To write an article about one’s life in Auroville is not an easy proposition, even for someone like myself who is accustomed to analyzing the intricacies of world politics, and particularly the hidden secrets of the inscrutable Middle Kingdom. Each member of the Auroville community is a unique individual, and it is on this uniqueness that we are required to build a livable human unity (‘actual’ according to Auroville’s Charter); this is also true for life-partners. Where to start?

Looking back over the last decades, in fact since we joined Auroville, I realize that Abha’s and my paths have been quite a way apart and yet similar; different because we come from different countries (I, from France and she from India), but also because our family backgrounds have been quite dissimilar.

In Abha’s case, she belongs to one of the most illustrious military families of independent India, it includes several generals. She says, “Looking back, I realize that my childhood and growing up years were inextricably linked to the wars in India - 1962 with China, 1965 and 1971 with Pakistan, and paradoxically that it was this war-strewn path that led to Auroville”.
On my side, though I come from a family counting many doctors and dentists, I was deeply attracted to Buddhism and already in 1972, I had the privilege to meet the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala; later, the Tibetan leader came twice to lay the foundation stone and inaugurate our Tibetan Pavilion in Auroville.

What is the common denominator between a peacenik, loving freedom and adventure, and a disciplined girl (who topped Delhi University in psychology)? But there are also similarities in our paths ...
Abha had a *darshan* of the Mother in February 1972, soon after the War for the Liberation of Bangladesh, in which her father played an important role.

Like many ‘Army’ children of her generation, she had suffered the trauma of the War with China in 1962, when her father had been taken prisoner of war in Tibet for seven months and for the first several weeks he had been tagged as ‘missing in action’. To support her children and herself, her mother joined the army medical corps as a doctor, putting the elder girls into boarding school and leaving four year-old Abha with her brother. A traumatic period for all.

In early 1971, something special happened while the Eastern Army in Kolkata was preparing to liberate Bangladesh; all the senior officers realized that they had each received a blessings packet from the Mother in Pondicherry.

As soon as the war was over, Abha’s father (Gen. Krishna Tewari) asked for leave to meet the ‘French lady’ who had sent her blessings to the generals.

The entire family (minus the eldest daughter Dr Uma who was studying in the military medical college at that time) traveled from Kolkata and reached Pondicherry serendipitously on February 20, 1972.

On the 22nd Feb, the family was granted a special *darshan* with the Mother, probably because Abha’s father was the first high ranking Indian army officer to visit the Ashram after the War:

> “*We stand in a line, just inside Mother's room, in order of age. The atmosphere is so charged, overwhelming, that my soon-to-be 13 year old heart begins to thump painfully hard against my chest, my knees are knocking against each other, dry mouth, clammy hands... then kneeling in front of Mother, dissolving and vanishing in her gaze, receiving her smile and then a rose... It was, in an instant, a life altering experience,*” recalls Abha.

That was it, their lives were changed forever. Though the Mother did not permit Gen. Tewari to retire immediately, over the next years, a large part of the family would make their separate ways to Auroville.

Dr. Kamla would work at the Auroville Health Centre and was later joined by her eldest daughter, Dr Uma who runs it now.
My experience is quite different, though at the same time similar: we were both ‘pulled’ to the Mother and Auroville by something that we couldn’t understand, but which entirely changed our lives.

One night of July 1972, I was between Kulu and Manali in Himachal Pradesh. As the road was blocked by a landslide, the bus stopped on the side. I was preparing to sleep ‘somewhere’ when destiny chose to strike.

A young boy approached me and I quickly gathered that he was inviting me to his place. I was not too keen, but during the ‘conversation’ (he knew perhaps two words of English and I knew one or two more), he spoke about Sri Aurobindo. I was intrigued because I knew of the existence of the sage.

As our exchange continued, the boy caught my hand and told me to follow him. It was becoming dark, but I could just distinguish the mountain path up which the youngster was leading me. Suddenly, he began to talk about “the Mother of Sri Aurobindo”. I thought to myself, the lady must be quite old. I knew that Sri Aurobindo was no more and if his mother was still on earth, she must be really very old. Then, I grasped that Sri Aurobindo’s mother was French!
We continued to walk for a couple of kilometers in the mountain to finally reach a small typically Himalayan house. In the house was a young lady who, I immediately understood, was connected with the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. She spoke good English, unfortunately mine was too limited, and also knew a few words of French, but her vocabulary was even more limited than mine in English. The lady showed me around the house; in her room, near her bed, there was a photo in a frame. I gathered that it was a picture of the French lady, the mother of Sri Aurobindo.

I was attracted by her eyes and what was hand-written at the bottom of the photo. I will always remember the words: “The world is preparing for a big change. Will you help?”

Without fully understanding, my heart said “Yes, I want to help”. That was it for me. I came back to India and Auroville with the second caravan in 1974.

Abha came in 1978; she remembers that it was I who reserved a hut in Aspiration for her and her friend. Since 1981, we have been living together, learning to adjust and understand each other as well as the adventure that is Auroville; it does not mean that it has been easy, but it is perhaps the objective of the game, to adjust and understand and grow.
There is no doubt that the initial ‘pull’ and resounding ‘yes’ to Mother remains in our hearts and minds, it has greatly helped us to ‘survive’ the ups and downs of Auroville and this yoga.

This reminds me of a note of an Indian government officer – from the Office of the Controller and Auditor General of India – while verifying Auroville’s accounts; he (mis)quoted Auroville’s Charter and wrote of the “Living Survivors of the Divine Consciousness”. We can’t as yet pretend to be the ‘living servitors’, but ‘survivors’ certainly we are!

One last thing. More than hundred years ago, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind... But that was not and could not be her whole mentality... When we look at the past of India, what strikes us next is her stupendous vitality, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, her almost unimaginably prolific creativeness. She creates and creates...”

Retrospectively, Auroville has given us the possibility to ‘create’ abundantly and for this, and much else besides, we are grateful. Abha runs a beautiful handicraft unit called Shradhanjali. She says: “My aspiration was to make things of beauty in a harmonious ecological way, working with young women from nearby villages. Forty years later, I continue to do this work. I'm also involved with Auroville Village Action Group, I feel that women hold the key for change in our society and it is essential that Auroville’s aims and ideals are simply but deeply understood in our bioregion.”
Currently my own ‘creation’ translates into more than two thousand articles and several books on China, Tibet, the boundary between India and China and occasionally France. Looking back, I think my research has been creative.

*His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Auroville in 2009 with Claude and Smiti*
We are also happy that our daughter Smiti has decided to follow the Auroville path; it is undoubtedly the younger generation which will make Auroville the City it should be… “The City the Earth Needs” that Mother spoke of.

We feel that we are immensely fortunate to have been ‘pulled’ to the challenge and adventure that is Auroville.

As shared by Claude & Abha,
Auroville, October 2021