RITAM
A bi-annual journal of material and spiritual researches in Auroville

Our aim:

- This is a journal under SAIIER connecting the various units under its umbrella, with the focus on education and other related areas of research.

- The purpose is to create a space where we express and share our work in Auroville and also invite others to share their perceptions with a view to look at where we stand with reference to the ideal.

- It will publish articles, interviews, etc. which are relevant to the Charter of Auroville, both from people in Auroville as well as those from elsewhere.

- This journal is for both Aurovilians as well as others who are looking to Auroville for pioneering work in many fields.

- The goal is to understand better the spirit of Auroville and in that context what we are doing and what further we can do.
Dear readers,

We look forward to your suggestions and comments. We would especially like to know whether you would want to continue to receive the journal by regular mail. All issues would also be up on the web at http://www.auroville.org/index/ritam.htm.

If you are comfortable reading it there, we need not send you a hard copy. If you would like us to send a copy to others who may be interested in receiving one, do let us know. For the moment, we are not putting a subscription price.

Please email us at saiier@auroville.org.in with your views and for any other information. We hope you enjoy this issue!

Editor

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Dianna

Dianne Bowler, a member of the Ritam Editorial Team, passed away in 2012 in her native country, Britain. In her memory we share here an extract from the tribute published in the monthly journal Auroville Today, to which she was a regular contributor.

On Friday 22nd June, Dianne Bowler (known in Auroville 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 at the end of March 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, helped to edit the SAIIER periodical Ritam, 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 preferences, 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.”

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

Alan
Meenakshi’s poems on nature, love and friendship are as meaningful as her poems on the miseries of the downtrodden, on changing values, and anger at disharmony. Throughout her poetry, whether they are feminist poems or songs of personal relationships, runs a universality that makes her readers relate instantly to her.

Initially, Meenakshi’s poetry was modelled on that of the Sangam poets whose poems tend to be cryptic and mostly descriptive of nature. The Tamil Sangam Age, which is said to have occurred between 300 BC and 200 AD, could be called the ‘age of naturalism’. According to Dr. A.K. Ramanujam, Sangam poets’ attention to ‘object’ is not to create the ‘object’ of the imagist, but the object as enacting human experience; poetry of objects is always a part of the human perception of self and others.

Later, Meenakshi’s interaction with people and places outside her familiar circle made her write poems of revolt against situations. Then came poems on social issues, women, children, and war. The next phase was when her destiny took her to Auroville and later on to other countries in the West, widening her horizons. Now she says: “I don’t claim any more ‘it’s my poem’. I just capture something in words that others receive in other ways. Now my poetry is ‘naked poetry’. It comes directly from something deep within.”

She does away with frills and ornamentation. Whether she is talking about a flower or a brook, a bird or an animal, an artisan or a politician, natural or manmade destruction, there is only truth in her words. And almost always, the poems project her keen sensitivity, culminating in the yoga of her private inner self with the universe.

Whether oppressed labourers or artists creating fabrics, the empathy Meenakshi feels for them is very real.

"All we know are holed-rags, which the sun pierces through, unmatched footwear, swinging scaffolds with missing teeth. We come swaying, bathed in brick sweat and the mason’s propitiating chants."

Raising the women construction workers to the status of goddesses being propitiated, sort of lightens the melancholy. Our hearts go out to the artistic weavers as we join in the poet’s lament against insensitive consumers:

“…the beauty of the thread on the handloom, the one who created it, who thinks of him?” (Meenakshi, Kavithaigal, Kavya, Chennai)

As one who has always believed in non-violence, Meenakshi becomes a confirmed pacifist as an Aurovilian. Her cry for peace is very clear. She wants harmony in nature as well as in the world of humans. An injured sparrow or a bird dressed for the table distresses her as much as war among nations and nuclear experiments do. What will be left of man she wonders, as she mourns in “Sobbing of an Unknown Woman”.

“I’m yet unmarried, I’ve no friends to prop my shoulder, no baby at my hip, none to send to battlefield, what shall I offer this sure death seeking a red-prey?” (Yutha Geetham).

She is an idealist at heart. She wants the country to have “a scholar barber to shave off the prickles, pricking the face of life, a fiery washerman, to bleach the man in society, floating in a mire of swarming miseries. A miracle scavenger this very
day, aglow within, to scoop and bury, the dark clogged waste within and without.”

Meenakshi’s life itself is a poem. She lives in the Auroville Matrimandir Nursery Garden, surrounded by 12 acres of lush beauty. Her life with people from all over the world in Auroville is her spiritual journey. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, she says, have brought a new dimension into her life. Her metaphysical leanings are very evident in poems like “Space Everywhere…”

“In an immense space, the smaller space of my house, in it my body, within it more space, in space, ecstatic light’s eternal dance.”

Meenakshi is very sure what she wants her poems to do. “My fiery poems, not to make songs for the skier, but to be salves for injured hearts.”

Meenakshi has the unique distinction of being the only contemporary Tamil poet of the 20th century to be included in World Poetry, An Anthology of Verses from Antiquity to Our Time, published by W. W. Norton, New York, 1998. This volume has “works of only the highest intrinsic quality.” Her poem “If hot flowers come to the street” was chosen and has also found a place in other anthologies edited by Oxford University Press. The Penguin Anthology of Contemporary Indian Women Poets also contains two of Meenakshi’s poems.

**Meenakshi, the Woman**

I come from Virudhunagar near Madurai and did my BSC Home Science, then M.A in Social Work. I have always loved serving people so when I graduated I worked in city slums, rural communities and got a lot of experience in dealing with the under privileged.

I heard of Auroville when I discovered they were looking for a qualified volunteer who could be a link between Auroville and the local villages. I arrived here in 1976 on February 21st but was very surprised to find that there was nothing much here. There was only a huge pit in the centre of the land with steel bars sticking out, but when I met Ruud Lohman I was very inspired by him. I immediately knew I was in the right place. Everyone was extremely helpful, “Take this, take that” they all said and put me in the Matrimandir Camp. Also, the very first man I met in the worker’s camp was a very tall Dutch man called Toine. Two years later we married. We lived in the Matrimandir Nursery and have been there ever since.

Ruur introduced me to the villagers who at that time were mostly illiterate and under employed. I would not say they were in a state of utter poverty; they were very simple, and I think they were quite content with their way of life, but the children were neglected and suffered from malnutrition. The village youth had no idea how to spend their free time so we started a Youth Club and I tried to help them with their further learning and life education. I remember well that on my very first day in Kulkalayam as a development officer of the Tamil Fund for Rural Development I had to translate a big argument. At that time each village was its own democratic entity with its panchayat leadership. They were very open to the Western people to come and settle here and build a new city on their doorstep. The temple was the centre of each village where festivals and meetings took place. They were very impressed that the westerners were building a temple to the Mother Goddess in the centre of their town, just like them. They called it “Amma koil.”

I was very impressed with the people from abroad, the white people who had come to live amongst us. They lived an extremely simple life and were very hard working. They wore simple clothes and used herbs for medicine, ate our South Indian food and apart from the colour of their skin seemed little different from the villagers. A Canadian woman, Janet, began a small unit where the village women learned to do crochet and knitting and were able to earn an additional income for their families.

About six years before I arrived in Auroville, I was taken to the Mother’s Balcony Darshan. I
I did not know what was happening but was very surprised by the crowds of people who all stood in absolute silence. All I could hear was everyone breathing. Then a little bird-like figure came out on the balcony and I felt two blue eyes piercing me, embracing me and tossing me about on blue waves. I fell on the ground and spent the next three days in Ashram hospital in a trance with a “spiritual fever.” It was explained to me later that I had experienced Darshan by the Mother touching all my chakras. Whenever I see Her picture I say “I know her,” as that was my direct experience and it has always stayed with me.

For the last five years we have organized a ten-day Children’s Annual Book Fair in Auroville which is visited by around three to five thousand children. I am now known as the “Book Akka” and am very satisfied as it has given a great impulse to reading that the children do not get at most schools, and definitely not in their homes. The children tell me they are putting money in their piggy banks so they will be able to buy a book next year and that gives me great satisfaction. There is not yet the tradition of individual book reading in rural India. We have always had a very traditional, storytelling society with oral culture and the people love to talk with each other instead of burying their nose in a book. Things are changing very quickly as they now watch a lot of television.

Now I am spending more time with the next generation and visit the local village schools and colleges. I would like to interview them and record their life journeys so others may share their hardships and visions. I spend time listening to them and many of them are able to confide in me which is very good for them. I try to give them a shoulder to lean on and listen to them. They all have their story and it comes from a deep shared past. They are strongly rooted in their culture and are moulded by its beliefs and traditions. When I was younger I reacted a lot, but now I have learned to know how much I can take in, how much I can keep, and how much I can give out. I feel as if these everyday experiences are added to the cells of my body.

I was a born poet! Before I could read or write I used to make up poems and recite and throw them around in my head. Ever since I have been in Auroville I have lived in this beautiful Nursery garden and I spontaneously write of the natural elements and the flowers and colours that surround me. I write only in Tamil and have one book that is bi-lingual: Marupayanam (Another Journey). I have completed eight books of poetry but my dream is to write a mature novel. It will be called something like “How my soul travelled” but so far I have only done the first chapter! Poetry flows easily for me, but the novel is a very different medium. I have done a few short stories and am the co-author of Sri Aurobindo’s Contribution to Tamil Literature, a research book of essays. Many people do not know that Sri Aurobindo translated Tamil poetry into English in association with Kavi Subramania Bharati.

My poetry is everywhere around me. Everyone is a story teller here. I have enriching experiences every day; my pot will never run dry. My dream is to realize the City of Auroville where there will be a universal embracing of the Tamil cultural, heritage and language. This is the history of this land and we are part of it. This is the land of the Siddhas and maybe this is why Mother chose this part of the earth to place Auroville. I think about that a lot and would like to do some research on it one day.

We now have a well established Tamil Heritage Centre in Bharat Nivas campus here. Its motto is ‘All are our habitats, All are our kith & kin’ an ancient voice from the Sangam Era. Auroville is known on the Tamil map with its literary associations. I am a member of Sahitya Akademi Tamil Advisory Board which gives me lot of opportunity to connect Auroville with great creative writers, poets, academicians, journalists, media persons, artists and scholars. They help in bringing Auroville closer to Tamilnadu and India, South East Asia and the wider world at large. In October 2011 I was in Singapore reading my poems to the members of the Poetry Society. It was a great moment of love and joy.

1 Tamil mystic poets.
The Fortress and the Temple

By Meenakshi

This fortress, built
By a king, is today
But a dream’s dark shadow
On the ground.
His love gift and palace
Are now merely
Ragged hives.

In the broken stone,
Parched grass,
Thorn bush cover and
In the ashen white
Of burnt bamboo,
Beauty in ruins.

A snake’s moulted skin
In the dance hall.
Is this cold wind
The tinkling of anklets?

At the edge of the pathway
To the headless spire,
In the water channel
Down the stone steps,
A nagalinga1 petal’s coolness:
Transcending Time’s
Capers, Sivam has
Enshrined itself!

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1 Published in the magazine Indian Literature, translated by N.Kalyan Ram
2 Nagalinga: flowers of the cannonball tree, with petals shaped like a snake with its hood raised and stamen in the form of a lingam, incarnation of Lord Shiva.

In February 2011 Kaviko Dr. Abdul Rahman Award for the best poet of 2010 was conferred on Meenakshi. Dr. Abdul Rahman, a leading senior Tamil poet and a great scholar, is also the Chairman of Wakf Board of Tamilnadu (Islamic Education). He presided over the function. Sri Ponnambala Adigalar, the head of a traditional Tamil Saiva mutt and a Hindu spiritual centre at Kundrakudi near Madurai, presented the Kaviko (Queen of Poetry) award. Dr. Sirpi Balasubramaniam, a senior poet and Convener of Sahitya Akademi, felicitated the awardee. The function was well attended by people of Vaniyampadi in Vellore Dist. It was a unique celebration of Tamil language beyond religious faiths in a rural-urban setting, where one could feel real human unity!
There are people who have a pretty little theory like that, which I have often heard; they say that one’s vital should never be repressed, it must be allowed to do all it wants, it will get tired and be cured! This is the height of stupidity! First, because the vital by its very nature is never satisfied, and if a certain kind of activity becomes insipid, it will double the dose: if its stupidities bore it, it will increase it stupidities and its excesses, and if that tires it, as soon as it has rested it will start again. For it will not be changed. Others say that if you sit upon your vital it will be suppressed and, one day, it will shoot up like a steam-jet … and this is true. Hence, to repress the vital is not a solution. To let it do what it likes is not a solution either, and generally this brings on fairly serious disorders. There must be a third solution.

To aspire that the light from above may come and purify it?

Obviously, but the problem remains. You aspire for a change, perhaps for a specific change; but the answer to your aspiration will not come immediately and in the meantime your nature will resist. Things happen like this: at a given moment the nature seems to have yielded and you think you have got the desired result. Your aspiration diminishes in intensity because you think you have the desired result. But the other fellow, who is very cunning and is waiting quietly in his corner, when you are off your guard, he springs up like a jack-in-box, and then you must begin all over again.

But if one can tear out completely the root of the thing?

Ah! One must not be so sure of that. I have known people who wanted to save the world by reducing it so much that there was no longer a world left! This is the ascetic way – you want to do away with the problem by doing away with the possibility of the problem. But this will never change anything.

No, there is a method – a sure one – but your method must be very clear-sighted and you must have a wide-awake consciousness of your person and of what goes on there and the way in which things happen. Let us take the instance of a person subject to outbursts of rage and violence. According to one method he would be told: “Get as angry as you like, you will suffer the consequences of your anger and this will cure you.” This could be discussed. According to another method he would be told: “Sit upon your anger and it will disappear.” This too could be discussed. In any case, you will have to sit upon it all the time, for if ever you should get up for a minute you will see immediately what happens! Then, what is to be done?

You must become more and more conscious. You must observe how the thing happens, by what road the danger approaches, and stand in the way before it can take hold of you. If you want to cure yourself of a defect or a difficulty, there is but one method: to be perfectly vigilant, to have a very alert and vigilant consciousness. First you must see very clearly what you want to do. You must not hesitate, be full of doubt and say, “Is it good to do this or not, does this come into the synthesis or should it not come in?” You will see that if you trust your mind, it will always shuttle back and forth: it vacillates all the time.
If you take a decision it will put before you all the arguments to show you that your decision is not good, and you will be tossed between the “yes” and “no”, the black and white, and will arrive at nothing. Hence, first, you must know exactly what you want – know, not mentally, but through concentration, through aspiration and a very conscious will. That is the important point. Afterwards, gradually, by observation, by a sustained vigilance, you must realise a sort of method which will be personal to you – it is useless to convince others to adopt the same method as yours, for that won’t succeed. Everyone must find his own method, everyone must have his own method, and to the extent you put into practice your method, it will become clearer and clearer, more and more precise. You can correct a certain point, make clear another, etc. So, you start working…. For a while, all will go well. Then, one day, you will find yourself facing an insurmountable difficulty and will tell yourself, “I have done all that and here is everything as bad as before!” Then, in this case, you must, through a yet more sustained concentration, open an inner door in you and bring into this movement a force which was not there formerly, a state of consciousness which was not there before. And there, there will be a power, when your own personal power will be exhausted and no longer effective. When the personal power runs out ordinary people say, “That’s good, I can no longer do anything, it is finished.” But I tell you that when you find yourself before this wall, it is the beginning of something new. By an obstinate concentration, you must pass over to the other side of the wall and there you will find a new knowledge, a new force, a new power, a new help, and you will be able to work out a new system, a new method which surely will take you very far.

Collected Works of The Mother (CWM) Vol.4 pp 178-181

Obeying the Divine Will

If everybody expressed the divine Will, there would be no conflict any longer, anywhere, all would be in harmony. That is what one tries to do, but it is not very easy.

There are four conditions for knowing the divine Will:

The first essential condition: an absolute sincerity.

Second: To overcome desires and preferences.

Third: To silence the mind and listen.

Fourth: To obey immediately when you receive the order.

If you persist you will perceive the divine Will more and more clearly. But even before you know what it is, you can make an offering of your own will and you will see that all circumstances will be so arranged as to make you do the right thing.

CWM 4:208.
Interview with Georges Van Vrekhem

by Paola De Paolis

This interview took place in July 2012, one month before Georges’ departure on August 31. It was published, in slightly shortened form, in the Italian bimonthly review Oltre Confine, n.7 Sept.-Oct. 2012, along with a long article on Sri Aurobindo and a selection of excerpts from his writings by Paola De Paolis. Here it is given in its entirety.

Georges, can you tell us how you discovered Sri Aurobindo?

I discovered Sri Aurobindo in 1964 through L’Aventure de la Conscience by Satprem. This book had just been published in France and I saw a copy in the window of a bookshop in Ghent, where I was living. At the time I was not at all interested in such things as religion or spirituality despite having been raised in the Catholic faith, and India and things Indian were still farther from my mind. Still, amazingly, ‘something’ told me to buy that book. It was late in the evening, on my way home from the cinema, so the first thing I did the next morning was to buy that book. When later in the day I cut it open – many French books were still bound that way – I read the quotation from Sri Aurobindo “I become what I see in myself. All that thought suggests to me I can do; all that thought reveals in me, I can become. This should be man’s unshakable faith in himself, because God dwells in him.”¹ which is the motto of the book – and something happened: I felt a pleasant force entering the top of my head. Strange to say, I read most of the book, which is still in my possession, but never finished it. My life was changed at the moment of reading that quotation.

How did you arrive at the decision to move to India, in 1970, to live, at the beginning, at the Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram in Pondicherry? There you met the Mother.

Your personal memory of her?

I was absolutely alone with my discovery. I read more books about yoga, of course, and faithfully practised, in the small room where I was staying, four fundamental asanas, with wonderful results. I also meditated, even after coming home in the middle of the night, for at that time I was the artistic manager of a professional theatre and also worked as a journalist for the printed press and the radio. But in those years yoga was still an uncommon topic. Two times I tried to talk about what was occupying me intimately, one time to a theatre director and another time to a decorator. Both times the result was a loud, sneering burst of laughter. I travelled to India without telling anybody what had become the aim of my life, and without anybody helping or guiding me. All guidance came from inside.

I actually came to India for Auroville, about which I had read an article in the review Planète. In my heart I have always been an Aurovilian; my motto has been throughout my life nihil humanum a me alienum puto². But I knew hardly anything about the Ashram and Auroville – I even did not know whether the Mother was still alive. I arrived in Pondicherry on 18 January 1970, two years after the founding of Auroville. I must say that I would have been unable to stay and work then on that desolate, sun baked land. That must have been why the Mother kept me in Pondicherry for eight years, in the Ashram. I had the privilege of meeting her six times personally, but I also count the darshans as personal meetings, for the Mother has said that on those occasions too she sees everybody individually. And when at the end of the darshan, after the Mother slowly retired again in her room and the crowds dispersed, I still felt the Power so strongly in my chakras that I could hardly move to go and stand discretely in some doorway.

¹ Thoughts and Glimpses, SABCL 16:378
² I think that nothing human is foreign to me.
I was rather confused when I was to meet the Mother for the first time. How does one behave in the presence of such a Being? Does one stand, does one kneel? And she had written on the back of my letter to her, asking for the meeting, that it would be _une entrevue silencieuse_\(^1\), which made it still more mysterious. So when her attendant Champaklal called my name and I entered the Mother’s room with my flowers, the first thing I saw was that thin arm of hers resting on her chair (she was then 92). Then I stepped in front of her ... and then I do not know anything any more, I was completely gone – until she called me back with her sweet smile. I must have recognized her there, and I suppose she gave me everything I would need in the future. And when I came down from her room and left the Ashram, that Force worked so much in my heart and my body that it almost felt heavy, for hours.

**And your experience at the Ashram?**

Initially it was not easy to live in the Ashram, for it was such a different world from the one I had left as the artistic manager of a professional theatre. I was totally ignorant, not only of the Ashram life but also of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s teaching. Moreover, when I asked the Mother for a job, she put me with the children as their sports coach. I still remember walking for the first time from the bus into the playground while holding on each side the tiny hand of a six-year old. With hindsight, I must say that those years in the Ashram have been both formative and informative for me. I lived the Ashram life, ate in the dining room, went to the meditations and the talks, lived through the days of the passing of the Mother .... And I saw all those Ashramites from nearby, about some of the better-known I would write later on. I also experienced the bright and less bright sides of life in a big community, the dedication of some and the hypocrisy of others. Those years were an invaluable part of my own spiritual education.

**What pushed you to leave the Ashram in 1978, and move to Auroville?**

I knew many Aurovilians in two ways: as a guide of visitors from all over the world to Auroville, and as an astrologer whom Aurovilians came to consult. Whenever I had a free afternoon, I would take my cycle and go to visit some Aurovilians in their huts or brand-new houses. Then, one day, when calculating a horoscope, a voice suddenly told me to go and live in Auroville. In India this is called an _adesh_. When one is given an adesh, one cannot refuse without putting the destiny of one’s soul at stake. I obeyed immediately, but it was painful, for my Indian partner wanted to remain in the Ashram, where she still is. After all those years we are still together. Moreover, this was 1978, the difficult time of the controversy between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society. I went to live in a hut with a roof of palm leaves, and got acquainted with snakes, scorpions, bats, rats and mice, with the blistering heat and the pouring rain.

**What was the atmosphere like in Auroville at that time? What do you see changed today?**

When I went to live there the atmosphere in Auroville was one of crisis. The Aurovilians wanted to become independent from the Sri Aurobindo Society which had turned out to be quite authoritarian. In my opinion, the separation of Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society was a necessity. The Auroville of today is completely different, as an atmosphere and as a way of life. The Aurovilians have remained faithful to their ideal even in the most trying circumstances. Auroville has been taken over by the Government of India; the villages on its territory are being integrated in its life; the number of the inhabitants keeps (slowly) growing. And the Matrimandir has been built and finished. If one knows how much importance the Mother gave to the Matrimandir, then this fact alone justifies all the trials and all the labour. Auroville exists. Auroville has become possible only thanks to a very powerful occult protection, for it was such a vulnerable undertaking. Problems, conflicts, controversies, disagreements …? Yes, time and again. But Auroville represents a humanity that has lost all

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\(^1\) a silent interview
orientation and where everything seems to hang by a thread. Of the present global situation there is only one coherent interpretation, that of Sri Aurobindo – which is the basis of Auroville.

Has Auroville brought something new to your previous experience?

Auroville, and my life in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, has changed me so much that on my visits to Europe I am hardly able to talk about my experience. Everything is new, and there is so little interest there for this kind of thing, even among people who think that they are open-minded and up-to-date. Most conversations consist mainly of platitudes and comments on the latest news. In most cases spiritual experiences are still out of reach of the Western mind, though there are more and more exceptions.

According to you, is Auroville fully embodying its role, today? The Mother said that this experiment had to help to avoid a third world war. What are now the greatest difficulties for this collective experiment and, on the other side, its greatest achievements?

The Mother has indeed said that, and many more things that are amazing at first sight. But it is difficult to comment on such things in a few sentences. If one says that Jesus of Nazareth is the son of God and that he incarnated to redeem humanity, people who never heard of Christianity would probably react with unbelief and ridicule. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were (are) Avatars, whose mission was to lay the foundations of a decisive step forward in the evolution, from homo sapiens to a supramental being, homo supramentalis. Hindus have no problem with the concept of the Avatar and with the fact that the successive Avatars in human history have incarnated to make the evolution possible. In the West, however, Christianity knows only one Avatar, Jesus Christ, and to non-Christians the Avatar-concept is pure fancy.

The Ashram and Auroville were and are instruments to accomplish the Aurobindonian aim – as are all people wherever in the world who long and work for a better tomorrow. The transformation of the human species is a complex process that was to be invented through the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This process is not terminated and continues, also in Auroville; in its complexity it requires an unusual faith, patience and dedication. Yet in Auroville, as elsewhere at the time of great changes in history, there are people who become impatient, step off the path, or become critical and disillusioned. Such phenomena are current in all spiritual disciplines. But there are also the ones whose faith stands up to all ordeals. As Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga is not a religion, and therefore has no creed or uniform prayer book, each individual who has started on the way has the interior Guide as his or her only source of inspiration. It is this interior Guide, by most ‘Aurobindonians’ identified with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who leads the life of the aspirant, and brings into his path what he needs.

Why Sri Aurobindo and the Mother said certain things, and wanted certain things to be done (the Matrimandir, for instance) is beyond the ken of the human reason. In fact, no disciple, follower or exegete has ever understood the process of their advance into the unknown, which was the hallmark of their Yoga. It is only with the hindsight obtained afterwards, thanks to the publication of their letters and literature, that a more or less complete picture has become possible. For this, allow me to refer to the books I have published in the last two decades or so.

The Mental era, characterized also by religions, is now at its sunset. The big spiritual revolution started by Sri Aurobindo excludes, by itself, the creation of another religion: “Above all, don’t make it a religion”, said the Mother. Do you think that, in general, there is no religious attitude in Auroville?

The complexity of a phenomenon like Auroville, with all its nationalities and races, is staggering, and so must be the effort to lead a spiritual
life as a community. It pertains to the human character to affirm its ego, especially under the mask of non-egoism. And it is this ego that will try to impose its own interpretation of the multi-faceted truth in the form of things to be accepted, a creed, a religion. Secondly, it is quite human to look for such formulas and religious interpretations, because to think for oneself is a constant burden, subject to doubt and insecurity. Thirdly, it is not simple to distil from Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s vision the force-lines that may carry oneself onward. Sri Aurobindo’s works are not easy to read, even for a trained mind. And, no doubt, the names of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and a building like the Matrimandir, suffice to brand the Aurobindian movement as a sect.

This means that the Aurovilians, and all Aurobindonians, have to live mentally in a constant ‘dialectic’ attention so as not to let their thinking become fixed into formulas. To prevent this, there is the concentration in the psychic being, the realization of which was always said by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to be the first requirement. I have seen many beginnings of the religious attitude and have even been attacked by its representatives. I know of five women who have introduced themselves as reincarnations of the Mother, and some more who boasted of having had all the same transformational experiences as the Mother in the Agenda.

My conclusion: where there is an important new movement that takes shape in humanity, there are always individuals who interpret it in their own, distorted way.

My answer: in a miraculous gradual way. What in yoga is not a miracle to our limited, groping human intelligence? Any real yogic experience is a miraculous result: the psychic realization, the realization of the Light above the mind, a contact with the Divine .... The world is one miracle, which science tries to bind into a corset of laws. Sri Aurobindo said, however, that there is a process to be followed, and that the process we discern in Nature supporting the evolution is also followed in the present transformation into a new species. Matter has to be refined in order to receive and incarnate the supramental consciousness and the supramental beings. This is what he and the Mother have been working on in their Yoga. Again, allow me to refer to my books, especially the volume of talks given by me recently in Auroville: Preparing for the Miraculous.

More than fifty years ago, the Mother said: “the moment of transformation is now”. Do you see any phenomena, on a planetary scale, pointing to the coming of this Big Transition?

This ‘now’ in which things are continuously happening is not the short moment of snapping one’s fingers or the blink of an eye, it may take many decades and even centuries. All the same, it is a short moment seen against the background of the eras of evolution. But humans always measure time against their own short lifespan.

The visible symptom (in the positive sense) of the Great Change is the unification of humanity, the globalization. This was posited a century ago by Sri Aurobindo as an inevitable condition [in The Ideal of Human Unity]. Before, even after the Second World War, the world consisted of many separate worlds. In the last half century, in spite of all misunderstandings, conflicts and even wars, the unification of humanity is undeniable. Now all nations and races depend on each other and have a common destiny; what happens to one has its repercussions to all. This has never happened before in the history of humanity, it is without precedent.
Paola De Paolis: Poetess and essayist from Rome, Aurovilian since more than 20 years. As an assistant lecturer at the University of Rome, she published some essays on the influence of Latin and Greek Authors on Sri Aurobindo’s works. Her Colpo di Grazia won the National Prize for Poetry “Casa Hirta ’80”. Among her translations are Savitri, The Life Divine and Letters on Yoga by Sri Aurobindo. Since 2000 she has given many talks in Italy, correlating Sri Aurobindo’s vision with the most interesting New Age authors and phenomena. In 2007 the RAI-2 TV program Anima Magazine dedicated a broadcast to Sri Aurobindo where she talking about his vision and work. In the same year her adaptation for the stage, Savitri : La Scoperta dell’Anima e la Vittoria sulla Morte, from Sri Aurobindo’s poem, was performed at the Auditorium of Rome. She translated recently and launched in Italy Oneness by Rasha and Eckhart Tolle and Sri Aurobindo : Two Perspectives on Enlightenment by A. Dalal.
Some words of Sri Aurobindo on Spirituality and Art

Spirituality is a wider thing than formal religion and it is in the service of spirituality that Art reaches its highest self-expression. Spirituality is a single word expressive of three lines of human aspiration towards divine knowledge, divine love and joy, divine strength, and that will be the highest and most perfect Art which, while satisfying the physical requirements of the aesthetic sense, the laws of formal beauty, the emotional demand of humanity, the portrayal of life and outward reality, as the best European Art satisfies these requirements, reaches beyond them and expresses inner spiritual truth, the deeper not obvious reality of things, the joy of God in the world and its beauty and desirableness and the manifestation of divine force and energy in phenomenal creation.

The aesthetic human being intensely preoccupied with Nature through aesthetic emotion must in the end arrive at spiritual emotion and perceive not only the infinite life, but the infinite presence within her; preoccupied with beauty in the life of man he must in the end come to see the divine, the universal, the spiritual in humanity.

The National Value of Art
SABCL 17:248

The Yogin’s aim in the Arts should not be a mere aesthetic, mental or vital gratification, but, seeing the Divine everywhere, worshipping it with a revelation of the meaning of its works, to express that One Divine in gods and men and creatures and things. The theory that sees an intimate connection between religious aspiration and the truest and greatest Art is in essence right; but we must substitute for the mixed and doubtful religious motive a spiritual aspiration, vision, interpreting experience. For the wider and more comprehensive the seeing, the more it contains in itself the sense of the hidden Divine in humanity and in all things and rises beyond a mere superficial religiosity into the spiritual life, the more luminous, flexible, deep and powerful will be the Art that springs from the high motive.

The Synthesis of Yoga
SABCL 20:132

What has been said of great creative art, that being the form in which normally our highest and intensest aesthetic satisfaction is achieved, applies to all beauty, beauty in Nature, beauty in life as well as beauty in art. … That which we are seeking through beauty is in the end that which we are seeking through religion, the Absolute, the Divine. … The search for Beauty is in truth a seeking, as in religion, for the Divine, the All-Beautiful in man, in nature, in life, in thought, in art; for God is Beauty and Delight hidden in the variation of his masks and forms. When, fulfilled in our growing sense and knowledge of beauty and delight in beauty and our power for beauty, we are able to identify ourselves in soul with this Absolute and Divine in all the forms and activities of the world and shape an image of our inner and our outer life in the highest image we can perceive and embody of the All-Beautiful, then the aesthetic being in us, who was born for this end, has fulfilled himself and risen to his divine consummation. To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create, as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God.

The Human Cycle
SABCL 15:134-35
Gustav Mahler

by Shraddhavan

(Sharing something of a personal study)

Nothing is all our own that we create:
The Power that acts in us is not our force.
The genius too receives from some high fount
Concealed in a supernal secrecy
The work that gives him an immortal name.
The word, the form, the charm, the glory and grace
Are missioned sparks from a stupendous Fire;
A sample from the laboratory of God
Of which he holds the patent upon earth,
Comes to him wrapped in golden coverings;
He listens for Inspiration’s postman knock
And takes delivery of the priceless gift
A little spoilt by the receiver mind
Or mixed with the manufacture of his brain;
When least defaced, then is it most divine.

Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, p.542

So far as I myself am concerned, … the need to express myself musically – in symphonic terms – begins only on the plane of obscure feelings, at the gate that opens into the ‘other world’, the world in which things no longer fall apart in time and space.

Gustav Mahler, 1896
When the composer Gustav Mahler died in May 1911 at the age of 51, he was best known to his contemporaries as a conductor and opera director. Nevertheless he left behind an impressive body of music, which today is amongst the most loved and the most frequently performed in the repertoire of Western Classical music. His output is a unique combination of song and orchestral music. In fact he used the human voice as an instrument in many of his symphonies. Although in his student days he produced some chamber music and attempted an opera, these works have been lost. An early cycle of song-settings – Lieder und Gesänge – remains little known. His oeuvre consists of a cantata for 3 soloists and chorus, Das klagende Lied (which has only recently re-entered the repertoire after over a century of obscurity); 4 orchestral song-cycles: Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen; Des Knaben Wunderhorn; Rückert Lieder; and Kindertotenlieder; as well as nine symphonies, many of which include song settings. There is also a first sketch for a tenth symphony which he was never able to complete. And then there is Das Lied von der Erde, consisting of orchestral settings of 6 translations into German of Chinese poems. This composition, which won early recognition as one of his most original and important works, is a fusion of symphony and song-cycle which has been characterised as ‘one of the most radical dove-tailings of existing genres in the whole history of music until then.’\footnote{Hermann Danuser, Gustav Mahler und seine Zeit (Laaber 1991) p. 204 – quoted in Jens Malte Fischer, Gustav Mahler; English translation by Stewart Spencer, (Yale University Press 2011) p. 563. This massive work of German scholarship, kindly lent to me by my friend Don Kelman, has been the source of most of the biographical information mentioned in this study.} Mahler subtitled it ‘a symphony for tenor and contralto voice and orchestra’.

I first came to know something about Mahler’s music from a music-loving friend in 1971. It was only over the previous 10 or 15 years – 50 years after his death – that the name and music of Mahler were becoming well-known and widely appreciated, through the efforts of his friend and younger contemporary, the conductor Bruno Walter, and the latter’s protégé and successor, Leonard Bernstein. Through the generosity of my friend, I was able, on a brief visit to London in that year, to attend a performance of Das Lied von der Erde in the Royal Festival Hall, conducted by Otto Klemperer – then in his 80s – who as a young man at the turn of the 19\textsuperscript{th} to 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries had known Mahler well and heard him conduct several of his own works including this one. It was an unforgettable evening for me, one that gave me not only great musical delight but also a powerful spiritual experience. I brought back to Auroville recordings of both Das Lied von der Erde and Mahler’s 5\textsuperscript{th} symphony. This has become his best-known work since the 4\textsuperscript{th} movement of it was used by the film-maker Luigi Visconti as the theme music for his film Death in Venice, released in London in the summer of 1971, just when I was there. This sumptuous melody is surely what most people recall when they hear the name ‘Mahler’, and it certainly contributed significantly to his growing fame and appeal in the 1970s.

The recordings I brought to Auroville were on reels of tape. It was 1971, audio-cassettes and CDs were not yet on the market, and I thought that the gramophone records of those days might not survive the journey. Although the tapes arrived safely, they did not get used much, since in the Auroville of those days even a tape-recorder was not easily available. Years later, these two compositions came into my hands again on CD, and I loved listening to them from time to time. But it was only in the autumn of 2012 that I got seized with a fascination for their composer – a fascination with his work, his life, and his character: what made him able to produce this enchanting music?

This interest was sparked when I came across some DVDs in our Auroville music library. Two were presentations of Mahler and his music, one by the conductor Ricardo Chailly, the other by the composer Luciano Berio, who has used the Scherzo from Mahler’s 2\textsuperscript{nd} Symphony as the template for the third of his five-movement Sinfonia of 1969. But the one which had the most
effect on me was *Autopsy of a Genius*: a study of his music as a reflection of his life, narrated by his biographer H.L. de La Grange and released in 2011, the centenary of Mahler’s death.

Some features of this revealing DVD made me want to know much more about Gustav Mahler’s life. For example, the film opens with the first movement of Mahler’s 1st Symphony. The image accompanying the music is of an Austrian forest; and the narrator tells an anecdote, which he considers very significant, about the composer’s early childhood. The little boy was taken on an outing by his father into one of the forests surrounding the Bohemian town of Iglau where they lived. But when they arrived there, the father remembered something he had forgotten at home. Leaving the child alone in the forest he returned to the town. Perhaps he got detained there; apparently it was only after quite some time that he remembered his son and rushed back to find him. He found the child sitting very quietly on a tree-trunk, absorbed in a trance of delight at the sounds and scenes of the forest around him. It is as if a moment of communion with the spirit of Nature such as this is evoked in the first movement of this 1st Symphony. The performance note he gave at the beginning of it reads ‘Wie ein Naturlaut’ – like a murmur of Nature. The gentle sounds of the forest are soon joined by distant trumpets – a call that might have reached the child’s ears as he sat there amongst the trees, from the garrison town where he lived. We are told that from a very early age he was fascinated by the military calls coming from the barracks and the music of the brass bands which marched past the house where he lived. Like other children he loved to run after the band; but the young Gustav showed an unusual capacity to retain the tunes he heard, and even, at the age of 3, he was able to reproduce them on a small accordion he had been given. Sounds and moods of nature, military-sounding brass, and the rhythms of Bohemian folk-songs and dances are all elements that recur often in the music he wrote as an adult.

Mahler was born in July 1860 in a hamlet in Bohemia, which was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and is now in the Czech Republic. In October of the same year, the family moved to Iglau, the nearby town. His family were German-speaking Jews – a minority in the area, where most of the population were Czech-speaking peasants. But German was the official language of the Austrian Empire, and he received all his education in German, even during the few months that he studied in Prague, the nearest big city to Iglau. His mother bore 14 children altogether, of whom only 7 survived. His younger brother Ernst, whom he was very close to, died at the age of 13 when Gustav was 15. Gustav was the eldest surviving child, and after his parents both died within a short time of each other in 1879 he became the head of the family and arranged for his younger brothers and sisters to move to Vienna, supporting them until their marriages or deaths.

As I mentioned before, his musical gifts were recognised very early on, and when he was only 5 his grandfather gifted him the family piano, which had been lying unused. He gave a first public performance on the piano in Iglau at the age of 10. In August 1878, when he was 15, shortly after the death of his brother Ernst, while Gustav was on holiday in the country with a school-friend his talents were noticed by a gentleman who was acquainted with the pianist Julius Epstein, a teacher at the Vienna Conservatory. Epstein heard Gustav play, and immediately arranged for him to join the Conservatory at the beginning of the new term, in September. There must have been some anxiety in his family about whether their son would ever be able to earn a living as a pianist, and it was agreed that he should continue his studies at the Iglau Grammar School at the same time as studying piano and composition in Vienna. It is not known quite how he managed this over the next 2 years until he graduated from the Grammar School in 1877. Perhaps he had to study more or less alone, and just present himself for the examinations. Meanwhile he was doing well in Vienna, where he won prizes in both the disciplines he was studying. He graduated from the Conservatory in 1878, and then continued
his musical studies for a further two years in the Department of Musicology of Vienna University. While at the University he became part of the circle of young men around a charismatic teacher of philosophy, Stefan Lipiner. He is known to have worked on two operas at this time, as well as *Das klagende Lied* – which he later referred to as his ‘Opus 1’ although in fact he never numbered his works in this way. He submitted it in 1879 for the Beethoven Prize of the University, but failed to win it. It then became clear that his future career would be as a conductor.

This in fact remained his profession from 1880 until his death in 1911. He started as a temporary conductor for the summer in a local spa, Bad Hall, but soon won recognition and moved on to larger cities and more prestigious posts, from Laibach (Ljubljana), to Kassel, Prague, Leipzig, then Budapest, then to Hamburg where he stayed 6 years. Finally, in 1897, he reached the goal he had been aiming for, as principle conductor and director of the Vienna Court Opera, where he remained for 10 years, resigning in 1907 because of failing health and an invitation to become principal conductor of the New York Philharmonic, which offered a better salary and a less demanding involvement.

Through all these years he supported through his conducting first his younger brothers and sisters, and then after 1901 a family of his own. For it was in this year that he married a remarkable Viennese beauty more than 20 years his junior, Alma Schindler. The couple had two daughters, the elder of whom died in 1907 – an event which devastated the parents, and, as is not unusual, led to a very troubled time in their marriage, with both of them suffering from both physical and psychological symptoms of strain.

Alma Mahler was a remarkable person in her own right. Mahler biographers tend to dislike her and to distrust her statements about her husband. Feminist writers on the other hand are impressed by the fact that she managed to captivate a number of the most outstanding men of her time. I will only say that it must have been a great challenge to her to be married at the age of 19 to such a strong personality as Gustav Mahler, who was then 40, and who insisted that she should give up all musical ambitions of her own, to dedicate herself to nurturing his career and his household. It was only towards the end of his life, after their marriage had gone through a tremendous crisis, that he seems to have realised that this was unfair and encouraged her to take up her old efforts at composition and helped her with them. At the time of his death she was just 30. Although she married again several times, she always kept his name and regarded herself as the guardian of his musical legacy.

If we return to 1884, when Mahler probably started work on his 1st symphony, we find that he was also working on his song-cycle *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wanderer, or a travelling Man), completed in 1885. This consists of orchestral settings of four poems of his own composition, and is supposedly inspired by an unhappy love affair with one of the singers in the company where he was conductor at the time. The music of two of the songs is incorporated into the symphony. The first contrasts the happiness of nature in the springtime with the misery of the unhappy lover. It is only the happy part of the music which is included in the 1st movement of the 1st symphony.

The last song of the cycle shows a remarkable change of mood, as the deep woe of the lover is soothed and transformed to joy by the scent of a linden tree. The linden tree is a powerful symbol in German literature, and it seems to have had a strong personal significance for Mahler himself. He later set another poem about the linden, not his own words, but those of the earlier poet Friedrich Rückert. We are told that for Mahler the lovely fragrance of the linden flowers represented ‘the sense of understated happiness that people feel in the presence of a loved one on whom they can count without the need for a single world to pass between them.’

1 JMF p.175-76
song expresses perfectly in words and music the way in which, in an extreme situation, some touch of Nature may bring healing and an opening up to a deeper level of being – what we might call ‘a touch of the psychic’ – in which that love and peace that passeth all understanding becomes suddenly real to us.

Another song setting of Mahler appeals to me very much. It is one of the Rückert Lieder and is called ‘Um Mitternacht’ – ‘At Midnight’. His biographer Jens Malte Fischer has this to say about this song: ‘The puzzle that this song represents has yet to be solved.’ Most writers on Mahler avoid mentioning it apparently. One who does comment on it calls it an ‘extraordinarily problematical piece.’

I think that the reason the musicographers and biographers find this song-setting a mystery, is because they do not recognise that in it Mahler is expressing a powerful inner experience that he has recognised in the simple words of Rückert’s poem. He could recognise it, because he had had the experience himself. The writers have not had it, so could not recognise it and could not understand what Mahler meant by his music.

To me this is one indication – and there are many others in his music – that Mahler had a strong inner life. It seems that he had it from childhood. We are told that as a child he often had a way of withdrawing into himself, almost as if in a trance – something that seemed much more than just the kind of ‘day-dreaming’ that many children do. As he grew older, Mahler read a great deal and thought deeply. I don’t think that he was a philosopher, but he seems to have been looking around for ideas that corresponded to his own inner experience. Such ideas and impressions, gathered from here and there as they corresponded to his own experience and feeling, matured into a personal world-view which shaped his life and was expressed in his music.

In his 2nd Symphony, for example, Mahler uses sung text to marvellous effect: first a soloist sings a short poem taken from Des Knaben Wunderhorn, ‘Urlicht’ – which expresses what in our terms we might call the ‘psychic sorrow’ and longing of the soul awakened to the pain of the world.

O little red rose!
Mankind lies in greatest need!
Mankind lies in greatest pain!
All the more I would wish to be in heaven.

Then I came upon a broad path.
An angel came and tried to turn me away.
Ah no! I would not let myself be turned away.

I am from God and long to return to God!
Dear God will give me light,
Will light my way
To everlasting blissful light.

Then in the next and final movement Mahler takes the words of a well-known Christian hymn which gives the symphony its appellation ‘The Resurrection’ – one which he had heard at the funeral of a colleague – set to be sung by a full choir and two soloists. To the first two verses of this hymn by Klopstock, Mahler added words of his own which seem to express his own faith and deep intuition about life and death and other life: ‘Nothing is lost to you’ – here they are, in translation:

Have faith! My heart, have faith!
Nothing will be lost to you.
It is yours, yes yours –
All that you longed for,
What you loved, what you strove for is yours.
O believe: you were not born in vain!
You have not lived and suffered in vain!

What was created must pass away!
What has passed away must rise again!
Cease your trembling!
Prepare! Prepare to live!

1 JMF p.176
O anguish! You that pierce all things –
I have escaped from you.
O death! You who conquer all things –
Now you have been conquered.

On wings that I have won for myself
In love’s fervent striving
I shall soar away
To the light that no eye has pierced.
On wings that I have won for myself
I shall soar away.
I shall die in order to live.

Rise again! Yes, you will rise again my heart,
in a trice!
What you have vanquished,
To God, to God, to God it will raise you!

When I hear these words and this music, I am strongly reminded of some lines in Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*. They occur in Canto 14 of Book Two, ‘The World-Soul’. There King Aswapati sees the realm where individual souls rest between births, ‘absorbed in internatal trance’. These wonderful lines occur there:

All that is made and once again unmade,
The calm persistent vision of the One
Inevitably re-makes, it lives anew:
Forces and lives and beings and ideas
Are taken into the stillness for a while;
There they remould their purpose and their drift,
Recast their nature and re-form their shape.
Ever they change and changing ever grow,
And passing through a fruitful stage of death
And after long reconstituting sleep
Resume their place in the process of the Gods
Until their work in cosmic Time is done.

*Savitri* p.294

I think that these wonderfully serene and comforting lines express one aspect of what Mahler believed. He felt that he was an exceptional individual, and that he was being carried and inspired by a great Force. Not only did he feel that he had a great gift, which it was his responsibility to share through his music, but also that he had the responsibility to live his life in such a way that he would benefit his fellow human beings in the present, and humanity as a whole in the future – as well as determining any future destiny of his own after death. He had a strong sense that the world was being carried forward, and that human beings are the instruments of that forward movement, so that what we do in our lives affects the quality, not only of our present, but of the future state of mankind – of which we ourselves shall probably be a part, in however different a form or state from our present one. Any good and positive things we do now in this life will benefit us also, as well as humanity, present and future, as a whole.

These beliefs of his must have helped him to live his life, which was far from being an easy one. He was born into a poor Jewish family in a rural area. His grandfather was a carter, who drove a cart to transport goods here and there. But although a poor man, it is said that he loved reading, and always had a book with him as he went about his work. His son, Mahler’s father, managed to set up a small business, a liquor-shop and bar, in the small town of Iglau. Gustav himself was born into a peasant hut, with a few windows that had no glass. But he was able to make a living for himself from his 20th year onwards, by his musical gifts – as a conductor. Today this is a prestigious profession – it was not so then, and Mahler had to work much harder than any respected conductor has to do today. Nevertheless he managed to support not only himself but his six younger siblings until they were able to support themselves, or married, or, in one case, died.

Throughout his career, and especially when he reached the peak of his profession and won the post of principal conductor, and a little later, the directorship of the Vienna Court Opera, he was the target of a virulent anti-Semitic Press in the Austrian capital, which hounded him until his death. When he was in his late 40s it was discovered that he had a defect in his heart, probably the result of a childhood illness. His younger brother Ernst died of heart-disease, and so did his mother and another brother who
emigrated to the United States in the 1880s. Nevertheless for 30 years Mahler kept himself fit for the strenuous life he had to lead, by walking vigorously everywhere, and spending his summer holidays walking, cycling, climbing mountains, rowing and swimming, as well as spending many hours a day composing – for it was only during his holidays that he could find time for his own music. When I read about his life, I get the impression of someone who hauled himself up out of poverty by his bootstraps – with energy and dedication, and a great sense of responsibility to his family as well as to his art. He achieved success in his profession, married a beautiful and highly intelligent young woman from a wealthy family of Viennese intellectuals, and managed to support her in the standard to which she was accustomed and which was appropriate to her position as the wife of an eminent man. But it was only in the last years of his life that he could begin to feel a little more relaxed about his livelihood. Up to 1908 it was a struggle. By then Mahler’s weak heart had been diagnosed. At first he reduced his physical activities – but then resumed them again, as he found that he felt better if he exercised rather than rested. Even in the last winter of his life, he was full of plans for the future and looking forward to a bright new stage of his career in the USA. But a throat infection of a kind that he had experienced repeatedly before and had always been able to overcome, lodged in the weakened heart so that he died within 3 months of the diagnosis of what was basically blood-poisoning – for which there was no cure in those days before penicillin and antibiotics. My picture of him is of an extremely vigorous and admirable person, as well as a great musician. In fact we might go so far as to say that he achieved a remarkable individual fusion of the search for Beauty and the search for Good – two aspirations that are often opposed in our human lives. And I believe he could do this, because his search was in fact a spiritual one, impelled by his soul.

To most of his contemporaries – as is often the case with artists who are breaking boundaries – his music was incomprehensible. There were a few young admirers, many of who became famous in their turn after his death. He befriended and supported these young men in the face of incomprehension and virulent criticism. Of one of them, Arnold Schoenberg, one of the founders of the ‘New Vienna School’, a forerunner of modern atonal music, Mahler remarked to Alma, ‘I don’t understand his music, but he is young and perhaps he’s right. I am old and I dare say my ear is not sensitive enough.’ He supported some of these young men in their early struggles, and it was they who remembered him after his death, and ensured that his music was not totally forgotten in the 50 years which followed – despite the fact that it was banned by the Nazi regime. Mahler himself was not surprised that his work did not find instant success. He used to say ‘My day will come.’ He thought that it might come in the 50 years after his death – but then, he probably did not expect to die at 51. In fact it did not begin to be widely appreciated until 1960 – the centenary of his birth. Bruno Walter had already started to introduce Mahler’s music in the USA after the war, and Walter’s charismatic younger colleague Leonard Bernstein took up those efforts in the late 1950s and 1960s and succeeded in bringing Mahler into the repertoires of the greatest orchestras in Europe and America by the 1970s.

There is some special quality about Mahler’s music which seems especially appropriate to our times. He was fascinated by polyphony – the musical complexity which comes about when many diverse voices have to be harmonised. Perhaps this was one of the factors that made him a great opera conductor and director. As a composer, in addition to the influences I have mentioned above, he admitted himself to be deeply indebted to Richard Wagner, who had brought a completely new kind of expressiveness into symphonic music and opera. There is a very revealing anecdote told by a lady who was his musical confidante before his marriage. She reports that when Mahler was attending a country fair in the summer of 1900, he was so

1 Quoted in JMF p. 481
taken with the sounds of the shooting galleries and the Punch and Judy show, the military band music and the singing of a male-voice choir that he exclaimed:

*You hear? That's polyphony, and that's where I get it from!* (...) Just in this way – from quite different directions – must the themes appear; and they must be just as different from each other in rhythm and melodic character (....) The only difference is that the artist orders and unites them all into one concordant and harmonious whole.\(^1\)

In Mahler's compositions, the polyphony is not only musical – that is to say, a matter of contrasting sounds and voices, but also emotional: they express at the same time varied and contrasting moods, giving a unique richness and complexity of harmony. Through these polyphonic harmonies he expresses an extraordinary range of deep feelings, which attest to his own great refinement of sensitivity.

Mahler was born into a Jewish family, but from his childhood was familiar with the principal church in the little town of Iglau, with its huge wooden angels and old organ. Later in his life he converted to Christianity, quite probably to advance his career – without saving himself from the anti-Semitic attacks which continued throughout his life. But it seems that he never practiced the formal side of either of these religions. Nevertheless, he had a deep sense of the Divine, and seems to have been seeking God throughout his life. He was a spiritual person, and wrote spiritual music which expresses the great conflicts, the great depressions which may afflict sensitive people in our days, but also the great exaltations, the great hopes and visions that uplift us and may yet save us.

There are some more lines from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* which come to my mind in connection with Mahler’s music. They occur in Book two, Canto 6 ‘The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life’. King Aswapati has already glimpsed what Sri Aurobindo elsewhere calls ‘The Suprarational Ultimate of Life’, which is expressed in these lines from Book 2, Canto 3, ‘The Glory and the Fall of Life’. Despite the contradictions and even perversions which afflict Life in the material world –

*Yet pure and bright from the Timeless was her birth,*
*A lost world-rapture lingers in her eyes,*
*Her moods are faces of the Infinite:*
*Beauty and happiness are her native right,*
*And endless Bliss is her eternal home.*

In the material world, this glorious goddess is a prisoner who cannot express, or perhaps even remember, the high source from which she has come. Here are the lines that seem to me to express something deep and true about Mahler’s wonderful music, which often carries us or points us towards a higher and more blissful state of conscious harmony and delight, while denying nothing of the darkness of our present human existence; they refer to the Life-being in its highest forms of expression – of which of course, great music is one:

*A blind heart-throb that reaches joy through tears,*
*A yearning towards peaks for ever unreached,*
*An ecstasy of unfulfilled desire*
*Track the last heavenward climblings of her voice.*
*Transmuted are past suffering’s memories*
*Into an old sadness’s sweet escaping trail:*
*Turned are her tears to gems of diamond pain,*
*Her sorrow into a magic crown of song.*

\(^{1}\) JMF p. 128-29
Deep Places

by Shraddhavan¹

I'm in no mood for mountains ...  
Too near down-pressing sky,  
Too barren, bright, unmySTERied they lie!  
So, climbing to a bald white peak  
I stopped – knee-deep in grass and flowers.

Better by far the lower forests,  
Where water gurgles out of sight,  
And calling, chuckling, birds unseen  
Flit from green to deeper green;  
There suddenly a single bloom  
Strikes to the heart's enchanted depths  
With its clear bell-note of deep blue.

Or let me swim, far from all shallows,  
In the still waters where the kraken sleeps,  
Where whales slide singing through the shadowy deeps;  
There let me dive and drown  
All littleness and all fatigue.

But best of all, in deep embracing interstellar spaces  
Beyond the sky-lid, free of every limit,  
To float forever marvelling  
Through endless symphonies of stars!

¹ From Stars in the Soup, available from the author on request.

Shraddhavan was born in England in 1942. She studied English Language and Literature at Bristol University, then spent several years travelling in many countries. In 1970 she was accepted by the Mother to join Auroville, and worked in the new Aspiration School until 1976 and later in various other educational projects in Auroville. Since 1999 she has been the Project Coordinator of Savitri Bhavan. Her writings – poems, stories, essays and book reviews – have been published in Mother India, Heritage Magazine and elsewhere. Her book of collected poems Stars in the Soup appeared in 2012.
My Credo

By Albert Einstein

When recently visiting Einstein's summer house in Caputh near Berlin, Germany, I came across a remarkable voice document by him called “Mein Glaubensbekennnis” (“My Credo”). It was obviously recorded a few months before Einstein left Germany for the United States in December 1932, never to return. Consequently his house was confiscated by Hitler's Nazis. The English translation is given here. Helmut

It is a special blessing to belong among those who can and may devote their best energies to the contemplation and exploration of objective and timeless things. How happy and grateful I am for having been granted this blessing, which bestows upon one a large measure of independence from one's personal fate and from the attitude of one's contemporaries. Yet this independence must not inure us to the awareness of the duties that constantly bind us to the past, present and future of humankind at large.

Our situation on this earth seems strange. Every one of us appears here, involuntarily and uninvited, for a short stay, without knowing the why and the wherefore. In our daily lives we feel only that man is here for the sake of others, for those whom we love and for many other beings whose fate is connected with our own.

I am often troubled by the thought that my life is based to such a large extent on the work of my fellow human beings, and I am aware of my great indebtedness to them.

I do not believe in free will. Schopenhauer’s words: ‘Man can do what he wants, but he cannot will what he wills,’ accompany me in all situations throughout my life and reconcile me with the actions of others, even if they are rather painful to me. This awareness of the lack of free will keeps me from taking myself and my fellow men too seriously as acting and deciding individuals, and from losing my temper.

I have never coveted affluence and luxury and even despise them a good deal. My passion for social justice has often brought me into conflict with people, as has my aversion to any obligation and dependence I did not regard as absolutely necessary.

I have a high regard for the individual and an insuperable distaste for violence and fanaticism. All these motives have made me a passionate pacifist and antimilitarist. I am against any chauvinism, even in the guise of mere patriotism.

Privileges based on position and property have always seemed to me unjust and pernicious, as does any exaggerated personality cult. I am an adherent of the ideal of democracy, although I know well the weaknesses of the democratic form of government. Social equality and economic protection of the individual have always seemed to me the important communal aims of the state.

Although I am a typical loner in daily life, my consciousness of belonging to the invisible community of those who strive for truth, beauty, and justice keeps me from feeling isolated.

The most beautiful and deepest experience a man can have is the sense of the mysterious. It is the underlying principle of religion as well as of all serious endeavour in art and science. He who never had this experience seems to me, if not dead, then at least blind. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness. In this sense I am religious. To me it suffices to wonder at these secrets and to attempt humbly to grasp with my mind a mere image of the lofty structure of all there is.
Last School – A Short History

By Deepti Tewari

This note, giving a short historical background to secondary education in Auroville, was written originally for parents of potential Last School students to help them make sense not only of the orientation of Last School but also to aid them in making conscious choices.

The very first Auroville ‘school’ came into being on the Last School campus in 1970-71.

This was subsequently shut down in the years of ‘political unrest’. It was in 1985, after a hiatus of almost a decade, that Last School reopened as a school for Auroville’s young adults and teenagers. Through a long period thereafter, Last School was the only school for teenagers in Auroville. Students automatically ‘graduated’ to this school from Transition which was for some years the only primary school. Last School used all the buildings on the campus and the student body was in the range of 60-70 or thereabouts.

The arrival of school-going adolescents on Auroville’s educational scene raised many new, and till then unanticipated issues. Besides their more complex developmental needs, it is when children arrive at their teens that many of the hitherto unaddressed dormant questions arise. These questions concerning the future – issues related to security, to the capacity for and pursuit of success and career and the ability to make money – were similar to many of the intentions at the heart of modern, utilitarian, industrial age education. What kind of education should the youth growing up in Auroville, be given? A whole gamut (perhaps even a cacophony) of views emerged.

Last School, of course, as Auroville’s only secondary school, was caught in the eye of the storm. What was evident in the many debates was a polarization of views. At one end of the spectrum were those who wanted to have done once and for all with excessive experimentation, which was seen as the bane of Auroville education, and who wished for a clear and firm adoption of some systematized certification system. Both extremes of the debate forgot something of what Mother had indicated. When she spoke of what life in Auroville ought to be, she clearly demanded a collective ideal that was ‘a life that wants to grow and perfect itself’. And as for the pursuit of certification as an end in itself, she diagnosed this as the disease of the modern world, something she did not want in her school. (Her remarks apropos are attached at the end of this note).

In this debate, the Last School team ended up displeasing both ends of the spectrum because it seemed to adopt a vaguer, somewhat muddling, centrist approach – a sort of responding to circumstances as they arose. But still, there were major inner changes which were a direct result of the ferment. For one thing, there was a sifting in the team and those who remained, the core group that is still present, arrived at a common set of key recognitions. The more important of these was that the vital being of AV teens needed to be much more ‘settled’. A primary need was therefore the creating of a physical/vital environment that would help this part of the nature find within itself a space of calm and beauty. Repeated experiences served to show that this was a solid base on which the pathways to awakening complexity in the mind could be securely built. Conducive conditions had to be created whereby the mind could plumb its depths and soar to heights and become capable of real synthesis. This period saw the birth of the Pyramids as a place where ‘all life was yoga’. At the other end of the spectrum were those who wanted to have done once and for all with excessive experimentation, which was seen as the bane of Auroville education, and who wished for a clear and firm adoption of some systematized certification system. Both extremes of the debate forgot something of what Mother had indicated. When she spoke of what life in Auroville ought to be, she clearly demanded a collective ideal that was ‘a life that wants to grow and perfect itself’.
of Art’. It was in this time that the importance of art and poetry and literature, of the humanities – history, culture, philosophy – approached in a more and more Aurobindonian way, came to the fore. It was also the period where the importance of endurance training through activities such as treks began to be planned at the school level.

While this deeper internal structuring was happening apace in Last School, many larger developments were occupying the education scene of Auroville. In the mid-90s CFL (Centre for Further Learning) and After School, for the O and A Levels and the Indian Open School exams, were started. These later morphed into what are today Future School and NESS respectively. On an outward level, this period also saw Last School endure much unpleasantness. For a long time, there was an organized attempt to bring to a close this experiment – almost as if the ending of free progress experimentation in Auroville would in some way legitimize other choices!

Looking back, the Last School team recognizes that there was a kind of Grace in all this. These difficulties served to liberate the team more and more from the hold of conventions. There was more room for real experimentation. In the last decade, with secondary level options available within Auroville, it has been largely those parents and those youngsters who have chosen to come to Last School who feel deeply that Mother’s idea of ‘a growth of consciousness aimed at increasing perfectibility’ will give them everything they could possibly need (whether as adults they ultimately choose to express themselves within Auroville or elsewhere).

It can be said that two types of students have come to Last School in recent years. There is always a small group of those who cannot fit into any of the other schools who turn to Last School as the very last port of help. Such students either stay only so long as they need to, to sort out their problems so they can return to the more ‘main-stream’ options, or they feel sufficiently enthused by the LS approach that they choose to remain and grow in this experience. The second category is the more ‘brave’ and consciously iconoclastic types who deliberately choose LS. These may be anyone: students from outside, who come (or whose parents bring them) to Auroville to experience a period ‘breathing the air of free progress’ (we always seem to have a few of this category); more often, it is the Auroville youth that appear to know inwardly that this is their place. These last have afforded the school some lovely moments: with whom teachers have discovered such joy of learning and growing together, that any educator would dream of encountering.

One such group has had a book, Passage, dedicated to their educational development. This book was released 2 years ago by the Minister of HRD (the Minister in charge of Auroville in Delhi) on a visit he made especially to Auroville. Those who consider putting their children in Last School can read this little book which not only records and illustrates the students’ growth, but also serves as an account of the experiment that is Last School – its contents and methodologies, and the aspects of the students’ natures which are attempted to be consciously sounded. Finally, and more importantly, it attempts to be a little handbook of Mother’s words with regard to the education she envisioned for Auroville.

The Mother on Certification

Why are no diplomas and certificates given to the students of the Centre of Education?

For the last hundred years or so mankind has been suffering from a disease which seems to be spreading more and more and which has reached a climax in our times; it is what we may call ‘utilitarianism’. People and things, circumstances and activities seem to be viewed and appreciated

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1 The book Passage is available for sale at the Visitors Centre and SABDA. Aurovilians can also contact Last School directly for a copy.
exclusively from this angle. Nothing has any value unless it is useful. Certainly something that is useful is better than something that is not. But first we must agree on what we describe as useful—useful to whom, to what, for what?

For, more and more, the races who consider themselves civilized describe as useful whatever can attract, procure or produce money. Everything is judged and evaluated from a monetary angle. That is what I call utilitarianism. And this disease is highly contagious, for even children are not immune to it. At an age when they should be dreaming of beauty, greatness and perfection, dreams that may be too sublime for ordinary common sense, but which are nevertheless far superior to this dull good sense, children now dream of money and worry about how to earn it. So when they think of their studies, they think above all about what can be useful to them, so that later on when they grow up they can earn a lot of money. And the thing that becomes most important for them is to prepare themselves to pass examinations with success, for with diplomas, certificates and titles they will be able to find good positions and earn a lot of money. For them study has no other purpose, no other interest.

To learn for the sake of knowledge, to study in order to know the secrets of Nature and life, to educate oneself in order to grow in consciousness, to discipline oneself in order to become master of oneself, to overcome one’s weaknesses, incapacities and ignorance, to prepare oneself to advance in life towards a goal that is nobler and vaster, more generous and more true... they hardly give it a thought and consider it all very utopian. The only thing that matters is to be practical, to prepare themselves and learn how to earn money. Children who are infected with this disease are out of place at the Centre of Education of the Ashram. And it is to make this quite clear to them that we do not prepare them for any official examination or competition and do not give them any diplomas or titles which they can use in the outside world.

We want here only those who aspire for a higher and better life, who thirst for knowledge and perfection, who look forward eagerly to a future that will be more totally true. There is plenty of room in the world for all the others.

CWM 12:351

Deepti Tewari: Sri Aurobindo and The Mother came into Deepti’s life when she was a teenager. The vistas that opened forth then, stretch onwards yet. For more than three decades she has lived and worked in Auroville. Her primary aim has been to become serviceable to an Auroville embodying the consciousness that gave it birth. This journey of discovery has taken her variously through stints in the organizational structures of Auroville; coordinating and participating in seminars and workshops; representing Auroville both within India and abroad; contributing to learning teaching materials; as also writing and editing The Matrimandir Journals. Exploring Sri Aurobindo’s and The Mother’s ideas about an education for a New Consciousness while teaching/working with teenagers and adults has been a major focus of the last 27 years.
In the religious and moral history of humankind the concept of sin has played a major role, especially in the so-called Abrahamic religions, that is Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Sin is understood as not following the commands of God as given to Moses on Mount Sinai, to Prophet Mohammed in the Holy Koran or elaborated in moral codices by the pandits of different religions. Fear is created in the minds of religious followers by underlying threats of punishment or promises of celestial rewards.

With the receding clout of religion in our lives the feeling of being a sinner or committing a sin has weakened. The isolation of faiths is breaking down by global communication, specially the internet. What had been universally accepted behaviour suddenly seems strange, old fashioned or even ridiculous compared with all the other moral systems. Rarely people nowadays are exposed to draconic and cruel punishments as earlier. This indifference towards moral rules is a transitional stage which in itself can be rather dangerous. Supported by irresponsible commercial offerings by the media appealing to the basest instincts, the complete collapse of traditional ethical standards can result in a behaviour exclusively oriented on personal enjoyment ruled by the three big powers in the hands of the hostile forces, money, power and sex. A previously unimagined range of deviant behavior is spreading like a contagious disease facilitated by mobiles and cheap tablets.

This then again challenges the traditional forces to try to impose adherence to the customary conduct of behaviour by violence. Terrorism can be understood as the effort to keep alive the old system in the midst of totally opposite tendencies. For example, in Tunisia there are now about 100 political parties, among which the Islamic ones are rather strong. To confirm their independence, some secular groups have announced public binge-drinking to counteract the Koranic prohibition of alcohol.

How to get out of this dilemma? Is there sin or no sin? Which religion gives the complete moral picture – Western, Christian, secular, Muslim sharia, Buddhism or Hindu dharma? The omnipresent confusion demands a clear cut answer.

It is not enough however to get rid of the idea of sin. Sin itself has to be got rid of. Human beings have to arrive at a consciousness where sin doesn’t exist anymore. Is this possible at all? Let us study the remarks of The Mother as reported in her Agenda, a record of her sadhana from 1951 till 1973, noted down by her disciple Satprem.

What are the Mother’s own experiences with ‘sin’? She says that she never understood the notion of sin and didn’t experience the feelings connected with it. Her endeavor was towards doing the right thing always for an appropriate
and efficient action. What helped her to do always the right thing was her ‘conscience’ which she describes as an adverse force which was constantly whipping her and giving her no respite in her quest for the right action. But there was nowhere the question of morality or sin for her. Her ideas can be understood with reference to Aphorisms 67, 68, 69 which Sri Aurobindo had articulated.1

The notion of sin is something I don’t understand, that I have never understood. To me, original sin seemed to be one of the most monstrous ideas people have ever had – sin and I just don’t go together!

MA 18.7.6

To cherish in secret the sense of sin.... No, I can’t say I’ve had that experience, in the sense that I have never had a very pronounced love of virtue.

That’s another thing I have noticed: even in my childhood I was already conscious of what Sri Aurobindo calls “living divinely,” that is, outside the sense of Good and Evil.

This was counterbalanced by a terrible censor which never left me. It took Sri Aurobindo to clear it from my path. But I didn’t have the sense of sin, of Good and Evil, sin and virtue – definitely not! My consciousness was centered around right action and wrong action – “this should have been done, that shouldn’t have” – with no question of Good or Evil, from the standpoint of work, of action alone. My consciousness has always been centered on action. It was a vision, a perception of the line to be followed – or the many lines to be followed – for the action to be accomplished. And any deviation from what to me was the luminous line, the straight line (not geometrically straight: the luminous line, the line expressing the divine Will), the slightest deviation from that, and ... oh, it was the only thing that tormented me.

And the torment didn’t come from me, it came from that character hooked on to my consciousness and constantly whipping me, hounding me, ill-treating me – what people call their “conscience,” which has nothing whatsoever to do with consciousness! It’s an adverse being, and whatever it can change, it changes for the worse; whatever is susceptible to being changed into something anti-divine, it changes. And it is constantly repeating the same thing: “This is wrong, that is wrong, this is wrong....”

But this was the only thing; there was never, never the idea of being either virtuous or sinful – never. It was a matter of doing the right thing or not doing the right thing. That’s all. No sense of being virtuous or sinful, none at all! I never, ever had that sense. So it’s a bit difficult for me to identify with the feeling Sri Aurobindo describes here; it doesn’t correspond to anything in me. I understand, of course! I understand very well what he means. But to identify with that sentiment....

MA 9.1.62

One of the ideals that Auroville has been created for – that human behavior should be guided by the awakened evolutionary divine center in humanity, the psychic being – is intrinsically connected to this discussion. The Mother says the first duty of every Aurovilian must be to find his or her psychic being. Those who live conscious of their psychic being and follow its hints can’t commit sin anymore. Auroville is meant to set an example to the world of a life guided by the Divine Consciousness represented by the inner Divine, the psychic being.

In the evolutionary self-unfolding of the involved Divine, human beings have reached the state of

1 Aphorism 67 – There is no sin in man, but a great deal of disease, ignorance and misapplication. Aphorism 68 – The sense of sin was necessary in order that man might become disgusted with his own imperfections. It was God’s corrective for egoism. But man’s egoism meets God’s device by being very dully alive to its own sins and very keenly alive to the sins of others. Aphorism 69 – Sin and virtue are a game of resistance we play with God in His efforts to draw us towards perfection. The sense of virtue helps us to cherish our sins in secret. (Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 12:430-31)
mentality between the spontaneous unconscious divinity of the animal and conscious divinity. The concept of sin arises only at this mental level. The Mother says:

*It is not the true consciousness, but it's what men call consciousness. So according to the human mode, it is obvious that man is much more conscious than the animal, but the human brings in sin and perversion which do not exist outside of this state we call 'conscious' – which in fact is not conscious but merely consists in mentalizing things and in having the ability to objectify them.*

*It is an ascending curve, but a curve that swerves away from the Divine. So naturally, one has to climb much higher to find a higher Divine, since it is a conscious Divine, whereas the others are divine spontaneously and instinctively, without being conscious of it. All our moral notions of good and evil, all of that, are what we have thrown over the creation with our distorted and perverted consciousness. It is we who have invented it.*

*We are the distorting intermediary between the purity of the animal and the divine purity of the gods.*

MA 19.7.58

While human beings are no more mere animals, they neither are gods. They stand in the awkward position of in-between. They have lost the sure guidance of the instincts but have as yet not found the sure divine guidance by intuition and the unfailing light of the gentle inner voice. In this dilemma they try to base themselves on mental rules and the whole mess opens up. Is there anything higher than mind? The Mother calls it ‘Truth’. ‘Truth’ is her metaphor for the Divine. The true nature of the individual is not the ego, this mental construction of the ignorance, it is the jiva, an individualized portion of the Supreme Divine. Men are called to live this Truth. But this Truth is not the same for everybody, the Divine is one but infinite, and each individual expresses one of these numberless divine possibilities.

*The being who lives according to his own nature, his own truth, must spontaneously find the right way of using things. When you live according to the truth of your being, you don’t need to learn things: you do them spontaneously, according to the inner law. When you sincerely follow your nature, spontaneously and sincerely, you are divine. As soon as you think or look at yourself acting or start questioning, you are full of sin.*

*It is man’s mental consciousness that has filled all Nature with the idea of sin and all the misery it brings. Animals are not at all unhappy in the way we are. Not at all, not at all, except – as Sri Aurobindo says – those that are corrupted. Those that are corrupted are those that live with men. Dogs have the sense of sin and guilt, for their whole aspiration is to resemble man. Man is the god. Hence there is dissimulation, hypocrisy: dogs lie. But men admire that. They say, ‘Oh! How intelligent they are!’ They have lost their divinity.*

MA 19.7.58

The sense of sin and guilt even has physical repercussions. The face of a man integrally devoted to the Truth is beautiful, peaceful, harmonious, noble.

The face of a man ruled by falsehood, ego, desire, mental rigidity lacks this beauty. The aspiration to manifest beauty is an indispensable constituent of the sadhana of integral yoga.

*To do this Yoga, one must have at least some sense of beauty. Without it, one lacks one of the most important aspects of the physical world.*

*There is a beauty of the soul, a dignity of the soul – it is a thing to which I am very sensitive, a thing that moves me and arouses great respect in me, always.*

*Satprem: A beauty of the soul?*
Yes, it shows through in the face; this kind of dignity, beauty, harmony of an integral realization. When the soul shows through in the physical, it imparts this dignity, this beauty, this majesty, the majesty that comes from being the Tabernacle. Thus, even things that have no particular beauty assume a sense of eternal beauty, of the eternal beauty.

In this way, I have seen faces change from one extreme to the other in a flash. Someone who had this kind of beauty, harmony, this sense of divine dignity in the body, and suddenly the perception of the obstacle or the difficulty comes, then the sense of wrong, of unworthiness — there is a sudden distortion in the appearance, a kind of decomposition of the features! And yet it is the same face. It takes place in a flash, it’s frightful. This kind of hideousness of torment, of degradation (it is exactly what has been expressed in religions as the ‘torment of sin’), it changes your face unrecognizably! Even features that are beautiful in themselves become frightful — and they are the same features, the same person.

Thus I saw how horrible is the sense of sin, how much it belongs to the world of falsehood.

The Mother, in a humorous vein, refers to humans in the self-righteous mental state as ‘poor devils.’ People who are, ‘so proud of being human and conscious and capable of being something else than a thinking animal but who are really way down in comparison ... with what has to be conquered — not even the first step of the ascent’.

Such people, and according to the Mother, most people fall into this category, can be found everywhere — on the road, in the dining hall, in the offices, the lecture halls.

If we want to overcome this condition the best lever we have is ourselves.

Man is the supreme transformer. Each one carries the world in himself; he is the alchemic furnace where the work of transmutation is to be done.

Don’t look for sin in others, change yourself first. That, according to The Mother, is the first step towards inner progress.

Certainly, a great step will be taken when it becomes natural for man to seek to perfect himself instead of expecting perfection in others .... That reversal is at the basis of all true progress. The first human instinct is, “It’s the fault of circumstances, it’s people’s fault, it’s ... See how this fellow is, how that fellow is, how ...” And it goes on indefinitely. The first step, the very first step is to say, “If I were as I should be, or if the body were as it should be, all would be perfectly all right for it.” If, to make progress, you wait for others to do so, you can wait indefinitely.

That’s the first thing that should be spread everywhere.

Never lay the blame on others or on circumstances because whatever the circumstances may be, even apparently the worst, if you are in the true attitude and have the true consciousness, it doesn’t matter in the least for your inner progress, not in the least — and I’ll say, including death. That really seems to be the first lesson to be learned.

Do you remember where Sri Aurobindo wrote (I am translating freely) that to facilitate progress, the notion of sin was introduced, but man immediately (laughing) saw sin in all others — he never saw it for himself! ... Sri Aurobindo’s sentence is charming, but I don’t remember.¹

Satprem remarks that it is more difficult not to hate the righteous than the sinners, one can easily identify with them. The Mother agrees. She says even in the Ashram the attitude of self

¹ The Mother is referring to Aphorism 68. See footnote 29.
righteousness persists, and as long it is there, there is no question of yoga.

Satprem: But the difficulty isn’t so much not hating the sinner; but not hating the virtuous! That’s far more difficult! Because one readily understands sinners, those poor people, but the virtuous....

Actually, what you hate in them is their self-righteousness, only that. After all, they’re right not to do evil – they can’t be blamed for that! But what’s hard to tolerate is their sense of superiority, the way they look down their noses at all these poor fellows who are no worse than they! [...] I must say that when this happens here.... In the world at large it seems quite normal, but when this happens here it always gives me a bit of a shock, in the sense that I say to myself, ‘So they’re still at that level!’

Even those who claim to be broad-minded, above these ‘conventions,’ immediately fall right into the trap. And to ease their consciences they say, ‘Mother wouldn’t allow that. Mother wouldn’t permit that. Mother wouldn’t tolerate such a thing!’ – to add a further inanity to the rest.

This state is very difficult to get out of. It is really Pharisaism – this sense of social dignity, this narrow-mindedness – because no one with an atom of intelligence would fall into such a hole! Those who have traveled through the world, for instance, and seen for themselves that social mores depend entirely upon climatic conditions, upon races and customs and still more upon the times, the epoch – they are able to look at it all with a smile. But the self-righteous ... oooh!

This is a primary stage. As long as you haven’t gone beyond this condition, you are unfit for yoga. Because truly, no one in such a rudimentary state is ready for yoga.

Sin is God’s corrective for egoism. When we do something which gives us an uneasy feeling we may become aware of its questionability. Sri Aurobindo says we should do, say or feel nothing what we could not do in front of the Mother. Of course there must still be some sincerity in the being – when it is totally crooked however it will feel nothing is wrong even while performing the most atrocious deeds in front of her...

There exists no reason why we should feel morally superior to anybody else.

If one enters the human collective psychological consciousness one realizes that any human being can do anything. There is no sin not our own. Sri Aurobindo articulates this idea in Aphorism 50: To hate the sinner is the worst sin, for it is hating God; yet he who commits it glories in his superior virtue.

Satprem: When we enter a certain state of consciousness, we plainly see that we are capable of anything and that ultimately there is no ‘sin’ not potentially our own. Is this impression correct? And yet certain things make us rebel or disgust us. We always reach some inadmissible point. Why? What is the true, effective attitude when confronted with Evil?

There is no sin not our own....

You have this experience when for some reason or other, depending on the case, you come into contact with the universal consciousness – not in its limitless essence but on any level of Matter. There is an atomic consciousness, a purely material consciousness and an even more generally prevailing psychological consciousness. When, through interiorization or a sort of withdrawal from the ego you enter into contact with that zone of consciousness we can call psychological terrestrial or human collective (there is a difference: ‘human collective’ is restricted, while ‘terrestrial’ includes many animal and even plant vibrations; but in the present case, since the moral
notion of guilt, sin and evil belongs exclusively to human consciousness, let us simply say ‘human collective psychological consciousness’); when you contact that through identification, you naturally feel or see or know yourself capable of any human movement whatsoever. To some extent, this constitutes a Truth-Consciousness, or at such times the egoistical sense of what does or doesn’t belong to you, of what you can or cannot do, disappears; you realize that the fundamental construction of human consciousness makes any human being capable of doing anything. And since you are in a truth-consciousness, you are aware at the same time that to feel judgmental or disgusted or revolted would be an absurdity; for everything is potentially there inside you. And should you happen to be penetrated by certain currents of force (which we usually can’t follow: we see them come and go but we are generally unaware of their origin and direction), if any one of these currents penetrates you, it can make you do anything.

The Mother then engages herself in the discussion of ‘perfection’. She rejects the idea of the virtuous people which defines perfection as a linear pursuit of virtue. While Sri Aurobindo characterized ‘seriousness’ as being the main obstacle to achieving perfection, perfection for the Mother also means fullness, completeness, the fullness of the Divine.

Aphorism 82: If men took life less seriously, they could very soon make it more perfect... God never takes His works seriously; therefore one looks out on this wonderful universe.

Sri Aurobindo CWSA 12:432

Satprem: One may ask how taking things seriously prevents life from being more perfect?

(After a long silence) Virtue has always been busy eliminating things from life and (laughing) if we could put together all the virtues from all the countries in the world, nothing much would remain in life!

Virtue claims to seek perfection, but perfection is a totality. So the two movements are contradictory: virtue, which eliminates, prunes, sets limits, and perfection, which accepts everything, rejects nothing but puts everything in its place, evidently cannot go well together.

MA 14.1.63

People understand divine perfection as moral perfection. But divine perfection means fulness excluding nothing. The same misunderstanding is found about ‘Purity of the Divine’.

Our whole way of thinking is wrong! All the believers, all the faithful (those from the West in particular) think in terms of ‘something else’ when they speak of God – He cannot be weak, ugly, imperfect, He is something immaculate – but this is wrong thinking. They are dividing, separating.

For subconscious thought (I mean thinking without reflecting, instinctively, out of habit, without observing oneself thinking), what is generally considered ‘perfection’ is precisely what is seen or felt or postulated as being virtuous, divine, beautiful, admirable – but it’s not that at all! Perfection means something in which nothing is missing. The divine perfection is a totality. The divine perfection is the Divine in his wholeness, with nothing left out. The divine perfection is the whole of the Divine, with nothing subtracted from it. For the moralists it is the exact opposite: divine perfection is nothing but the virtues they stand for!

From the true standpoint, the divine perfection is the whole (Mother makes a global gesture), and the fact that within this whole nothing can be missing is precisely what makes it perfect. Consequently, perfection means that each thing is in its place, exactly what it should be, and that relationships among things are also exactly what they should be.
Perfection is one way to approach the Divine; Unity is another. But Perfection is a global approach: all is there and all is as it should be – that is to say, the perfect expression of the Divine (you can’t even say ‘of His Will,’ because that still implies something apart, something emanating from Him!).

It could be put like this (but it brings it down considerably): He is what He is and exactly as He wants to be. The ‘exactly as He wants to be’ takes us down quite a few steps, but it still gives an idea of what I mean by ‘perfection’!

Divine perfection implies infinity and eternity – all is coexistent beyond time and space.

MA 7.7.61

It’s like the word ‘purity’ – one could lecture endlessly on the difference between divine purity and what people call purity. Divine purity (at the lowest level) is to admit but one influence – the divine Influence (but this is at the lowest level, and already terribly distorted). Divine purity means that only the Divine exists – nothing else. It is perfectly pure – only the Divine exists, nothing other than He. And so on.

MA 7.7.61

Everything in itself is perfect. Everything is an expression of the Divine. The only sinfulness consists in being no more in its appropriate place. Satprem asks what about cruelty? The Mother gives the surprising answer that it is legitimizied by the fact that the performers of cruel acts experience intense joy. But as it is deformed, it is repugnant. Here again the sentiment of ‘beauty’ comes in. The ugliness of cruelty deprives these acts of their legitimacy which otherwise would be based on their joyfulness.

Aphorism 66 – Sin is that which was once in its place, persisting now it is out of place; there is no other sinfulness.

Sri Aurobindo CWSA 12:430

Satprem: Sin is said to be something no longer in its place. But has something like cruelty, for example, ever had a ‘place’?

Exactly what came to me – I receive all the questions people ask. The question arises immediately: if one kills out of cruelty, for instance, or inflicts pain out of cruelty, did that ever have a place? ... For even though deformed in appearance, it is nevertheless (we always come back to the same thing) an expression of the Divine. What lies behind, tell me?

Sri Aurobindo always said that cruelty was one of the things most repugnant to him, but he explained it as the deformation of an intensity. We could almost call it the deformation of an intensity of love – something not satisfied with half-measures, something driven to extremes (which is legitimate) – it’s the deformation of the need for extremely strong sensations. ...

Certain things can be called ‘sin,’ if you like, such as cruelty. Well, the only explanation I see for such things is the deformation of the need or taste for extremely strong sensations. I have noticed that cruel people experience an Ananda in their cruelty – they find an intense joy in it. It is thereby legitimizized. Only it’s in such a deformed state that it’s repugnant.

MA 18.7.61

Human beings are constantly exposed to all kinds of often malicious forces and their suggestions. It is up to them to discriminate, to accept or refuse them. Otherwise they are just their puppets and playthings. The movement of disgust and revolt against them is helpful in their rejection. The conscious effort towards the Divine Consciousness finally leads to the identification with the Divine Will which culminates in total peace and unfaltering serenity.

If one always remained in this state of consciousness, keeping alive the flame of Agni, the flame of purification and progress, then after some time, not only could one prevent these
movements from taking an active form in oneself and becoming expressed physically, but one could act upon the very nature of the movement and transform it. Needless to say, however, that unless one has attained a very high degree of realization it is virtually impossible to keep this state of consciousness for long. Almost immediately one falls back into the egoistic consciousness of the separate self, and all the difficulties return: disgust, the revolt against certain things and the horror they create in us, and so on.

It is probable – even certain – that until one is completely transformed these movements of disgust and revolt are necessary to make one do within oneself what is needed to slam the door on them. For after all, the point is to not let them manifest.

In another aphorism, Sri Aurobindo says (I no longer recall his exact words) that sin is simply something no longer in its place. In this perpetual Becoming nothing is ever reproduced and some things disappear, so to speak, into the past; and when it’s time for them to disappear, they seem – to our very limited consciousness – evil and repulsive: we revolt against them because their time is past.

Consequently, there is only one solution: by aspiration, concentration, interiorization and identification, to unite with the supreme Will. And that is both omnipotence and perfect freedom. It’s the only omnipotence, the only freedom – all the rest are approximations. You may be en route, but it’s not That, not the total thing.

If you make the experiment, you will come to see that this supreme freedom and this supreme power are accompanied by a total peace and an unfaltering serenity: if you notice any contradiction – revolt, disgust or something inadmissible – this indicates that some part in you is not touched by the transformation, is still en route: something still holding on to the old consciousness, that’s all.

There is a veil of falsehood covering Truth which must be removed through total identification with the Divine. In the Divine Consciousness sin, death, suffering, sickness and falsehood don’t exist. In her experience of 13 April 1962 The Mother identified Love as the Origin, Maintainer and Fulfiler of the creation. By the total identification with this Origin we become Him without any possibility of sin any more and His Will is expressed spontaneously.

One thing must inevitably cease: the Deformation, the veil of falsehood covering Truth, because all we see existing here is due to that. If the veil is removed, things will necessarily be completely different, completely: they will be as we experience them when we emerge individually from that deformed consciousness. When one comes out of that consciousness and enters the Truth-Consciousness, one is incredulous that such things as suffering, misery and death can exist; it’s amazing, in the sense that (when one is truly on the other side) ... one doesn’t understand how all this can be happening. And, although this state of consciousness is habitually associated with the experience of the unreality of the world as we know it, Sri Aurobindo tells us that this perception of the world’s unreality need not exist for the supramental consciousness: only Falsehood is unreal, not the world. And this is most interesting – the world has its own reality, independent of Falsehood.

I suppose this will be the first effect of the Supermind – perhaps even its first effect in the individual, because it will begin in individuals first.

Satprem: Is it putting things in their places?

In my experience, it is; and it has come to the point where the more concentrated the Force, the more things turn up at the very moment they ought to, people come just when they should and do just what they ought to be doing, the things around me fall into place naturally – and this goes for
the least little detail. And simultaneously it brings with it a sense of harmony and rhythm, a joy – a very smiling joy in organization, as if everything were joyously participating in this restructuring. For example, you want to tell someone something and he comes to you; you need someone to do a particular work and he appears; something has to be organized – all the required elements are at hand. All with a kind of miraculous harmony, but nothing miraculous about it! Essentially it’s simply the inner force meeting with a minimum of obstacles, and so things get molded by its action. This happens to me very often, very often; and sometimes it goes on for hours.

MA 18.7.61

In Mother’s experience of the supramental ship [Agenda 3.2.1958] there was a selection of people fit to disembark¹. This fitness wasn’t based on any moral qualities but on their ability to be in relation with the supramental world.

At that time, my impression (an impression which remained rather long, almost the whole day) was of an extreme relativity – no, not exactly that, but an impression that the relationship between this world and the other completely changes the criterion by which things are to be evaluated or judged.

This criterion had nothing mental about it, and it gave the strange inner feeling that so many things we consider good or bad are not really so. It was very clear that everything depended upon the capacity of things and upon their ability to express the supramental world or be in relationship with it. It was so completely different, at times even so opposite to our ordinary way of looking at things!

With people, too, I saw that what helps or prevents them from becoming supramental is very different from what our ordinary moral notions imagine.

MA 9.1.62

How to get rid of this archaic sense of sin? The omnipotent means of overcoming it is Divine Laughter, the identification with the Divine Smile behind everything. We have to find the inner sun and bathe in it. Everything has its legitimacy but it must be at the right place.

The only way to make life perfect (I mean here, life on earth, of course) is to look at it from a sufficient height to see it in its totality, not only its present totality, but over the whole past, present and future: what it has been, what it is, what it must be – you must be able to see it all at once. Because that’s the only way to put everything in its place. Nothing can be done away with, nothing should be done away with, but each thing must find its own place in total harmony with the rest. Then all those things that appear so “evil,” so “reprehensible” and “unacceptable” to the puritan mind would become movements of joy and freedom in a totally divine life. And then nothing would stop us from knowing, understanding, feeling and living this wonderful Laughter of the Supreme who takes infinite delight in watching Himself live infinitely.

This delight, this wonderful Laughter which dissolves all shadows, all pain, all suffering ... We only have to go deep enough into ourselves to find the inner Sun and let ourselves be bathed in it. Then everything is but a cascade of harmonious, luminous, sun-filled laughter which leaves no room for shadow and pain.

In fact, even the greatest difficulty, even the greatest grief, even the greatest physical pain, if you can look at them from there, take your stand there, you see the unreality of the difficulty, the unreality of the grief, the unreality of the pain – and all becomes a joyful and luminous vibration.

1 It is believed that an immense ship, a symbolic representation of the bridge between our world and the supramental world, is the training ground for people destined for the supramental life. The Mother’s earthly consciousness went there for two hours on February 3, 1958.
It is ultimately the most powerful means of dissolving difficulties, overcoming grief and getting rid of pain. The first two [difficulties and grief] are relatively easy (relatively), the last [pain] is more difficult because of our habit of regarding the body and its sensations as extremely concrete and positive – but actually it is the same thing, it’s just that we haven’t been taught and accustomed to seeing our body as something fluid, plastic, uncertain, malleable. We haven’t learned to permeate it with this luminous Laughter which dissolves all shadows and difficulties, all discords, all disharmony, all that grates, cries and weeps.

This Sun – the Sun of divine laughter – is at the core of everything, it is the truth of everything. What is needed is to learn to see it, feel it, live it. And for that, let us flee from those who take life seriously, they are the most boring people on earth!

It’s the exact, exact opposite of what I feel now: no matter what happens – something wrong in the body, something wrong with people, something wrong in circumstances – instantly, the first movement: “O my sweet Lord, my Beloved!” And I laugh! And then all is well. I did this the other day (it’s spontaneous and instantaneous, it isn’t thought out or willed or planned – none of it – it just happens), it happened the other day (I don’t recall the details but it was over a circumstance that hardly seemed sacred): I saw myself, and I started laughing. I said, “But look! I don’t need to be serious, I don’t need to be solemn!”

As soon as it comes (Mother makes a solemn face), I get suspicious, I say to myself, “Oh, something is wrong, some influence or other must have entered the atmosphere that shouldn’t be there.” All that remorse, all that regret, all that ... ooh! The sense of indignity, of fault ... and, going a little farther, the sense of sin – oh, that...! That seems to me to belong to another age, a Dark Age.

After all, what is sin? We have seen that sin disappears when we live in the awareness of the Divine Laughter, the Divine Sun. There sin can’t survive, sin is only possible when we are far from the Divine. As for now, the whole world is therefore in sin...

What do these people call “sin,” to begin with? What is sin? When I am told about sin, I answer, “You know, sin is not being Divine.” So the whole world is in sin.

And something kept coming again and again to me: there is no other sin ... (because this followed a few lines I read in Savitri on the glorification of sin in the vital world, the words came to me because of that) ... there is no other sin, no other vice than to be far from Thee.

It seemed to explain everything.

It wasn’t I who wrote it! There’s no “I” in it: it comes just like that.

The ‘far from Thee’ is so, so intense in its vibration, it has a concrete meaning.

And that’s the only thing: all the rest, all moral notions, everything, everything, even the notion of Ignorance ... it all becomes mental chatter. But this, this experience, is marvelous. ‘Far from Thee....’

The beautiful thing to know is that The Mother is always our mother. She is always there for us and her arms are wide open. For Her, Divine Love incarnate, there is no unforgivable sin: even the worst of sinners are safe in Her.

For me, to every sin mercy.

Satprem: But is there mercy for total egoism?

Yes, oh, yes! That’s just it!

MA 7.1.70
Martin Sobieroj, born in Germany in 1943, first came in contact with the writings of Sri Aurobindo in 1961. He worked as a Librarian in Germany and joined Auroville in 1992. Here he has compiled a topic index to the Agenda and undertaken research studies on a wide variety of themes seen in the light of the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Having been confronted with the impact of Nazism on his family’s life and consequently his own, he felt like summarising Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s revelations and statements on Nazism against the background of contemporary Germany in his book Der Stern des Abgrundes: das Medium Adolf Hitler im Lichte Sri Aurobindos und der Mutter. He is also interested in the relationship of Christian thought with the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, on which he has written several papers.

In Savitri Narad prefigures the final redemption, which the Christian fathers called the *Apokatastis Panton*: “the re-unification with the Divine”:

> He sang of the glory and marvel still to be born,  
> Of Godhead throwing off at last its veil,  
> Of bodies made divine and life made bliss,  
> Immortal sweetness clasping immortal might,  
> Heart sensing heart, thought looking straight at thought,  
> And the delight when every barrier falls,  
> And the transfiguration and the ecstasy.  
> And as he sang the demons wept with joy  
> Foreseeing the end of their long dreadful task  
> And the defeat for which they hoped in vain,  
> And glad release from their self-chosen doom  
> And return into the One from whom they came.

*Savitri*, p.417