"In my school days I had dreamed of becoming a perfect ruler, of doing something substantial for the people" writes Karan Singh in his autobiography. He went on to write that over the years this boyhood dream got crystallized into "a strong predilection for spiritual ideas." This new turn, this evolution of his boyhood dream and aspiration was, in the words of the renowned bi-lingual writer Manoj Das, "a brilliant case of an evolved soul, a spontaneous attraction for the most splendid doctrine in the history of spirituality that Sri Aurobindo presented..."
Then this “new” dream and aspiration informed and directed Karan Singh’s course of life, his actions, his work for the country, for humanity, for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother – and for Auroville.

In 1991, when the Government of India invited him to take up the chairmanship of the Auroville Foundation, Karan Singh was 60. A bright public career was behind him. A number of books were to his credit. He was known internationally as a charismatic and scholarly torch-bearer of Indian and world culture, religion, spirituality, and public good – coming, as he does, from a high social milieu with a royal family background. He could have opted for a happy peaceful life devoted to study and music. But he readily accepted the invitation and saw in it the god-sent opportunity to serve and realise his aspiration and dream.

His maiden speech at the Centre of Indian Culture (CIC) in 1991 was a start of a new chapter in the life of Auroville. The speech had a plenty of nuggets such as:

"I look upon this Foundation as not just another Act passed by the Parliament but something much deeper and more profound."

"You have had an extraordinary career so far – Auroville has reached a certain level. What we need now is a major push into the future."

Auroville was founded in 1968 but it can be said that the Auroville Foundation was founded in 1991 thanks to the prudent and insightful ways in which Karan Singh managed to integrate the Foundation within the mosaic of Auroville. But more than integration, he enriched both Auroville and the Auroville Foundation by his brilliant and insightful interviews to Auroville Today, by his speeches, by his communications, by his help in the administration, his stress on the completion of Matrimandir as a soul of Auroville, his ever-present moral and active support in the vital tasks of Auroville, his enthusiasm to make Auroville known in the world, and numerous other ways including his availability, his instrumentality in the creation of Savitri Bhavan, and in furthering The Master’s remembrance by naming an auditorium after Sri Aurobindo. All these testify to but one thing: Karan Singh has done his best to direct the course of Auroville – which he described to the Indian Parliament as “an arrow shot into the future.”

Taken as a whole, the words that Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy about Jawaharlal Nehru apply to Karan Singh as well: “... he bears on himself the stamp of a very fine character, a nature of the highest sattwic kind, full of rectitude and a high sense of honour: a man of the finest Brahmin type with what is best in European education added....”

Personally, I will always remain grateful to him and to Angshuman Basu of the Auroville Foundation for giving me the precious opportunity to work on the book “Dear Aurovilians - Inspiration for Karan Singh’s Auroville Collaboration".
Karan Singh himself wrote to me, after the book was released in Auroville in September 2018, that whoever sees the book is full of accolades for it and that he had forwarded the book to the Prime Minister and to many others.

In his communication with me, Karan Singh was always prompt, and a spirit of mutuality, of sensitivity and of consideration could be discerned from what he wrote.

In my life, I have had the good fortune to meet and know several extraordinary well-known and unknown individuals. Karan Singh is among them in the well-known category. I regard it as one of my life’s joys and privileges to have come in touch with him.

26 years ago, in 1994, I received a first letter from Karan Singh appreciating my paper on the fundraising aspect of Auroville’s land-securing and land-safeguarding. In my reply I wrote among other things: "Association of a person like you - a noble birth, a noble soul and spirit - with Auroville is a matter of great soul-happiness and a sign of a good future."

I still hold to that view.

Aryadeep Acharya
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