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The

Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



Forty Years of
Auroville

Mother said many times: "Whoever gets my touch, whoever has a second of true aspiration, true love for me, he is finished for life, for all lives — he is bound to me. I have put a golden chain round his neck, his heart is bound eternally to me."

It is a thing nobody can see, you yourselves don't see; but it is a fact, it is there. The golden chain is there within your heart. Wherever you go, you drag that chain, it is a lengthening chain. However far you may go, it is an elastic chain, it goes on lengthening, but never snaps. In hours of difficulty, in hours of doubt and confusion in your life, you have that within you to support you. If you are conscious of it, so much the better; if you are not conscious, believe that it is there. The Mother's love, Her Presence is there always.

Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta (to the final-year students of the Higher Course on October 26, 1976)

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On the Cover:

Michel Lemaire '71 (Kalya) and Fabienne Bernard represent Auroville at Auroville's inauguration ceremony on 28.02.1968.

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THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana Panda '79

Life begins at 40, they say, so it makes sense to celebrate the completion of four decades since the birth of Auroville.

Forty years! It seems as if it was only yesterday that the excitement of the inauguration filled our days and nights in the Ashram. Those of us who were in the School then look back at that period as a time when we were living a dream. It was a time when we expected the unexpected. The whole world was coming to us, we didn't have to go anywhere.

It is difficult now to believe how closely the school was associated with that inaugural ceremony. As Geeta Lall says, in her short piece in French, the students had even been asked to make sketches for the design of the urn of the amphitheatre. Only a few people today are aware that it was the students of the School who represented the countries which did not send a representative. And somewhere in their hearts the students felt that Auroville was being created for them, so that they could very naturally move from the Ashram to Auroville after they had finished their studies. After all, not everyone is inwardly ready to live the disciplined life of the sadhak in the Ashram. Nor was anybody in those days keen to go too far from this large family where they were growing up. Auroville would be that golden middle path where we could have both, the spiritual life as well as the worldly one.

Why then did so few choose to go and live there? There are many reasons but it could be mostly because for many years the focus of Auroville had changed — it had not yet found itself, while at the same time the focus of the students had changed — not many were looking for that middle path anymore. We had featured Auroville as our cover story in one of the issues in 2000 and the number of former students of the School who have settled in Auroville has not changed significantly since then.

The memory of that ceremony during which

the earth of so many countries was mixed in the marble urn remains like something out of a fairytale. The euphoria of that time is hard to recreate. The very concept of many countries coming together was such a novelty in those days when even people of the different parts of India did not get an opportunity to know each other.

The idea of a place which would embody world union is still fascinating. Many big cities of the Western world have a population which is made up of a large variety of people of different races and cultures and it is quite a common experience to feel the presence of many languages and many different ways of life simultaneously in one place. As one takes a ride in the London Underground, for example, it is common to see people take out their mobile phones and start speaking in so many different languages. All at once there is a multitude of tongues — Hindi, Gujarati, Russian, Japanese, Bengali, Polish, Tamil, Italian, French, Spanish and English, of course — all in the same coach. What makes Auroville special therefore is not the fact of gathering many different countries and cultures in one physical space but the attempt to make this gathering harmonious and to give the whole thing a spiritual background, because everywhere else this coming together of different cultures is connected to economic necessity and has an underlying sense of mistrust and fear.

All those students who had participated in the ceremony at the amphitheatre in 1968 were teenagers then so today most of them are touching sixty. The fantastic city that they had thought would be standing in that barren land hasn't yet happened but the good news is that the global village is here. For a few years now, every alternate Sunday, a little group of former students and devotees sets off towards Matrimandir, and as we weed the garden and sandpaper the scaffolding pipes, we can see the marble urn of the amphitheatre from the corner of our eyes. Then we feel that we have come full circle. ❧

FOLLOWING THE STAR

R. Prabhakar (Batti) revisits the memories of Amrita-da

Amrita-da is a name most of us who have lived a fair length of time in the Ashram (any time between 1920 and 1970, but later too), pronounce with fondness and admiration. He lived, at least from the early 40s to his demise, in the room adjoining the Meditation Hall which we very practically refer to as Central Office. But to many of yesteryear it was and still is “Amrita-da’s Office” or simply “Amrita-da’s Room”.

He was a very “pleasantly-handsome” man. I would think that much of that “pleasantness and handsomeness” exuded from within. He was a great man, genuinely warm, and never did he lose his calm. Rather, a smile seemed always ready. He had a lot to scowl about if he wanted — for, as a trustee, he had to deal with, and satisfy a 1000 of us and our 10000 problems. But the scowl never showed; the smile always won. I think from his viewpoint (or vantage position) it was possible to see the lighter side and/or the meaninglessness of most of our complaints — so the smile.

Amrita-da was not always Amrita-da. It was Sri Aurobindo who made him “Amrita”. He was Aravamudhachari Iyyengar (quite a mouthful) of Kazhipervembakam village. The village is situated 15-18 km north-west of Pondicherry (ECR). He was from one of the Brahmin families of the village. It seems that, one by one, all the Brahmins

emigrated from the village (It is not very clear why). Aravamudha himself came away to Pondicherry for his studies at Calve College. He lived in a house in Muthialpet. Even as a young boy in his village, in 1905 or so, he had heard of Sri Aurobindo. The very name “Sri Aurobindo” somehow attracted him even then. It filled his heart. Sri Aurobindo arrived in Pondicherry in 1910 — when Aravamudha heard of that arrival, he harboured a strong desire to meet Him.



Left to Right: Kumud Bagchi, Sri Aurobindo, Amrita

MEETING WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Aravamudha was acquainted with some, like Ramaswami, Rangaswami, Subramanya Bharati, Bijoykanta, who were close to Sri Aurobindo. He had Darshan of Sri Aurobindo several times from far and near, but never really met him. It was through the good offices of Bijoykanta that he finally met the Master. On that preordained day, though Amrita¹ did not know he was

to meet Sri Aurobindo, he felt as he walked towards Sri Aurobindo’s house², that the street and everything around was bathed in an “extraordinary light”. “It was as though the presence of Lord Krishna behind the sun, pervading the whole sky, was there....” In the downstairs verandah of the house, Bijoykanta was waiting for him, all smiles, and said: “I told Sri Aurobindo about you, and also told him about your strong desire to see him”,

¹ I now refer to Aravamudha as Amrita, though it was only later that he was given that name.

² It was then on Rue François Martin — called “Guest House”.

then he added, "Let's go". Amrita-da felt as if he "was truly going up towards the sun..."

About his meeting with Sri Aurobindo, Amrita-da writes, "Bejoykanta got up first, I followed him, reached the head of the long corridor and, as I just stood there, Sri Aurobindo, who was about twenty feet away, turned his eyes upon me. Whether I walked to him or took a leap to him, I do not know. What I remember is that a lamp was lit everywhere in me and I saw in a spontaneous and automatic movement in front of me an intense celestial beauty. My being unknowingly swam, as it were, in a sea of silence, it fell prostrate at the lotus-feet of the Master, it did not utter 'My Refuge, my Refuge', but lay there body, life and mind all together a single block. Sri Aurobindo touched me with his flower-like hands and made me stand up. I drank the drink he gave me. That eternal sight still lives in my memory in the same form. I do not know why I burst into sobs as I clasped him. Tears streamed down from my eyes."

As he lay at Sri Aurobindo's feet a sight he had seen years earlier came back to Amrita-da. It was a "repetition of a marvel of many years before".

THE MARVEL OF MANY YEARS BEFORE

What is the marvel which Amrita-da is referring to? The experience that came back to Amrita-da first happened to him as a young boy around

the year 1905 at his village on the banks of the village pond. Describing the scene in *Old Long Since*, Amrita-da writes:

"Our village. A huge sand-hill far away from the village. On the sand-hill stood rows of thick-set palm trees almost striking the sky. On the north of the hill in the lowland was a wide and deep reservoir of water. It was the village-tank. The tank was full of lotuses and there were lilies too in a little corner of it. On its eastern bank was a banyan tree; at a distance from that a Peepal tree.

"In the evenings the Brahmins of our village in order to perform their evening rites (*sandhya-vandanam*) would start from the village, cross the mango-grove, amalaki-grove, tamarind-grove, date-palm forest, etc., wade through the small stream flowing with a soft murmur, climb the sand-hill with its palm forest, get down to the bank of the tank and sit by its edge. After having performed the evening rites, Japa and Tapa, they would get up and, all of them reciting together the Vishnusahasranama (the thousand names of Vishnu), come back to the village.

"On the eastern bank of the tank was a small temple of Ganesh, the holy image of Eyenar at the border of the village.

"One evening. Darkness had just crept over the place. I was sitting on the sand-hill by the tank. I was then about 8 or 9 years old. Four or five Brahmins were still on the bank occupied with the



Recent photo of the tank in Amrita-da's village

performance of rites. In that dim darkness of the evening, just two or three stars twinkled in the western sky.

“And then, in front of me at a short distance and gradually drawing nearer and rising above as it came close to my head, there appeared a shining ball, a big ball of the size of a palm fruit. Its lustre was dark blue. My eyes fixed on it, I kept looking at it. That ball shone soothing my eyes, comforting my body, seizing my heart and, as it slowly swam up, proceeded far to the south; my sight followed its course till it disappeared.

“I must have been immersed deep within me at that time because I was oblivious of the earth and voyaging in the sky. Someone in the darkness, his face I could not see, called me to go home and so I came back to the waking state. Ten miles away from our village to the south-east was Pondicherry!

“Sri Aurobindo had not yet come to Pondicherry. The beings of the upper worlds were as if making ready the blessed town of Pondicherry to receive Him!



Recent photo of Amrita-da's village

“While I lay at Sri Aurobindo's lotus-feet for the first time I saw once again that glowing ball, familiar to me and quite close, appearing in the dark blue sky within me and leading me towards the south. It seemed as if the star had accomplished its ordained work.”

EPILOGUE

Some of us (Manoj, Swadesh, Prafull, Saroja, Kumuda and others) who had heard and read

about Amrita-da's village and the experience he had had there, decided to pay it a visit. So we went there to see and if possible “feel” what that young boy saw and felt a 100 or more years ago — be it in a minute degree.



One of the huts belonging to the Brahmins who left the village

We reached the village which is off the East Coast Road. It had naturally moved on with the times — but fortunately not too much. It still breathed an old air charm, simple and rustic (not pristine). We were drawn to this, and more so, when amongst the many old villagers there, an ancient 92 year old man with an unclouded memory recounted an “on-the-spot-history”. He talked of Iyengars who had left and of one who had gone away to join an Ashram at Pondicherry and had not returned! He pointed out old dilapidated houses and one thatched hut falling apart — all belonging to one or another of the Brahmins who had left. We picked him up in our Trekker and drove on to The Pond. Oh! What a spot it was! I could (without much exaggeration) say “pristine”. It was just as Aruvamudha had described it — sand hill, Banyan and Peepul trees, a row of palm trees (albeit reduced in numbers). The lotuses were there, in bloom and in a corner, lilies (Aruvamudha had seen them). And as we sat, we watched the age-old village “pageant” of graceful yet strong women with pots on their heads come to collect water for the household. Curiously enough they did not dip the pots in the pond. They had dug out some deep holes a few feet away from the main water body wherein water seeped, filtered through the intervening sand or earth. Then came small herds of cows and goats. They stepped in delicately into

the water and had their fill for the night. (This they did on the opposite end of the pond from where the women filled their pots). And then the eternal sundown (Sandhya) when the sun slowly dips behind the distant trees and as slowly the night takes over — all in silence, a miracle happening of everyday! It stills the mind and heart — we have only to sit and look, without grudging the time “lost”. For us city-dwellers “daylight” is replaced by tube light, mercury, sodium, halogen lights. Our senses are stupefied, benumbed, by the roar and fumes of traffic. Lost are limpid starry skies and times when we can soak our minds in silence. We had found all this for a fleeting hour — so we lingered; each in his own thoughts and silence. The old man sat with us.

The old man called a small big-eyed girl, his grand daughter, and gave her some instructions — to go tell her mother to prepare tea or some



Another view of Amrita-da's village tank

warm milk from the home-coming cows for us! We overheard him. We pleaded with him not to trouble himself and others — to no avail. Back at the village hot fresh milk awaited us. We then bid them good-bye and wended our way home — happy that the “Star” could still lead, though from south to north-west, and in a small measure a 100 years into the past. ❧

[See also “Amrita — the Ever-Living One” on p. 36]

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FORTY YEARS OF AUROVILLE

In the history of the world the 1960s proved to be a defining decade. There was a great movement to start things anew and to do away with the weight of the past, to experiment and to expand. Some feel that in founding Auroville the Mother started off that revolution on the occult plane. Others say that the Mother could see that the world was ready and it was the right time for such a step to be undertaken in fulfilling Sri Aurobindo's dream of world unity.

The ceremony which took place on 28th February 1968 to mark the foundation of Auroville remains unforgettable to those who took part in it. At that time the Banyan tree was the only landmark. The amphitheatre was prepared next to it with the marble urn in place, ready to receive the earth from 124 countries as well as 23 states and union territories of India.

The ceremony began at 10:30 am with a short piece of the Mother's music and a message from her which was relayed from her room in the Ashram. The equipment for this transmission was set up by the staff of the All India Radio inside the Mother's room and when she spoke her voice could be heard from the speakers at the amphitheatre in Auroville. The people who had gathered there heard her read out the charter of Auroville in French.

After that Vijay-bhai and Kiran-di went up to the urn with a bit of sand from the Samadhi and the Mother's flag to represent the Ashram. They also had the Auroville Charter in the Mother's handwriting.

The sand and the Charter were lowered into the urn. Then as the Charter was being read out in Tamil, Sanskrit and English in the background, one by one, in alphabetical order, the representatives of the different states of India walked up to the urn with a little bit of earth brought from their states and tipped it into the urn.

The different countries of the world followed, also in an alphabetical order. The charter of Auroville was read out in Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish in the background. Like for the Indian states, a boy and a girl representing the country went up to the urn, the girl holding a placard with the name of the place and the boy holding an earthen container with the soil (or sea-salt for the countries which did not send any soil).

When all the countries had finished adding their soil, Kalya and Fabienne, went up with the earth of Auroville and its flag. Finally Nolini-da closed the lid of the urn and the ceremony was concluded.

The students of the School replaced any representative who had not come. We have three accounts which give us a glimpse into the event and the atmosphere of the place as felt by the authors. We also have articles by Aster and Chandresh, both of whom currently live in Auroville. Finally John Harper and Gauri Shankar write about the work at Matrimandir, the structure of which is finally complete after 37 years.



The Inauguration Ceremony of Auroville taking place on 28.02.1968

LA NAISSANCE D'AUROVILLE

Geeta Lall '71

JANVIER 1968

« Alors j'aimerais que vous imaginiez la forme que prendra la structure dans laquelle on mettra la terre du monde tout entier. »

M. Roger Anger a appelé quelques élèves pour exécuter un dessin de cette structure qui représentera le symbole de l'unité mondiale. Nous nous sommes mis au travail en exécutant plusieurs esquisses de structure d'urnes et de la forme que prendrait la terre tout autour.

M. Roger Anger nous a dit qu'on allait choisir un de ces dessins pour le jour de l'inauguration d'Auroville. Bien sûr on n'avait pas le droit de « guigner » le papier du voisin. Tanmaya nous a montré quelques-uns de ces croquis.

J'attendais et je brûlais d'impatience de voir comment ce serait le jour du 28 février 1968.



Vijay Poddar with soil from the Samadhi and the Auroville Charter in Mother's handwriting and Kiran Poddar with Mother's flag went up to the urn first.

FÉVRIER 1968

Mère a envoyé un petit mot pour représenter les drapeaux de tous les pays qui allaient participer à la naissance de cette ville nouvelle, de ce rêve de Mère, Auroville. Mère ne voulait pas qu'il y ait de vrais drapeaux. Elle a demandé que soient fabriquées des pancartes. Fixées sur des bâtons, chacune porterait le nom d'un pays et des rubans aux couleurs des drapeaux y seraient accrochés.

Les pancartes ont été fabriquées à Harpagon. L'imprimerie de l'Ashram a imprimé les noms sur du papier et les rubans, on les a achetés au marché. Nous avons effectué tout l'assemblage. Je me rappelle que nous avons un grand plaisir à travailler même la nuit. Quelle joie de participer à

la naissance de cette ville nouvelle, Auroville.

Arrive le 28 février. Tôt le matin je me suis préparée en pensant comment allait se dérouler toute la cérémonie.

Nous sommes partis dans les autocars de l'Ashram. Arrivée sur le terrain je suis restée « bouche bée ». Je me suis dit « Ouah! Quelle ouverture! Quelle beauté et harmonie règnent sur ce terrain! » J'ai été sidérée par la Présence qui dominait cet endroit. Les chaises pour les « VIP » ont été installées. Chacun avait une place. Nous

avons pris les nôtres. Il y avait beaucoup de monde mais un silence dominait l'endroit. La cérémonie a débuté. Chacun est allé faire le tour du terrain pour monter jusqu'à l'urne et y mettre la terre.

Je représentais le Venezuela. À mon tour je me suis levée et je marchais lentement. Je posais

chaque pas avec cette pensée en moi: « Ô Mère, que ton rêve, que cette ville nouvelle existe et qu'elle grandisse et s'épanouisse pleinement, telle que tu l'as voulue. » Je m'approchais de l'urne; arrivée au sommet je suis restée figée, je ne pouvais plus bouger, je me forçais à me déplacer. Impossible! Comme si quelque chose m'avait envahie, je sentais sur la tête un poids lourd, très lourd! Et puis hop! tout d'un coup ce sentiment a disparu. J'ai continué, je me suis éloignée de l'urne et suis descendue.

Plus tard entre le feuillage du Banian nous avons tous aperçu une forme qui ressemblait à celle du visage de Mère.

Le jour du 28 février reste inoubliable. ☸

AUROVILLE INAUGURATION CEREMONY

Surendra S. Chauhan '69, who represented Morocco at the inauguration ceremony, remembers.

Here is an account of the divine event which took place 40 years ago and it seems as if it was only yesterday, such has been the lasting impact of this event in my heart and mind and soul. The week before the inaugural ceremony was a hectic one. There were a series of meetings, briefings, interactions and brain-storming sessions to explain the *raison d'être* of Auroville and its UNESCO link. These conferences with the delegates were led by Shri Navajata-ji, Dr. Indra Sen, Kireet bhai and other eminent persons. The meetings were held in the courtyard of the Library and in the old Society Office premises. Shri Navajata-ji was always very convincing and impressive with his unique style of putting across his point of view very softly. Dr. Indra Sen and Kireet bhai added a psycho-



A section of the spectators present on the occasion

spiritual flavour in their dialogue with the delegates, and I still recall the freshness and aura of innocence around the faces of the young visiting delegates from all over the world. Many socialist countries did not send their delegates, so a pinch of sea-salt was taken as a symbol of world unity as the oceans touch the boundaries of the continents and countries. The scene then shifted to the central site of the inaugural ceremony — the heart and soul of Auroville. An urn was placed at the center of the amphitheatre, the site of which had been auspiciously selected. It was going to be

filled with the soil of the various countries.

The momentous day arrived. The Auroville charter is a masterpiece of the vision of the Divine



Roger Anger (left) at the ceremony. Roger, who was appointed chief architect of Auroville by the Mother, passed away on 15th January this year.

Mother. It was read in different languages to the large gathering. Sri Madhav-ji read it in Sanskrit. The Ashram was represented by Vijay and his sister Kiran. And, lo and behold, the proceeding commenced. A boy and a girl from the participant countries or those of us from the School who represented a country, held in our hands the placards bearing the name of the country. I represented Morocco with Sanjukta Lall. The Divine Mother's voice was relayed from her room. Her voice came through most powerful and resonant and hearing it was a supremely divine experience. Then we all walked slowly around the amphitheatre and moved towards the urn which



Bhagawat Dolia and Subhra Banerjee, from the Ashram, representing Pakistan

MARKING ANOTHER ANNIVERSARY

Arup Mitra '73

The novel idea of collecting the earth from all the countries and pouring it into a single urn to signify world unity was unique and innovative. The laudable idea came from the Mother and no other ceremony could have better symbolised the foundation of an international city.

Then, there came a rider. When, during the first period of Wednesday the 28th of February 1968, we were asked to assemble in front of room number seven in the school courtyard, one of my classmates excitedly whispered into my ear that a girl and a boy from among us would represent such countries that had only sent their earth, but not their delegates. In those days of reticence, the thought of sharing the dais with a girl was thrilling. And my heart throbbed in happy anticipation.

Soon, I was joined by a shy, large-eyed smiling girl of my age named Aruna Nandi. We were designated to represent Thailand. Happily, that long morning gave us ample opportunity to come to know each other better. As a first step, we introduced ourselves as best as we could during the exciting trip to the barren land which had just been named Auroville, in an overcrowded convoy of buses such as we had never seen before. Then, surrounded by an indescribable multitude of people, the romantic wait under the cool shade of coconut *kiths* before the beginning of the earth-pouring ceremony, prompted us to drift a little closer to each other.



Arup Mitra and Aruna Nandi/Mitra representing Thailand

What finally bonded us together was the concluding lunch at the Society House, overflowing with noisy delegates from all over the globe.

When nearly nine long years later, Aruna Nandi became Aruna Mitra, the foundation structure of the Matrimandir was peeping out of the ground-level, the barrenness of the red land giving way to lush forestation, and Auroville itself was becoming a destination for international seekers of peace and spirituality.

Better late than never, as the adage goes. For, this time around, Aruna and I are right on track to return to the familiar venue and take part in the celebrations marking Auroville's fortieth birthday, — and our fortieth anniversary.

was at the centre, carrying in our hands the soil or the pinch of salt as the case may be. And one by one we placed the sacred soil of so many countries, heralding a new era of world unity. It was a wonderful feeling to be part of this divine event, at once glorious and profoundly symbolic.

This remembrance would remain incomplete without a special mention of the exceptional spiritual nature of the atmosphere. It was simply electric and ethereal, as if a light was pouring

down from heaven. Throughout the days, commencing from 21st February until the great day, 28th February, we were caught in a mood of a great aspiration.

One remembered the memorable line from *Savitri*, "Built is the golden tower, the flame-child born." But these are mere mortal reminiscences. Human language is incapable of recapturing the grace, glory and the all-pervading power of this event which comes once in a millennium. ❧

WHICH COUNTRY DID YOU REPRESENT?



Congo (Kinshasa) represented by
Nalin Patel and Aruna Barai

Underlined names are those of delegates sent by the respective countries/states for the Auroville inauguration ceremony. The names in brackets are those of the delegates who came but did not participate. The others are Ashram youth who substituted for representatives who did not come.

STATES OF INDIA AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR: Niladri Banerjee, Kusum Barai
ANDHRA PRADESH: M. Sesha Sai, Harini Gopal
ASSAM: Dilip Agarwal, Karuna Mukherjee
WEST BENGAL: Somen Biswas, Bandana Maitra
BIHAR: Hemant Dayal, Pushpa Sinha
CHANDIGARH: Rajender M. Singh, Pimmy Ahluwalia
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HARIANA: Upendra Ratra, Rita Sardana
HIMACHAL PRADESH: Vijay Sharma, Maria Jain
JAMMU & KASHMIR: Rafiq A. Bazaz, Anita Samyail
KERALA: Vinod Das, Shobha Das
LACCADIVES: K.M. Kunhiseedikoya, K.K. Hajorommabi
MADHYA PRADESH: Pratap Reddy, Kiran Mehta
MADRAS: R. Kuppuswamy, R. Chitraklekha
MAHARASHTRA: Marazban Patrawala, Ambadasi Nakaji
MANIPUR: Pratik Ghose, Tripti Das
MYSORE: I. Sreekant, Uma Ratna
ORISSA: Subhranshu Mishra, Meera Singh
PONDICHERRY: R. Selvaraj, Nirmala N.
PUNJAB: Anand Arya, Gulshan Sippy
RAJASTHAN: Navin Poddar, Manju Jhunjhunwala

COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

AFGHANISTAN: M. Tarik Abawi, Pemma Chodan
ALBANIA: Debabrata Halder, Chhanda Mukherjee

ALGERIA: Abijit Gupta, Gauri Gupta
ARGENTINA: Cristobal Kirton, Sunita Mahatta
AUSTRALIA: Ross Conabere, Niranjana Arya
AUSTRIA: Joseph Szarkar, Suzanne Steiger
BELGIUM: Kiran Kakkad, Asha Kothari
BHUTAN: Bishma Kandoi, Sumitra Dhandhanian
BOLIVIA: Vivek Rane, Vinay Sharan
BRAZIL: Laxman Mahtani, Maria Lucia Carrera
BULGARIA: Mihail Dimitrov, Sangeeta Chowdhury
BURMA: Maung-Tin-Nyunt, Debjani Halder
BURUNDI: Debdas Chatterjee, Smita Mehta
CHINA (Nationalist): Kanu Dey, Vimala Mouttaya
CHINA (Communist): Bokul Chakravarty, Hema Singh
CAMBODIA: C. Konthal, Kalyani Bhattacharya
CAMAROON: John Ndeh, Gargi Bajpei
CANADA: Stephen Inglis, Terry Delanny
Jean-Pierre Bunel, Madelaine Gosselin
CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.: Purushottam, Dipali Chakravarty
CEYLON: Bandu Senaratna, Patsy Kreltszheim
CHAD: Nityaprakash Khare, Lavanya Reddy
CHILE: Ratan Ghose, Indu Rai
COLUMBIA: Fernando Iragorri, Shashikala Patel
CONGO: Shobhan Roy Chowdhury, Pinakini Patel
CONGO (Kinshasa): Nalin Patel, Aruna Barai
COSTA RICA: Jitendra Shah, Antika Ghose
CUBA: S. Ravi, Vilas Patel
CYPRUS: Arvind Mistry, Chandrima Sengupta
CZECHOSLOVAKIA: Jiri Strasiripka, Ales Wotruba
DAHOMEY: Basabjit Deshmukh, Meera Roy
DENMARK: Swen Pedersen, Lison Ratra
DOMINICAN REP.: Ashwin Kakkad, Charubala Patel
EQUADOR: Ajay Sharma, Jyoti Reddy
EL SALVADOR: Kabul P. Mitra, Sutapa Kanungo
ETHIOPIA: Swapan Basu, Deepa Didwania
FIJI: Sashikant, Jyoti Patel
FINLAND: Siddharta Bhabock, Archana Maheshwari
FRANCE: Pierre Gros, Dominique Marty
Florence Chomette
GABON: Rajanikant Naik, Nishtha Mukherjee
GERMANY: Reinhold Pingel, Petra Erdmann
GHANA: Milan Ghose, Indira Tendon
GREECE: Prithwiraj Narasimham, Denise Sioris
GUATAMALA: Ranajit Roy, Tossi Bose

GUINEA: Rajesh Saha, Rita Bhattacharjee
 HAITI: Aveni Shah, Nanda Reddy
 HONDURAS: Vinay Anuru, Charulata Patel
 HUNGARY: Audrey, Elizabeth Andai
 ICELAND: Maurice Shukla, Vishakha Patel
 INDONESIA: Mohammad Kartono, Minoti Mohanti
 IRAN: Siavash Hatami, Shahla Danesh
 IRAQ: Walid Khalid Alwadi, M.Kadhum Latif
 IRELAND: Garvano Gallagher, Seraphine Martin
 ISRAEL: Sharad Parekh, Suman Mehra
 ITALY: Bruno Petris, Elena Bellotti
 IVORY COAST: Rashesh Jivarajani, Minakshi Patel
 JAMAICA: Kamallesh Patel, Veronica Braham
 JAPAN: Ashwin Barai, Wakako
 JORDAN: Usama S. Abughosh, Savitri Umachigi
 KENYA: Paul Kingola Maundu, Alex Mboha
 KOREA: Paljore Thondup, Rachita Nayak
 KUWAIT: Bader Abughosh, Basil Abughosh
 LAOS: Boun Horn Prakhin, Boun Sou Prakhin
 LEBANON: Nirmal Jhunjhunwala, Shernaz Daruwala
 LIBERIA: Anand Reddy, Ruby Roy
 LIBYA: Amitangshu Chakravarty, Gita Patel
 LUXEMBOURG: Rajeev Reddy, Mounou Shamsukha
 MALAGASY: Abhijit Mitra, Swapna Artaud
 MALTA: Mahesh Patel, Rina Chakravarty
 MALAYSIA: Eusebeus Gunter, Kau-Soo-Keong
 MAURITIUS: Bhardwaj Modi, Veena Poddar
 MALI: Ranajit Gupta, Bhuma Bajpei
 MOROCCO: Surendra S. Chouhan, Sanjukta Lall
 MAURITANIA: Shreyas Gandhi, Moon Patel
 MEXICO: Jagannath Panda, Mukti Das
 MONGOLIA: Thok Thok Bazar, Chetana Kothari
 MOZAMBIQUE: Mukund Patel, Savita K.
 NEPAL: Vishnupalit, Anita Kumari Garg
 NETHERLANDS: Hubert Van Rijckevorsel, Carian Witte
 (Ted Polderman) (Ruth Dippel)
 NEW ZEALAND: Anthony B. Lendrum, Lotus Patel
 NICARAGUA: Chandravan Arya, Jacques Dhandhania
 REP. OF NIGER: Prakash Budihal, Bharati Shah
 FED. OF NIGERIA: Amakpoho R. Iwatt, Sudha Srivastava
G.K.Y. Jacks (F.A. Nzeribe)
 NORWAY: Henning Christensen, Kristin Gylseth
 PAKISTAN: Bhagawat Dolia, Subhra Banerjee
 PANAMA: Animesh Samanthray, Chetana Bhatt
 PARAGUAY: Subhas Thakkar, Renu Gupta
 PERU: Eduardo Sarmiento, Bharati D. Patel
 PHILIPPINES: Walfredo Adan, Chandralekha Patel
 POLAND: Agami Reddy, Prema Singh
 PORTUGAL: Kanhaiya Dalmia, Evelyne Janssens
 QATAR: Rajan Sankpal, Savita Srivastava
 RHODESIA: S.K. Hwindingwi, Gita C. Patel
 RUMANIA: Touyamani Bala, Bala Kottamasu
 ROWANDA: Tejendra Parmar, Vikram Dolia
 SAUDI ARABIA: Michael Barretto, Vasundhara Bhatt
 SENEGAL: Mahesh B. Patel, Bharati B. Patel
 SIKKIM: Prem Bahadur Subba, Om Kumari Pradhan
Chumsang Bhutia
 SINGAPORE: Indra Arya, Gracey John
 SOMALIA: Bashir Gardaad, Bulbul Dhir
 SOUTH AFRICA: Mukesh Gupta, Datta Mukherjee
 SOUTH YEMEN: Mohsen Hamdani, Cheta Poddar
 SPAIN: Lopez Nadal Gonzali, Gita Dolia
 SUDAN: Henry Khamis Wani, Pragna Karun
 SWEDEN: Lars Fredén, Kankana Mukherjee
 SWITZERLAND: Oscar Laser, Sahadja C. Roll
 SYRIA: Tarun K. Banerjee, Tapas Bhatt
 TANZANIA: Meelit Shah, Mamta Shah
 THAILAND: Arup Mitra, Aruna Nandi
 TOGO: Jay Sharma, Autosshi Bose
 TUNISIA: Benimadhav Mohanti, Uma Dhandania
 TURKEY: M. Akay, Mme Akay
 TIBET: Galek Namgyal, Dikki Dolker
 UGANDA: J.M. Ssentongo, Kamala Atrey
 USSR: Alla Didenka, Sergey Mirakyan
 UAR: (I.S. Ismail), (Kaut El Kauli Al H.)
 (Saiyal Ali El Sayed), (Habiba Hassam Helmy)
M. Shaweed, (Mrs Laila Kamel El. Kozaïy)
 UK: Julian Earle, Joanna Lancashire
 USA: John A. Ware, Jeanne Ernst
Louise Owens
 UPPER VOLTA: Gurudas Banerjee, Ila Patel
 URUGUAY: Bipin B. Prasad, Amala Mouttaya
 VENEZUELA: Vijay Anuru, Gita Lall
 VIETNAM: Jack D. S. Thong, Anne-Marie D. N. Thu
 YUGOSLAVIA: Danor Bonacic, Katarina Treppo
Maro Bonacic
(Milosh Greic (Mickey))
 ZAMBIA: Inyambo Nyumbu, Christine Chilangwa
Arnon Dixi Zulu

 ASHRAM: Vijay Poddar, Kiran Poddar
 AUROVILLE: Michel Lemaire, Fabienne Bernard

AUROVILLE

THE JOURNEY OF HUMAN UNITY BEGINS WITH A DREAM

Chandresh Patel '79

Sitting in the Ashram courtyard, it becomes easier to gather the strands of one's stray thoughts and immerse oneself into the quiet atmosphere. In spite of the increase of cars' honking, visitors to the Ashram, the hustle-bustle of the Ashramites going about their daily chores, the Samadhi carries its own atmosphere charged with deep peace.

The same atmosphere, ambience, buildings and rooms were there when the Mother and Sri Aurobindo spent years and decades living and aspiring to precipitate the Descent of the Supramental consciousness into the earth atmosphere to hasten the march of Nature towards the Gnostic life upon earth. The sadhaks, sadhikas and the children and parents gathered around the Masters, inspired by the ideals and feeling the intensity and purity of the living atmosphere of the Ashram life and premises.

Sri Aurobindo had the dream of the inevitable Human Unity and the Mother who put all her energies into realising the truth brought down by Sri Aurobindo, spoke of her dream of an ideal city — "There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities;

a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments...."

The day was February 28, 1968 twelve years after the Descent of the Supramental Consciousness on earth. At 10:30 in the morning, on a barren plateau close to a lone banyan tree, the youth of the world were invited to come and share in this dream and build a city that would become the cradle of a new Humanity. The Mother's organ music wafted across the devotees from the Ashram and people from around the globe who had come to witness the start of a new age. The Charter of Auroville was read by the Mother in French. Thereafter, the memorable ceremony of laying the symbolic earth from the states of India and the various countries of the world in the lotus urn took place....



Mongolia was represented by Thok Thok Bazar, a delegate from that country, and Chetana Kothari

Within a few months of the inauguration of Auroville in February 1968, the youth of the world arose. The student uprising that began at Nanterre and Sorbonne in Paris, spread like wild fire to other parts of the globe. The youth wanted a change. No more looking at the past, but ready to face the challenges and the need of tomorrow. No more world wars and structures of the past, but new opportunities, a new age of peace, love and unity. The 'flower children' grew up and went about the globe with pearly eyes. They were attracted to the truth of the East. Many came to the light that shone from Pondicherry and Auroville.

The dream, the ideals and the poignant

symbols were the beginning. The city of Auroville is today at the threshold of a new age. Forty years in the making, the symbolic spiritual centre, the Matrimandir, is now complete. The call from Matter to Spirit to come manifest in actuality is raised. The forests have been planted, water run-off bunded, small communities have taken deeper root, children have been going to school and now their children shout and play in the forests and grounds of Auroville. The first Aurovilians from around the villages have taken on a new role in the building of Auroville. Human challenges, though, remain as real and intense as always. The actuality of Human Unity seems a chimera. Difficulties abound. Many of the pioneers who came harkening to the first call left due to the challenging governance issues. There are new forces, new faces, new energies and a new impetus. People are coming, many are returning. They come with goodwill once again and with experience of their home countries to build the City of Dawn, Auroville. More youth are rising to the call of Human Unity, the Dream. This February, there will once again be a soil ceremony, albeit differently. A call has gone to the various Auroville International centers to bring once again symbolic earth from their countries. The ceremony will be in two phases, one with the bonfire on 28th, when Auroville children will place the collected earth into the Auroville symbol prepared beforehand with New Creation flowers. And then, on the 29th, probably in the evening, in another silent ceremony, the earth mixture will be distributed.

Once again we will aspire to dream. It is not our dream — it is the Dream of the Divine. "...In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their soul. Education would be given, not with a view to passing examinations and getting certificates and posts, but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones. In this place titles and positions would be supplanted by opportunities to serve and organize...."

We will not laugh at each other, we will laugh together. We will collaborate, within and without, in all spheres of life. It is a lifelong commitment to learn, to grow, to be plastic. "...Artistic beauty

in all forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, will be available equally to all, the opportunity to share in the joys they bring being limited solely by each one's capacities and not by social or financial position...."

We will struggle, we will build, we will discover, we will yield. "...For in this ideal place money would be no more the sovereign lord. Individual merit will have a greater importance than the value due to material wealth and social position. Work would not be there as the means of gaining one's livelihood, it would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side would provide for each one's subsistence and for the field of his work...."

The Hero Warrior's clarion call is to fight the battle of the future against the past that seeks to endure — "In brief, it would be a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood."

A dream in the making? Nay, a real laboratory of Life. ☘



Nolini-da closing the lid of the Urn after the completion of the soil ceremony

THE AUROVILLE EXPERIENCE

...AS THE JOURNEY CONTINUES....

Aster Patel '55

My dear friends... the many links in our chain of gold!

To share the Auroville experience, it is in the form of a letter that I wish to reach out to you. Or, rather, to draw you into this circle of experience. In tracing this path, Mother has included all of us. So it has always seemed to me.

It began in an unusual way — as Her workings often do!

After completing the Higher Course at our Centre, I had gone to the 'Sorbonne', at the University of Paris, that ancient seat of learning in Europe, for further studies. When I was about to finish the thesis I was working on, Mother sent me word, through a letter written by M. André, that the United Nations was organizing in New York, a 'World Youth Assembly' to commemorate its 25th anniversary and that She wanted me to attend the same and represent Auroville! This was in August 1970. I was not here in 1968 when Auroville was founded. I only had a very vivid account of the inaugural ceremony through a letter written by Aratidi. At that time, I was witnessing, from the sidelines, the 'youthful revolution' that swept through Europe and America, with its epicenter in Paris! An entire generation was forging ahead towards the future.

On returning home to the Ashram a few months later, I asked Mother what work I was to do. And She said, "The indication has already been given to you." That is how this lap of the journey got started — in slow stages and by rather hesitant steps!

Some of the steps of this journey, which continues, is what I would like to share. Steps which stand out like landmarks along a line of experience of which one had no inkling and which marked a significant turning-point in one's personal growth.

*

I started to visit Auroville to get a feel of its atmosphere and to know what it was that Mother had started as a new field of experience. The Ashram I was almost born in! But Auroville, what was She intending to do here?

At that time, the red earth of Auroville was sparsely inhabited. On alighting each time from the station-wagon, on putting one's feet on the barren soil — in a place known as 'Auromodèle' — one was encircled in an atmosphere of 'wholeness' that was palpable. A 'wholeness', in which the inner and the outer being melted into one expanse of freedom. A quality of 'freedom' never experienced before.

There was something here to explore. One did not know what it was — and one knew even less how unusual was the path that led that way.

*

The next turning came not long after! One came to do some work in the concreting process that was going on to build the structure of Matrimandir. One stood with the spade in hand, unable to 'inwardly' relate to the pile of pebbles on the ground that had to be shovelled into a metal basin!

That was the time when I was taking four classes in the morning at 'Knowledge' and all were centered around the theme of 'matter'! And I believed I was 'authentic' in my approach to the subject... and it was not only of the 'mind'! Little did one know that true authenticity lay elsewhere. There was something to discover here, another mode of consciousness to arrive at.

A long process started. Another kind of effort began to be made — that of consciousness centered in matter.. to find its base there. And not in the head, or even in the heart, as was the case earlier. Consciousness based in matter... to become the seat of perception and action.

It was a long, long process... for this to stabilize itself even partially!

And during the time this process was working itself out, there was the need to work *in* matter, with one's hands! Gone was the passion for reading, understanding, writing. All this had to be laid aside — a very difficult task! There was an immersion in matter... where one arrived at a great and unexpected joy. The joy of matter is greater than the joy of the mind, says Sri Aurobindo!

And the work one did was to supervise house-construction, of which one knew absolutely nothing! And discovering the deep connections between space and consciousness and form.

Helping in food processing and cooking. Another new line of activity! Designing clothes... which would soften the rough edges of a personality!

*

And, then, came another work — of which Mother had spoken earlier but the period of apprenticeship was long before one was ready to begin with it! To set up a Centre of Research in Indian Culture!

But the sense of 'culture' is no longer the same! For all is grounded in a conscious material base — which holds a sense of unity and a directness of perception and action. And where the process of 'thinking out things' has itself undergone a change.

New discoveries are made, new forms of living and experience begin to take shape. Old activities come alive once again — but in another manner and with other qualities. There is a simplicity, a transparency, a concreteness that has another 'feel'.

After a long lapse in the life of Auroville, poetry readings begin again — in small groups under the quiet shade of casuarina trees — so as not to attract the attention of too many people passing by! There are exhibitions — the very first ones to be put up. There are dance performances and workshops, new forms of movements are worked out. Music concerts too.

And then, also, a sharing of 'thoughts' through lectures and seminars! Another round begins! But the content and form has undergone a change. A sense of the 'whole' begins to emerge — slowly but quite palpably. A 'whole', with a base in the

firm texture of matter. And not in the 'mind', which tends to create a world of ideas, planing high, but unable to relate in full measure to life-in-matter.

*

A fuller meaning of the Auroville experience begins to dawn. This experience is that of another **evolutionary** cycle, greatly accelerated, covering in short and compressed cycles of both time and space, long vistas of growth beginning from a new quality of **matter**, as its ground of emergence and unfolding. Of a matter unveiling the consciousness hidden in its core....

This 'newness' of matter has a 'feel', even a 'fragrance' which is distinctive. Substance itself is of a density that is transparent. It is not fluidic, but malleable. Contours are not absolutely rigid but moulded in softness. A kind of a plasticity of 'form'... in a substance that lends itself, offers itself to changing forms.

*

Other perceptions follow that re-trace this cycle. The cycle began on a barren red soil, which offered a daunting task of regeneration. Work on land, digging wells and planting trees. Creating shelter for the people, growing food. Like the early settlements of man that history tells us of!

This simple basis of life once created in Auroville was followed by a refining of these first necessities.

Then emerged spontaneously, from this ground, new forms of creative expression — in crafts, art, poetry, music, dance and what is known as 'education' for the growing child. Experiments were made in new forms of architecture... in houses, schools. Another quality of 'space' came to exist.

The many stages of a new evolutionary cycle, springing from a more conscious base in matter, became visible. Another matrix of substance was emerging — with whatever difficulties, of which there were many!

*

In this process, the sense of the 'collective' begins to assume a particular importance. It has a 'presence', a 'dynamis' of functioning, concrete to the last details that is astonishing.

What is this collective? This became a big question. How is it different from a 'community'? One sat in endless meetings of large numbers of people, week following week, years on end, trying to sense these differences.

The experience that grew was interesting and worth the making. The people present here, in this field of the Auroville experiment, incredibly diverse as they were... in culture, personality type, educational and social contexts... formed one entity that was representative of mankind. What bound them into one entity was the **Consciousness** at work on the earth and their own seeking for 'something else'. That 'something else' had its centering in **The Dream** of Mother. It was a curiously formed 'divine whole' of human nature — each completing the other, none able to move without the rest doing likewise! The difficulties of this human diversity, in their collective impact, were part of each one's life and effort at growth. Either all moved or no one did!

*

With time, something else became clear. When the collective was caught up in a particular problem to be resolved — such as dealing with authority, with a sense of possession and control, handling of money and the power it can give — there was an intense straining to go through. A straining, which did not seem to be in proportion with the actual problem in hand! But after a long drawn-out period of this struggle and effort to find a solution, when something got resolved, or the 'knot' that held the complexity of the problem in its folds was, if nothing else, loosened from its moorings, then one learned — through the media... the newspaper or the television — that a similar problem, carrying that mix of elements, found its answer, or was made more easy, elsewhere in the world.

Does this collective in Mother's experiment in Auroville hold the world's *problématique*?... A big question that has loomed large. And with that, the significance of the entire work, and the experience it offers, takes on another dimension.

*

In the past few years, one is becoming increasingly aware that the presence of this matrix, as a

field of new creation, is spreading in the world like a kind of 'substance'. And it is beginning to mould human life more widely — in a general collective way. The sense of the 'collective' as a necessary field of growth is taking hold of the human spirit.

The world itself becomes the field of the experiment and a participant in it... in a concrete manner. And Auroville, in its collective framework of existence and action, holds the intensity of the world's problems — they are enmeshed in this particular ground.

*

From the early days, Mother had begun the work on the **Matrimandir**. She called it "the soul of Auroville". There is the 'inner chamber', where the sun's ray on the crystal lights up our consciousness... to reflect its own transparency in a depth of silence... in which our being is re-created. An action which shapes it. And the walk through the gardens, and the climb up the steps and the twin stair-case and the spiral ramp trace, in material form, the movements of the inner journey of consciousness. The outer journey images the inner landscape — and the two become one 'whole' of experience.

Today, Matrimandir is resplendent in its puissant glory, with the structure emerging in a fullness of form. Rising from the red of the earth, the Golden Sphere is the symbol of man's future.

*

As we approach the Golden Day on February 29, 2008, the significance of this moment in evolutionary time overwhelms us. That we should be here on earth is the greatest privilege of our birth.

The concentration of Force and its radiating power — that makes this new cycle of human evolution possible, and initiates and guides its workings — is in that 'courtyard' of the Ashram. The 'courtyard' where our being has come to rest....

This much for now... more perhaps another time!

With love, Aster
January 24, 2008

THE BUILDERS OF MATRIMANDIR

John Harper's involvement at Matrimandir began in 1974. During '75-'77 he assisted Chamanlalji with his teaching of solar energy in our School, while continuing his research for the optical system to bring the sun ray into the Inner Chamber of Matrimandir. From '78 he has been at Matrimandir full time. He writes about the work it has taken in the last 37 years to complete the Matrimandir structure.

When we talk about the Matrimandir we usually speak about the work going on there but seldom

do we mention the people doing the work, yet it is these people, hundreds of them who have been involved in the construction over the decades, who have built the Matrimandir to what it is today.

These people have been the 'tools', you might say, who the Divine Builder has used to bring Matrimandir into being.



The four supporting pillars begin to rise

Every aspect of the work has been carried out by dedicated teams working under the direction of the architect and the site engineer to bring each phase of the work to a perfect completion.

Over the decades there have been many outstanding teams, some of them known for their substantial contributions, like the team of 400 who excavated the crater for the foundations during 1971, or like the high flying scaffolding teams

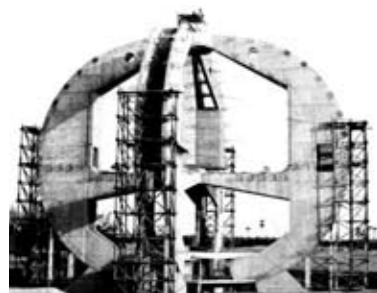
who worked like gymnasts to erect the pipe scaffoldings — up to 36 meters with no safety harnesses most of the time. There were the mechanically-

minded men of the first workshop teams that carried out the manufacture of the steel tube frames of the spiral ramps and the first crane that was then used on top of the struc-

ture for 20 years. Some teams have worked quietly and steadily for years together to bend and fit the steel rods for the RCC structure, followed by others of their ilk who laboured for another 9 years to fabricate the steel skeletons for the 1,100 precast concrete beams that make up the space frame of the sphere.

There were the beam casters, young and old, and the beam lifting and fitting teams, and throughout, whenever there was a big concreting, the teams were largely expanded by volunteers who came from all corners of Auroville, and from the Ashram too, to help out with the lengthy concretings of the structure, first the four giant ribs, then the concrete cantilevers, floor, walls and roof of the Chamber, then finally the sphere of precast beams enveloping it.

When the major concreting works on the structure were over in 1988, new teams spontaneously formed, of men and women who quite soon became skilled in working with marble,



The pillars are complete

and who worked for months on end to place the slabs of white Italian marble on the walls of the Inner Chamber and, then, white marble from Rajasthan on the floor. A concentrated few of this group etched in marble the 3 meter wide symbol of the Mother that lies at the center of the Chamber, holding Sri Aurobindo's symbols and the crystal globe on top of it.

That globe itself was the fine product of a team working not here, but at the Zeiss factory in Germany during



The structure of the Inner Chamber is ready

the late 80s, casting and polishing that wonderful crystal sphere for us.

Always there have been quiet, dedicated teams of volunteers cleaning shuttering, chipping concrete, painting scaffolding pipes and attending to all the modest jobs needed to keep the construction process moving forward. All jobs, of course, are in the end modest — any task can be offered in the path of karma yoga, for which the Matrimandir has provided a majestic and all encompassing field.

Some teams at Matrimandir have been very much involved with research, with developing the many unique parts of the structure. The golden tiles of the discs, the translucent triangles of the inner skin, the heliostat developed to direct the sun's

CHRONOLOGY OF MATRIMANDIR'S CONSTRUCTION

Feb 21, 1971	Laying of Matrimandir's foundation stone.
Feb 21, 1972	First concreting of the foundations.
Nov 17, 1973	Completion of the 4 pillars, which now support the Matrimandir.
1973 -1976	RCC structure up to the top ring.
1976 -1978	Structure of the Inner Chamber.
1978 – 1988	Ramps and Space frame.
1988 – 1994	Completion of the Inner Chamber.
1991 – 2000	Construction of the bottom tank, pillar extensions, central staircase, outer shell, petals. Fabrication and gilding of about 1/3 of the golden discs. Cladding of the amphitheater and half of the petals. Beginning of the layout of the gardens with radial paths and oval road.
2000 – 2008	Completion of fabrication and fixation of the golden discs, the petals cladding, the marble work inside the structure, the inner skin, the outer waterproofing layer, the lotus pond below Matrimandir, the petals' interiors, the entrance shields and the new stainless steel service crane. Completion of the contouring of the gardens with layout and cladding of the gardens' radial paths and installation of the automated irrigation system for the entire 20 acre gardens' oval.

ray into the Inner Chamber, the special coloured shields and painted domes of the petals' meditation rooms, all these and many more are the result of long avenues of development and research by



The outer space frame is in place

individuals intensely concerned with the needs of these different aspects of the Matrimandir.

Outside the structure too, the gardens of Matrimandir have long been the field of keen interest by teams of plant lovers, horticulturalists and enthusiastic volunteers.



Mother's symbol under the Inner Chamber and one of the ramps

Today, with the layout of the gardens area fully demarcated by pathways bordered by green grass, we have several expanding teams busy with the upkeep of these acres and more who are looking forward to future garden developments.

And, with the gradual completion of the Matrimandir, new groups have naturally formed to take care of the building and to organize its pattern of use. Volunteers come every day to clean the marble floors and white carpets, do the laundry (hundreds of socks, cushion covers and mats need



The lotus pond below the Matrimandir

to be washed regularly), and generally make sure that the interior of Matrimandir is in perfect condition. Working with them these days is the access team, a core group of Aurovilians who organize and arrange the daily bookings, introductions and

Chamber visits for the first time visitors and long time friends too. Along with them is a quiet support group of service people who are always on hand inside Matrimandir during all the hours of its use to direct the visitors, guests, or residents who may come to sit in the Chamber. At the same time the other side of their function is to provide a security to the structure and to the Chamber to guard against any possible mishaps.

At present there are some 300 people working every day at the Matrimandir, some volun-



The central staircase leading up to the second level

teers, some employed, all busy to complete the construction and the gardens and to maintain what has been accomplished so far. From those in the office maintaining links with supporters all over the world, to those still balancing high up on Matrimandir finishing the installation of the new crane, there is one thread that is shared by all. Whether they speak Tamil, Russian, English or French, there is one universal language that silently links everyone: the joy of a shared aspiration



The Matrimandir — structure complete after 37 years

in work, the aspiration to bring more and more perfection to the work that has been given to us by the Mother. Each feels it in his own way, each may have a different understanding of what he or

she is doing here and of what the Matrimandir really is, but that aspiration is one, and invisibly it crosses all barriers to form an unspoken bond that is shared by all. ❧

VOLUNTEERING AT MATRIMANDIR

Gauri Shankar Pattanaik '80 (Munna)

It's an early Sunday morning, around 6:30 am. A group of rather enthusiastic looking people has gathered in front of the Corner House, probably awaiting some common transport. The bus arrives, they all get in. The space not being sufficient, a few of them volunteer to follow the bus on two-wheelers. The bus disappears towards the ECR road with this bunch of men and women of various age groups, the perceptible enthusiasm being the common factor on all the faces.

This has been the scene on alternate Sundays for the past 3 years and 9 months. What is it all about?

THE GENESIS

In December 2003, The Golden Chain Fraternity organised a week-long reunion of former students. Among other activities, there was a visit to Auroville arranged by the alumni members living in Auroville. This gave us an insider's view into the various activities taking place in the International Township and its evolution.

While leaving Auroville that day, most of us present felt very spontaneously that a link should be kept alive with Auroville instead of coming back there as visitors every few years. Matrimandir, which is considered the soul of Auroville, automatically became the point of focus and without much discussion, it was decided that GCF would organise some activity in and around Matrimandir on alternate Sundays.

The first such trip was arranged on 25th April 2004. And it has gone on ever since without any interruption, apart from occasional rescheduling for practical reasons.

A TYPICAL WORKING MORNING

A small team generally organises the logistics such as transport, breakfast and orientation of the new comers. The group leaves at 6:30 am from Corner House and reaches Matrimandir by 7 am. While most of us go up to the Inner Chamber for concentration, some sit under the banyan tree.

At 7:30 am, we all gather in front of the monument where the day's schedule is explained to us by some Aurovillians. Depending on the strength of the group on the day, we divide ourselves into smaller batches to go to different work centres. The work assigned may be as varied as cleaning of the golden disks, gardening, scrubbing and painting of scaffolding pipes, work in the compost yard, concreting of structures related to the Matrimandir, etc...

There is a break for breakfast at 9 am and the second session of work starts at 9:30 am and continues up to 10:30 am.

Depending on the workload, if so desired by our friends from Auroville, we have also worked on all Sundays instead of alternate ones for specific periods. In fact, of late this has become quite frequent, the initiative having come from the volunteers themselves.



WHO COMES?

Our numbers have varied from 12 to 40, however for the past year or so we normally have had 25 to 30 persons quite consistently.

It would not be out of place to indicate that although this movement had been started by The Golden Chain Fraternity, we have considered it as our offering to the Mother and therefore have encouraged others too to join in. There are many other devotees/Ashramites, not former students of SAICE, who come regularly and work with exemplary sincerity. In fact, often their number has surpassed the number of former students. This only underlines one point that GCF, for various activities, is only a facilitator and does not intend any exclusivity unless limited by unavoidable constraints. The camaraderie and the fun, especially during the bus journeys, has to be seen to be believed.

Often around the Darshans or the New Year, many former students or other Ashram guests visiting Pondicherry volunteer to work.

ATTITUDE

I have always been touched by the sincerity of all the volunteers who participate in this work. Some enjoy particular jobs as a learning process, some consider the (de)weeding of the lawns as a symbolic attempt to uproot undesirable elements out of their own beings, for some it is a test of their physical endurance, some consider it a privilege to know more about flowers and plants. Narad, who was assigned the work of the Matrimandir gardens by the Mother, often shares with us his experiences and conversations with Her. He has this ability of transmitting some of his deeper emotions to all those who are around him, making it an occasion to collectively remember Her.

There are also others who remind the fellow volunteers to be quieter during work and not to forget that it is basically an offering and a prayer of the body to the Mother Divine.

HOW LONG?

It has been close to 4 years. How long do we intend to go on? Allow me to cite a small incident. About 5 years back, there was an exhibition on Matrimandir which had been put up by Auroville in the Ashram exhibition hall. It communicated

not only Her vision of Matrimandir, and the technical details of the structure, but it also brought out the dedication of all those who have been involved in its construction spanning over three decades.

I had asked the lady acting as guide at the exhibition: "How much more time would it take for the construction to be complete?" She replied, "Many of us believe that the construction of the Matrimandir in some way represents the evolution of human consciousness. Hence work at Matrimandir would probably go on in some form or the other as long as we continue the efforts for our growth and evolution" — as long as we wish to (de)weed our inner gardens....

LAST WORDS

Today, when I watch the Golden Sphere bursting out of the red earth of Auroville, I am inevitably reminded of those first steps in the early seventies, when we all joined in as small kids to help dig the foundation, followed by the construction of the four pillars. Hardly did I know or even imagine that such would be the serene grandeur of this unique edifice, so concrete would be the experience of communion in the deafening silence of the Inner Chamber, so overwhelming would be the feeling of joy and peace by looking at this grand presence from under the banyan tree. The love and friendship with the Matrimandir have grown over all these decades. Some of us may even perceive it as the magnificent symbol of the matrimandirs that we all keep building in the innermost core of our hearts. ❧



THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA VISITS

The President of India, Shrimati Pratibha Patil, visited the Ashram on the 22nd of December, 2007. She was accompanied by the Lieutenant Governor of Pondicherry, Sri Mukut Mithi, and the Chief Minister, Thiru. N. Rangaswamy, among others. She was received at the Ashram gate by the Trustees. After paying her respects at the Samadhi [►], Shrimati Patil came to the School. At the main gate two eight-year-old students greeted her with bouquets of flowers. Upon entering the School courtyard, in a spontaneous gesture, Shrimati Patil stopped and waved to the students and teachers who were all standing silently at balconies or sitting on the steps under the Hall of Harmony. Then, she, along with Manoj-da who was guiding her, and some of

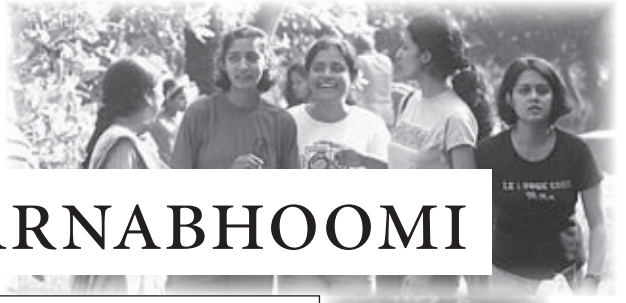


her entourage, walked to the open area in front of Sisir-da's room where a small exhibition of some of the students' pottery and art work was put up for her [◄]. After that, the guests, along with the Trustees, proceeded to take their seats on the stage, facing the lawn. Once the dignitaries were seated, the programme which had been specially organised for the occasion, began. Children recited passages from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in French, English and Marathi. This was followed by songs on India in Sanskrit and Hindi. Finally children of groups A5, A4 and A3 presented a drill which

they had performed on 2nd Dec, 2007 [►]. The drill was based on a patriotic Hindi song which had been sung by the children themselves earlier and recorded.

After the programme, mementoes were presented. It was soon time for the President to leave. Before departing she expressed her deep appreciation for the programme. She also remembered her previous visit to the Ashram (probably in '71) when she had met the Mother. She then proceeded to the Matrimandir. ❧





THE TRIP TO SWARNABHOOMI



श्रीमातुश्चेतनासिक्ता ज्योतिषाऽऽलोकिता गुरोः ।
स्वं धाम पूर्णशिक्षाणां स्वर्णभूमिः समेधताम् ॥

May this Swarnabhoomi, this land which has been watered by the Mother's Consciousness and illumined by the Master's Light, this abode of those who have had the integral education, grow and prosper....

(Shloka by Vishunlalit '64 (Arya-Vishnu))

Swarnabhoomi is The Golden Chain Fraternity's (GCF) ten-acre plot, adjacent to Merville, at the Lake Estate. On 30th December 2007, former students of SAICE (along with their spouses and children), teachers and captains were invited for a get-together at Swarnabhoomi. The get-together was held to inform alumni of GCF's plans for the plot, get their feedback and to get development work started in earnest.

A number of the alumni offered their vehicles to transport people. Trips were organized from Corner House at 7:00 am and everyone gathered at Swarnabhoomi at about 7:30 am.

THE DAY'S PROGRAMME

Manoj-da, Jhumur-di and Albert-da began the day by planting a cutting from the Ashram's Service tree. After a brief concentration, everyone walked to the cashew grove.

As soon as all had taken their seats, the Mother's music was played for a short while, followed by a recording of this special message given by Pranab-da for the occasion:

*"Dear brothers and sisters,
Mother has given us an Ideal to live for.*

P.T.O.





*She has laid down the path to reach that Ideal.
She has given all instructions necessary to walk on this path.
And She has given us a place with all commodities to strive for
this Ideal.*

*I believe the best service to Her is to become what She wants us
to be. We must remain ever grateful to Her for this wonderful gift.
Victoire à la Douce Mère! Vande Mataram!"*

The GCF trustees then made a presentation on the Swarnabhoomi project. Kiran put forward the concept of creating a beautiful retreat with various types of gardens and pavilions, each landscaped to create a specific atmosphere. Finally Manojda concluded the session by reading a quote from the Mother.

Next on the agenda was the foundation laying ceremony for 'Shelter', the multipurpose building, which is to come up soon. Sand from the Samadhi and a Blessing Packet were encased in a stainless steel box in the pit made for the foundation. Everyone then took their turn to sprinkle petals from the Samadhi on it. After this, *shramdan* was organized — the planting of "Imagination" saplings, the setting up of benches and tables using kadappa slabs and cement blocks, and the cutting and pasting of the name "Swarnabhoomi" for the name plaques.

By the time the work was completed everyone was hungry and breakfast was served. After breakfast, many of the alumni took a short trek to Merville with Prakash-bhai and his team.

Soon it was time to leave and say "au revoir" to Swarnabhoomi. The entire morning's proceedings had passed off in a joyous spirit. In spite of the difference of age among the approximately 250 people who had gathered, there had been a great sense of





camaraderie and togetherness. The link that binds us all had been self-evident, silently guiding us in our efforts to create a beautiful sanctuary in the midst of Nature for all children of the Mother.

FOLLOW-UP ACTION

Following the get-together, GCF now proposes to take up the first phase of development in Swarnabhoomi. Naturally any development will seek to preserve and enhance the natural beauty and special atmosphere of the area. The first steps will include:

- Getting electricity (for which the application has been made and posts erected).
- Installing a pump for the borewell we had dug earlier.
- Constructing the multipurpose 'Shelter' building having a living room, a kitchenette, a store room, a pump room, a few toilets and a covered veranda for classes, meetings etc.
- Clearing a motorable dirt path along the edge of our plot.
- Fencing the border with thorny plants (where required).
- Establishing a small nursery.
- Designing and starting work on gardens and ponds.
- Constructing a tree house for children.
- Creating trekking routes in and around Swarnabhoomi.

Swarnabhoomi offers us many possibilities. To begin with, it is an opportunity to work together in the midst of Nature. Here is your chance to take a break from your usual work, your computers and your routines, and go out into natural surroundings. For those interested, **The Golden Chain Fraternity is organising once-in-a-month Sunday working trips to Swarnabhoomi.** Join us. You can contact the GC office for details. We invite all to come and participate enthusiastically in this endeavour. ☘



TANGA BOARDING OR “MILLIE’S HOME”

Millie Pinto, Udar’s sister, was the owner of the house and that is why the boarding was officially called “Millie’s Home” but it was popularly known as “Tanga Boarding”. “Tanga” was the name of the family which had previously owned the house and had sold it to Millie. Although the boarding was known by the names of those who had at one time or another owned the beautiful old house, the real heart and soul of this home for the children of the Ashram was Kiran-di. She was in charge of this boarding, which was started most probably in November 1959, and was assisted in her work by various ladies over the years. She is remembered by all for her cooking and her kindness, both of which were by all accounts of an exceptionally high order. We have collected the accounts of the early boarders. Some years later this boarding became an all boys’ boarding, and after Didi’s passing, was looked after by others. We will write about that phase of the boarding at a later date.

Situated just a block away from the Park, off Rue Suffren, the boarding’s main charm lay in its sprawling garden bordered by tall mango trees. Going to school or coming back home the children had to cross the park, which in those days was a quiet place. We must keep in mind that everyone either walked or cycled then and to the smaller children it may have seemed that they lived quite a distance from the School and the Playground.

We would like to remind those who might have missed our previous issues in which we wrote about the early boardings, that in those days not only did boys and girls live in the same boardings but also very small children lived with teenaged students, which recreated the ambience of a real biological family. Children came from various corners of the country and got assimilated into a larger group, communicating with each other either in Ashram Hindi or Bengali or English. In later years many former students have felt that this combination of circumstances helped them to grow up with an awareness about the underlying similarities in the culture of the different parts of India and to a large extent freed them from the usual prejudices.



Tanga Boarding inmates. L to R: Kirit Patel, Anand Arya, Harvinder Singh (Harbu), Prithiviraj, Shivaji (Subroto’s brother), Siddharth B (partly visible)

MEMORIES OF TANGA BOARDING

Kim Reddy ’75

Tanga Boarding started functioning some time in Nov/Dec of 1959 or 1960. The founding guardians were Kiran-di and Saryu-ben (who was from East Africa). The first boarders were — Siddharth Bhabok, Prema and Hema (sisters), Kim Reddy, Vivek Rane (who later joined Auroville and is currently in Paris), Nanda, Ananda Reddy, Anand Arya (not sure), Kireet Patel (close friend of Ashok Patel of

Singapore), Shivaji (brother of the muscular Subroto) his sister Krishna and Mala (Ira-di’s sister). Subsequent boarders were — Sangeeta, Ranit, Ranjana, Jayashree and her brothers Vivek and Uttam, Arindam, Anirban, Hemant, Aruna (Arup Mitra’s wife), Pragna, the Gujarati Nivedita and her brother Parimal, the Bengali Nivedita and her brother Nilotpal.... And the guardians who helped Kiran-di were Mohini-ben, Ira-di and



Tanga Boarding courtyard (1960). L to R: Vivek Rane, Saryu ben, Ananda Reddy, Kim Reddy

Boarding was on the Rue de la Caserne. Kiran-di to us was an angel, more than our biological mother. I remember how she used to set our clothes neatly pressed for us to wear to school. She used to walk me across the park (quite a distance in those days!) early in the morning for the Mother's balcony *darshan* every day till the practice was discontinued by the Mother. And after the morning session I used to walk back and spend time in the park trying to catch butterflies. Much later the same practice continued — but of a different kind!

In the early boarding days, before the existence of a common kitchen and dining room for the students (like the Corner House), every boarding had its own kitchen. And I remember at Tanga boarding it was an almost “à la carte” type of menu. Kiran di was the best cook I have ever come across. Even in hindsight I can give this statement. She would come up with the best possible menu at every meal. And her cakes were absolutely divine. On the anniversary of the boarding (I think it was Nov 15th, later changed to Dec 16th due to an error from the Mother's secretariat) we used to go to see Mother. I remember on one occasion we were in the School, in the middle of a class and all of a sudden I got a message that Mother was waiting to meet the boarding inmates, and none of us were even aware of this. In fact, it was by error that an appointment had been scheduled in the

some others I do not recall at the moment.

Between the time I first came to the Ashram and the time that it took for Tanga Boarding to be established, I stayed for a while with Nirata-di's family, since I was under-age.

The year was 1959. The

Mother's diary. The general practice was that Kiran-di would bake a really special cake and present it to the Mother when all of us met Her in Her chamber. Mother would keep one half and give us back the other half as *prasad*.

Tanga Boarding had a huge one acre campus with the main building in front and a big courtyard at the back and a sprawling garden all around with gigantic mango trees lining up the western border. The kitchen and the dining area were detached from the main building along with the servants' quarters at the back. The dining hall had a long rectangular mosaic table where all the inmates could sit and enjoy the freshly cooked food served hot with lot of love, care and attention. With the advent of Corner House this luxury was discontinued. There were quite a few adventures apart from the routine fights at the dining table and all the so-called older boarders bullying me since I was the youngest of the lot.

But we had great moments and a wonderful family and Kiran-di was to us more than all the parents put together. The fact that my first visit home during the annual vacation was in 1967 — nine years after I first came to the Ashram in 1958 — clearly shows that I at least never missed my parents in all the years that I stayed in Tanga Boarding. ❧



The Indian team hopefuls with their cheer leaders. Back row (l to r): Kiran-di, Mala, Ranjana, Nanda, Ira-di, Aruna. Front Row (l to r): Vivek, Arindam, Ranit, Hemant, Anirban, Kim

REMEMBERING KIRAN-DI

Hema Arora '69

Kiran-di — her very name evokes kindness, caring and love. Always dressed elegantly in a white saree, her face framed by wavy silver hair pulled back into a bun, eyes that gazed at the world with sweet benevolence, a lovely complexion, smooth rosy cheeks and a smile that illumined her whole being with charm and beauty — that was our “Didi”, as we fondly called her.

She was in charge of “Tanga Boarding” (later renamed “Millie’s Home”). It was a beautiful two-storey colonial building with a covered, red-tiled veranda running along three sides. You entered the Boarding through a gate smothered with creepers of “honesty”, “harmony” and “purity”.

A small path led to the main building. About 12 children (ranging in age from their early teens to their late teens) lived there. Didi occupied the ground floor with 5 boys and all the girls lived upstairs. There was a small garden in front and a big one at the back which beckoned the children to enter and explore all its verdant, shady nooks and corners flowering with mystery and delight.

Kiran-di’s life revolved around the well-being of the children under her charge. She loved them and cared for them as if they were her very own, and she spoiled them atrociously. She had a special corner in her heart for Kim Reddy (Nanda’s brother) — a bright-eyed, chubby-cheeked boy with a sunny beguiling smile.

One of the ways of expressing her love for the children was through her cooking. She was a wizard in the culinary art and spent hours sweating over a coal fire (there was no gas or electric stove at that time) making delicious dishes to tempt the

children’s appetites. For breakfast she made two or three varieties of egg because one child liked omelettes, another wanted scrambled eggs and another would eat only boiled eggs. For lunch she made rice, hot chappatis, tasty vegetables and dal. Here again, if someone disliked a certain type of



Nanda, Hema, Kiran-di, Prema

vegetable she made sure that he got what he wanted. She catered to their likes and dislikes. Being brought up in “Dortoir”, my sister Prema and I were taught to eat whatever was put in front of us, without any fuss. We were absolutely flabbergasted by the children’s behaviour. On Sundays, Didi always made something special, hot puries and halwa, a cake, a pudding or some other sweet dish. So much care and love went into her cooking, but in spite of that the children grumbled. Well, that’s human nature! Sometimes, when we older girls remonstrated that she was spoiling them, Didi just smiled and answered, “Oh! they are so young still; they have plenty of time to learn.”

Some evenings, after the younger children had gone to bed, Didi along with Prema, Nanda and me sat in the moonlit garden and exchanged

stories and experiences. One such evening, when the moon had drenched the atmosphere in liquid light and mystic loveliness, we sat in the garden, not drinking in the beauty, but our gaze riveted sadly at the boundary wall that skirted our building. The top had been covered with shards of glass, not to deter intruders from breaking in, but because some of the boarding children were sneaking out over the wall to watch late-night movies or to go shopping. Didi felt dejected and a bit let down by this turn of events.

Had her love not been a good enough shelter from the lures of the outside world? Or had she not been firm enough with the children?... she mused.

To dispel her gloom, Prema said, “Didi, as you so often point out, children will be children, and they will learn by and by”.

“How about preparing a recipe for raising children?” I chipped in laughingly. “Let us not dethrone the chief ingredient — Love. But...”

I stopped here because a smile dawned on Didi’s face, a radiating smile that chased away the clouds of sadness and buoyed up her sense of humour.

“But let us not forget firmness and discipline either,” intervened Didi, “they too are indispensable”.

“Add understanding and patience and lots of cheerfulness,” Nanda’s voice joined in.

Here all of us sang in chorus, “Mix all the ingredients thoroughly together and everyday serve large helpings to all the children (big and small)”...

Didi had a great sense of humour and there was a particular incident which she narrated each year during the mango season. While in Kolkata she had as guest an English gentleman who very much wished to taste a mango as he had heard so much about it, and wanted to see for himself if it was as delicious as it was made out to be!

“It certainly is,” Didi replied, “but it is a bathroom fruit.”

The gentleman looked at her in amazement and exclaimed, “Is it so quick?”

Didi dissolved into laughter and answered, “No, no, but it is such a juicy fruit that it spoils your clothes if you are not careful.”...

TANGA BOARDING (MILLIE’S HOME)

Pragna ’80

Our Kirandidi was a very elegant lady. She was immaculate and a perfectionist.

When I joined the boarding in 1967, I was the youngest of the fifteen girls.

My first impression of our loving and caring Didi was that she was like a mum and friend to all of us.

Cleanliness was always at the top of her agenda. She would always make sure all the children in her care dressed properly and looked neat and tidy.

I remember that meditation in the Playground was a must, though we used to fall asleep! And if we missed meditation then the Saturday film show was a no-go. We would have to stay back with her!

She always believed in natural remedies when any of us was ill. She would take us to Debu-da. The Nursing Home was the last resort.

Birthdays were made extra special for each of us. The beauty of staying in Tanga Boarding was that Kiran-di knew what we liked and disliked. In other words, she looked after us as her own.

There were times when in our little minds we thought she was a bit harsh, but in the end it was all for our own good! We all had lots of fun staying with her.

When we finally had to leave the boarding, nobody wanted to leave her!

Every evening at about 5 p.m. Didi would go to the Ashram with a lovely bouquet of flowers — flowers grown and tended by her with as much love and tenderness as she showered on the children. With faith and devotion she would offer herself, along with the flowers, at the feet of the Lord and the Divine Mother and quietly recharge herself in the sea of infinite Joy and Love and Peace that floods the Ashram atmosphere at all times. ❧

KIRAN-DI

Mina (Umachigi) Shah '71H

I came to know Kiran-di (Didi) at a turning point in my life. I was a teenager, the Dortoir boarding which had been my home since childhood had just been 'dismantled'. We sisters and brother were together then — and now I alone was being shifted to "Tanga Boarding". I had even then a sincere wish to become a doctor and did not exactly know how to go about it. All this together — and I was with a new guardian in my life!

But Didi was wonderful! Soft and gentle, aristocratic and with classic good looks.... A sweet face, perfect skin with a singular glow, wavy hair parted in the centre and a smile playing on her lips.... A crisp white sari and a bunch of keys hanging at the waist.... It made me happy just to see her and all my fears and uncertainty disappeared even as I came to live in the boarding.

She was really a very caring Didi. Attentive to details in all spheres: cleanliness of the boarding, food (which she herself cooked), health of the children, maintaining the big garden around the building, relationship with parents, managing the servants, immaculate accounts — she did everything to perfection. She was always working hard, always with a pleasant smile on her face and the embodiment of patience and affection.

However there was a sadness lurking in her eyes at times. A distant memory of the young children she had herself lost.

After 1 ½ years with her I left the boarding to study "outside". She was always encouraging — giving me a 'hero's welcome' when I went to meet her on occasions.

Many years later one day, I found her sitting

on the footpath on the way to my mother's house. I ran to her and helped her stand up. She said she was exhausted and always felt so — could I now, as a doctor, help her?

There were tears in my eyes. She was very pale and I knew it was urgent to attend to her. So she was under "my care" now at the hospital. We spent many hours together — and this lady who lived in



Tanga Boarding. Back row (l to r): Nanda Reddy, Kiran-di, Ruby, Nivedita (Gujarati), Indrani, Ranjana Patel, Sangeeta, Prema. Middle row (l to r): Hema, Pragna, Nivedita. Front row (l to r): Rajesh Rane, Parimal, Ranit

such a clean environment herself, now took the not so clean environment of the public hospital in her stride. Not complaining, gently she once said, "Can anything be done about all these cockroaches around me?"

She was given many a blood transfusion — but finally she succumbed to her illness — calling me in the final moment so that I could be with her. I have no words to describe the soft iron lady that she really was. She must be somewhere amongst us surely because it was always her wish to come back and be a member of group A5. "I will start here young and fresh at the feet of the Mother," she would say. ❧

ANANDA MATH

The 1st December Programme, 2007

The 1st December programme marking the School anniversary this time was a departure from the usual. Instead of taking a piece of writing from the Mother or Sri Aurobindo the students chose to enact a dramatised version of Bankim Chandra's novel Ananda Math. The connection with Sri Aurobindo was there, of course. The first thirteen chapters of the novel were translated into English by him. The real point of the performance was to bring out the beauty of the song "Bande Mataram". We are all familiar with the beautiful English translation of this song and it is impossible to think of it without thinking of Sri Aurobindo. Although the final year students were given the work of producing the play, the final cast was made up of former students, Ashramites, devotees as well as students who were from all levels of Knowledge and the School.

For the last few years we have all been saying how wonderful it is to see our outgoing students take up the work of the organisation and performance of the 1st December programme, but in all our praise and joy we tend to overlook the practical difficulties this arrangement creates. Although we read about how in spite of all difficulties the programme eventually turns out to be a success, we don't really register the cry for help that is embedded in the story because it is indeed quite unfair to expect the students to produce a performance of the caliber of a 1st December when in fact they are just not equipped to execute it.



The ground realities are quite different from the ideal situation in which such a work can be carried out. The students have their priorities and the Knowledge Programme takes up a lot of their time and energy. The end of the school year also has a string of programmes and no one wants to miss them and it is also a time when the students are winding up a phase of their lives, which involves farewells and get-togethers. Can they reasonably give any attention to the production of a major performance? Added to that is the truth that many of the students have never seen a 1st December programme in their lives and don't know the level of excellence they are supposed to reach. If there is a little more practical thinking and planning, it can take out the stress from the minds of those who work behind the scenes.

The programme that was presented in 2007 started out like a disaster in the making but managed to impress everyone in the end. Once again the miracle of 1st December, the intervention of divine grace, took place. Maurice, who was asked to help with the direction and Sumati, an outgoing student who, along with her classmate Shubham, had taken up the responsibility of the organisation of the programme, share their experience of working on Ananda Math.

THE BACKSTAGE STORY

Maurice Shukla '75

The flair for stumbling onto happy discoveries is called serendipity. Isn't it quite amazing and marvellous that almost everything that happens to us in life is serendipitous, i.e. an opportunity for progress and inner growth! And so it was with *Ananda Math*, this year's theme for the annual programme at the Theatre to celebrate the 64th anniversary of our School.



I was first confronted with it earlier on in the year, but at that time I declined to take it up (due to some pressing engagements). Then the Mother, in her usual mischievous way, placed me in a situation where I had no other

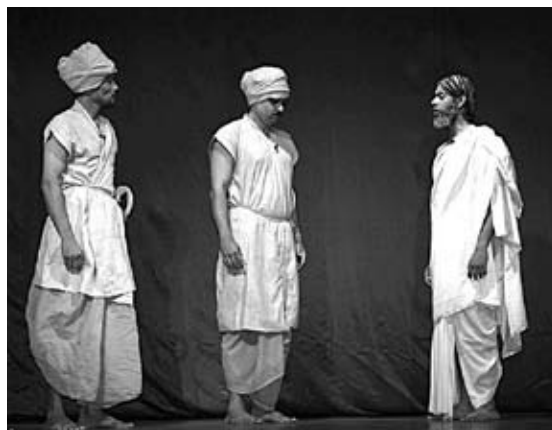
option but to take up the challenge. By finally embracing this challenge, however reluctantly, I have discovered its deeper purpose. Sunayana had gone through the original dramatisation by Ashish-da and had made some very positive changes, mainly by incorporating a narrator into the script and including as much text as possible from Sri Aurobindo's 1906 translation of the first thirteen chapters of Bankim Chandra Chatterji's novel. Unfortunately she couldn't stay on to help Subhash-da with the other aspects of the production. Subhash-da was struggling heroically with this enormous enterprise and when he himself requested me for help, well, I did not have the heart to say a blunt 'no'. I reluctantly accepted but I could only help in November. Then Sumati threw the narrator's role at me. I refused point-blank; I wanted to see a young student take

it up and promised to help train him/her. This was towards the end of October and I already felt that the 1st December was way, way behind schedule. In all the preceding School anniversary programmes I had participated in, we were normally well into regular run-throughs by the end of October. When I began working with Chinmoy on the narrative text I was told that the script was not yet quite definitive! I panicked at that and decided that I would limit myself to helping Chinmoy. When I went to the Theatre on the 1st of November, expecting the participants to be at full throttle on the stage, I found instead a rather listless group of people sitting around Subhash-da brooding over the changes of the revised script and discussing the nitty-gritty of the play. Seeing them in that mood I wondered if it was indeed the 1st day of November or if we were three-four months away from D-day. It *had to be* November, my mind reiterated, since I was on holiday from the Lycée between 1st and 12th November. Seeing this state of affairs, I lost my confidence and thought of burying my head into the sand a second time. But then something stirred within me and nudged me into saying 'yes' to this earnest plea for help. Probably because something in me enjoys battling out of tight spots. And what better way to spend these godsend twelve days than trying to make sense of this utterly non-sensical situation?

This was only the beginning of this roller-



coaster ride called *Ananda Math*! News came the next day that Unmukta who was playing Kalyani had ruled herself out with a broken knee! Amrita agreed to replace her. So three weeks before the show we get a new heroine. A great start! Thanks for the invitation, Mother! Three days later more good news followed. To feed the perverted me in love with tight spots: Sujay had a motorcycle accident and had some bad burns, especially in his legs. Lovely! Any more surprises, Ma? Two days later Mother gleefully obliged with one more! Sujay with the burnt legs now was 'chicken-poxed' as well! He was to come out of his quarantine only after the 13th! Are you testing or teasing me, Mother? Don't you taunt me, please. I was certainly not going to play Mohendro up to the 1st of December, NO way! However, I did replace Sujay right up to the light-fixing days, but when he re-appeared from his quarantine, greatly debilitated in body but determined in spirit, I heaved a huge sigh of relief. Somewhere I knew that this boy at least wouldn't let me down. And he didn't. Sujay resumed Mohendro's role on the 15th, hardly two weeks before the Final Show. Meanwhile, Subhash-da was having a really tough time with the temple and the battle scenes despite the fantastic goodwill and cooperation from the participants, both young and old. *Ananda Math* was taking on the shades of very high-voltage drama indeed. On the one hand, I stubbornly kept working with the main characters, while on the other, I went on battling despondency, frustration and pessimism, all combined. I even toyed at the back of my mind with a quick-fix stand-by programme ready to replace *Ananda Math* for the 1st. I could not see how the programme would be able to even stand on its feet, let alone walk or run. Some of the main actors were still holding their scripts in their hands during the scenes with utter nonchalance and that did not help in mitigating my growing despair! Unbelievable. I had never seen anything like it, not even with the most professional troupes. But we marched on, or rather trundled along. And the more I delved into the main characters, the more I was mesmerised by Bankim's astounding genius of characterisation and story-telling. Would we ever be able to touch even the outer skin of these



characters and do them justice? Would it be right to present something so miserably inadequate for a 1st December programme? We went on impelled by some inexplicable Force and I began asking myself if it was fair to pull so hard on Their Grace, to lean so heavily on Them? Shubham who was playing Satyananda, the leader of the Santans and the power behind the revolution, had a very important line in his script which went: "But if we are to succeed, not only Divine Grace but human effort also is necessary". In a significant lapsus, during the rehearsals he would invariably come out with, "But if we are to succeed, not only human effort but Divine Grace also is necessary." And he was probably right on the mark. For what happened in the last four-five days was nothing short of an absolute MIRACLE of that Grace. She had once again lifted us straight out of our incorrigible mediocrity into her heaven of all-forgiving Love. This whole story of battling external enemies to win independence and self-respect was ultimately a battle within us and it was only when we turned desperately and entirely our efforts within that we managed to salvage a little bit of honour for ourselves as Their children. Without this *deus ex machina* Grace, the story of *Ananda Math* could never have reached any kind of acceptable resolution and extricated us all out of our despair, nervousness and pessimism.

I have never seen in all my years of doing theatre and especially a 1st December, such a long, difficult play take on this kind of shape in such an astoundingly short time while being prepared with such casualness and nonchalance. If this is not a proof of Their abiding Grace, then I do not know what is. ❧

VANDE MATARAM

Sumati '07

According to me the 1st and the 2nd December programmes are the most important annual events of the Ashram. They achieve an importance of this magnitude because they are the best opportunities that are yearly offered to us to participate collectively and creatively in an effort, to remind ourselves of what we ought to be doing in this place. This collectivity does not consist only of those who appear in the shows on the final days, but of every person who helps in however small a way to put up the shows. It is this very attitude that led Shubham and me to choose *Ananda Math* by Rishi Bankim Chandra for our theme, even though it meant side-stepping a little from the tradition of choosing something from the works of the Mother or Sri Aurobindo.

In the beginning our intention was to present only the portion that Sri Aurobindo has translated. Even those thirteen chapters that barely take us into the actual story help us to thrill in His creative genius. However, by lucky chance, I happened to read the remaining portion of the story translated into English by Barindra Kumar, Sri Aurobindo's brother. Then we realised that as far as ideas go, *Ananda Math* is, in a sense, some of Sri Aurobindo's fundamental ideas about life, love and yoga put into story form. In fact, one night in early April or May, when I was wondering whether we should really present on the 1st of December something that has not been written by the Mother or Sri Aurobindo, a single thought flashed in my mind, "I am sure They would not mind."

Two of the main ideas in *Ananda Math* continue to excite me even now because they remind me so much of Sri Aurobindo. The first is of course, Bankim Chandra's understanding of how the British would, in spite of themselves, help India to realise her greater self. The second is about Shanti's attitude towards Jibananda, which reminds me constantly of the letter that Sri Aurobindo

had written to his wife Mrinalini Devi about what a wife should be to a husband. And last, but not the least, the song Vande Mataram, along with its translation by Sri Aurobindo, can never cease to inspire us.

The odds that we faced were not few, to say the least. In fact, at one point, some people suggested that we postpone the entire play to January and schedule some meditation and poetry reading for the 1st of December. I often wondered if we (Shubham and I) too, like Frankenstein, had created a monster over whom we had soon lost control. Once when I mentioned this to Shubham he looked at me and said, "Do you think we could have done anything else?" I had no answer because I knew that for no other theme would we have felt the same thrill and conviction.

The show that took place on the final day was a sheer miracle, according to most of the participants and helpers. However, as the famous saying goes, "God helps those who help themselves." This miracle would have perhaps not occurred had it not been for the sincerity of some people.

A great deal of the credit should of course go to Ashish-da, Subash-da and Maurice. Ashish-da, upon our request, took up the challenging task of rendering the entire novel into play form. Not



only was he very faithful to the original work in terms of the story and the incidents, but he often remained faithful even to the *tournures* of the sentences, thus keeping alive the Bengali spirit of the play.



While speaking of the script we cannot forget Sunayana-di who edited a large portion of the play. In fact she was the first person who made us aware that the play would be at least three hours long. I personally have learnt much from her about many practical aspects of staging a play.

We cannot thank Subash-da enough for having agreed to direct the play in the first place. Without his whole-hearted commitment it would have been impossible to put it up. While pulling him in we assured him that he would have to see only to the acting. Finally, he ended up looking personally into every aspect of the play, from the music to the costumes and the stage decor.

We can say that Maurice moulded the main characters into what they ultimately became. Without him, Satyananda, Jibananda, Bhabananda, Mahendra, Kalyani and Shanti, and all the other heroes of Anandamath would not have come alive.

A very gentle and unassuming person who appeared on the stage for only one small scene is responsible for our wonderful costumes. She is Aparajita. It is difficult for me to explain how much she struggled until the last moment to create some of our exotic costumes, notably those of the Muslim and the British soldiers. Not only did she do a grand job at the end, neglecting her health and her studies in the process, but also managed to do it without spending too much money.

Another person, who, without craving for any attention on the stage, helped during the entire show and during most of the rehearsals, was

Sneha. With Amit and Jasmine's help she took full charge of the props. This efficient team, with the help of several participants, cut down at least fifteen to twenty minutes from the original time that the play was taking.

We must also thank Basab-da and Amita-di for composing the music in the play. Basab-da's Vande Mataram composition was certainly one of the highlights of the play. We are grateful to Manas Bardhan for having spent hours recording and editing the music and various other sounds in the play. And we cannot forget Habul-da, Sampat-bhai and Praful-da's departments, who made many of our props. We also thank Ambi for choreographing the fight scenes and for watching the play and making some very useful notes during several rehearsals. We have of course not forgotten the theatre team comprising of Bina-ben, the light people, the electricians, the catering people, the make-up people, and those who helped us get dressed, who were all as efficient as always.

Last, but certainly not the least, we thank profoundly all those who did the roles of the soldiers of the three different armies — British, Muslim and Santan dal of the sannyasis. They took up these small roles with a lot of goodwill and gave the play so much of their time, energy and commitment.

We must also not forget the little goddesses, who, in spite of their age, cooperated so well with us.

The readers are perhaps wondering why I have not yet mentioned my gratitude to those two divine Beings who are the real Helpers of not only the play, but of every bit of growth and progress in the Ashram. I have not done so, because that, I believe, is something that each of us should do at every instant, in our own hearts. ❧



ASHRAM TITBITS

AMRITA — THE EVER LIVING ONE

Udar Pinto

Amrita was a very lovable person. He was always in good humour and joked and laughed with us and yet he did his work very well. He was very much loved by all the servants and they were happy to work under his charge. [...] Besides being a very good worker, he was a very learned person. He was quite a scholar in Sanskrit and in Tamil and he agreed to try and teach both these languages to me. I say he tried because we did not get very far. We would mostly laugh and have jokes and only a little of learning. But they were happy days for me. Amrita had a very precious gift which I envied much. It was the gift of "Repartee". He would answer or say fine things at once, when this was called for and not like myself and others who would only think of fine things which we could have said but did not, as these words came to us too late.

For example, one day when we were doing our class together, I asked Amrita why the letters in Sanskrit are called "Devanagari", letters of the Gods, and he explained that Sanskrit was not invented by man but by the Gods. It was They who worked out the letters, which are supposed to be among the most perfect in the world, and so it is called the letters of the Gods. Now I knew how much Amrita loved and praised his own mother tongue, Tamil and so I asked him, "What about Tamil?" And he replied, "Oh! The Gods invented Sanskrit for the world to use but among Themselves They spoke in Tamil." We had such a great laugh but, he said this at once and not as an afterthought.

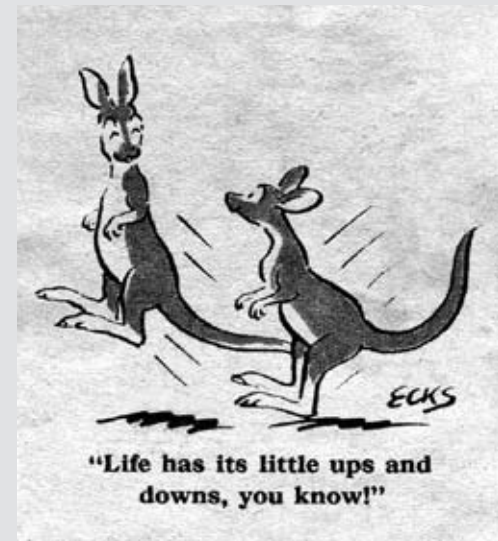
There are some more examples about his gift of repartee, but these I have come to know of from others and are not first hand; but they are very fine. In the early days of the Ashram the Mother used to meet the Sadhaks and Sadhikas and hold talks with them, or Mother's Classes as they were called. Of course, Amrita never missed going to these but, due to his work, he was, at times a bit

late in arriving and he would try to slip in quietly so as not to be noticed. But the Mother who could see all around Her even when fully involved with Her talks would notice his sly arrival. Once, when the Class was discussing the relation between the Overmind and the Supermind and Amrita had just slipped in, the Mother said: "Ah, here is Amrita; we will ask him about it." And She called out to him as he was just trying to be unnoticed, "Amrita, what is the relation between Overmind and Supermind?" and Amrita replied at once, waving his hands about, "Veery good relations, Mère, veery good relations," and sat down. The whole class, with the Mother, was in roars of laughter.

Well, these are some of the very fine things I remember about this very fine person, Amrita.... The name Amrita, given to him by Sri Aurobindo is very, very apt. He is truly immortal and without death and will live for ever in our minds and hearts and, if our souls have a memory, in our souls also. ❧

From: *Amrita — Birth Centenary, 1995*

CARTOON SEEN BY THE MOTHER





QUIZ TIME!



ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE LAST ISSUE :

1. *In which part of the Ashram Main Building was Sri Aurobindo on 24th November 1926 (the Siddhi day)?*

He was on the first floor above the Reception Room. At that time his room was the one just above the Reading Room.

2. *“My aim is to create a centre of spiritual life which shall serve as a means of bringing down the higher consciousness and making it a power not merely for ‘salvation’ but for a divine life upon earth. It is with this object that I have withdrawn from public life and founded this Ashram...”*

These lines are taken from a letter written by Sri Aurobindo. To whom did he write it?

The letter was written to Maharani Chimnabai II of Baroda, the wife of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwar under whom Sri Aurobindo had worked after returning from England. (See *Autobiographical Notes and other Writings of Historical Interest*, p. 440)

3. *Who had lived in Japan with the Mother and also lived in the Ashram for many years?*

It was Datta. She was an Englishwoman whose real name was Dorothy Hodgeson. She had chosen to live with the Mother and had travelled with her to Japan and came to Pondicherry with her.

4. *“Mute stands she, lonely on the topmost stair...”*
This is a line from one of Sri Aurobindo’s poems. Who is this “she”?

These lines are from the poem “Despair on the Staircase”. The “she” is actually a... cat!

5. *What is the spiritual significance of the white lotus?*

The name given by the Mother to the white lotus is “Avatar”.

WE REGRET TO INFORM OUR READERS THAT, WITH THIS ISSUE, WE ARE ENDING “QUIZ TIME!” — AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING.

La Chaise du Divin

Svetlana, qui vivait à l'Ashram depuis 1965, a participé aux tout débuts d'Auroville. C'est elle qui a lu la charte en russe, le 28 février 1968. Nous publions ci-dessous une lettre de Svetlana à Mère, écrite en 1970, à propos de la charte d'Auroville, et les réponses de Mère.

Mère, j'allais justement T'écrire pour Te poser la même question que Galeran au sujet de la Charte d'Auroville.

Voici pourquoi : il y a quelques jours, j'ai eu entre les mains la maquette et le texte d'une brochure de l'Association pour Auroville, qui doit être éditée à Paris et diffusée en France pour l'information de ses adhérents. Il est prévu en outre que cette brochure sera traduite « dans toutes les langues » et envoyée partout.

Or, la première chose qui m'a frappée, c'est que le texte de Ta Charte, reproduit en français, ne comportait pas les mots « CONSCIENCE DIVINE » mais ceux de « CONSCIENCE PARFAITE ». J'en ai parlé à quelqu'un : il m'a été répondu que « Tu étais d'accord pour supprimer les mots "Dieu" et "Divin" quand il s'agissait de textes destinés à l'extérieur, parce que ça faisait peur aux gens. »

Dans certains cas, oui, bien sûr. Mais pour la Charte, je trouvais ça douteux, et je tenais à savoir la vérité.[...]

Quant à moi, il m'est venu ceci :

Tant que ceux-là même qui sont censés construire Auroville auront peur de ces mots-là et de ce qu'ils signifient, comment la ville pourra-t-elle se construire ? On essaie de supprimer de la Charte ce qui est son fondement ! C'est empêcher le fondement même de la cité ! Ça a quelque chose de risible.

Le Divin essaie de Se trouver une petite place spéciale sur la terre : Toc ! on lui retire la chaise au moment où Il va s'asseoir !

(C'est une image, bien sûr... Il n'a besoin ni de chaise ni de s'asseoir...)

Voilà, Mère, Je suis à Toi,
en essayant très humblement d'être chaque jour plus
dans TA CONSCIENCE DIVINE.

*Svetlana
ton image est charmante.
On va essayer d'empêcher qd'on lui
retire Sa chaise ! ton amie*

*Je regrette
mais je n'ai jamais dit pareille
 sottise à qui que ce soit*