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## THE VIRTUOUS CITY OF AL-FARABI AND AUROVIL CITY IN INDIA

This article is devoted to the theory of the virtuous city in the heritage of al-Farabi and its embodiment in Aurovil, India. The idea of a perfect society and a perfect city has been attractive for the best minds of mankind since the antiquity. Al-Farabi wrote a treatise on his vision of a virtuous city, in which he outlined his idea of "ideal society". Many of its positions were reflected in the city of Aurovil, which was created as the City of the Future - a city free from any religious and political views and beliefs.

Life in the city is based on the principles of justice and humanism, free labor and the happiness of each citizen. Research on this topic is being carried out for the first time in Kazakhstani oriental studies. It is based on a comparative historical method and has a preventive nature in order to stimulate further researches in this direction.

The results of the study allow us to conclude that the ideas of humanism and philanthropy are timeless, giving us a hope for their mandatory implementation. The value of the heritage of al-Farabi is confirmed by time, which speaks of his genius and historical insight. Utopian, at first glance, ideas about an ideal society are being realized today, which allows us to look with hope into the future of humanity.

**Key words:** Al-Farabi, virtuous city, ruler, happiness, city of the future, Aurovil, India.

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### Әл-Фарабидің Мейірімді қаласы және Үндістандағы Ауровиль қала

Мақала әл-Фарабидің шығармашылық мұрасындағы мейірімді қала теориясын және Үндістанда салынған Авровиль қаласын қарастыруға арналған. Мінсіз қоғам және мінсіз қала идеясы ежелден адамзаттың ең жақсы ойшылдарын толғандырады. Ұлы ғалым әл-Фараби өзінің мінсіз қоғам туралы ойларын баяндайтын ізгі қала туралы трактат жазды. Оның көптеген ұстанымдары болашақ қаласы - діни және саяси көзқарастар мен тіркемелерден босатылған қала ретінде құрылған Авривиль қаласында көрініс тапты. Қаладағы өмір әділеттілік пен гуманизм, еркін еңбек және әр адамның бақыты қағидаттарына негізделген. Осы тақырыптағы зерттеулер салыстырмалы тарихи әдіске негізделген және осы бағытта одан әрі зерттеулерді ынталандыру үшін алғашқы рет шығыстану зерттеулерінде жүргізілуде. Зерттеу нәтижелері гуманизм мен қайырымдылық идеялары ескірмейді және оларды міндетті түрде жүзеге асыруға үміт етеді деген қорытынды жасауға мүмкіндік береді. Әл-Фарабидің шығармашылық мұрасының құндылығын уақыт дәлелдейді, бұл оның данышпандығы мен тарихи көрегендігі туралы айтады. Утопиялық, бір қарағанда, адамзаттың болашағына үмітпен қарауға мүмкіндік беретін идеалды қоғам туралы идеялар бүгін жүзеге асырылуда.

**Түйін сөздер:** әл-Фараби, мейірімді қала, билеушісі, бақыт, болашақтың қаласы, Ауровиль, Үндістан.

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### Добродетельный город у аль-Фараби и город Ауровиль в Индии

Статья посвящена рассмотрению теории добродетельного города в творческом наследии аль-Фараби и ее воплощению в Индии, где был построен город Ауровиль. Идея совершенного общества и совершенного города волновала лучшие умы человечества уже в древности. Великий ученый аль-Фараби написал трактат о своем видении добродетельного города, в котором изложил свое представление об идеальном обществе. Многие его положения нашли свое отражение в городе Ауровиль, который был создан как Город Будущего – город, свободный от религиозных и политических воззрений и привязанностей. Жизнь в городе основана на

принципах справедливости и гуманизма, свободного труда и счастья каждого индивидуума. Исследование по данной теме проводится впервые в казахстанском востоковедении, основано на сравнительно-историческом методе и имеет превентивный характер с целью стимулирования дальнейших изысканий в этом направлении. Результаты исследования позволяют сделать вывод о вневременности идей гуманизма и человеколюбия и надеяться на их обязательное воплощение. Ценность творческого наследия аль-Фараби подтверждается временем, что говорит о его гениальности и исторической прозорливости. Утопические, на первый взгляд, представления об идеальном обществе, получают сегодня свою реализацию, что позволяет с надеждой смотреть в будущее человечества.

**Ключевые слова:** аль-Фараби, добродетельный город, правитель, счастье, город будущего, Ауровиль, Индия.

## **Introduction.**

In modern conditions of a certain level of degradation of society, when the moral and ethical foundations created over the centuries are lost, spiritual values are overthrown and social landmarks are overturned, ideas about a perfect society, about an ideal city, about a happy future of mankind acquire special urgency. These ideas are presented as a kind of lifeline, a way out of the quagmire of moral decay and inhuman politics. The idea of creating a human society based on the principles of humanism and justice has always been attractive to great thinkers, and many of them left their thoughts and ideas about a perfect society and a perfect city to their descendants.

Justification for the choice of topic; relevance of the topic

The relevance of the topic of this research is determined by the growing interest of progressive mankind in the search for ways to implement principles of humanism and justice as a way to save our planet from inevitable death. The modern process of globalization has its consequences, such as penetration of negative and pernicious tendencies into social life, characterized by moral decay, moral deviations, and a loss of spiritual guidelines. Considering these problems, it seems quite natural to turn back to classical sources and identify their responses in modern reality.

Definition of an object, subject, goals

The object of the research is the timeless spiritual parallels between the Treatise on the virtuous city of the Turkic scholar al-Farabi and the creative heritage of the Indian philosopher Aurobindo Ghosh, whose ideas about the perfect society and city were embodied in the city of Aurovil, built in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The aim of the work is to find historical and spiritual parallels in the the idea of a perfect

society and possible ways of its implementation. A hypothesis is about the timelessness of the ideas of humanism and philanthropy, their non-attachment to a specific country and a specific historical period, as well as the possibility of implementation, despite their some utopianism and futurism.

## **Methodology**

Comparative-historical and analytical research methods allows to analyze the results of the real embodiment of the idea of a virtuous city, which was attempted in the twentieth century in India.

Since ancient times, people thought about the possibility of creating an ideal society. Famous philosophers and scientists set forth their ideas – some of them only partially, and someone dedicated entire treatises: Aristotle and Plato, Hobbes and Locke, Aurobindo Ghosh and Herzen - they all put forward their ideas about what an ideal society, an ideal state should be looking like. Of course, each of them had their own vision of this “ideality”.

Among the philosophers of antiquity there was no general definition of an “ideal society”. “Plato, for example, described an ideal society as a union of three unequal social groups: rulers, strategists and producers, thereby showing that in an ideal society all people cannot be equal in their duties, but on the contrary - each person fulfills his certain role, since each person has his own soul and path. “Justice” was a term common to all. Aristotle identified the concepts of “society” and “state”. An ideal state, which means a society, he says is the one that provides the most happy life for as many people as possible. For him, the state is a political society of people who unite for the common goods” (Mamonkina, 2014: 160). You can also have a look at the “City of the Sun” by Tomaso Campanella and “Utopia” by Thomas More.

## **Results and discussion**

Such a prominent philosopher of the East as Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi, a great scientist,

whose 1150th anniversary is being celebrated by all progressive humanity in 2020, could not avoid this matter. Al-Farabi is the founder of Aristotelianism in the East, one of the brightest representatives of the school of classical Arab-Muslim philosophy, “the second teacher after Aristotle”.

He made the foundation for the eastern utopian view of the state and society. “A city in which the unification of people has as its goal mutual assistance in matters by which true happiness is obtained, is a virtuous city, and a society where people help each other in order to achieve happiness together is a virtuous society. The people, all of whose cities help each other in order to achieve happiness, are a virtuous people. In the same way, the whole earth will become virtuous if nations help each other to achieve happiness”- this is what the “Treatise on the views of the inhabitants of a virtuous city” says (Grigoryan, 1960: 7).

Each person, according to al-Farabi, occupies the main place in the system of an ideal social and state structure. Al-Farabi places human happiness above all religious precepts and requirements (Nagiyev, 2009: 243). In order to build an ideal society, first of all you should become a virtuous person, and you achieve it through chastity, noble deeds. “Happiness is the goal that every person strives for, it is a kind of perfection. The explanation of this does not need words, it is an utterly known thing”, this is how the treatise “Indication of the path to happiness” begins (Al-Farabi, 1973: 437). Al-Farabi calls the goal of the state’s activity precisely the achievement of the happiness of every person.

For a general designation of the state and society, al-Farabi uses the concept of “city” (al-Madina). He opposes the “virtuous city” (al-Madina al-Fadil) to the “ignorant city”, which was characterized by immorality and depravity. In the same way, the inhabitants of these cities are opposite. If the inhabitants of a virtuous city are humane and striving for universal happiness, then the inhabitants of an ignorant city do not strive for spiritual development, they only thirst for material wealth, powers, and carnal pleasures. This is “happiness” in their mind. But, it also has a downside: illness of the body and spirit, suffering from a lack of financial opportunities to get pleasure and satisfy their passions.

Ignorant cities are united under desire for wealth, power, craving for the satisfaction of material needs and carnal entertainment. They have their own variety: the city of necessity, the city of exchange, the city of baseness, the ambitious city, the power-hungry city, the voluptuous city.

Describing the virtuous city, al-Farabi compares it with the human body, where all organs interact with each other, help to protect health and to keep the human body healthy (Mamonkina, 2014: 161). It is reflected at the principle that all people - residents of this city-state should interact, while ensuring its well-being and happiness. Thus, an ideal virtuous state is such an association of “virtuous” people who, with the aim of their unification, have the achievement of universal happiness, the achievement of justice and prosperity, through mutual assistance, mutual respect for each other, support and understanding, discarding all base needs, discarding the attraction to material gain, fame and wealth.

According to al-Farabi’s concept of a virtuous city, its inhabitants are divided into five categories, such as: the most worthy persons (philosophers, sages), orators and ministers of religion (rhetorics, poets, musicians, scribes, preachers), gauges (geometers, doctors, gauges, astrologers), guards (warriors), and rich people (cattle breeders, merchants, farmers).

Al-Farabi attached great importance to the role of the ruler of the city - the state, who should also have good qualities, such as: wisdom; perfect judgment; the ability to convince; the ability to imagine; the ability to physically wage a holy war; healthy and strong (Speranskaya, 2011: 186-190). If there was no such person, but there were group of people who had the above-mentioned qualities all together, al-Farabi invites them to take the place of the ruler, becoming the best heads. This is the “reign of the most worthy.” In a situation where there is no such group of rulers, “the head of the city, according to al-Farabi, becomes a person who combines knowledge of ancient laws and regulations that were introduced by the first generations of imams and through which they ruled city; an excellent ability to understand where and under what circumstances these laws should be used in accordance with the goal pursued by them by the early generations; the ability to reveal what is not explicitly expressed in ancient laws, oral and written, following what can be revealed in ancient laws; [the ability] to understand well and be judicious in one or another of the events that could not be foreseen in the ancient laws that contribute to the preservation of the city’s prosperity; excellence in oratory, persuasion and imagination. At the same time, this person must have the ability to wage a holy war ”(al-Farabi, 1973: 437). This is “rule by law”. And, lastly, when there is no such person, however, there is a certain group of people, among whom all the qualities necessary for rule are found, they become lawful heads.

How brilliant was al-Farabi, more than a thousand years ago, thinking about the fate of the individual and the people, the community and the city, man and humanity. The theory of the virtuous city is more relevant than ever in our days, in the context of socio-political tension in the world and the numerous signs of moral degradation of human society.

Al-Farabi's idea of a virtuous city found its unexpected embodiment in India. In the south of India, as an experiment to create an international society of people living outside of politics and religion, was created the international city of Aurovil, or the «city of dawn».

A hundred years ago, in 1920, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh - the world famous philosopher, religious reformer and creator of the concept of integral yoga has founded an ashram in the city of Puducherry (an ashram is a religious community), where his followers began to gather. Like al-Farabi, Sri Aurobindo dreamed of an ideal society where every individual would be happy, which ultimately would lead to the improvement and happiness of the whole society in general. This is what he writes in his book "The Ideal of Human Unity" (Sri Aurobindo, 2020: 8): "The society will become perfect in which the most favorable conditions for human improvement will be created. Human perfection will not be complete if it does not bring the community in which he lives, and ultimately the largest of all possible human communities - united humanity - to true perfection «(Sri Aurobindo, 2020: 15). "Ideally, the unification of mankind would mean the creation of a system in which, as the first rule of a harmonious life together, peoples would be given the opportunity to unite freely on the basis of natural relationships between them, conditioned by territorial, ethnic, cultural proximity and economic expediency ... must learn in all his thoughts and actions to clearly understand the single soul in humanity, a particle-soul and a unique form of embodiment of which is every person, every nation. The principle of the ego, based on separation and isolation, must be transcended, but at the same time individuality is preserved, for its destruction will lead to a stop in development. Living together should be organized according to the principles that ensure complete freedom of individual manifestation and interchange between various elements, as well as satisfying the need to dare and overcome, thanks to which the human soul lives and grows to greatness" (Sri Aurobindo, 2020: 17). And these words are spoken at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the world was torn apart by military conflicts and economic crises, and tough

laws of the caste system reigned in India itself, dividing people according to the principle of birth in a certain social group!

After the death of the philosopher, the community was led by his disciple and follower Mother Mirra (more often just Mother) - Mirra Alfassa, a French woman who lived for many years in the ashram of Sri Aurobindo. In 1964, a society named after Sri Aurobindo was organized by the followers of Sri Aurobindo, and the secretary of Navajati at the first Conference of the Society proposed to create a city of a new type. There were several reasons for this. Mother Mirra also wrote a book about the perfect society of the future «Dream», which made a great impression on the followers of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. In addition, her spiritual disciples from all over the world often came to the Mother's ashram. But they did not want to live in an ashram with its primitive living conditions. They had their own jobs, as well as own businesses. And the ashram was visited only for spiritual communication with the Mother, conversations and meditation. Then the idea came to create a city for people who would like to live «in the atmosphere of the Mother», but at the same time do not limit their life to the ashram: do not donate their property to it and do not adhere to its strict rules.

Mother Mirra warmly supported this idea, especially since its roots came from her spiritual teacher - Sri Aurobindo himself. Talking about the history of Aurovil, its inhabitants quote the words of the Mother: "Go and find a large banyan tree in an open field, and build a new city of Aurovil there" (Abundance Publications, 2007). Here is how she outlined her dream of an ideal city: "Somewhere on earth there must be a place that no country could consider its own property, where all people of good will, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying only one authority - the highest Truth. Peace and harmony should reign there, and all the fighting instincts of a person should be used exclusively to eliminate the causes of his suffering and misfortune, to overcome human weaknesses and ignorance, to overcome his limitations and inadequacy. This is a place where the needs of the spirit and the desire for progress would be preferred over the satisfaction of desires and passions in search of pleasure and material wealth. In such a place, children could grow and develop without losing touch with their souls; education would not be given to pass exams and receive diplomas or positions, but to enrich and strengthen existing abilities and develop new ones. Here titles and social standing would be replaced by the ability to serve and organize; the

needs of the body would be equally satisfied, and intellectual, moral, or spiritual superiority would be expressed not in an increase in available pleasures and material wealth, but in an increase in duties and responsibilities. Beauty in all its artistic forms - drawing, sculpture, music, literature - would be equally accessible to everyone, and the opportunity to enjoy it would depend only on the spiritual needs of everyone, but not on social or material status. Since in this ideal place money would no longer be the highest measure of personal achievement, individuality would be valued much more than material well-being and career achievements. And work would no longer be a livelihood, but a way of expressing oneself and creating opportunities to serve society, which, in turn, would provide everyone with everything they need to live. It should be a place where human relations (which so far are based almost exclusively on competition and struggle) would be replaced by the desire to surpass the other in the ability to do good, to cooperation and true brotherhood” (Van Vrekhem, Georges, 2000: 15). That was written in 1954, but Mother had the idea of creating such a city in her early youth and more than once throughout her life she seriously thought about implementing this idea (Mirra Alfassa, 1991).

On February 28, 1968, the inauguration ceremony of the city of Aurovil was held, which was attended by five thousand guests from all over the world. During the ceremony, the laying of a marble urn took place, where all those present put a handful of earth, brought from their homeland. The City Charter was also read out. It was announced by the Mother herself. The broadcast was conducted from the ashram in Puducherry.

Here is the text of the Charter:

- Aurovil is not owned by anyone. Aurovil belongs to all of humanity. However, in order to live in Aurovil, one must be a voluntary servant of the Divine Consciousness.

- Aurovil is a place of endless knowledge, indefatigable progress and unfading youth.
- Aurovil is a bridge between the past and the future. Its purpose is to courageously strive towards future discoveries, using all the achievements of inner and outer life.

- Aurovil is a center for material and spiritual research, preparing a living embodiment of real human Unity. Aurovil welcomes all people of goodwill. Aurovil welcomes everyone who craves development and strives for a higher and more true life (K.D. Sethna, 1977: 9).

And today the Charter remains the main legislative document for the inhabitants of Aurovil.

The place for the foundation of Aurovil was chosen by chance: Mother, closing her eyes, pointed with her finger on the map a place about ten kilometers north of Pondicherry. The city’s project was coordinated with the government of Tamil Nadu and the central government in Delhi, as well as approved and supported by UNESCO. Thus, the city of Aurovil is an international project of UNESCO and the Ministry of Education of India. The project was announced as an experiment to create an international community of people living outside politics and preferences in religion. Indira Gandhi described Aurovil as “an exciting project that brings harmony of different cultures and understanding of what the environment should be for a person’s spiritual growth” (Peter Richards, 2000: 4).

Aurovil is divided into districts: cultural; residential; international; industrial. They spread out in a spiral from the Matrimandir (Mother’s Temple). It is a huge spherical building as high as a nine-floor building, purposely built as a place for meditation and concentration. From a far distance, it looks like a huge flower with golden center as a slightly flattened ball, from which brick-colored petals extend. In the upper hemisphere of this “temple of meditation” is the main thing - the “Inner Hall”, cylindrical in shape and faced completely with snow-white marble. In it, at a short distance from the walls, twelve columns are installed around the circumference, which really do not support anything - they do not even reach the vault. They symbolize the liberation of human consciousness from ignorance.

City life is governed by the Aurovil Foundation (Aurovil Today, 2020). All actual issues are being solved by the working groups. Each of them deals with problems in one certain direction. Particularly important decisions are made by the Assembly of residents, where all adult citizens are present.

Currently, the city has about 80 settlements - communities, basic social infrastructure, water and electricity supply, telecommunications, roads, etc. The city is, in fact, a large-scale eco-settlement: there are no cars, main kinds of transport are mopeds and scooters. There are several thousand inhabitants in Aurovil. People live in compact garden communities. All communities (about fifty in total), according to the Aurovil tradition, are named relating to their spiritual content: “Brotherhood”, “Transfiguration”, “Grace”, “Aspiration”, etc. A community can have from five to several dozen people, on average 30-40. In each community,

people of different nationalities gathered at their own will: Tamil, French, Germans, Bengalis, Dutch, Russians, about 30 nationalities in total. Mainly young people live in Aurovil, the average age of Aurovils' citizen is 30 years. There are many children in Aurovil, including those from mixed marriages, they usually know two or three languages. At school, instruction is in English, the study of Tamil language is mandatory. The child education system in Aurovil begins with a nursery and ends with the last grade of secondary school. All centers of this system are experimental, implementing the principles of upbringing and education proposed by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (Mirra Alfassa, 1992).

Aurovil is a bridge between the past and the future. Its purpose is to courageously strive towards future discoveries, using all the achievements of internal and external, spiritual and material life. Aurovil is a place of endless learning, tireless progress and never-ending youth. There are no beggars in the city, but there are no rich either. There are no idlers here, each resident must work and earn money. The working day lasts about five hours. There is work for everyone. The city has the following enterprises:

- Center for Scientific Research
- Enterprise for the production of computers
- Grocery shopping service
- Dairy farms
- Plant for the production of methane from municipal waste
- Engineering and architectural bureaus
- Sewing workshop
- Construction firms
- Landscaping and landscaping services

All settlements in the city are made using non-cash transfers. Funds to the city treasury come from deductions from enterprises, private donations. Education, medicine, attendance at the cultural events in Aurovil are free. Aurovil has a vibrant cultural life. Concerts, performances, dance performances, art exhibitions are regularly organized (AurovilToday, 2020).

## Conclusion

The main goal of Aurovil is to realize the idea of the unity of people, regardless of their religious and political views. Aurovil wants to be a City of Peace, where men and women from all over the world can live in peace and harmony. Aurovil must serve Truth outside all social, political and religious conventions. All his efforts are directed towards peace, truth and harmony. The life of the Aurovilians is an example of the amazing unity of the inner world of man with nature and the surrounding outer world. Experimental programs in agriculture, medicine, education, culture and other areas are being implemented here. The city of Aurovil is a mini model of the spiritual transformation of the whole world.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Aurovil, on 28 February 2018, Indian President Ram Nath Kovind sent a message to the community, in which he called Sri Aurobindo "one of the greatest sages of modern India". He also wrote that Aurovil "represents humanity's aspiration for peace and goodwill" and that it is "a unique symbol of human unity" (NavBharat Times, 28.02.2018). Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Sri Aurobindo and Aurovil Ashram on 25 February 2018. After meditating in the Matrimandir and participating in some activities, he gave a speech to the audience of Sri Aurobindo. Speaking about the Aurovil Charter and the basic principles of life in society, he said: "Indian society is fundamentally diverse. It promotes dialogue and philosophical tradition. Aurovil demonstrates this ancient Indian tradition to the world, bringing together global diversity". At the end of his speech, he expressed his wish that Aurovil could continue to develop and support new and creative ideas for India and the world (NavBharat Times. 25.02.2018).

Thus, we see that even the most daring ideas of thinkers of the past can find their embodiment years and centuries after their expression. The modern history of mankind is a time of numerous experiments both in the field of science and technology and in the field of social life. And one of these experiments in the image of the city of Aurovil was successful.

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