what was learned?

What we are witnessing is that when residents come together to learn Sanskrit and other wisdom texts, there is a deeper inner connection they experience within themselves and with each other. Auroville is going through a difficult phase of conflict and accelerated transformation since last year. As all our programs are held with an intention to discover our inmost being and to realize unity, what is heartening to see is that participants even with "opposing views" in the conflict are able to sit in the same circle and learn and chant together and we do see sparks of a shift towards unity in those moments. These moments of seeing the light and experiencing unity even during the atmosphere of intense conflicts have been the most meaningful this year. With complete श्रद्धा /faith and आत्मसमर्पण / surrender to the Divine Consciousness, we are committed on this adventure of collective yoga for human unity.

10. Conclusion:

Any final remarks, and/or intentions for next year.

As willing servitors of the Divine Consciousness, we are deeply committed to continue this यज्ञ / Yajnya of learning Sanskrit and wisdom from the Indic Knowledge Systems in the spirit of Auroville's intention to realize human unity. We thank SAIER for the continued support.

11. Links and attachments:

Photos (please attach as separate files), links to videos and websites, any other supplementary material that you would like to share.

A Presentation made to the SAIER team in July 2021 on the evolution of Samskritam Auroville into Vidyamandir:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EyBsAVEik_rxpI_jC7gwNh3baPfqwjnO/view

Sanskrit mantra chanting for Sri Aurobindo's 150 birthday

<https://sriarobindo150.auroville.org/articles/invocation>

Spoken Sanskrit Course by Dr Anuradha Choudry:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTfNiCg-Lc&list=PLbRMhDVUMngfYG2GVf2bQnIgsI0Y923g3>

Full Bhagavad Gita chanting

Invitation: <https://events.auroville.org.in/events/17723>

Recording of live-streaming on the Gita Day in which some participants also joined online:

<https://youtu.be/ciL0rSiMxCw?t=945>

(P.S. Apologies that the recording quality is not very good due to limitations of devices we had at our disposal at that time and also internet connection speed used for live-streaming.)

Nada Yoga

Some details on the Nada Yoga workshops and classes we conducted in Auroville:

<https://events.auroville.org.in/events/17725>

<https://events.auroville.org.in/events/17777>

Natyashastra:

The on course by Dr. Bharat Gupt, developed by Indus University which we referred to during our study circle: <http://indiccourses.org/course/natyashastra-1/>

Recordings of sessions in Auroville by Adi and Smrithi from Anaadi Foundation:

Significance of Gurukulam and Indic Knowledge Systems

<https://www.aurovilleradio.org/workshop-gurukulam-based-on-indic-knowledge-system/>

Yogic Neuroscience and First Person Research

<https://www.aurovilleradio.org/workshop-yogic-neuroscience-and-first-person-research/>