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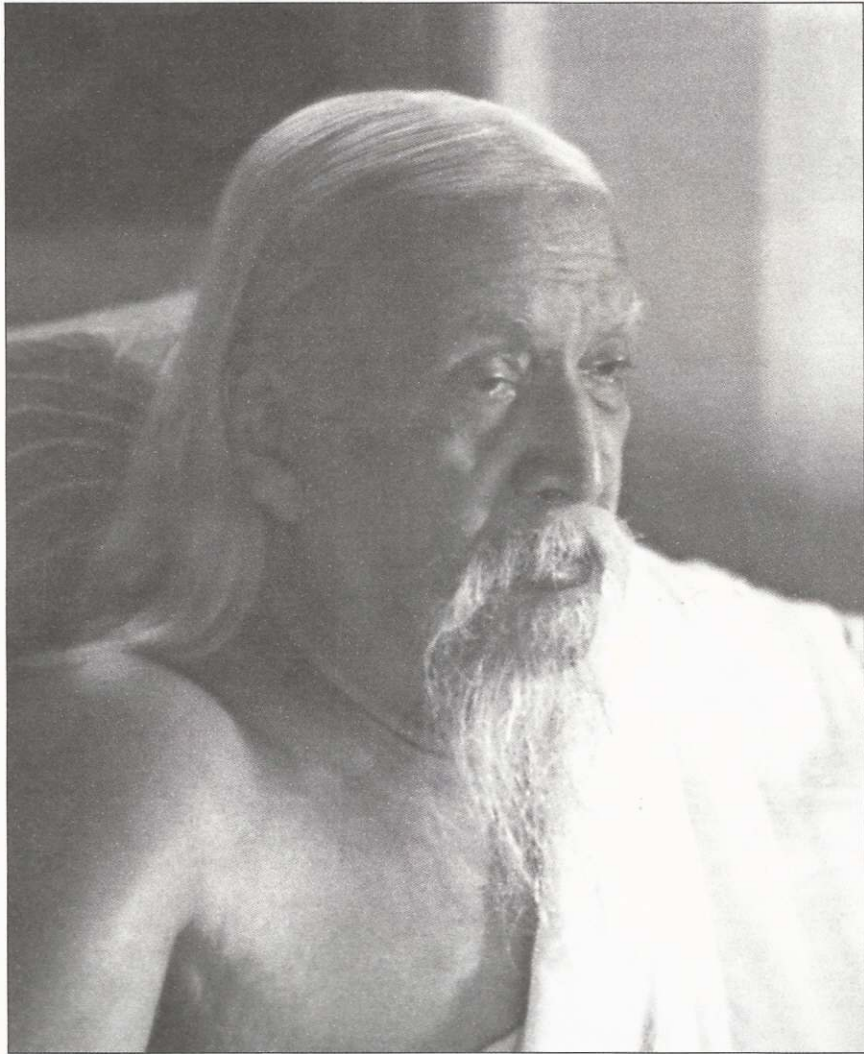


PHOTO: COURTESY SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Sri Aurobindo 1872 - 1950

Psychological challenges

One of the biggest misconceptions about life in Auroville is that it is some kind of paradise on earth where people are free to devote themselves to their spiritual development because they are insulated from the cares of the world. Nothing is further from the truth. Auroville brings people face to face not only with every aspect of the world but also with themselves. This can be deeply disturbing.

In this issue we explore the psychological tensions of living in Auroville and the Ashram, and how some dedicated therapists are dealing with these challenges. We also look at how the villagers deal with psychological difficulties. Of course, there is often a social component to personal problems, so we also feature the work of an Aurovilian social worker which aims at uplifting the local population, as well as solving misunderstandings between Aurovilians and workers through improving mutual understanding.

Ultimately, of course, the solution to personal difficulties in the yoga – of personal inadequacy, failure, disappointed hopes, depression etc. – lies elsewhere, as Sri Aurobindo made clear in one of his letters to a sadhak.

“All who enter the spiritual path have to face the difficulties and ordeals of the path, those which rise from their own nature and those which come in from outside. The difficulties in the nature always rise again and again till you overcome them; they must be faced with both strength and patience. But the vital part is prone to depression when ordeals and difficulties rise. This is not peculiar to you, but comes to all sadhaks – it does not imply an unfitness for the sadhana or justify a sense of helplessness. But you must train yourself to overcome this reaction of depression, calling in the Mother's Force to aid you. All who cleave to the path steadfastly can be sure of their spiritual destiny.”
(Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga*)

“I work with the Presence”

Barbara is a psychotherapist who has lived in Auroville since 1996.

What are the different resources available in Auroville for psychological problems?

There are many Aurovilians who offer to work with all kinds of different methods, which people can choose from if they want to find out more about themselves. For special psychological problems there are therapists available, and people will choose with whom they want to work. Actually, I don't call myself a psychotherapist, but rather I do consciousness and energy work. This can also work for mental health problems, and occasionally I work with such people. There is also Siegrun, a Jungian therapist, with whom I share the work when needed.

We have an agreement with the Ashram that if we need help from a psychiatrist, we can refer to Dr. Alok Pandey. He understands that sometimes things may come up with spiritual working or opening, and he also knows the kind of pressure under which we live, and that there is not so much outer security and stability here.

Unfortunately, we do not really have the facilities yet for people in crisis, in the sense of a place where people can stay for some time with a team that knows what to do.

Is it common that there are severe cases?

There is mainly depression and bipolar disorder, one could say vital disorders, also in young people. I think this is a problem everywhere. People normally live in their vital, and this can become unbalanced in the present time.

Can you tell me more about your approach in working with people?

My work as a therapist in Auroville is different from the way I worked before, because here it is always connected with the purpose of Auroville and our purpose for being here. For me, it is Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who are the guiding Light and Force: I need their Presence to work. When I work with the Presence, I look at how it wants to work, and by that I may use different approaches depending on the person and the situation.

I feel easily which energy wants to come for a person and where the blockages and resistances are. The main thing in the work is getting a grounding in deep peace – vertically on all levels, and horizontally – and through this the balancing starts. People learn to open up to the higher, deeper and vaster dimensions, and by this the healing potential is activated. It comes through the Force itself which organizes the process.

I also use flower remedies. Mother gave very detailed significances of the vibrational qualities of the flowers on the different levels of being. The special vibrations can be helpful to remove blockages and resistances and activate receptivity and resonance in the different areas.

What are the types of problems and issues people come with? Are there certain patterns or characteristic issues, and are these different here than elsewhere?

There are Aurovilians who have been here for quite some time, and now they are stuck. It is as if nothing works anymore, they do not know any more what to do. This is now quite common.



Then there is the influence of the collective field, which is experienced as being interconnected in a constant growth of chaos.

When I listen to people's experiences, we often find out that this is due to egoistic mental structures which are now dysfunctional. The power is somewhere else. There is a pressure that we go into a different practice in our daily lives and change our conditioned reactive patterns and habits. A progressive surrender into the Divine Consciousness is the answer. This is a complex process and will take time. But this is exactly the condition for living in Auroville given by the Mother in the Charter. It is a grace to live and to work here.

If people are getting stuck, do you get stuck too since you are working with these people?

I don't feel it is very different if I am

working on myself or on others, because the boundaries are thinning more and more. That is a good thing, but it can be difficult and sometimes confusing. But I know that what I cannot do, the Presence can do.

It is always the Force and the Light which essentially work out what has to happen. Therefore the thing is to become conscious of how the Force wants to work and to collaborate with it. That way one can evolve in the way that is needed.

Actually, this is why I love to work here. Here we immediately have the karma of our actions, and we can learn the consequences quickly. So we can try to get reorganized to make it better, and find the next steps we need to take.

You have talked about the new kinds of difficulties you face in your work; do you also see new kinds of progress?

For many of us, the collective life of interconnectedness in ignorance and falsehood appears to be overwhelming. By living this impossibility, by experiencing what it is, there is an intensification of the urgency for a shift into something else. It is the moment to leave the collapsing separative patterns of the past and to live in openness and sincere receptivity for what wants to come. Then something new and fresh can happen. The only safety lies in living from within outward – instead of talking. To grow into unity and creativity we need the true psychic and soul realization.

From an interview by Larry

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Psychological problems and homeopathy

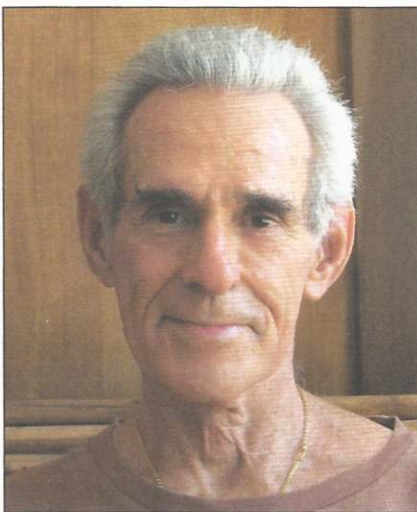
Michael Zelnick is a homeopath.

What are the different problems that people come to you with?

The range is quite broad. I treat everything from acute situations such as injuries, colds and flu's to psychological problems of various sorts, from serious depressions to what I'd call non-pathological "life problems". People call me up and ask if one can treat this or that homeopathically, and the answer is always "Yes". Theoretically I can treat anything homeopathically. Mind you, that's not to say that I can treat every problem successfully, but I'm generally willing to try.

Among the types of psychological issues that come up in your work, are there patterns or common kinds of issues?

I wouldn't say there are "patterns" though, certainly, some types of problems occur more frequently than others. People looking for help because they are grieving over the loss of a loved one are fairly common, as are people who have been in relationships that are falling apart, or have broken up, leaving them feeling lost, confused, or depressed. I see a fair number of individuals who are having trouble negotiating a transition point in their life: they are not satisfied with their work situation, or they don't feel that they are progressing in their spiritual endeavour, or they are just feeling "stuck" and they are wondering if



there is something that can help them... It's a pretty broad spectrum.

What is your initial approach?

In principle, whatever the problem, the basic approach is always the same: we sit together and I "take the case", which means I try to get the most complete picture I can, not only about the particular, "presenting" issue, but also the individual himself (or herself), everything he can tell me: how it feels to be him, how he functions emotionally, mentally, physically... There's a being there, mind is part of it, emotions are part of it, body is part of it: it's not like there are purely mental problems or purely physical problems... Anyway, at the end of the process I'm (hopefully) going to have

a something like a 3D picture of the person and I am going to try to match it with the picture of a homeopathic remedy and then give the patient that remedy. If I get it right, one will see an amelioration of the patient's condition. So, as I said, in principle, the process is the same whether the patient has come because he feels stuck, is grieving for a broken relationship, a mother who died, or is bugged because he comes down with a cold every couple of months.

In a general sense, how does homeopathy work to relieve these difficulties?

The basic principle of homeopathy is that "like cures like". In practice that means that something which, when administered to a healthy individual, produces a certain set of symptoms, will, if administered to someone displaying those symptoms as a result of pathology, cure that pathology. In the course of the past few centuries, since homeopathy started, a great many remedies have been "proven" (that's homeopathic jargon for "tested") - I think the *Materia Medica* presently runs to about 4000 remedies and is constantly being expanded - though I could probably treat 99.9 percent of patients that come into my office with 100 remedies, maybe even 50. Anyway, as I said before, the programme is to

develop a comprehensive picture of the patient and administer the remedy with the most similar picture. No one really knows how it works, but there's a great body of compelling experience indicating that if you get the remedy choice correct, it does work.

Homeopathy is said to work on the subtle level. How so?

The process of making a homeopathic remedy involves diluting the starting material so radically that by the time you get to what is called the 12th potency, which is rather low in terms of the potencies most homeopaths tend to prescribe these days, you wouldn't be likely to find a single molecule of the original substance in any given sample of the medicine. We say that the process of raising the remedy to higher and higher potencies releases ever more subtle ranges of the energy associated with the original substance. Is that really what's going on? Who knows? It's as good a metaphor as another. The most common potencies I work with are 30, 200 and 1M - all of them a long way from 12 - there is, to all intents and purposes, nothing there in terms of material substance. This is why homeopathy has always driven the straight scientific establishment nuts: everyone knows you can't produce a material effect without a material cause.

Is homeopathy a spiritual healing method?

Not necessarily. The fact that it operates on a subtle level doesn't make it spiritual. Black magic also operates on a subtle level. I figure its spiritual, or non-spiritual, quality has to do a lot more with the orientation and intention of the homeopath than with anything else.

How much does intuition come into your work?

No doubt, the best results come when the intuition operates. I've been a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for most of my adult life, that's 40+ years now, and I know very well that when I truly see something it's their gift. When I remember (which, with varying success, I try to do when I'm taking a case), I ask the Mother or Sri Aurobindo to let me see what I need to see to help my patient. It is very rare that after taking a case I prescribe something for the patient on the spot. Generally I concentrate as much as I can during the case-taking, and then I try not to think about it for 24 - 48 hours. Sometimes during that period "something will come". It can be as definitive as, "That's the remedy," or as general as, "Have a look at it this way." If it comes like that, it's usually pretty reliable. When that doesn't happen (which, unfortunately, is hardly exceptional) I have to sit down at my computer and "work the case" the old-fashioned way.

From an interview by Larry

Bringing peace and harmony

Meenakshi is a well-known poet and social worker.

What kinds of activities are you involved with in assisting the local villagers?

I came to Auroville as a trained professional social worker, with teaching experience in the university, mainly in group social work and community organization. That expertise and the uniqueness of Auroville gave me the opportunity and freedom to experiment with bringing peace and harmony between people. I still enjoy this work and I share my experience with others.

When Auroville invited me to help create a bridge between the future city and the existing native Tamil villages, I found divisions in the villages because of the strong hold of the caste system and feudalism. The villages were economically-depressed and educationally-backward. There was under-employment, inequality in land holding, and a lack of commitment for improving the health and hygiene of the villages. So with our programmes we started work on improving the basic infrastructure in the areas of health and education.

One of my first jobs was to help the villagers to construct a good school building with better facilities, supported by Irumbai Panchayat. That gave a face lift to the whole community. But still one could see many kids were not going to school. They were herding the cows and goats, collecting fodder or firewood, taking care of younger children or assisting elders in the family trades as a potential economic unit. I also found many children from the local villages were not going to school but instead playing on Auroville constructions sites. They were drop-outs, bullied by peer groups, stay-outs due to an unfriendly school atmosphere or pulled-outs by elders for economic reasons.

I started Ilaignarkal Tree School (a school under a tree) inside Matrimandir Nursery in 1976 with the objective of making these children learn joyfully. The next stage was caring for young workers of Auroville from the neighbouring villages to continue their further learning life skills. We established a small shelter house for youth when they were in need of care and protection. With this approach both the economical needs of the family and the educational needs of the youth were addressed.

Ilaignarkal Education Centre is moving ahead on the same path to create a harmonious

place with unending education for all. Presently the new Ilaignarkal Education Centre, north of Matrimandir, gives hope to both young men and women and their children to realize their aspirations and feel enriched. Our students are the best healers and social change agents in their village communities.

Ilaignarkal publishes a Tamil Monthly which bridges Auroville and the communities around to enrich the universal culture of Love and Peace. We have created group singing songs, social games, and plays.

Can you say something more about the kinds of problems that you intervene with in Auroville?

I believe in the co-evolution of people living in the region and Auroville. The workers of Auroville who come from the neighbouring villages make a tremendous contribution to Auroville's growth. When there are problems we help in translation, mediation, and explain things from their point of view. Because I know Tamil, I translate and help provide mutual understanding between the various cultures represented here.

I try to take a neutral and objective position when I am asked to help find a solution between, for example, an Auroville resident and a person employed from a neighbouring village. I am also often asked to help sort out issues between villagers or groups.

In most cases there are misunderstandings or communication gaps. For example, a worker may all of sudden take leave which is not liked by the Auroville employer, which is understandable as it can disrupt work. But in village life, the social network is very strong. If a death occurs in the family, they may need two or three days leave, or perhaps an advance payment from their wages. It may be very difficult for an Aurovilian to understand why so many days are needed for



the death of a cousin or other distant relative. But for the worker from the village it is an essential thing, a part of their life because they are a member of a larger family. In the same way, they may need to make a contribution to the temple, or require money to celebrate a marriage.

Another example is that, according to the seasons, the work and duties of the people in the village may change. When it is harvest season, all the children and family members will rush to the field. So this may lead to unplanned absence and misunderstandings with employers. These are the kind of things they have to explain to their employer, but then the language barrier comes and there is misunderstanding. Then people come to me, I make both parties sit together and explain why she must take so many days leave, why she needs to get so much money for celebrating the puberty of the daughter, or celebrating the pregnancy of the sister.

From the side of the Western Aurovilians, they come from a culture where everything is well-organized and planned, and once the annual or monthly plans are agreed for workers' leave they feel it is all settled. But it is not like that here. Each day is different. If I am a worker, you may ask me "will you come tomorrow?" I say "yes" but I may mean "maybe" or "no" because I don't want to hurt you and will know for sure only tomorrow. It is in the Tamil language itself: the negativity is less; we give a positive response to almost everything. It doesn't mean that we will always do it! It is an intention and an expression of goodwill. That also takes some time for the Western mind or the educated elite to understand. They think everything should go along with their plan, but here it is according to the social plan or the divine plan.

What do Tamil villagers do when they are having psychological problems? Where do they go

for help?

To a temple, to the temple priest. If it is a joint family, they also have their elders with whom they share their experience. But normally, they seek the help of their family deity. Some may take a yellow cloth, tie a one rupee coin in it, keep it near the photo or statue of the god, and ask it to take away the problem. Each person has a personal god, the family deity, and for the village there is the common temple. So normally, the burden is placed at the feet of the Lord.

Women normally will have a supportive group near the water pond or the workplace where they will sit around. Generally there will be an elderly, experienced or educated person, and they will pour out their problems to her. Even when there is a death, they will sit around and hold each other and cry. The problems are shared by a sensitive, small group.

When my mother, who is 85, has a problem, she will take up the ancient scriptures and read. She will always get an answer in the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, or Kandapurana, which have stories about all kinds of human relations, problems and solutions. She will say the same thing has happened to so and so in this story, that they have faced it like that, and they have prayed to that god.

Doing this work, you must also feel under strain at times. How do you cope?

Sometimes there is work pressure and then I listen to soft music, and that changes the mood. Then I also have my best instrument, which is to write. So once I finish an article or poem, it is a big solace, a big relief, and then I can take up some reading.

So each one has her own way of letting it go, whether it is small or big. If you don't have a shoulder to lean on, you create your own space and work it out. You go to the plants, and give water. Or you have a pet. One of my team members will always talk to me about her goats. In the afternoon she takes all her goats out. When she is very angry about something, she walks for miles and miles with her goats. Once she has poured everything out, she comes back quiet.

From an interview by Larry

"I try to give a holistic understanding"

Are there unique problems that you have encountered as a psychiatrist in a spiritual community like the Ashram?

Yes. One problem I often encounter in the Ashram, and it is perhaps also the case in Auroville, is that the moment some people enter a community like this they feel they have become a very special kind of person, a chosen one, and that they are immune to certain kinds of very human tendencies and above the laws of nature. However, instead of making them immune it rather opens them to problems due to a lack of humility.

The second thing I have observed – and it is connected with this perception of themselves – is that people here go into denial, they refuse to look at everything they don't want to see in their nature and very often they project it onto others. Alternatively, they have a 'spiritual' explanation of what is happening which veils the problem. So if somebody becomes unbalanced in some way, they may tell you that transformation is happening in their cells. The problem is that often those around them also get convinced, so it becomes a shared delusion. They don't see that what the patient is doing is very far from yoga.

There are different ways in which people avoid looking at themselves. One strategy is to isolate themselves from the rest of the world. This makes them feel they are special and that the rest of humanity is inferior. It's a form of spiritual arrogance, and this can go to absurd lengths, like the belief that if you haven't gone outside the Ashram for many years at a stretch you must be an advanced yogi. Or if you do not speak or smile and remain aloof you must be

Dr. Alok Pandey is the Ashram psychiatrist. Before entering the Ashram, he served for nearly twenty years in the Indian Air Force in various capacities, including clinical as well as teaching assignments. Here he talks about the psychological issues experienced by people living in an ashram environment and how he deals with them.



having heavenly visions. The Indian mind is very prone to these conventional stereotypes due to its past ascetic tendencies. Fortunately, in the Ashram such cases are rare and the majority are quite a balanced lot.

Actually, self-deception and cover-ups don't work here but it takes a long time for people to understand this. So when people are confronted with unpleasant aspects of themselves, they don't know how to handle it.

The other tendency, which is more common in 'intellectually-prone' humanity, is that all impulses and vital tendencies are justified as being part of the yoga, the argument being that by allowing them an outlet you are simply exhausting them.

Another thing I have observed here, in contrast to outside, is a big resistance to allopathic treatment: taking an allopathic drug is often seen as a sign of inferiority. I'm not a big fan of allopathy, I understand its limitations, but I have seen cases spoilt beyond any help because the person has got hooked on to some New Age kind of thing.

The same forces that operate outside basically operate here but in a much more intense way and there is this intense pressure of Truth, so the resistance to change is also felt much more acutely and the evolutionary conflict experienced in a sharper way. Also the amount of freedom that is allowed in the Ashram allows people to go to extremes very easily, because many of the façades that we use outside, for example, like being polite out of self-interest, are gone. So this brings out a whole subconscious side of nature which one rarely gets to see outside.

Does this make your work as a psychiatrist much more difficult?

(Laughs) Sometimes I cherish my pre-Ashram days because then it was fairly simple. People would come with a certain problem and giving them a larger picture would help relieve much of their suffering. But here, you see, everybody is a *pandit*, an expert!

Do people in the Ashram come readily to you for help?

In India the term 'psychological disorder' is very pejorative: it is often wrongly construed as an equivalent of 'madness' and saying that somebody is 'mad' is a form of abuse. In fact, of the many people who come to me for consultation, very few can be termed as having 'lost their head'. But because of this mistaken belief, when I first came to the Ashram people would resist coming to see me, or even being seen with me in case people drew the wrong conclusions! Now things have changed because over the years people have developed trust. Besides, I see general cases as well as psychiatric ones.

What kinds of psychiatric disorders do you encounter here?

Well, humanity being the same everywhere we have a similar pattern of illnesses, though they take a different hue due to the Ashram ethos. Most of them present themselves as difficulties in the nature, unusual conflicts, anxieties

and obsessions, depression and unbalanced behaviour. People have nervous breakdowns and there are psychotic episodes as well. The pressures of trying to lead a yogic life are often underestimated by those who have never seriously worked upon themselves.

Is it easy to detect when individuals have problems?

This can be a problem since things here are given a certain 'colouring', interpretation. People are always ready to give all kinds of 'spiritual' advice (based on books they have read) without really having a clue about what's going on inside an individual. For example, in a typical ashram community, and I'm sure also in Auroville, where the value of work is emphasized, there is a tendency to feel that somebody who is working a lot is very sincere in the yoga. But that person may be driven by a vital energy which makes them restless, unable to do without work. So when that person falls into depression, people are shocked. On the other hand, there are people who are very quiet, who spend hours apparently sitting in meditation and who are looked upon as very yogic. But then they suddenly have a breakdown because behind the quietude a storm was brewing inside them.

Another reason people don't pick these things up here is because there is such freedom that if somebody doesn't come to work for two months people don't mind. And even when people suspect something may be wrong, they don't want to report it because they don't want to be seen as jeopardising someone's stay in the community.

So how do you treat psychological disorders here?

I understand the sensitivities, hence I use certain terms which people find easier to accept. So it's better to say their nerves are weak or that they are very sensitive. In fact, I am against labelling: it's like a dark incantation or a black mantra, it simply creates an adverse formation, and it is contrary to healing practices in the light of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. For example, if somebody is psychotic here, the first tendency among the Ashram inmates is to say he is attacked by hostile forces. This may be the case, but it doesn't help to keep telling a person this, you are only strengthening the hostile forces. It is best to treat the whole thing as a process, a working upon nature of certain forces, and see what best can be done to restore the balance of nature and, if possible, use the crisis as a means for evolutionary growth.

Rather than labelling a person, I prefer to see them as a unique spirit which has had a setback on its spiritual journey. So, rather than telling them they are schizophrenic or depressive, I try to give them a holistic understanding of what is happening inside them. This will differ from patient to patient depending upon their level of understanding and the complex play of forces within and around them. I would start by going into details of what could be the problem, what could be the deeper issue, the core conflict from the evolutionary point of view, and then I try to give the person a way to come out of it, for instance, through using guided imagery or a mantra calling Mother's help. I also give medication if necessary.

The crucial step is for them to arrive at a spiritual and psychic understanding and control, but this is a difficult path which takes time, patience, courage, faith and, above all, the Mother's Grace.

Of course, if I have a difficult case of psychosis I use medication, but I try to use the minimum dose and I use medication to buy time while I observe the individual. In cases like this, I don't begin with spiritual counselling because a person who has lost touch with the basic realities has first to be grounded.

Actually, I have two kinds of difficult cases who come to me. One kind wants only medication and nothing else. Any attempt to touch upon the deeper layers meets with resistance. So I respect the patient's wishes because I don't believe in forcing anything on anyone. The other

type of client doesn't want any medicine at all but expects me to heal them by some kind of magic! Fortunately most lie somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

Can anything be done at the community level to minimise the danger of its inmates having psychological problems and to deal with them when they occur?

From my observations of what happens in the Ashram, I think we should be very careful here not to take people too young and with too little experience of life. If individuals have not faced the world, they have never had a chance for their ego to be worked upon and certain things will come out through the process of yoga which they may not be able to handle. So I think that one should not be admitted here before the age of 25, and then they should be introduced to very practical aspects of yoga through classes on the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

Secondly, I think there has to be some kind of a boundary line, perhaps very wide and plastic, which marks the limit of what is acceptable behaviour. If people pass beyond it, they should be told to leave. Often this helps the person because they are then less exposed to the pressure of transformation and the normal checks and balances of life outside keep him in moderation. Without the Mother's physical presence you need safeguards like this.

But what about people who have lived in the community for 30 to 40 years and are having psychological difficulties? Surely they can't just be sent away?

For these cases there should be a community support system which involves people who have proper technical knowledge but who are also wide and sympathetic and have a deep understanding. In addition, there could be a support group; a group of volunteers willing to work round the clock with very clear guidelines about what to do when someone has psychological problems. One thing is clear: we're not going to send someone away from the Ashram just because they have a breakdown. Many other factors have to be taken into consideration.

There could also be a special facility in the community itself where people can go to recover or which can accommodate those who've reached a point of complete breakdown, who are beyond repair, like burnt-out psychotics. We don't have such a facility in the Ashram, so we accommodate some of these people in the home for the elderly.

I think that there are a few things which can act as a safeguard against losing one's psychological balance in a place like this. One is to never let your spiritual goal vanish from your eyes when you are confronted with obstacles or temptations, because when a force like strong ambition or desire is active in us, it tends to veil that goal. Secondly, and almost paradoxically, it is to remain firmly grounded rather than enter into the mists of spiritual romanticism.

Another simple solution that I have found is to tell people to be in the rhythm of life here. Every place has its intrinsic law which is ingrained within its fabric, what is called outside its 'work culture', but here the material organization has also a spiritual and occult dimension. So to keep balanced it very much helps to follow the Ashram rhythm: to work at the allotted place and time, to go to the Playground, eat in the dining room, attend collective meditations and read something daily from Their writings etc. I've seen that one of the first things that happens when people start to have problems here is that they withdraw from work or they seclude themselves from these activities and they start losing will and faith. These are very clear indicators that something is going wrong.

Finally, the idea that one must be transformed in one lifetime – and that the Kingdom of God can be taken by storm – is very prevalent in some people and it can lead to a want of balance, just as the idea of being someone special or some such vanity can create serious psychological problems. Like the mythical swan of the Vedas, one needs to keep one foot on the ground even as the other is lifted to the skies. We need to understand and have faith that God works with infinite patience and infinite love and that as long as we are steadfast in our goal, He will bring us home.

From an interview by Alan

Sri Aurobindo on psychological issues

"It is necessary to observe and know the wrong movements in you; for they are the source of your trouble and have to be persistently rejected if you are to be free. But do not always be thinking of your defects and wrong movements. Concentrate more upon what you are to be, on the ideal, with the faith that, since it is the goal before you, it must and will come.

To be always observing faults and wrong movements brings depression and discourages the faith. Turn your eyes more to the coming light and less to any immediate darkness. Faith, cheerfulness, confidence in the ultimate victory are the things that help – they make the progress easier and swifter.

Make more of the good experiences that come to you; one experience of the kind is more important than the lapses and failures. When it ceases, do not repine or allow yourself to be discouraged, but be quiet within and aspire for its renewal in a stronger form leading to a still deeper and fuller experience. Aspire always, but with more quietude, opening yourself to the Divine simply and wholly."

"Difficulties and perplexities can never be got rid of by the mind brooding on them and trying in that way to get out of them; this habit of the mind only makes them recur without a solution and keeps up by brooding the persistent tangle. It is from something above and outside the perplexities that the solution must come. The difficulty of the physical mind – not the true thinking intelligence – is that it does not want to believe in this larger consciousness outside itself because it is not aware of it; and it remains shut like a box in itself, not admitting the light that is all round it and pressing to get in. It is a subtle law of the action of consciousness that if you stress difficulties – you have to observe them, of course, but not stress them, they will quite sufficiently do that for themselves – the difficulties tend to stick or even increase; on the contrary, if you put your whole stress on faith and aspiration and concentrate steadily on what you aspire to, that will sooner or later lead to realisation. It is this change of stress, a change in the poise and attitude of the mind, that will be the more helpful process."

Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga

The decisive moment

Henri Cartier-Bresson died on August 3, 2004, at his home in Paris, France. He was 95 years old. Widely respected as one of the founding fathers of photojournalism and a pioneer in the art of photography, his pictures are admired for their spontaneity and mastery of form.

Cartier-Bresson always said his aim was to capture "the decisive moment," that is, the essence of a situation or event that was unfolding before his eyes. There was certainly a yogic element to Cartier-Bresson's art. He loved perfection, and his quest as a photographer was to glimpse eternity in the fleeting instant. Inspired by the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, he once said that his photographic method was to use his open eye to look through the viewfinder upon the outer scene, while with his other, closed eye he looked within. It was, perhaps, this inward gaze that caught the Mother's attention and led her to grant him permission to photograph the Ashram in 1950.

When Cartier-Bresson arrived in Pondicherry on April 23, in time for *darshan* on the 24th, he was in the midst of an extraordinary series of events. He had just come from Tiruvannamalai, where he had photographed Sri Ramana Maharshi leaving his body, and borne witness to the fireball that streaked slowly over Arunachala at 8.47 p.m., the exact minute of the sage's absorption into the Self. On the 24th, Cartier-Bresson was to obtain the only photographs ever made of Mother and Sri Aurobindo together at *darshan*, and on the 25th he was destined to shoot the last living photograph of Sri Aurobindo, thus completing a remarkable trinity of final statements – Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, and Sri Aurobindo.

By what Grace or hidden design the Divine chose Cartier-Bresson to record India's three greatest leaders/spiritual figures of the 20th century as they stood on the threshold of life and death, we can only speculate. But clearly the phenomenon has a profound inner meaning. When Cartier-Bresson arrived in Pondicherry in April 1950, Sri Aurobindo had been in retirement for over 20 years, and had repeatedly declined requests to be photographed. In retrospect, we also know that Sri Aurobindo had already decided to leave the body, and was deeply engaged in two Herculean tasks: completing *Savitri*, and preparing for the first fully conscious descent into Death in the history of life. In a very real sense then, Sri Aurobindo was poised on the edge of his own decisive moment.

Initially, the Mother only gave Cartier-Bresson permission to photograph the premises of the Ashram, as well as Ashramites engaged in their usual activities. However, soon she allowed him to take shots with Mother in the background, and as the trust grew, Mother even let Cartier-Bresson take portraits of herself. Cartier-Bresson's diary shows that he felt the Mother's sweetness and kindness, and his photos of her

distributing flowers certainly express this quality.

Yet the greatest photos were still to come. On the morning of April 25, 1950, the day after *darshan*, Cartier-Bresson went to thank the Mother for the favours granted, and to ask for one more permission, to photograph Sri Aurobindo in his private quarters. According to Cartier-Bresson, he finally persuaded her with the statement, "I am only photographing the female aspect of the Divine. What about the male aspect?" In any case, the Mother consulted with Sri Aurobindo and – surprisingly – consent was given.

From the mechanical perspective, the session was quick and quiet. Cartier-Bresson took about 10 minutes, during which time Sri

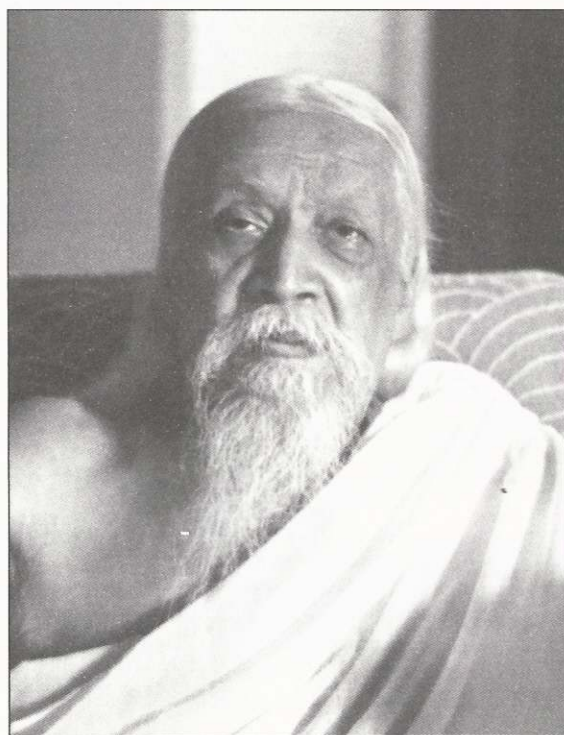


Photo of Sri Aurobindo by Cartier-Bresson, 1950

Aurobindo impressed the photographer with his complete immobility. In his diary from the time, Cartier-Bresson wrote "The room was so neat and tidy and impersonal. Sri Aurobindo did not wink an eye during the entire ten minutes I was watching him, he did not seem to belong to that impersonal setting." During an interview in Paris, 40 years later to the day (25 April 1990), Cartier-Bresson recollected thus: "My impressions of the Mother – a power woman. Sri Aurobindo was very remote. I had 'a tremendous meditation' far away."

From the spiritual perspective, on the other hand, Cartier-Bresson's portraits of Sri Aurobindo sitting in his armchair stand among the most substantial documents in human history. The side shots, in which Sri Aurobindo's face is less prominent, are unproblematic, so we shall review these quickly. What one sees in these photos is a meditating sage who seems to have

materialized on the film from the future. Sri Aurobindo barely appears to belong to this time and place: in the inner eye, one sees him as a bolt of frozen lightning on the verge of striking, or perhaps striking so continuously that one can no longer distinguish rest and motion; outwardly, it seems as if the chair itself is about to launch forward and fly. Time has ceased, and the Timeless is radiating out of Sri Aurobindo's figure with diamond intensity...

However, the frontal compositions are more perplexing, especially the head-on portrait, so we shall dwell on it further. The first and most obvious feature of Sri Aurobindo's last portrait is that he is not smiling. Also, he gives no revealing gesture or motion of note, and the composition seems rather static. There is nothing here to suggest transcendent bliss, not even that distantly tender smile from the Beyond that Welling captured in his famous bust of Sri Ramana Maharshi, shot only a few years earlier. On the surface, at least, Sri Aurobindo seems almost the antithesis of the *jivanmukti* that he was: his face is lined, his expression serious, and the atmosphere grave. This is not the delightful face of Krishna, rather the physiognomy of a warrior who has marched thousands of miles on foot and has yet, to borrow Frost's famous line, miles to go before he sleeps. Even the Mother later commented that she was surprised by Sri Aurobindo's look, for it was not the ever-patient and sweet visage she had come to know and love. "He... he let go..." she said poignantly.

And yet, I feel, there is a deeper message and a divine purpose behind Sri Aurobindo's solemnity, and artistically the inner dynamism of this photo is only accentuated by the composition's seemingly static weight. For what we do see in Sri Aurobindo's bare, frank look is the face of the supramental Avatar preparing to confront Death, to plunge into the very heart of Darkness and sow there the first seeds of the Life Divine. Sri Aurobindo looks grave here because the moment literally is grave. Make no mistake, this is no light *lila* of a God who does not feel the pain of human clay, it is the fully conscious surrender of the Godhead who has become the death-bound suffering that we are. Truly, this last photograph of Sri Aurobindo is the modern expression of Christ on the Cross, only the passion is inner not outer, and the Lord is dying in order to secure for us life everlasting on earth, not in some hereafter.

Speaking for myself, I feel that Sri Aurobindo's last portrait has a tremendous interiority of feeling, as if the whole of humanity is carried in his soul and aspiring for the Divine. It is a profoundly serious testament, granted, and therefore not easy to bear during lighter moods

and more superficial moments. But when I am down, when I am feeling defeated, when I have reached the utmost limit of my endurance, then this photograph comes to me with a unique power of spiritual healing. Especially it speaks to me in my absolutely darkest passages, during those dire and decisive inner moments when it feels my very soul is on the verge of relinquishing the battle because the world's burden is too great and my own failings too recalcitrant. When I look to Sri Aurobindo's last portrait in such times of critical need, then suddenly he looks different: I see that his face is my face, is every human face, is the Divine who has taken birth on earthly soil. I feel that his fatigue is my fatigue, is all human fatigue, is the Divine who has assumed the burden of human toil. I look into Sri Aurobindo's left eye, and am taken in by the soft, receptive compassion of the divine Friend who understands my pains and errors because he shares them, whose sympathy is boundless because he walks right at my side and knows intimately every rock and pitfall on the Path. I look into his right eye, and am met by the steady gaze of Wisdom that looks dispassionately upon the labour of ages and fills me with a calm knowledge that the final fruits of evolution are as certain as the failures of the moment now seem. I look again upon the lined visage of the great Warrior who has fought so much, endured so much, and a new resolve enters my soul. I think "well, since He has borne so much for me, I must give something small in return. I will go one more step forward on the path – in honour of Him." And so my heart warms again, and my will returns. I feel the arm of the great Protector around me, and the grim predator of darkness that was stalking my soul recedes, banished by a diamond Light that shines out from behind one human face.

This, for me, is the significance of Cartier-Bresson's final portrait of Sri Aurobindo. It extends to struggling mortals the helping hand of an Avatar who otherwise might have remained forever impersonal and distant to us. For though *Savitri* and *The Life Divine* bring us glowing intimations from a brighter future, the weaker parts of us needed something else, too – this visual reminder that the supramental Avatar was also human like us. He is not only above and beyond us, He is also with and inside us, feeling our feelings, fighting our battles, facing the same mortality we face. Evidently, Sri Aurobindo knew exactly what he was getting in Cartier-Bresson, and he decided the French photographer was the right instrument to convey the Avatar's parting gift to a suffering humanity, a gift made all the greater by its very humanity.

Michael Miovic

(This is a slightly edited version of an article which first appeared in *Collaboration*. Michael Miovic is a psychiatrist based in the U.S. He has worked closely with colleagues in the Ashram to develop the field of integral health and consciousness studies.)

REFLECTION

Contacting the evolving Auroville

One of the major unsolved tensions in Auroville today can be summarised as the opposition between the 'given' and the 'emerging'. While this can be seen most clearly in different approaches to building the city, this opposition takes many different guises. It can even be seen in different ways that people approach and interpret what The Mother has said about Auroville. There are those who seem to believe that when Mother spoke about the community she was uttering absolute truths which hold good for eternity. Others believe that if Mother had been in her body today, she would have wanted certain things to be done differently, not only because today's world is a very different place from the world of 1968, but also because the spirit of Auroville is in constant evolution.

In fact, the opposition between these points of view is less absolute than it seems. Those who take the evolutionary standpoint acknowledge that Mother laid down certain fundamentals that are unlikely to change: the Charter is an obvious example. The 'absolutists', particularly those who met her, admit that Mother was always very flexible, so it is very likely that she would have organized certain things differently today. But, they ask, who is to say which things she would change, and how? None of us, they believe, have the required consciousness. Consequently, it's safer to stick with what she said.

This attitude seems profoundly unsatisfactory. Not only does it run counter to their warning not to take their words as holy writ, but in their own spiritual explorations both Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are often seen to be reassessing, and sometimes even discarding, what they had previously taken to be fundamental truths.

This is partly due to the fact that the pressure of the Supramental is reordering those fundamentals: what was true before is not necessarily true now. Yet this also seems part of a natural cosmic process. As The Mother put it in one of her Prayers and Meditations, "Every moment, all the unforeseen, the unexpected, the unknown is before us, every moment the universe is created anew in its entirety and in every one of its parts."

In fact, in terms of Auroville Mother had already demonstrated her flexibility. When she was told that land constraints made it impossible to begin the construction of Bharat Nivas, she simply reoriented the zones to solve this problem. (If she hadn't, some of us might be arguing today that the original orientation of the zones had an occult significance which couldn't be tampered with.) And even her original conception of the Matrimandir and its surroundings which she said she 'saw' ("I had a vision of it") is very different from the design which she later approved.

So the question is not so much whether she would have changed anything today, but rather what, and how? Would she, for example, want us to materialise the original Galaxy Plan in the minutest detail? Would she still want a 'vast' lake around Matrimandir? Do we still need our own airfield? And what about all the other issues which exercise us daily? Issues like the difficulty of acquiring all the land needed for the city and greenbelt; of providing adequate accommodation for all those who wish to live here; of becoming self-sufficient; of providing high-class further education and jobs for our young people; and of ensuring that only the 'right' kind of people join the community. On some of these issues – which were not even dreamed of in the early days of the

community – she gave no specific guidance. Others, like the difficulty of acquiring the land, had been anticipated by The Mother, but given the present situation her advice then – buy as much as possible as soon as possible – may require some modification.

So what does Mother want today for Auroville? As far as I can tell most people don't ask this question. Either it doesn't occur to them, or they don't see the point (Mother is dead, no?), or they assume that they already know what Auroville needs. Actually, just asking the question is already a radical step. For not only is it an affirmation that her presence continues actively to guide this community, but to ask such a question sincerely requires humility and an effort to empty oneself of all one's preconceptions, to fall very quiet and listen for a very different kind of note.

To do this individually is good, but to call for Mother's guidance as a group may be even more powerful. For Christ's promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them" seems to indicate a universal spiritual law. Of course, the call has to be absolutely sincere. But I think most us have been here long enough by now, and we know each other well enough, to tell when somebody is presenting his or her own views in the guise of Mother's. A true communication is likely to have a completely different quality from that which we have grown used to in our personal contacts and community meetings.

So are we ready to try it? Are we ready to see that many of our problems and our disputes stem from the fact that we are not in contact with the evolving reality of Auroville and of Mother, and then to put a huge and concerted effort into making that contact?

Or would we prefer to keep quoting the books?

Alan

Petal pilgrimage

Mary Alexander lived in the Matrimandir Workers' Camp in the early years, and has been closely associated with Auroville and AVI-USA ever since. Last year she visited the 12 meditation chambers in the petals around Matrimandir.



courage a form of trust, or is trust a foundation for all?

Next was Goodness, a lovely magenta. Either it was painted differently around the focal design or the light was different, brighter and turned the area around the disk white. It was also the first where the colour of the room seemed to penetrate the closed eyes not as a different colour, but as magenta.

Goodness. In my life I have focused on kindness. It seems more is needed. Are goodness and kindness linked? I suspect kindness is a part of goodness, but not the whole of it. Magenta is not a colour I generally care for, but it seeped in as goodness seeps in and transforms human relationships. Like the attitudes towards the Divine, those towards humanity are closely linked. For how can we truly have goodness without equality, generosity, and peace? The corresponding garden is Life.

The greens of Humility and Gratitude were similar. Humility was gentler in colour, and ever so slightly bluer. I wondered if I even really knew what humility felt like. Is it even a feeling or just a poise? I loved the colour, one that I have wanted to paint in the middle room at home. Humility. To be humble, I think one must simply be humble. It is not something to be controlled, managed, or exercised. Simply be. It is the Divine that acts. One is a channel only.

Gratitude — such an intense green, a magical green, my favorite colour. Gratitude is almost a buzz word these days. We are grateful for ... things, people, experiences. But to feel gratitude for its own sake is much harder, for I haven't ever practiced it without connecting it to a thing, person, or experience. Perhaps it is in having

appreciation, she handed me a token for Aspiration, the only petal I had not yet visited.

Aspiration is yellow-orange-gold without the shine. I was so grateful to be there that I felt the colour on my skin, as though I were becoming that colour, the membranes, tissues, organs absorbing it becoming aspiration.

Over this circuit of 12 petals, I found a growing capacity to hold the colour of the room visually, with my eyes closed. I also came to deeply appreciate the focal piece of each room. When I had seen photos of them, they seemed like random 1950's art pieces. But as I moved through the rooms, I found that they tangibly represented the quality of the room and provided a launching place for a meditation on that quality. I experienced the room of Generosity twice, having visited that petal once before I began my pilgrimage. It was different and more powerful the second time, as the experience of one room built upon the other. In the end, I was both reluctant to stop, and clear that my experience was complete for the present.

As I contemplate this petal pilgrimage from the distance of a year later, I am surprised to look



Sincerity



Perseverance

progress towards the Divine. We like to measure progress, but each journey towards the divine is unique, so the measurement can only be oneself, and the mind, emotions, and physical may not understand the progress being made. Or they may claim the progress and divert it for other purposes. The room colour is a strong, red-orange salmon colour. The opposite colour, the colour of Sincerity, remained in my retina when I closed my eyes.

Here I began to notice the Gardens. One enters and exits the petal of Progress, if going straight out, between the gardens of Consciousness and Bliss, which were under construction. Bliss matches Receptivity and Consciousness matches Progress. An extension of the experience within the petal was woven into its connecting garden.

The entrance to Garden is between the gardens of Light and Life. Light is its garden. The red of Courage was softer than I anticipated — courage to step towards the light, to release the defending ego, to do what is asked by the Divine. In the face of chaos, courage. Is

A deep purple is the colour with Generosity, an area where I felt I had plenty of room to grow. It is linked to the garden of Power and is one of the attitudes towards humanity. Perhaps when I understand generosity fully, I will understand its appropriate link to power.

Equality was a deep purple-blue, drenching my being. Again the colour stayed true when I closed my eyes, and I wondered if this was a matter of getting used to the experience, or if something else was also changing. Wealth is the garden with Equality, and I found I was not truly equal about wealth. At the same time, there are so many aspects to equality — towards people and life experiences. To be generous truly, one must be equal. To really be good, one must be equal. To act with equality, therein lies peace.

Peace is a royal blue. Somehow there was nothing to be said. It just was.

A beautiful sky blue fills the room of Sincerity. It is petal number one, the foundation. This quality was the first which was stressed at the time I began learning about Integral Yoga. It is indispensable for making Progress, its garden.

gratitude simply towards the Divine that Harmony (its corresponding garden) emerges.

An intensely radiant yellow is Perseverance. Such joy in that yellow, and it seeped in. It was a bodily experience. Cells, what can you do with this yellow light? What needs perseverance in this form? No need to decide. Just take it in.

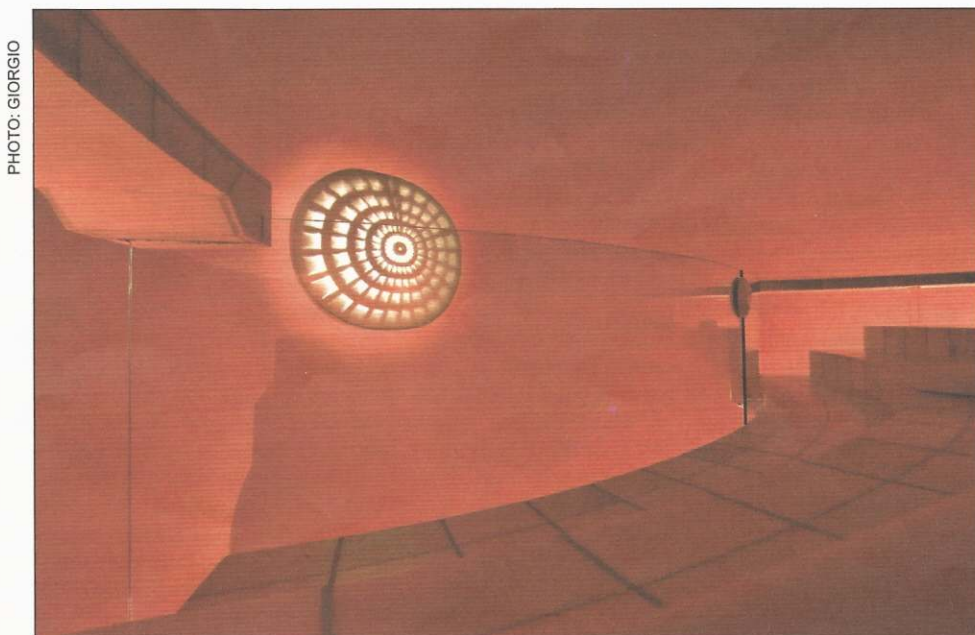
At this juncture, I was scheduled for a road trip, and so would miss Aspiration, the only remaining petal I had not visited. I realized that the thought of stopping was a bit wrenching. It was not a journey I was in a hurry to end. I had come to know by name some of the staff who graciously handle the many daily visitors to Matrimandir and I shared my dilemma and decision with them.

After a lovely trip to Thiruvananthapuram, I arrived at the Matrimandir gate a bit later than usual. A large group of Japanese tourists were already lined up to receive their tokens. The woman at the booth waved me and another woman forward before dealing with the tour group. To my surprise, delight, and deep

back and reflect that this year has been remarkably different for me in so many ways. Externally, I was given significantly more work to do, both at my regular job and as treasurer for AVI-USA when donations increased tenfold after the cyclone, and yet I felt prepared to do it all to the best of my ability, with little distress. At the same time, opportunities came that I had not particularly sought out, yet I was ready to act upon them. And my health was such that I missed no days of work during my teaching year, which is a first in my life. Without thinking about it, I seem to have taken some of the quality from each petal forward with me into my life, transforming my experiences and responses to what came my way.

For many years I thought of the petals as something less than the inner chamber. I now perceive that every part of Matrimandir and its gardens is an important piece of the Whole. What an amazing gift!

Mary Alexander



Progress

Planning the city: a new way forward?

During his visit, Dr. Doshi met with various work groups and individuals involved with activities relating to town planning. He also held two open meetings with the community. The main purpose of the visit was to see if the community could better harmonize its viewpoints and goals concerning town planning. This reflected Dr. Doshi's frustration as a planner that he couldn't get clear signals from the community concerning what kind of city it wanted and within what time-frame.

In the first community meeting, he began by describing how a professional town planner works. A client body gives the planner a particular brief. The brief will describe a particular vision and goals to be achieved and it will give guidelines as well as specifying constraints. Once the brief is clear, the planner will take it to his planning office, which is made up of professionals from different disciplines - architects, landscape designers, mobility specialists, social anthropologists, ecologists etc. as well as planners. This team will come up with a conceptual plan based upon the brief which will then be presented to the client and other interested parties. This concept may be accepted or modified, but once there is clarity at the concept level the planning team will begin by focussing on one sector. Taking into account factors like the topography, climate etc. they will then work out various proposals, starting at the macro and proceeding to the micro level. At each stage, these are presented to the client for feedback. And so it proceeds.

Dr. Doshi noted that in Auroville this hasn't happened. Why? Firstly, because he feels there is no clarity regarding what kind of city the community wants, so there is no clear brief or terms of reference. Secondly, even if there was clarity, there is no professional planning office to convert the vision into concrete proposals.

Regarding the first point, Dr. Doshi said that the Galaxy Plan has been there since the beginning of Auroville as a model for development, but he noted that our present living pattern was that of a village rather than a city. So do we prefer this? Alternatively, if we wanted something more urban, could we adopt the Galaxy Plan?

This evoked a number of responses. While nobody suggested that the

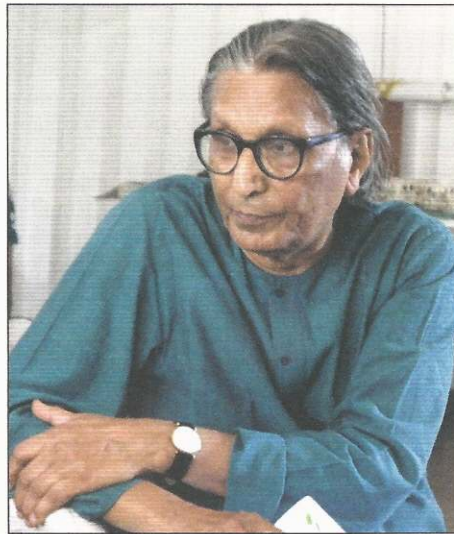
The eminent Indian architect, Dr. B.V. Doshi, is a member of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation. He is also Chairman of the Town Development Council (TDC), in which capacity he recently visited the community.

Galaxy Plan should be put aside, a number of people had reservations about the way that some Aurovilians wanted it materialised. "They want to follow it too literally rather than allowing it to develop organically," was one reaction. A water specialist noted the planners were "stuck in an old pattern. They would just like to transpose the Galaxy as a geometrical figure which has no relation to the geographic reality." He explained that the way they are attempting to translate the Galaxy into matter is flawed because ground realities - like topography, soil condition, water flow etc. - are being ignored.

Dr. Doshi responded that ground realities clearly have to be taken into account. However, he noted that much of the opposition to the Galaxy Plan was based upon people's imagination of it rather than a deep understanding. "You have never tried to explore Roger's Plan." He pointed out that it is very 'porous', there are many green spaces, and that the density decreases towards its edge, where it merges with the Greenbelt. Above all, as he sees it, "The strength of the plan is that it is not a rigid thing. At the ground level there is a lot of variation."

At this point a Greenbelter pointed out that the community had only agreed to the Master Plan (which is based upon the Galaxy model) to get government protection for the land, and on the understanding that the Master Plan would be interpreted flexibly. However, he believes that the planners have shown little flexibility. There are now plans to mark a right of way through a substantial portion of the Auroville forest for the ring road, even though this road never received full community approval. Why can't the planners be more flexible on its dimensions?

Dr. Doshi noted that in planning, the macro and the micro levels always go together, so while the status of special trees, for example, should be considered, planners should never lose sight of the overall structure; "the structure is the backbone of the city". Dr. Doshi considers that the form of the Galaxy model has a special energy, "it is a yantra", so while there can be some flexibility we should retain its basic proportions and dimensions: "These are not merely lines, they are



important." And who is to decide what changes will be made? "We can't have people saying, I like the Galaxy Plan but I am going to tell you how to do it. We should leave it to technically-qualified people to show us what they can do. At every stage, the relevant parties can be consulted, but we have to find a way to move forward."

One participant said she had hoped Dr. Doshi would find a way of bringing together the different views regarding the Galaxy Plan. And she mentioned a previous attempt at this, the 'Dreamcatchers' group, which she had found inspiring. "They tried to interact with every aspect of Roger's plan and came up with a different vision which I thought was a real synthesis."

Dr. Doshi answered that this was precisely the reason he had called these meetings; to initiate dialogue and find a common way forward so nobody feels alienated. "It's teamwork," said Dr. Doshi, "it's like a company in which everyone is a shareholder. At the same time, decisions have to be made, we have to move forward, so the directors who are performing an executive function need a clear mandate to do this. But they need a brief. You have to tell them what you want and draw up clear guidelines."

At this point an architect, while agreeing that Auroville should set up a specialised town planning office, emphasised that the office should have no authority to implement its own plans. It should be answerable to a client body set up by the Residents

Assembly. Dr. Doshi agreed. The Town Development Council should be the client body selected by the community and given a clear mandate by them. However, another architect clarified that, in her view, the Council on its own should not propose new ideas to the planners. Its responsibility should be to see that the planning office is working in line with the brief and policies embodied in a Master Plan approved by the community.

At this point, yet another architect made a practical proposal. "Our living patterns are way too scattered at present, so let us try to come up with a model of a different density more appropriate to a city. Let's plan what we are going to do in the next five years for a population of 5000." This was refined by a present member of the Town Development Council who suggested we come up with agreed planning priorities for the next three years and that these should be presented to the Governing Board at their next meeting in September.

So what did these meetings achieve? There seemed to be wide agreement on the need to establish a planning office staffed by specialists, and on empowering Dr. Doshi to head this office. There was also a new awareness of the need to explore the Galaxy Plan far more deeply than had hitherto been done.

But did the meetings heal old unresolved tensions, like those between 'planned' and 'organic' development or between participatory and 'top-down' decision-making? One participant was sure they had. "Your presence has helped cohesion. Now there is a feeling we want to go forward together." But this may have been too optimistic. For example, Dr. Doshi's dismissal of the Dreamcatchers' work as merely the work of "young architects" seemed disrespectful of the attempts of a very committed group of people to offer a new vision of the Galaxy Plan based upon synthesising different approaches.

Moreover, Dr. Doshi's remarks about the 'yantric' quality of the Galaxy Plan and the need to respect its proportions, coupled with his remark that when "people go to a sacred space they should have reverence and put their egos aside", may encourage those who simply want to translate it literally without respecting ground realities or the reservations of other members of the community. In addition, there still remains some unclarity concerning the respective roles and powers of the Residents Assembly and its 'client' body, the Town Development Council. Can the Council initiate new studies on its own or does it always have to refer back to the Residents Assembly? And can an unwieldy body like the Residents Assembly be expected to draw up clear guidelines for the planners?

At the same time, there was a certain feeling at the end of these meetings that something fundamental had shifted; that the city, however it may eventually look, is now very much part of our collective agenda and that there is a strong will to bring it into manifestation. There will surely be many roadblocks on the way. But the journey, at long last, seems to have begun.

Alan

Further work group meetings

In addition to meeting the community as a whole, Dr. Doshi also received presentations from various working groups and made recommendations. In his meeting with the TDC, he suggested they should define the structure of L'Avenir / TDC, including the roles of each team and team members and the task groups. He also noted that the layout of the Transit Lounge is good, and Manu should proceed further with the design of the project.

At another meeting, Dr. Doshi was presented with designs for new housing projects. His general comment regarding all these projects was they must show how they relate to their surroundings and how they provide services to the other buildings in the vicinity. He also noted that every building made in Auroville should be a model, should fully express, or attempt to express, something different.

Later, Gilles Boulicot made a presentation on water. He described our present water situation and then considered alternative/future scenarios, like multi-sourcing and the incorporation of the Matrimandir Lake into a proposed water management system. He proposed to launch a study of water shortage within Auroville and the surrounding villages; create a design for city surface water that is sustainable and reproducible; and launch a study to see how the Matrimandir could be refilled with rain water and act as a storage unit for the city. Dr. Doshi endorsed the need for such a study, and recommended that a cell of 4/5 people should take it up and report within 1.5 years. He felt that Michael Bonke's proposal for the lake is secondary and a detailed report needs to be presented on this.

Finally, Dr. Doshi met with the Infrastructure Group. Toine gave an overview of the current infrastructure situation which revealed that our infrastructure has developed in an unplanned, organic fashion but now can be upgraded following the line of the key roads. Regarding roads, the work is focusing on completing the Crown and radials but there is resistance from residents. The team would like to proceed in three phases of work. Firstly, laying markers to give the imprint of city, secondly, clearing and cleaning, keeping shade and only removing Work trees, and finally, removing all the trees necessary. Dr. Doshi recommended the Group should dialogue with residents, explaining what they are missing in infrastructure services. They should try not to stop the momentum of work but there is a need to resolve issues peacefully. If there is a house in the way, they must look at things differently and find alternatives.

Regarding the ICITI project which aims to connect Auroville and the surrounding villages to the outside world with low magnetic radiation, Dr. Doshi recommended a need for dialogue with the community but to go ahead wherever possible.

LETTER

Dear Auroville Today,

With reference to the article in your February, 2012 issue introducing Michael Bonke's proposal for the lake around Matrimandir, which includes providing it with desalinated water and an additional lake which would serve as a backup supply and provide electricity, I would like to point out the following:

With his proposal, Michael Bonke is taking the Lake as an end whereas it is a means to: 1) serve as an isolating zone between the Park of Unity (the Matrimandir Island) and the city centre and, 2) have water charged with subtle energy from Matrimandir and then provided to the residents. The second point is what Vastu as well as Feng-Shui experts would insist on and explains why, on 23.6.65, the Mother spoke to Satprem of having there reservoirs that would provide water to the residents, and why she insisted so much on running water.

Having missed this crucial point, Michael ends up proposing to create at huge cost a huge liability which would require an average of 265m³ of water every day (= 97,000 m³/year to replace evapo-transpiration losses alone - more being required to replace seepage losses) as long as the proposed lake exists. Then, in order to try and correct this initial error, he comes up with an extravagant scheme to produce water at great cost. And all this to create a stagnant lake - which is bad according to Vastu and Feng-Shui experts.

Roger rightly kept insisting that the Lake has to have a useful function in the city's water supply system. Indeed, it has to be an asset - not a liability. The way to make it an asset is to extend its outer watershed by dumping around it part of the earth extracted from it so that the system comprising the Island, the Lake, its outer watershed and a treatment plant feeds much more water into the city's drinking water supply system than would be required during drought years. Basic calculations prove that this is absolutely possible. Doing this would have the following advantages: 1) the lake would need neither desalination plant, nor a pipeline linking it to the beach, nor wind turbines, 2) not only would this system produce water, but it would allow the storage and treatment of surface water collected throughout the city area, which in turn would feed even more water into the city's drinking water system (this could even allow us to dispense altogether with the need for a desalination plant), 3) it would allow water energised by Matrimandir to circulate throughout the city and be provided to its residents, 4) it would reduce a lot the cost and nuisances of earth transportation by reducing the volume of earth to be dumped far away (this in turn would make it easier to find dumping sites for this earth, which is a major problem) and, 5) it would allow people to see the Lake while standing next to it on its northwest side (which would not be the case otherwise as they would be lower than the Lake's bank).

Gilles Guigan

This music breaks barriers

In early July, Prahlad Singh Tipanya and his troupe of Kabir singers and musicians held satsangs at SAWCHU in Bharat Nivas on successive evenings. We talked with Mita (who, along with Patrick Dubos, helped to organize the event) about Prahlad-ji and his music.

Tell us about Prahlad-ji and what has led up to this event.

Prahlad-ji is one of India's foremost interpreters of Kabir, the 15th Century poet-saint. He was awarded the Padma Shri last year, which is the fourth highest civilian honour in India. He sings in the Malwi tradition, and comes from Malwa in central India, in Madhya Pradesh. He has a great troupe with an amazing violinist, and his sons also play and sing second vocals. He often plays for audiences of five or six thousand people, so Auroville is a tiny audience compared to what he is used to. People travel for days to have a chance to listen to him.

Prahlad-ji first came to Auroville for the first Kabir Festival in 2008. It was a huge

she went out into the villages to discover the folk tradition of Kabir singing. There Shabnam met Prahlad-ji and from their meeting developed the Kabir Project, which includes books, CDs and films. Shabnam is also a wonderful translator for Prahladji, and has now started singing herself. During his performances he sings in Malwi, which is a dialect of Hindi, but he always gives incredible explanations of what each song is about, and either she or someone else will translate this. Unfortunately she will not be here for this visit.

For me, Prahlad-ji's interpretations of Kabir bring together everything that I have understood and felt about what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are all about, and why we are here on earth. There is a perfect resonance of their messages, and no incompatibility. For example, the music expresses the idea of going within and discovering who you are beneath all appearances, and the idea that the Divine is in everybody and everything. It is about opening up the heart to the Divine to have a direct relation with God, leaving aside institutionalized forms, especially the priesthood. There is a relentless message to discover the guru within

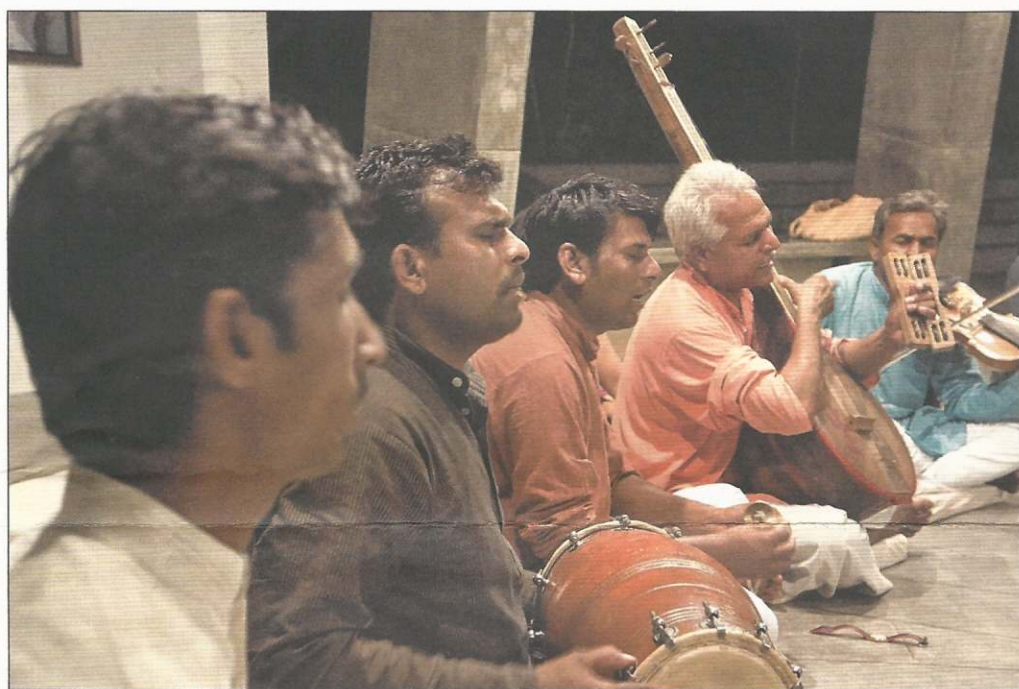
During the first Kabir Festival in 2008, in addition to the concerts, we also had the night *satsangs*. In villages around India they have these all-night sessions in which they sing. We had one of these sessions in SAWCHU. Some people came to this as antagonists, with rigid positions over certain issues we have in Auroville, and afterwards they actually smiled at each other. So that is the biggest thing that it brings: the sense that we are one. I also think it moves something in the heart, and in Auroville we tend to be more intellectual and caught up in the mind. This music breaks those barriers. For me it is a tool to go deeper within, and to continue on the path that we are here for, Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's yoga. It does it in a very beautiful and natural way.

After the first Kabir Festival, Prahlad-ji came back to Auroville in 2009 for a workshop in which he tried to teach us some of the songs. There were about 80 people who participated. Some Aurovilians also went to Bangalore for another Kabir Festival the same year. Then, in 2010, a few Aurovilians including Patrick and myself went to Malwa, Prahlad-ji's native place, for the first Malwa Kabir Yatra. The Yatra moves from one place to another, so every night there was a *satsang* in a different village, and everybody piled into a bus and went from one village to the next. It was a wholly different experience, living with the singers and musicians during this incredible 10 day trip, which was all about unity and breaking the barriers amongst human beings. Other Aurovilians went for the last Kabir Yatra in April 2011, and as a result of that, with a group of some 40 volunteers, we organised a major Kabir Festival in April this year in Auroville. A whole galaxy of performers sang Kabir, and more than 2000 people attended.

After the Festival in 2012, some of us Aurovilians decided that we should get together and learn the songs and keep the momentum going. We meet every Saturday at 3 pm in different houses, and there is a group of around 13-15 people. We learn the songs and their meanings through translations. During the first session we wrote out the text of the songs in phonetics, because everybody doesn't know the Hindi script. Satish, who was a volunteer at the April Kabir Festival and has studied Kabir, has been helping with the translations for these sessions. Then we sing the songs; it is not just an intellectual exercise, you have to sing! It is a wonderful experience to participate with a group in this beautiful poetry and music.

From an interview by Larry

(For more information on the Kabir Project, visit www.kabirproject.org.)



Prahlad-ji (2nd right) with his group

event, with films during the daytime and concerts at night. The main performers were Prahlad-ji and his team, and Mukhtiar Ali, a Mirasi folk singer from Rajasthan. That event came about thanks to Aurovilian Dharmesh and his friendship with Shabnam Virmani, the filmmaker and founder of the Kabir Project.

Shabnam has made two films about Prahlad-ji. After the big riots in Gujarat in the mid 90s, she was touched by the Kabir songs which often speak against Hindu-Muslim divisions as well as other human intolerances, so

oneself. There is also a strong idea of being rooted in the body, and controlling the five senses. There is intense *bhakti*, devotion, but there are also hard-hitting songs against exclusivity in religions and their narrowness and violence. It provokes a deep questioning about the insincerity that we have in ourselves. Sometimes he says things that are so strong, people even cry. At other times, it is fun and happiness and you have people dancing. The music is wonderful and really moves you.

What does it bring to Auroville?

On Friday 22nd June, Dianne Bowler (known to us as Dianna) left her body. She was 73. She had only recently been diagnosed with motor-neuron disease (ALS), a serious degenerative disorder. She had left Auroville earlier in the year to receive treatment in the U.K., which is where she passed away.

Dianna was always so full of life. She loved the simple things, like feeding the birds in her garden or delighting in the flowers in the local women's hair. In her relatively short time in Auroville, she made many friends and brightened up many lives. As one friend put it, "She came into Auroville like a bright spinning wind spirit, lighting everything on its way but departing too soon."

She also took up a bewildering number of activities. She gave English classes, led a writers' workshop, became part of a group to campaign for road safety, organized tea parties for the Brits, edited the SAIER periodical, and edited and published a book on how Aurovilians came to Auroville. In the latter book, she revealed something of why she and her husband, Norman, came to Auroville and what it meant to her.

"We are in our early seventies, and do not want to spend our remaining years in an old creation of a lifetime's habit and pref-



erences, very comfortable though they may be. We have a wonderful sense of involvement, energy and purpose here in Auroville. I feel as if I have been living under a stone for years and have now come into the light. This is the place I have been searching for all my life. We will now place ourselves in the Mother's care for the rest of our lives."

She also wrote that, "Living in Auroville I feel like a child

Saraswati on stone



PHOTO: IRENO

This painting, engraved on stone, is the first of a series of "the seven Heavenly Sisters, or the Rishi's wives". They are, as their creator Emanuele describes it, "an attempt to give form to the secret existence of the wives of the Rishis, the seers of Vedic times. The Rishi's wife is a very important presence and her role and action have been too often kept in the shadow." This piece shows the moment just before Saraswati, one of the 7 Heavenly Sisters, starts to play her sublime music.

The work is inspired by these words in *Savitri*:

For I, the woman, am the force of God,
He the eternal's delegate to man.
My will is greater than thy law, O Death;
My love is stronger than the bonds of Fate:
Our love is the heavenly seal of the Supreme.

(The painting, which is for sale, is being exhibited in Savitri Bhavan until the end of August. Prints can also be ordered. For more information, contact lele@auroville.org.in)

PASSING

Dianna

in a sweet shop", and it was this sense of continual wonder, curiosity and celebration that she brought to many of her articles in *Auroville Today*. As a writer she had a unique touch: light, frequently quirky (sometimes, it must be said, a touch too light and quirky for the rest of the team) but almost always life-affirming. However, when she detected injustices or lacunae in our community life, she didn't mince words. In her last article, for example, she highlighted the unpreparedness of our health services when it comes to taking care of old and sick people. Speaking from experience, she wrote, "The frightening reality is that there is nowhere in Auroville to go to be cared for. What a crazy situation!"

Dianna kept her sense of humour to the end. When I phoned her a short time before her passing she told me, laughing, that she had been lying in bed writing her obituary. "But only in my head, as my arms don't work anymore. It would have been good, though!"

We will miss her.

Alan

Dianna was cremated in Bristol, England, on 3rd July. The service was attended by her family as well as friends from the Auroville family.

News in brief

Aurovilians meet Prime Minister

A delegation from Auroville met with the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, at Raj Nivas, Puducherry, on 30th June 2012 during his recent visit to Puducherry. The Aurovilians conveyed their gratitude to India and his Government for the special tolerance and understanding towards Auroville, and he spoke very highly and with great reverence about Sri Aurobindo and the significance of Auroville. Dr. Singh said that the message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is in line with that of the great saints and seers of India, whose wisdom transcends races and boundaries. He spoke of the gratitude of India to all the people who have dedicated their lives to Auroville and said it was an honour for him to meet with some of them.

The Aurovilians invited him to come to Auroville and to visit the Matrimandir, but the Prime Minister said that it would not be possible on this visit. Regarding urgent issues, the Aurovilians brought up the issues of tax exemption and the pressing need to protect the land for the city and the green belt.

Survey of latest housing projects

L'Avenir drew up a questionnaire to find out from the residents what worked and what didn't in the latest housing projects, so as to enable better building practices in Auroville. 34 people from the five residential communities of Luminosity, Maitreye, Arati 3, Surrender and Realization answered the questionnaire. Overall, the survey tells us that people are satisfied with unit size, lighting and circulation and social spaces. Issues considered 'average' are functionality, acoustics, and ease of maintenance. People were mostly dissatisfied with plumbing, contractor, contractor response to warranty issues and building finishes.

Ashram historian gets 1-yr visa extension

Many Aurovilians who had read and appreciated the book, "The Lives of Sri Aurobindo", were pleased that the author, Peter Heehs, was granted a one year extension to his visa by the Home Minister, P Chidambaram, overruling the recommendation of ministry and immigration officers.

Railway routing

We reported in a previous issue that two routes for a railway to connect Puducherry with Chennai are being considered by the authorities, one to the west of Auroville and one passing through to the east. Recently the railway authorities, L'Avenir and the Auroville Foundation met together, visited sites and are now looking at the routing of the line.

Discussing collective priorities

A General Meeting was held at which the Residents Assembly Service invited the community to discuss its collective values and priorities. In particular, they wanted to know what we can agree on with regards to future directions for the community, what the most important areas in need of attention are, and what values we want to develop.

Selection proposal approved

The Study Group's proposal for the selection process for the next L'Avenir d'Auroville has been ratified by the Residents Assembly. The Residents Assembly Service has now organized the formation of a Selection Committee and collected nomination forms for new members of L'Avenir.

Biochar

The huge biomass waste created by cyclone Thane is a problem. Much effort has been expended by the cyclone response team and others to ensure its proper disposal. One such initiative was started by EcoPro. It wants to utilize this biomass for the creation of biochar (charcoal



Cyclone timber being stored near Matrimandir

produced from biomass) and highly productive Terra Preta soils, as well as for the generation of biomass energy.

Council concerns

The Council points out that they have been dealing mainly with complaints related to territory issues: extension of fences leading to disputes among Aurovilians, and non-authorized constructions on Auroville lands or by Aurovilians on their family land inside the Master Plan area. They are concerned that increasingly establishing oneself and one's family as landowners has become in Auroville a priority, whatever the consequences for the project of Auroville.

Auroville open again

The Auroville Council had a meeting with new members of the Entry Service who will open for new applications on the 16th of July. One of the suggestions was to establish a more direct line of communication regarding house sitting between the Housing Group and the Entry Service. The latter will inform Housing when someone is in a Pre-Newcomer situation. For house sitting (of a longer than 3 months term) it is recommended that Newcomers or Pre-Newcomers are given priority when it comes to house-sitting as there is still a shortage of housing specially for them.

Passing of Govindaswamy

Govindaswamy, a highly respected elder, worked for Auroville for more than 40 years. He supervised teams which dug the foundations of many buildings as well as trenches for electrical and telephone lines. He passed away peacefully at his residence in Sanjeevinagar on May 28th.

New Era Secondary School results

Class X & XII students of New Era Secondary School, Aspiration, have done well in the recently concluded CBSE Examination. Out of the 14 students who appeared in the Class X examination, all passed and qualified for higher studies and out of 10 students in Class XII, 9 of them came out in flying colours resulting in 90 % success.

News from Future School

After 4 years of fund-raising events and other efforts, we have finally managed to finish our new study lab/library! We send out our heartfelt thanks to all who helped us in this effort – financially, with in-kind donations, and with supportive thoughts, words and prayers. Presently, we are in the process of building an extension to the study lab, which will house a multi-purpose hall plus 4 large classrooms to accommodate the very large class sizes we are

now receiving each year (18 +). This is being constructed with funds from Auroville's annual grant from the Government of India, for which we are grateful.

16 students left the School this year. Of these, 8 will attend universities in India and abroad, 3 students will begin apprenticeship programmes in France and Germany, and 5 students have chosen to stay in Auroville for the time being and are getting involved in various Auroville projects and work areas.

Electricity subsidy reduced

As electricity rates are rising, the bi-monthly electricity subsidy has been reduced from 250 units to 200 units per person. Currently 1/3 of Aurovilians do not use the total subsidy.

Town Development Council/L'Avenir report

The TDC/L'Avenir recently made a report of its activities to the Governing Board. Among other things they mentioned they had made a layout for the Residential Zone (sectors 1 and 2) which foresees a population of 5,000 people. This had been prepared taking into consideration the foot-print of the Galaxy and also the physical ground realities, the morphology of the land and the water catchment area. They have also been taking steps to protect the Green Belt from unwanted development. These include, preparing Green Belt Land Use Regulations; commissioning a survey of the existing land use in the Green Belt, including land not owned by Auroville; and drawing up a working paper for a regional plan to be presented to the local authorities. The aim is to get a regional plan approved by the local authorities to safeguard the Green Belt.

Meanwhile, there are three new projects in the International Zone financed by a Government of India grant: the Center for Indian Studies, the Tamil Heritage Center, and the Auroville Language Lab. One more project, Cité Universitaire (a student hostel for 150 people), has been approved for site permission. A plan for the International Zone was approved in 2009 by L'Avenir, but it is felt that some review is required in order to keep consideration of certain ground realities, and to reassess the concept and the space for the national pavilions in order to give more space for institutional development and centres of excellence in the area.

The TDC is also studying the possibility of developing a collection/storage/treatment system of surface water – one of whose features will be a Lake around Matrimandir and its gardens (as envisioned by The Mother). Infrastructural work for an interconnected water distribution system in the Residential and Industrial Zones has been started using funds from the Government of India.

More trees cut

The cutting of trees along the Vikas radial has caused further controversy. L'Avenir explained that the trees were cut to excavate trenches for a high tension cable and a water pipe. They acknowledged, however, that a breakdown in communication with the contractor carrying out the work had resulted in more trees being cut than originally intended.

Protection and development of International Zone land

A group of Aurovilians concerned about the threat of pollution and encroachment in the International Zone has started to explore solutions to remedy this. The group met with the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Mr Balabaskar, and with Mr Srinivasmurthy and explored together various solutions. The next day, the group met members of L'Avenir d'Auroville and came up with an action plan involving, amongst other things, surveying the land to identify more precisely the ground realities; starting the installation of the first section of the water infrastructure along the loop road; developing temporary farming wherever possible in the International Zone; and studying the possibilities of temporary and non-temporary housing for volunteers and Aurovilian caretakers in the area.

AVArtService

It has been almost 2 years since the Integral Sustainability Platform was held in Auroville with the aim to develop a platform for collaborative planning. Since then, some Aurovilians who participated in the discussions on 'Culture' have been meeting regularly to take the proposals forward. This group, along with others who have joined, propose to initiate a service for artists called AVArtService. AVArtService wants to be an arena for events that bring together different people; to foster unity between people through artistic means; to nourish individual experiments and group efforts; and to create platforms for artistic research and creation.

Women's enterprise development workshop

The Tamil Nadu Cooperation for Development of Women (TNCDW) has requested Auroville Integral Rural Development to organise a three-day workshop on "Product Development, Design and Packing" in Auroville for their staff involved in women's enterprise development programmes.

Inner Chamber temporarily closed

Due to necessary carpet cleaning and maintenance work in the Inner Chamber, the Matrimandir was closed for one week in late July.

Auroville website survey

A recent survey reveals that the Auroville website receives 90,000 unique 'hits' per month. However, 76% of the people accessing the website leave it again within 30 seconds. Of the remainder, 38.9% want to know more about the vision of Auroville and 29.4% want information relating to either visiting or joining Auroville. Only 6.9% access the site because they are considering making a donation or supporting Auroville in some other way.

Rooftop solar projects

Recently, a 10 kW rooftop solar photovoltaic plant was commissioned at Maroma by Sunlit Future. It is connected to the buildings' main electrical distribution board and is capable of exporting to the TNEB grid. The next grid interactive rooftop projects in the pipeline are the Auroville Foundation office (15 kW) and the Town Hall (10 kW). The bottom line is that renewable energy, including rooftop solar, is now mainstream.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Subscription rates (including postage):

- ◆ One year subscription rates: India Rs. 450; other countries Rs. 2,000 equivalent.
- ◆ Two year subscription rate: India Rs. 800, other countries Rs. 3,700 equivalent. Those for whom the subscription rate is an obstacle are invited to contact *Auroville Today* information on reduced rates. *Auroville Today* does not receive any funds from Auroville. Your subscription (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) helps us to continue this work.

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1. **Through our website:** Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through www.auroville.com/auroville-today
2. **By sending your contribution directly to Auroville Today:** Surrender, Auroville 605 101, Tamil Nadu, India. Cheques sent directly to *Auroville Today* should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash.

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