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The modern Utopia that is Auroville

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Auroville plans to host a festival in Chennai in January that will include a seminar, cultural programmes, exhibition of a range of Auroville products and a week of events.— Photo: S.S. Kumar

Nowhere do contradictions coexist as harmoniously as in Auroville, the universal city founded by Sri Aurobindo's spiritual compatriot Mirra Alfassa, who is more familiar as The Mother.

Over 2,000 members, many from distant lands, call this place home, but never own a piece of property. Money does not change hands here, but cottage enterprises that have been set up enjoy turnover running into crores of rupees. There are no rules to obey or leader to follow, but projects without specific timelines actually attain fruition, sometimes quicker than the hierarchical world outside.

A less lofty ideal than The Mother's Utopian vision of Auroville as a place on earth that no nation could claim as its own and where men and women would live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities, would have crumbled under the weight of such contradictions.

However, even though the 'sociological experiment' has soldiered on, remaining true to its founding ideals, for over four-and-a-half decades, Auroville now looks to change how it is viewed from the outside, specifically to dispel wrong notions and promote a better societal understanding of the Aurovilian philosophy.

Auroville plans to host a festival event in Chennai in January next - after all it sits in Tamil Nadu (Villupuram district) though its spiritual home has roots in Puducherry - that will

include a seminar, cultural programmes, an exhibition of a range of Auroville products and a week of events by various Aurovilians.

With so much written and discussed about this 'ideal township devoted to an experiment in human unity,' the festival will seek to answer the question 'What is this Auroville?' that has confounded the outside world.

"An important focus area for the event will be to engage the youth on our concepts," said N. Bala Baskar, secretary, Auroville Foundation.

The festival will seek to project Auroville as a place of research and experimentation, a multicultural centre which is constantly evolving and a place of never-ending education.

In fact, there are several Aurovilian success stories worth sharing with the world.

"The strides made in areas such as renewable energy, education, healthcare and waste management in Auroville are no mean achievements. We receive people from different countries who seek the expertise of Aurovilians in these areas. The festival will allow people to interact with Aurovillians on how these can be replicated in other parts of India," said P.R. Srinivasamurthy, under-secretary, Auroville Foundation.