

I Remember¹

An Interview with Anjani Dayanand

15th August 1964 was a momentous day in my life.² That was the day when I had my first Darshan of the Mother. Dayanand had been a regular visitor since 1960. He used to bring Darshan and New Year Messages through which I got my initial introduction to the Mother. The New Year Message of 1964 “Are you ready?” was the turning point in my life. It made me ponder deeply. I tried to find the answer within myself. It came strongly on 14th August 1964. That day was momentous in that Dayanand was very ill, running high temperature, in Madras. And I told him that I wanted to go to Pondicherry Ashram for the Darshan the next day. “But you can’t drive the car, what shall we do?” And he said: “Don’t worry, engage a driver, and I too will come.” The next day, we left our son Satya with our maid, and drove down to Pondicherry reaching there just in time for the evening balcony darshan. There was a downpour. We had not brought any change of clothes and were completely drenched. I was terribly worried. Dayanand had come with a high fever. We returned immediately after the Darshan. I put him back in bed and called the doctor in the morning. The doctor saw him and asked: “What, are you joking? What has happened? He is normal.” That was my first introduction to the Mother – direct. After that there was no looking back.

Before the balcony Darshan we had spent a few minutes in the Society House. Dayanand was a member of the Society. There was a big crowd in the hall. Navajata saw me and came across the hall and asked me: “Where are you coming from? What is your name?” I told him my name. “What are you doing?” I told him my designation. He said, “I think that we are going to work together for a long time”. The Auroville project had just been announced.

So, after that it was a regular contact by phone every morning – every day-to do this work or that for Auroville. No point in going into all those things. But one major thing was: he said the Mother was keen that we should acquire all the land – at least the inner circle – straightaway. I prepared a detailed note for acquisition of the required land and took it to the Chief Minister, Mr. Bhaktavatsalam, who was very understanding and approved the proposal. A Government Order was issued. The Collector of South Arcot District was directed to initiate action for land acquisition. The Collector of Cuddalore sent a letter to the Society asking for an undertaking to pay the cost of the staff to be appointed for the work of land acquisition. The total cost for one Tahsildar, one Revenue Inspector, two Karnams (village officers), and two Talayaries (helpers), worked out to Rs.68, 000/- per annum. Navajata did not accept the proposal. When I informed the Mother about Navajata’s decision She was very unhappy, “Why has he taken this decision?” She asked. I told Her that Navajata felt that land acquisition through Government would take a long time; whereas direct purchase would be quicker.

In retrospect this was obviously a wrong decision. I am mentioning this because it is good to know, at least now, what the Mother’s views were on the issue of land acquisition.

There were many other issues that were discussed and it would neither be possible, nor appropriate to narrate all of them at this point of time.

The other significant date in my life was 4.5.67 about which The Mother had said, “The Supramental has manifested in the administration,” and when I went for pranam, She repeated the same to me and said to me “You will see its action by and by”.

I was still working in Madras. My son Satya had come of age for admission in the school. I had sent his photo to the Mother and She had approved of his admission. I arranged with Prabhaben and Kishorilalji to take care of him and decided to go back. Before leaving I sent a letter to the Mother seeking for Her Grace and Protection for Satya. The Mother was angry and She asked

¹ Reproduced from “Darshan”, pp. 109-13.

² The day before, at its First World Conference (held in Pondy), the SAS had decided “to develop a new township near Pondicherry for those who want to prepare for a new life”. Early 1965 Mother named it “Auroville”.

“How can she leave Satya and go. It is my responsibility to see to his education. She must take him back.” After a month or so, Navajata came to Madras and brought me a special blessing packet and card from the Mother with the message from the Mother to tell me that She would be very happy if I decided to come and stay in Pondicherry. This was before 4.5.67.

And then came 4.5.67. Within few weeks the transfer order to Pondicherry came. The Chief Secretary Government of Tamil Nadu told me: “You will be going to a job where you are not eligible for your scale of pay. You will be one down.” I said that I did not mind and I would go willingly. And within a couple of months I was promoted as Chief Secretary. When I went to the Mother and told Her, She said happily, “We have done a fait accompli”.

Work on the Auroville project had started in right earnest. Preparations were going on for the inauguration of the project on February 29, 1968.³

A book “*Introduction To Auroville*” was prepared for distribution. Roger Anger took the book to the Mother for approval. The Mother said: “Show it to Anjani”. They came to my office. I went through it and said that I did not feel quite happy about it and that I did not know why. Then they took it to the Mother and told Her about what I felt. She then wrote out a message: “India has become the symbol representing all the difficulties of modern humanity. India will be the land of its resurrection, the resurrection to a Higher and Truer Life.”⁴ The Mother asked to show the message to me and ask me whether in the context of that message the book was alright. What more could I say but express my gratitude to the Mother for giving me this opportunity to serve Her.

When work started in Kuilapalayam village, the people were against Auroville. They were worried that they will lose their livelihood. The Mother told me to go to them and tell them that it is in their own interest to collaborate. Auroville will bring them a lot of good. We do not want to dictate to them. Roger has shown me the plan of a model dwelling to be put up for them, which will help them to live with dignity. It was a very good experience for me to be able to communicate with the people.

The Mother had envisaged the receipt of large funds for Auroville from international sources. I informed Her that the World Bank has the power and authority to sanction a grant up to rupees five crores for an innovative experimental project and whether I could prepare a project report for Auromodel, which was to be like a transit accommodation before joining the mainstream Auroville. After I prepared the report, She studied it in great detail and was very happy. She even went to the extent of telling me to get it printed and informed me that the cover should be orange with black lettering. We submitted the project to the World Bank through the Government of India. It did not come through then due to lack of adequate support from International Bodies. I feel it is still a valid document which can help to fulfil the Mother’s vision.

The Mother told me another important thing relating to the accounting for the funds received from various sources. She wanted all Aurovilians to be treated at par, and funds coming from all countries should be put in a common account, in the general account of Auroville. In spite of Her dear instruction the management started a German account to begin with, followed by a French account, American account etc. When the Mother was informed about this, She was very unhappy.

In conclusion I would like to mention an experience I had on the eve of the inauguration of Auroville.

Sleep was eluding me because of all kinds of apprehensions. I sat up around past midnight and opened the book ‘Savitri’. The following lines stood out, and after reading them I found my peace, and I went back to sleep peacefully:

The silent Soul of all the world was there:
A Being lived, a Presence and a Power,

³ Anjani surely meant 28th.

⁴ Mother spoke to Satprem about this message on 3.2.68.

A single Person who was himself and all
And cherished Nature's sweet and dangerous throbs
Transfigured into beats divine and pure.
One who auld love without return for love,
Meeting and turning to the best the worst,
It healed the bitter cruelties of earth,
Transforming all experience to delight;
Intervening in the sorrowful paths of birth
It rocked the cradle of the cosmic Child
Anil stilled all weeping with its hand of joy;
It led things all towards their secret good,
It turned racked falsehood into happy truth;
Its power was to reveal divinity.
Infinite, coeval with the mind of God,
It bore within itself a seed, a flame,
A seed from which the Eternal is new-born,
A flame that cancels death in mortal things.
All grew to all kindred and self and near;
The intimacy of God was everywhere
No veil was felt, no brute barrier inert,
Distance could not divide, Time could not change.
A fire of passion burned in spirit-depths,
A constant touch of sweetness linked all hearts,
The throb of one adoration's single bliss
In a rapt ether of undying love.
An inner happiness abode in all,
A sense of universal harmonies,
A measureless secure eternity
Of truth and beauty and good and joy made one.
Here was the welling core of finite life;
A formless spirit became the soul of form.

“You Have Come, I Am Happy”⁵

An Interview with Dayanand

Dayanand: My contact with the Mother started in 1953, when I came here as a student of the Post Graduate Course in Ecology in the Botany department of Annamalai University. My professor Dr. T.C.N. Singh had brought us here, so that he could place the entire team who were working on “The Effect of Music on Plants” before the Mother. She used to encourage that experiment. The first time I saw Her in 1953 was in the playground where activities were going on. We stood in a line and I bowed down at Her Feet. She straight away gave me the *Hymn to the Mother Durga*, which was the first book I received from Her. I thought it was over with that. All the students who were with me left and I too was going out but just stood at the entrance to the playground and looked to my right – by then She had moved from Her seat near the map to the classroom where She was taking the classes. As I stared, I saw a column of light and I was stuck to the place. Tears were rolling down my eyes; I could not move. I do not know how much time elapsed till somebody came and prompted me, “Come on, all the people have left.” So, that was my first contact with the Divine Mother. It started like that and never left me afterwards.

While I was studying I always kept a blessing packet with me all the time. After finishing my education at Dehradun I left for Chennai; there was a break – destiny had to work itself out. Then in 1963, I came with my wife Anjani and had darshan of the Mother. Later on, in ‘64, we came with Satya, our child. I got involved in Auroville at that stage, 64-65, without my knowing about Auroville. I didn’t know about Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga, I knew that the Mother was the Divine Mother once and for all I knew-not from the head, from the heart, that was all. The mental part I never knew.

In 63-64 Navajata called me and said that there is a project like this – Auroville project – and we have to buy land. “While you are on your tours would you like to go around, perambulate Puthurai and Pattanur areas and be of assistance and assess the land. So that was how the first contact with Auroville started. Every time I began tours it was planned in such a way that I was here in the night. I kept the car in Golconde and in the daytime went to Pattanur and perambulated the land. At that time it was presumed that Auroville would be surrounded by a large water-body – that is what the Mother wanted – and so Puthurai area was the first to be purchased. But later on because the area was too small, the location was shifted to Irumbai, which was spread over Idayanchavadi, Bommiarpalayam and Kottakarai villages.

In 1966 I was selected by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the Colombo Plan for a one year study at Oxford University. I chose as a special subject for my thesis ‘Reclamation of Saline soils with special reference to Kaluveli swamp’. I chose the subject since I had been informed that the Mother had said that at some future date there was a likelihood of Olympics being held at Auroville and at that time reclamation of Kaluveli swamp would be useful.

On return from Oxford, I was welcomed with open arms by the Mother, when I went for Pranam (11.07.1967). She welcomed me with open arms with the words, “So you have come back I am happy.” I had no intention of resigning my job but something inside me prompted me to ask whether I should resign. Since my attempt to come on deputation was not approved by the Government, the Mother approved my resignation and offered to help financially for refunding the amount spent by the Government for my training in Oxford – I had taken the plunge.

One particular experience I would like to share. During my entire stay in Oxford, I had so regulated my life that at 6 a.m. local time, I would sit in meditation. I had written to the Mother about this and She had blessed me. Throughout my entire stay I was conscious of the Presence; this is what kept me going.

⁵ Reproduced from “Darshan”. pp. 114-18.

Auroville office actually started where Purna Prema is now staying.⁶ We were the first people there – upstairs – and downstairs was the Auroville office. I was the first person to start the Auroville office. Thereafter Roger came and said that Indira Gandhi might be coming and the downstairs portion was made into an exhibition, to show to Indira Gandhi. The Auroville office functioned from that place for quite a long time till it shifted to beach office – when we got the building from Padmini.

My regular work in Auroville started straight away on my return from Oxford. I was looking after land survey estate management, agriculture, water resource development etc. It was an exhilarating experience for me. I had three survey teams and we worked with meticulous care to mark out our lands with granite stones marked “AV”. For the work, I had to perambulate, walk, and see that the stones were laid correctly. Every tree was enumerated. If there was anything interesting like seed, flowers or the soil of Auroville, – every Sunday I used to take them, to the Mother. She was delighted to see them. And we even had raised a crop of paddy in the Matrimandir area – a short term saline variety of paddy. I remember taking that paddy in a white porcelain bowl. How She blessed it! Then, at that time, She wanted the planting of transformation trees – 24 in number in Matrimandir area. Along with survey work many things were going on side by side: development of the infrastructure, exploitation of water resources, – that is drilling a series of bore wells taking the water to different areas of Auroville, taking care of the estate, thousands of cashew and mango trees, Jackfruit trees, Palm trees, all the produce of the area etc. – Multiple sort of activities were going on. They were too complicated and very few people were there at that time. Actually the Mother told me, “You are doing too much work. So, you should not take up teaching in Auroville.” (They asked me to teach also.) She said, “No.” You see the infinite care the Divine Mother bestowed on you to each individual person’s physical needs – which is astounding. One day when we had gone to the Mother, Anjani told Her that I was not taking food properly. And I was amazed that She wrote a chit to Purna Prema to see that I got non-vegetarian food – chicken – for my body and that continued for three months. That was Her level of concern for each and every individual.

Then we began doing different projects also, like the ‘Saline water irrigation research project’. And the biggest project that Auroville had undertaken was the Farmers, Education and Training Project so that the local villagers were integrated with Auroville. Farmers from 30 villages, about 15,000 farmers, were trained in a very systematic manner so that they understood and got integrated to Auroville in some way or another. And it went on for five years.

Q: What about “Om” of Matrimandir.

There are hundreds of fossils [fossil: The remains (or an impression) of a plant or animal that existed in a past geological age and that has been excavated from the soil.] in Auroville, especially in the Aurobrindavan area. At the time of the inauguration of pillars⁷, (She always used to write with brushes) She had put “Om” on a fossil and sent it to Matrimandir. I do not know whether it is still there or not.

(.....) So far as I remember, it was put under the Mahalakshmi Pillar foundation.

Dayanand: Well, the fossil will be there... One interesting thing is that there was nothing to worry about. As I said, if anybody asks me whether I have lived in heaven, I say I have lived in heaven on earth. From 1963 up to 1973, definitely I lived in heaven. I had no worry at all. For any problem you can run to the Mother and ask Her. She would sort out everything. So, I say that I had the experience of living in heaven. It was a wonderful occasion; supramental had practically descended on earth.

Q: (.....) I think the Mother gave you in 1971, “a sweet year” card. Can you tell something about it?

⁶ House diagonally opposed to the Ashram at the crossroad rue de la Marine.

⁷ Dayanand speaks here of the function which took place on 21.2.72 for the first concreting. Mother had written “Om” “Blessings” and had signed a fossilised wood (which Alain Grandcolas had found while excavating the earth) which was then indeed placed under the Mahalakshmi (East) pillar during this ceremony.

Dayanand: Why can't you take it? I am still keeping it. Some other things I have already handed over to the Auroville archives. Things regarding Ganeshji, I gave to Kusumben.⁸ This is still with me; it has to go to Auroville. Someday I can hand it over when the new Secretary comes. That was for the Sri Aurobindo's Centenary. It started in 1971; Mother was in such a fantastic state, a joyous state. And that was how it should be celebrated and that is why she wrote "A sweet year". She gave it to Champaklalji. I would like to hand it over as soon as possible – it belongs to Auroville and it does not belong to me. It was meant for Auroville. It was a sweet year, 1971.

A tragic incident happened in the beginning of Auroville because the people there were not used to vehicles going into their village. It was an early experience to them. So whenever a motor vehicle went through the village, children would run after it. Then X started the school there in Idayanhavadi. I think the school van ran over the child and the child died. The Mother wanted to know how to sort out the situation at my level. I said that the only thing left was compensation. (You cannot compensate loss of life, it is a ticklish issue.) You must remember that we are talking about the 60's. Then I gave my assessment. I told the Mother, "In my assessment we can give Rs. 5,000/- to the parents of the child." She took Rs. 5,000/- and wrote "Dayanand" on the envelope, put it there, and said, "You go personally and in the presence of the entire village, give Rs. 5,000/- to the parents of the child. Say we are sorry and it will not happen again." I remember going to Idayanchavadi. And in the presence of the entire village, on the main road, I gave Rs. 5,000/- to the parents and the matter was settled.

When the time for Auroville Administration Committee had come, Navajata informed me that he had a particular person in mind to represent the committee, whether I had any objection. I said I had no objection. But when he returned from the Mother, She had suggested my name instead of that particular person. That is how I got into the C.A.A. (Comité Administratif d'Auroville).⁹

There are many more things to share, perhaps at a later date and time.

All I have stated is a recollection from memory. There will be mistakes for which you will have to excuse me.

⁸ Dayanand speaks here of the Ganesh Temple at Auro-Orchard. Kusumben had been asked by Mother to look after it.

⁹ The first meeting of the CAA took place on 15.3.70. The designation of its members was as follows:

Anjani Dayanand	Administration
André Morisset	Coordination
Nava	Collection of funds
Laljibhai Hindocha	Promotion of Industries
Suresh Hindocha	Technical management
Dayanand	Agriculture
Prem Mallik	Marketing Management
Roger Anger	Town Planning

To-be joined by Shyam Sunder for legal matters.

The Committee met every Sunday morning at 10.30 a.m.

Wil (a Dutch lady) acted as secretary of the Committee.

The CAA met for the last time on 27.2.71. It was then 'suspended' by Mother who commented: "*No more committees. No more useless talks*". Mother then appointed Shyam Sunder as her secretary for Auroville's affairs.