nic environment. It is for mankind, it is for this change
that it is being built.
Human unity: it means a consciousness of oneness, at
least in a sufficient number of people who have that
consciousness. They are not here yet. So in more sober
moments I say, in three hundred years it will be, but you
will see only the beginning.
And when things go down, can they rise again? I don’t
know. Yet people come. They say, "You don’t un-
derstand! You are like a light to us here, it is tremendous,"
so...
That delightful joy, that everything is possible...

From a conversation with Shyama

She offers her hands

Interview with Patrick and Heidi

Patrick
It was during my fourth trip to India, in 1971. I was travel-
ing with a bunch of friends, all lovers of adventure and
lovers of India. At that time those journeys took a lot of
time, passing through Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, and even
Lebanon. When later I heard about the beat generation
(Kerouac, Ginsburg), I related very much to that experi-
ence, because this is how we lived.* For the first time we
were going to travel by train. We must have had a little
more money than usual, so we were going to catch a
train from Istanbul to Tehran. That was a legendary train,
much more mythical than the Orient Express. It crossed

* We had been locked up in a cell in Beyrouth; we had sold our blood in
Greece and in Kuwait for a few dollars; we had discovered Istanbul at
dawn, as beautiful as in the Arabian Nights; we had stayed there in a leg-
endary hotel full of bandits and traffickers: we had hitchhiked in Iraq and
been locker after by Iraqi soldiers; we had been caught in a sand storm in
Koweit; we had been locked up again in a Koweit jail, etc.
the Lake Van in Kurdistan (the train was put on a boat); it was a wonderful trip. In Istanbul, at the Hyder Pasha Railway station, which is the station located on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, just before departure I met Heidi. There was a whole crowd of people, a whole coach full of hippies, beatniks, on their way to India.

As the journey took three nights and three days, I had time to get acquainted with Heidi. She told me that she was going to Pondicherry to stay at the Ashram of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I had already travelled through the South of India, I had heard of the Ashram, but had heard of it as of a place which was much too serious for the type of adventurers we were at the time. We wanted to have fun, and do all sorts of things which didn’t have anything to do really with spirituality. So we were considerate enough to bypass the Ashram and not bring them any trouble. Consequently, I knew about it without having ever been there. But Heidi had stayed there in 1968.

From Teheran we went to Meshed, and from there we took a bus for the last Iranian town, Taibad. Then after crossing a no-man’s land, we took another bus which dropped us at the first Afghan city, Islam-Gala. All my friends were there in Kabul. At that time the atmosphere in those small Kabul hotels in the middle of gardens was quite nice. There was an atmosphere of friendly adventure (these were the last moments I was going to spend with all these buddies. I had spent years with them on the road, discovering all these countries, but soon our paths were going to part).

As luck would have it, just when we were going to apply for Indian visas, we were told that India and Pakistan had gone to war and that the border was closed! So we thought: let us go back to France, work for some time and then we will come back. We flew from Teheran to Paris. As soon as we heard that things had settled down, we took a flight for Bombay.

We arrived in Pondicherry in the beginning of 1972. First we stayed two days in a government guest-house in front of the stadium. What was strange is that on the second day of our stay we both quarrelled in a terrible way, as if someone wanted to separate us. Anyway, it was over the following day. We went and saw Ravindra, who was the one who assigned tasks in the different departments of the Ashram. He didn’t ask questions (it was much easier than entering Auroville those days!) He gave each of us a job. Heidi was going to work at Art House, where balik was made, with Minidi and Milidi. Sunil’s sister. They were from the great Bengali families of the early days – the first girls who had put on shorts to do sport. So Heidi had a good support. And I was also very well looked after by Bula-da, a very old disciple, a pillar of the Ashram. I spent a year and a half with him. He was like my spiritual father. He grew fond of me, and I was very fond of him. So I worked in the water and electricity departments, visiting all the houses, the bathrooms, the toilets, the kitchens, etc., in order to repair pipes, flushes, taps, etc. I spent a year and a half under his guidance. I worked every day, morning and afternoon. During the remaining time, we participated in all the activities of the Ashram, including going to the Sportsground, etc. I even was granted the extraordinary permission to go to the swimming pool. It was something! It was a permission rarely accorded. I had been given a curious slot, from 5.30 to 6.15. It was a historic place with such a special atmosphere. We lived rue Romain Rolland, at Society Guest-House, which was run by very kind people. We slept in a room without windows, and the only way to cool down was to wrap ourselves in wet bed-sheets. It was a

Bula-da, Patrick’s mentor during his stay at the Ashram

time for tapasya. Not so much for Heidi, because by nature she already had this aspiration for simplicity, for ascetic life, but certainly for me.

When did you decide to stay?

I never asked myself too many questions, and since Heidi also didn’t… What triggered the whole thing was the fact that I was attached to Heidi. So, it meant the Ashram. Afterwards of course, there was a personal movement, but at the beginning it was due to Heidi, who undeniably was attracted to the Ashram. What is strange is that during my travels I had stayed in different ashrams several times; I had spent several months in remote ashrams of Bihar, various places which were nice, but I never truly felt that I was made for that. There was something, there was a small flame, but not a deep urge. I had tried to be a sannyasi, I had tried many things, but it was not what I needed. For a nature like mine, some guidance and support was necessary. Even now, here in Auroville, I can feel the need of it. I feel the need of a sort of fraternal cohesion. And this, we immediately felt, was present in the Ashram. It was clear. There was no question of money. It was an amazing privilege to be able to attempt a beginning of sadhana in this ideal environment, supported and guided.

We came several times to Auroville. Nothing; absolutely nothing. No call, nothing. Visiting Auroville in 1972, I don’t remember having felt interested in the least. This bearded man with his guitar in Aspiration, I felt, pfft… In some halls for beatniks and hippies I had come across atmospheres which were much more elevated.

On a spiritual level and on the level of brotherly rela-
tionships, we spent an idyllic year in the Ashram. No restaurant, no alcohol, no outings, no shopping: the pure Ashram life as the Mother had set it out for her disciples. That was the first time in my life that I worked full day. Amazing! That will go down in history.

Heidi saw Mother for the first time in 1969, so she saw her in a more intimate atmosphere. For me, it was more like standing in a line of people. Note that it was better for her... no need for her to linger over me. Move on please!

Counouma brought to Mother herself our request for a residence permit. We got the guarantee of the Ashram in 1972. In September we went back to France in order to work for some time, and then we came back in 1973, one month before she left her body.

Heidi
A little while before, we had decided to come to Auroville. The Society people had shown us the land which is Djaima now, and we agreed to take care of that land. We were in the Society office on the beach. We had to fill papers and we were ready to sign when we met Rose and Boris, whom I had known from before. We told them that we were going to go to Djaima, but they advised us against it: it was too close to the village, and there was a lot of wind in summer. They proposed to show us a place here in Fertile. We agreed, and we went back to tell Shyamsundar that we had changed our mind. He said: "All right, but don't change it every day."

At the time there was more land than there were applicants.

Patrick
What is strange for me is that during those three-four years of wandering, I didn't find any suitable place for me. But of course we were acting more like a group. When I think about it now, I would have done things differently. I would have stayed in a yoga school, I would have learned something, done something more constructive. But strangely enough, this period, which was so unconstruc-
tive, had led to a result which is enough for an existence. I don't see where else we could have had such an existence...

Heidi.
The fact that I came here is not due to coincidence. Or if it was, it was a coincidence that was guided.

First I had decided to go to India. I wanted to change everything in my life, so I wanted to go to India, without precisely knowing where in India. But India it was. Then, by chance, at a friend's house, I saw a television programme made by Louis Malle, it was a series on India with a documentary on Pondicherry. Some people were interviewed. They showed Mother; there was even some footage of Mother speaking. I didn't understand at all what she was saying, but at the end of the programme I told myself that this was where I wanted to go.

Actually, a few months later, when I flew to India, I had almost forgotten about it, but in that plane there was Jean Legrand. We had a stop-over at Cairo, so we could talk in the airport. He told me that he had seen Mother.
that he had had to go back to France because he was called for his military service, but that at the time of departure Mother had told him "Ce n'est qu'un au revoir", as if she knew he was going to be declared unfit for service. This was what had happened and he was coming back to the Ashram. Jean told me that if I had the intention to go to Pondicherry, I'd better go immediately because in a few days there was going to be a Darshan. So we went together by train to Pondicherry. Three days later was the Darshan. I stayed one month.

I had an Indian friend who kept telling me, "You have to see the Mother." I kept answering, "No, no, I don't want to trouble her." Finally, two days before my departure, I wrote a letter and sent it to her along with my photo, and I was given a time, just before I was due to leave.

She is sitting in her armchair. I kneel in front of her, with a bunch of withered flowers in my hand. Silence. She looks at you; you are like an opened book; you cannot hide anything. And then an amazing smile, a radiant smile, a big smile. She offers her hands like this (palms opened). I did not dare! But she said, "Hey, Hey!" (encouragement) so very gently, and slowly I hold out one of my hands and place it in hers.

It was a very strong experience. From that instant, it was decided.

Sometimes I am surprised to see people who have arrived in Auroville years later, and who also have a real rapport with Mother. If I had not met her physically, I don't know if I could have had that rapport. I marvel to see that some people have the same contact despite not physically meeting her.

That's it. I went back to Europe to take my sister back to Pondy with me, but she got married. So I headed back alone...

Patrick.
And, no luck, she met me! (laugh)

Heidi.
One is guided. At every step. On that flight to India, if I had not met Jean, I could have landed in Goa or God knows where. I had no plan.

From a conversation with Patrick and Heidi