

Auroville Today

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The inauguration ceremony in full swing

It's a funny thing about really big events. Many people can remember in detail what they were doing when they happened, but few can remember the details of the events themselves.

Take Auroville's inauguration ceremony of 28th February, 1968. Over 5,000 people attended. Many of them were aware, even at the time, that this was an event of major importance not only for India but also for the world. Yet ask them now what they recall and all too often there is an embarrassed smile or shrug. Perhaps it was just too big for comprehension. Perhaps this was Mother's way of 'dosing' her power. Perhaps.

The problem is that when memories fail myths and half-truths are only too happy to rush in and fill the gap. Here, then, thirty five years later, is our attempt to understand what happened on a wind-swept plateau on a hot February morning when Mother invited all people of goodwill to build a city. And a dream.

February 28, 1968

Thirty-five years ago Auroville's inauguration ceremony took place on a barren plateau in Tamil Nadu. What exactly happened? Gleaned from preparatory Ashram documents, participants' memories and newspaper reports, this resumé is perhaps the closest we'll get to the definitive story.

The ceremony, which would take 75 minutes, began at 10.24 with the white-clad announcer briefly explaining the order of events to come to the 5,000 or so people assembled in the amphitheatre. At 10.30 there was the sound of a gong, there were a few bars of Mother's music, then came Mother's voice, relayed from her room in the Ashram:

Salut d'Auroville à tous les hommes de bonne volonté. Sont conviés à Auroville tous ceux qui ont soif de progress et aspirant à une vie plus haute et plus vraie.

[Translation: Greetings from Auroville to all men of goodwill. Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher and truer life.]

A few more bars of music followed, then Mother read The Charter of Auroville in French.

The announcer then stated, "Now the earth from the Ashram will be put in the urn." Kiran and Vijay Poddar approached the urn. Kiran carried Mother's flag and Vijay carried earth from the Samadhi and a stainless steel container with inside the scroll with The Charter of Auroville in Mother's handwriting. As they reached the urn Sunil's 1968 New Year music began to be played, along with Mother's New Year message: *Remain young, Never stop striving towards Perfection*. The stainless steel container was lowered deep into the urn by ribbons, along with the earth.

The announcer then introduced the formula which would be followed for the rest of the ceremony. The Charter would be read successively in 16 languages by nationals (usually Ashramites) of those countries or cultures (the languages in order were Tamil, Sanskrit, English, Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Tibetan). Before each reading the announcer would introduce the translation

— "Now the Charter in Tamil will be read..." — and specify which states of India or countries would approach the urn during that reading (the states first, countries afterwards, all in alphabetical order). In all, two young delegates from each of the 23 States or Union Territories of India and representatives from 124 countries (63 persons were delegated by embassies, the rest were students from the Ashram school) walked up to the urn. In each pair one would carry a placard with the name of their State or country, the other would carry earth (or a substitute) from that State or country in a small bowl. After the earth was tipped into the urn, the representatives walked down the ramp from the urn. Their placard was taken and placed in a pre-assigned socket, they signed a scroll with their names and the name of their State

or country, and then they walked up a ramp out of the central arena.

Finally came the announcement, "Now the earth of Auroville will be put in the urn. Then the urn will be sealed." Michel (Kalya) and Fabienne, Mother's great-grandchildren, approached the urn. Michel carried Auroville earth while Fabienne carried the Auroville flag (the symbol was an open lotus with another lotus in its centre against a background of 'dawn gold'). Then Nolini and his son walked to the urn. He placed the lid over the top and removed the screwed handle. The urn was sealed, the inauguration of Auroville complete.

Alan (with particular thanks to the Auroville Archives)



The flag of Auroville and some of the placards of the participating countries and states of India

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Brainstorming infinity

Recently an important workshop was held in Auroville to suggest ideas for a permanent multi-media exhibition in the Centre for Indian Culture on "The Sense of the Infinite: A History of Indian Culture".

C o-sponsored by the prestigious Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, the workshop brought together a pantheon of Indian scholars and intellectuals, Ashramites and Aurovilians. The workshop was structured around three programmes of Sri Aurobindo which set out a programme for the renaissance of India. The first, "The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is the first most essential work", led to a discussion of the nature of that knowledge and the particular qualities of India's spiritual heritage. While one speaker affirmed that no one religious doctrine was regarded as supreme in Indian tradition, there was general agreement that the source of India's spiritual wisdom lay in the Vedas and the Upanishads. And here, as one participant put it, the essential wisdom can be reduced to two key statements: "The quest is God", and "You are That." In other words, as the special guest Professor Manohar Joshi, Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Science and Technology, pointed out, the genius of India

future of the earth". Another consequence is that time and space are not viewed as absolutes but merely as constructs of a lower level of consciousness. "When I am in a higher consciousness I live in eternity," explained Dr. Kapil Kapur, Rector, J. N. University, Delhi, "for if I carry the words of Ashoka, if Ashoka is part of my being, what does it matter who I am or what age I live in?"

Modern problems

Sri Aurobindo's second prerequisite for an Indian renaissance – "The flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge" – led to some discussion of the nature of true creativity, but it was his third prescription – "An original dealing with modern problems in the light of the Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society" – which generated deeper responses. For when participants were asked to identify the problems of modern India certain heart-felt views kept emerging.

their own land. We are turning out workers, clerks, bonsais, not leaders." Yet another speaker noted that the present Indian Constitution is "asymmetric" in relationship to the true genius of India, for it stresses rights rather than *dharma*, "which is the cosmic law of our individual and national existence."

It was also recognized, however, that all present failings cannot be laid at the door of pernicious foreign influence. "The present intellectual state of India is pathetic," claimed Aurovillian Dr. Aster Patel, while Dr. Meera Srivastava pointed out that, "Modern Indian intellectuals have done nothing for reviving the spirit of India. We must be able to transcend the intellect to manifest the new body of India."

Is, then, the ancient wisdom of India lost to the modern generation? No, asserted writer Manoj Das, it's merely submerged and can be contacted at any moment. In this context, Aurovillian poetess Meenakshi pointed out that the Tamil language fuses the ordinary with the transcendental – the word for house, '*vidu*', comes from the same root as 'liberation' – while another participant noted how simple customs, like drawing *kolams* or making *pranam* to the rising sun, have the deeper significance of harmonizing the individual with him or herself and the cosmos.

It was also asserted that new forms cannot evolve without a new spiritual energy. Dr. Aster Patel felt that such a new spiritual dynamism is already a fact of our times, reflecting the descent and working of the supermind. As evidence, she pointed to research which was opening up a new holistic perception of matter; the frequency and extent of major world upheavals; and what she termed the appearance of "a new kind of personality, deeply rooted in matter yet with a heightened sense of spirituality".

What kind of exhibition?

The final sessions focused upon the proposed exhibition "The Sense of the Infinite: A History of Indian Culture". Who should it be for? What should it contain? How should it communicate its message? There was general consensus that it should be aimed primarily at the young, and a suggestion was made to organize a further seminar at which youth from all over India would be invited to contribute their ideas. As for the message, it was agreed that the prime goal should be to restore pride in India's spiritual and classical heritage through showing its continued relevance to the world of today. Professor Manohar Joshi suggested that the exhibition include illustrative references to certain qualities of the unique Indian spirit – the spirit of renunciation, heroic greatness, universality etc – and that "the grand culmination could be the legend and symbol that is Savitri...the secret for India and the world of the knowledge which can help us overcome the contem-

porary crisis and lay the establishment of a civilization that can unite different poles of existence under the overarching sovereignty of the Spirit".

Shradhdalu cautioned, however, that as India is infinite she can never be fully comprehended. He favoured an exhibition which, while combining different media, would also be constantly changing and re-expressing itself. Other speakers stressed that the exhibition should be, above all, an experience, and that it should communicate deep truths through all the senses. In this context Bala Bharat, who is well-known for his short films aimed at "selling India to the Indians", noted how important it is to communicate the essence of key concepts, like India is one and India is infinite, through the emotions: "this is the best way to fundamentally shift people's centre of gravity."

Personal Reflections

When people of such eminence are brought together to discuss such a topic the immediate outcome is likely to be, at the very least, thought-provoking. This was definitely the case here, and the organizers should be praised for their success in attracting such fine minds. I've a feeling, however, that the best use was not made of the assembled talents. The stated purpose was to 'brainstorm' about the topic, implying fluid interactions through which an initial insight generates further insights in an ascending spiral of creativity. Yet the physical arrangements militated against this. Almost all the sessions took place in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium where the panelists of the day were seated in a long curve across the stage, while the rest were seated below, scattered around the vast auditorium. Moreover, while there was provision for questions to be sent up from the audience to be discussed by the panelists, the format was very much one of 'talking heads' – with each speaker getting a specified allocation of time – rather than one of dynamic interchange. It was noticeable that when, on the last afternoon, the venue was changed to the more intimate and 'egalitarian' ambience of the Centre for Indian Culture, the creative synergy was higher.

A more serious reservation concerns the apparent assumption that the way to approach a topic like "The Sense of the Infinite" is primarily through the intellect. Actually a number of speakers pointed out that the wisdom which ancient India prized highest was the wisdom founded upon direct identification rather than intellectual enquiry (which Sri Aurobindo termed 'indirect knowledge'), and that discussion cannot be a substitute for action – "talking about infinity won't bring infinity", as Dr. Meera Srivastava pithily put it – so it was disappointing that there were not attempts to explore the theme through other forms like art, dance or music.

Moreover, while many of the invitees were clearly not ordinary academics, their remarks sometimes revealing profound depths of understanding and inner development, what the workshop conspicuously lacked were people who are consciously trying to work with and embody the new consciousness in their lives and work. In fact, there was very little reference to the new force which Mother pointed out had irrevocably changed the nature of matter itself. Why? A suspicion remains that even the finest Indian minds have not yet fully comprehended the revolutionary nature of Mother's work in the last decades of her life, something which made her re-evaluate even 'spirituality' itself.

Ultimately, the larger consequences of a seminar like this are impossible to assess: they will be played out in diverse ways and through diverse individuals and organizations over years to come. Clearly, though, this was an important beginning and catalyst for further explorations. As one enthusiastic participant put it during the final session, "This kind of workshop can only happen in Auroville. This is what Auroville is for."

Alan



The Sri Aurobindo Auditorium, Bharat Nivas: best venue for brainstorming?

resides in the insight that human beings can be One with Brahman or God. What are the consequences of this view? Firstly, as Sri Aurobindo mentioned, India has always taken spirituality as the master key of existence. This is reflected in the general understanding that the first movement should always be inward, and that manifestation should be an expression of an inner realization. As one participant explained, an Indian artist is not interested in art for art's sake. A painting will only 'live' to the extent that "its voice is divinity, speaking to the

One was the tendency of India to uncritically adopt Western models of development, poverty alleviation and education, so cutting itself off from its roots. Regarding poverty, for example, it was pointed out that the West viewed the solution primarily in economic terms whereas Sri Aurobindo pointed out that poverty in India cannot be solved until the nation follows its *swadharma*, its true genius. Similarly Shradhdalu, from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, described how the 19th century British-influenced education system of India is today "churning out millions of strangers in

Among the workshop participants were:

Dr. Kireet Joshi, Chairman, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, Chairman, Auroville Foundation
 Dr. V.C. Srivastava, Director, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla
 Dr. V.R. Panchmukhi, Chairman, Indian Council of Social Science Research
 Dr. Kapil Kapur, Rector, J.N. University, New Delhi
 Dr. Chandrakala Padia, Professor of Political Science, Benares Hindu University, Varanasi
 Dr. Ashoke Sen Gupta, Indian Council for Philosophical Research
 Dr. Meera Srivastava, Head of the Department of Hindi, Allahabad University
 Dr. V.K. Anand, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla
 Smt. Veenapani Chawla, theatre director,
 Professor Manoj Das, writer, Sri Aurobindo Ashram
 Dr. Chamanlal Gupta, Professor of Applied Science, Solar Energy Unit, Sri Aurobindo Ashram
 Professor Kittu Reddy, S.A.I.C.E., Sri Aurobindo Ashram
 Shradhdalu Ranade, Sri Aurobindo Ashram
 Dr. Matthijs Cornelissen, Consciousness Research Group, Sri Aurobindo Ashram
 Smt. Shruti, musician/researcher
 G. Bharatbala, film-maker
 Smt. Kanika Bharatbala, film-maker

Shri K.R. Malkani, Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, delivered the inaugural address

Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Honourable Minister for Human Resource Development, Government of India, delivered the concluding address

"Your efforts fill me with a great hope"

On 31st December, Professor Murli Manohar Joshi, the Minister of Human Resource Development, Science and Technology (the ministry responsible for Auroville), visited the community. In the evening he addressed the residents in the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium. Here are extracts from his speech.

To my mind, Auroville is an achievement and yet a promise which is still to be fulfilled. For Auroville is a great effort that aims at fulfilling a tremendous dream, a Divine Dream. This Dream places Truth as the sovereign principle – Truth, not as the mind sees it, but the Truth that can be seen by a supramental vision, by the faculty of *vijnana*, to use the expression of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. It is a Dream where human relationships are to be built on the principle of universal fraternity, where work is to be conducted in the spirit of service to the Divine Consciousness, and where life is lived as a process of constant research whereby highest values can be embodied both in the individual and collective life.

This Dream has consequences for the growth and development of a new form of economy, a new form of social organization, and a new form of hierarchy that is based on inner quality and recognition of individual excellence.

I am aware that the task is extremely difficult, but it is the one task that should be carried out if humanity is to make the next step forward in its upward march....

Sri Aurobindo has spoken of a world union of free nations, in which each

nation brings to the totality its own special contributions that can enrich the unity and oneness of the entire humanity. This is a great vision, and the fact that you have voluntarily come here to organize a model of human unity puts on your shoulders a great responsibility to work out the problems which have divided the world so far into East and West or into smaller divisions of regions and provinces. Your efforts fill me with a great hope. Sri Aurobindo has said that humanity has today decisively turned towards the ideal of human unity; and even though there are dangers on the path, they can be minimized if the principle of law and liberty is rightly employed.

Let me conclude with what Sri Aurobindo has said in one of his illuminating passages in his book *The Ideal of Human Unity*:

"Today the ideal of human unity is more or less vaguely making its way to the front of our consciousness...and this ideal of human unity is likely to figure largely among the determining forces of the future; for the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it, especially the scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem now

no more than the provinces of a single country.

But this very commodity of the material circumstances may bring about the failure of the ideal; for when material circumstances favour a great change, but the heart and mind of the race are not really ready – especially the heart – failure may be predicted, unless men are wise in time and accept the inner change along with the external readjustment. But at present the human intellect has been so much mechanized by physical science that it is likely to attempt the revolution it is beginning to envisage principally or solely through mechanical means, through social and political adjustment. Now it is not by these, chiefly or only, that the unity of the human race can be enduringly or fruitfully accomplished."

This statement is a great warning to all of us who want to have unity; in Auroville, particularly, this warning



Professor Murli Manohar Joshi leaving Bharat Nivas

must be taken in full measure. It is not by social and political devices that unity should be attempted to be accomplished. As Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, and let me conclude by quoting it:

"A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution, no other can replace it....It is in the soul that it must find its roots; the love which is founded upon a deeper truth of our being, the brotherhood or...the spiritual comradeship which is the expression of an inner realization of oneness."

LAND

Land for Auroville: the young take up the challenge

Auroville's future is being threatened by rapidly escalating land prices and speculation

Since December 2002, the Auroville Land Fund team has begun a serious fund-raising campaign. With about 200 acres of village land up for sale in the City Area and the Green Belt, there is a desperate need for funds. In the years just before the Mother left her body, the securing of land in and around Auroville had been one of her primary concerns. "The lands for Auroville are to be bought and can be bought. The money is needed, will you help?" – was one of the urgent injunctions she left for Aurovilians to work towards, while the land was relatively cheap. Perhaps she knew how difficult this work would become once Auroville had established itself as a city.

Not surprisingly, in the thirty-five years of Auroville's growth real estate prices have spiraled to amazing heights. The pioneers who made Auroville their home in the late sixties and seventies, and other dedicated Aurovilians who came later were mainly responsible for transforming



Vennila (9), Abinayam (11) and Nisha (11) from Transition school in charge of the fundraising booth at Pour Tous

Auroville's barren landscape into the tropical lushness it sports today. The concerted efforts of these "greenbelters" in tree-planting, digging wells, and building check dams went a long way in preventing further soil erosion and in reversing the bioregion's low ecological status. Given

Auroville's successful experiments in various fields, including water management, alternative energy, and organic farming, its present reputation as an eco-friendly city dedicated to the spiritual ideals of human unity and progress attracts a fair number of visitors each year.

But is Auroville's present pollution-free, and attractive green environment mainly responsible for its rising land costs? With Pondicherry having reached its expansion limits, more and more people are looking towards Auroville and its vicinity. With the annual inflow of foreign tourists in Auroville, local eateries and restaurants have sprouted in and around Auroville. Larger resorts offering accommodation with pool facilities are reported to be initiated along the beach in the near future. Within Auroville there is also the pressing danger of land speculation and haphazard development, particularly along the main roads. Hopefully the present campaign will yield good results. Children from Auroville schools are assisting in the booths that have been specially set up at Pour Tous and the Solar Kitchen, reflecting a new surge of energy within Auroville to secure the land for Mother's vision.

Abha Prakash

Enquiries regarding donations can be sent to Landfund@auroville.org.in

In brief

Republic day

On January 26th, the Republic Day of India was celebrated by a flag hoisting at Bharat Nivas by Ms. Santosh Malik and children of Auroville schools singing patriotic songs.

Matrimandir

At a meeting of the Residents' Assembly on January 6th, 70 people voted in favour of a proposal elaborated by the Auroville Council to create a Matrimandir Focus Group as well as a Matrimandir Co-ordinators' Team and Core Team. About 13 people abstained and one person voted against the proposal. The mandate of the Focus Group is to facilitate and provide the necessary space for open discussion, transparency, fair process and impartiality at the Matrimandir. The Group will have the responsibility and duty to assist in the clarification and finding solutions to conflict issues such as the lake, gardens, access, interface of the Matrimandir area with the city and pending issues of the Matrimandir structure. The Coordinators Group will consist of the coordinators of all the work areas. From amongst them, a Core group will be formed. The Matrimandir Workers Team announced afterwards that it did not accept the resolution and that a vote of so few people cannot be sufficient to replace an established working team. The Auroville Council explained in a subsequent note in the Auroville News that the resolution is not endorsing the removal of people presently holding functions at Matrimandir.

No compensation for assets

The Auroville Funds and Assets Management Committee stated that no compensation will be given for the value of immovable assets left behind if an individual leaves Auroville permanently. A Repatriation Fund is in place for those who need help, but such help will not be related to the value of the immovable assets that were created by the individual in Auroville.

ARKA

The project managers of ARKA, a housing project for senior citizens, announced that the structure of the public buildings will be finished soon and that the building of the residential units for senior citizens (above 60 years) is about to start. The public buildings have been funded by a friend of Auroville as a donation. For more info contact mariagrazia@auroville.org.in

Health Fund

The Auroville Health Fund, which started on February 1, 2002, stated that around 1000 Aurovilians and newcomers are part of the experiment. The Fund operates as a co-operative insurance, where all participants bear the health costs collectively.

Vijnana opens

Sonja and Krishnaprem, two professional health practitioners from Germany, have started Vijnana, a natural health-care service unit. The unit is located in the industrial zone and works in co-operation with KOFPU, the Kottakarai Organic Food Processing Unit.

Out of the blue

Manoj Das Gupta, trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, remembers

I'll try to say whatever I remember, but I do not claim any absolute authenticity as I have a very bad memory. In January 1968 I was down with paratyphoid. I was kept to my bed for a few weeks, and one day, as I was lying in my cot, probably towards the end of January or the beginning of February, Roger Anger, Navajata and Gilbert came to visit me. They came to tell me that Mother had asked me to write the Charter of Auroville. I was taken aback. "Charter? What does it mean?" I asked. They told me, "How you conceive this township." If I remember correctly, what they said was that someone had written a draft charter or something like that, and Mother was not quite satisfied and had suggested my name. I drafted something, and when Mother's Charter was made public I was pleased to see that some of the things I had mentioned were there – a place for perpetual education, no religion, some of these things. But it is very unfortunate that I did not keep any copy of what I had sent to her. Then – the date on the note is February 24th, but I am doubtful about that – someone had written to Mother:

*Douce Mère,
It is necessary that there be one central information office for the*

Auroville Function where every piece of information is collected and then suitably arranged to be available to others who need it. Such an office is already supposed to be in existence with Norman Oscar, but all information is not available there. If You Yourself, Douce Mère, appoint someone to this work, it will be effectively done. Then each one will be instructed to send every piece of information small or big to this central office and also the person in charge will go round and collect the information himself.

Below it Mother had written
Manoj will do that work.

That came out of the blue for me. On January 31st, I wrote to Mother informing Her that I had recovered and that it appeared that She had appointed me for something for Auroville, but that I had no experience. I asked Her to give me the Force and Guidance so that I could be Her worthy instrument for the Work. Mother replied that Roger would inform me what was to be done. But then She added, in this marvellous caring way of hers, that for the moment I shouldn't fatigue myself in order that I completely healed. "My tenderness is with you and my bless-

ings so that you can recuperate." I started to teach again on February 11th. A few days later, I learned that I had to replace Gilbert for his work in Auroville, (he was in charge of press relations with Eckhardt) during his absence. But I also learned from Navajata that I had to take responsibility for the children who would come for the ceremony. I wrote to Mother asking Her what She expected from me. Unfortunately I do not remember anymore what She said to me when I visited Her with Roger. On 17 February I sent Mother a list of 33 countries from where earth would arrive, to be deposited in the urn, and a list of the countries which had agreed to send children form the ceremony. Some countries had asked that children from the Ashram school would represent them. There were, of course, many problems of organization. For example, three persons each believed they were responsible for the planned youth conference. Mother's response is very instructive and I believe valid even today for both the Ashram and Auroville.

"Here nobody can be the exclusive leader – everybody has to learn to collaborate. It is a very good discipline for the vanity, self-love, and the

*C'est bien.
La personne ne peut être
un chef exclusif. Tout le monde
doit apprendre à collaborer.
C'est une très bonne discipline
pour la vanité, l'amour propre
et le sentiment exclusif de
l'importance des personnalités.
Lecteur J.*

excessive sense of importance of personalities."

Blessings,
Mother

On the 27th, I wrote to Mother that I understood that She had chosen me to give some souvenirs for the children, that we had decided to do that after dinner that evening, and if this was all right. It also appeared that Mona Sarkar had asked me to work with him during the ceremony and I asked Her if that was ok as I was free that day. Mother replied that it was ok. The youth camp took place at the Sri Aurobindo Society office, after the dinner. I do not remember anymore what the gifts were. The atmosphere during the ceremony? A tremendous power. It was a real fes-

tival, with all the buses, the barren land – and when Mother's voice came, live from her room in the Ashram, it was overwhelming. There definitely was a very special force present that day. Auroville could never have started, even less have materialized to the extent it has today, if there were no Divine power sustaining it. Other memory: I would go every morning with all the information to Mother. One day she told me: so far, I have received ideas about buildings, this, that. The real Auroville, it will take 200 years. So it's obvious to me that the change of consciousness is the first requirement. We put the cart before the horse if we talk about physical transformation before having realized that.

A thousand paths

From Udar Pinto's reminiscences

Mother involved me on three occasions regarding Auroville. The first was the inauguration of Auroville. There was a plan: two young representatives of each country would come and bring earth from their country and put it into that urn. And at the same time the Charter would be read in some languages. Now Mother told me that the communist countries were refusing to participate because of one word in the Charter: the word 'divine'. So she said, "I want you to see the Russian Consul-General." I was surprised because I knew nothing about it so I complained, "Why send me?" "You just go! Don't think of anything clever to do, I'll just put words in your mouth."

Now I'll tell you about Mother. When she asks you to do something, she arranges the circumstances beautifully. You see, I was ordered to see the Consul-General: as a complete stranger you have to make an appointment and you have to wait. I just went straight, made no appointment and said I was from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and I wanted to see the Consul-General. Normally you don't succeed, but they said "Yes" – very naturally. It is a kind of a miracle but you don't see it as a miracle. That is the beauty of Mother's miracles; they happen very naturally. So the man asked me to come up at once, he greeted me at the door and said, "Oh! Come, come, we are so happy about this whole scheme of Auroville, the first international city of the whole world; but this one thing



Udar Pinto (left) and Roger Anger walking up from the Urn

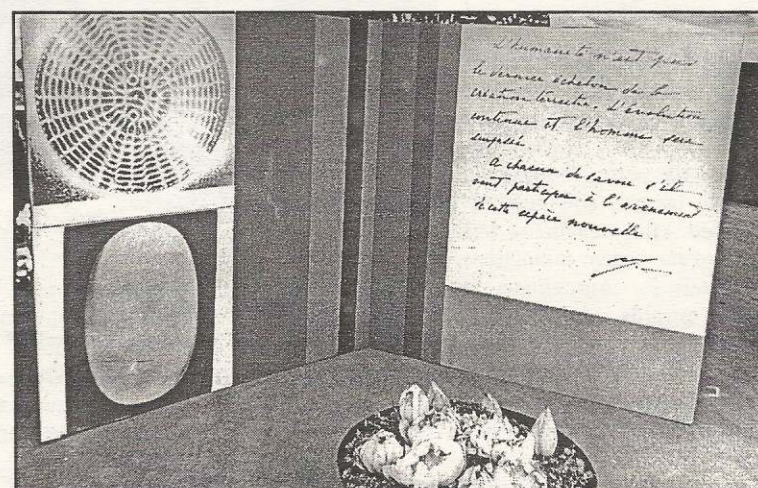
stopping us is about 'the Divine'..." Now I didn't think of what to say and I'll tell you how Mother works. I said, "All right, Consul-General, if you can't take the word 'Divine', let us see what you can take. Do you believe in progress?" "Of course we believe in progress, communism has to progress." "Progress towards what?" "Go on progressing; what progress towards something!" I said, "Suppose I say, progress towards perfection?" He began to ponder, then he embraced me, "You have given a new slogan for our party. I will inform my government immediately." Then I waited for him to cool down a little bit and said, "And what about ultimate perfection?" "Now you begin to become a philosopher, ultimate doesn't mean anything." He was a happy fellow, with a good sense of humor. I said, "All right, you don't like it because it means nothing. And what about zero and infinity, they mean nothing and yet you have to use them in mathematics. You Russians are very good in mathematics, if you remove

zero and infinity they'll shoot you!" (laughs) "Yes", he said; he was a very sweet man. Then he said, "All right, I'll accept ultimate perfection. Then what?" I said, "That is the Divine."

"What! That is the Divine?" "Look Consul-General, any effort you follow, ultimately you reach the Divine. There are a thousand paths and ultimately you reach the Divine." "Is that so? All right then, we can take that."



Master of ceremonies Udar Pinto (left) discusses inauguration matters with Roger Anger and others



Part of the exhibition arranged around the Banyan Tree. The text signed by The Mother states: *Humanity is not the last rung of the terrestrial creation. Evolution continues and man will be surpassed. It is for each individual to know whether he wants to participate in the advent of this new species*

The day the balloon went up

It was like this, wasn't it? A long-time Aurovilian tries to remember

One of my earliest memories as a child was being held out the window of a railway carriage as the train wound its way along the side of a valley, revealing first one end of the train and then the other, my grandfather twisting me first one way, then the other as he sang out, "There's where we come from; there's where we go." Forty years later I had a similar experience as I came onto Auroville land for the first time for the inaugural ceremony. The bus in which we traveled had turned the corner near Hope and suddenly people were standing up, pointing. There were no trees then, remember, and the views were long. Some people pointed way across the barren fields to an orange meteorological balloon tethered near a distant banyan tree; some pointed behind to all the buses that followed us, while others were pointing ahead to all the buses going around the next bend. Everyone started to laugh... We had arrived at the Ashram four months earlier. The first we heard of Auroville was when Mother told us we were to work for it. And although in the meantime we had been given work in Ashram departments we had started to involve ourselves in the preparation for the opening ceremony.



Lowering the stainless steel container into the Urn

Over the years I've been trying to recall it as a glorious time when we all worked harmoniously together under the directions of the Mother. But it wasn't like that. It was a mess. For four months everyone disagreed, argued, contradicted each other, worked at cross-purposes, fought for their own version of things. In mid-February, for example, we were still undecided how even to identify the country whose representatives were going to walk up the spiral pathway with their samples of earth to put in the urn. The man who wanted flags, knowing that we now lacked time to get them, stormed out of one meeting in search of an Ashram artist who would agree to silkscreen 124 different flags. "Have you seen some of those flags?" someone shouted after him. Before the reverberations of the slammed door had faded away someone else came up with another idea: how about making a gigantic jigsaw puzzle of a world map, so that everyone coming up to the urn could be able to fit his country's shape into the general picture? I got up and quit, right then and there, but I realized before I had even got out the door

that no one had invited me to be a part of that committee in the first place.

On the 27th February I went to bed convinced that the next day would bring about the biggest shambles the world had ever seen.

I awoke at first light to a fantastic day, Crows in the palm trees, kites in the sky, a faint shushing of small waves breaking on the shore. We left the house early, clad in white; everyone that day seemed to be wearing white. The buses were lined up in the streets between the Ashram and the sea-front. I rather think each one had a number for I remember looking for a particular bus, suddenly filled with a keen apprehension that if I wasn't careful I might miss out on something fundamentally important. Looking back I always fancied I wore some kind of badge identifying me as something or other, although that strikes me now as unlikely. On reflection I think it must have been some symbolic tribal feeling I was experiencing, the badge perhaps a declaration of some inner commitment.

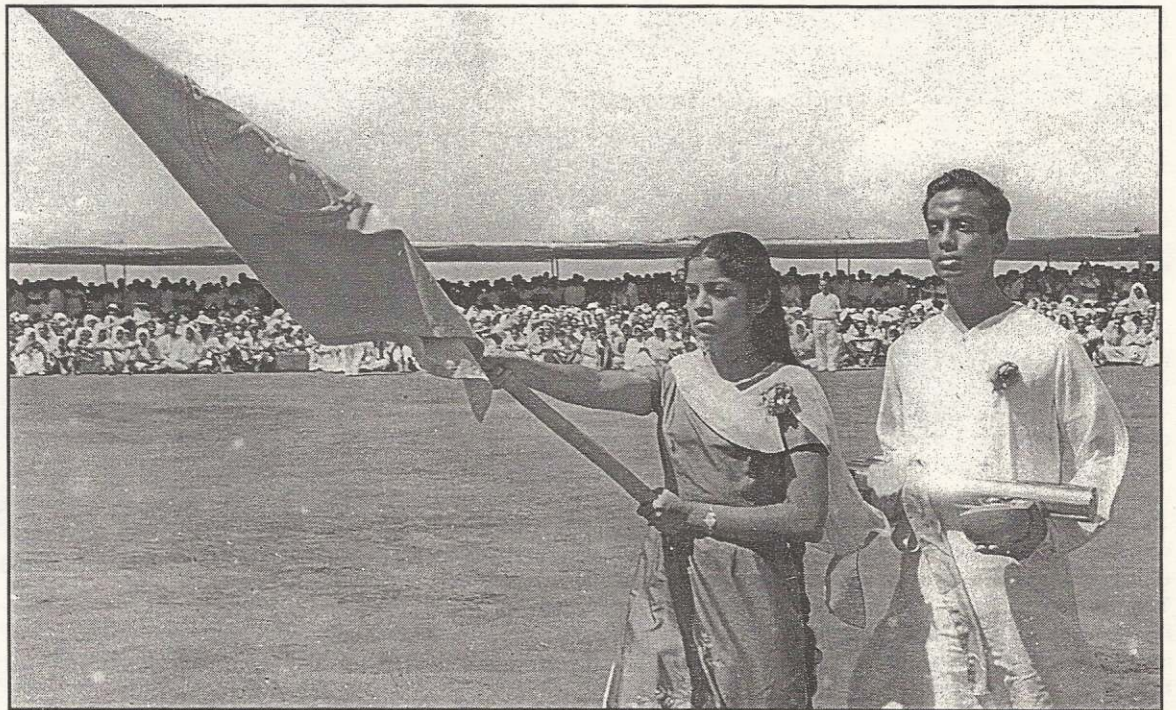
I suppose it was catching, this apprehension, for it resulted in a bit of scurrying to and fro with calling out to children and wayward aunties and old grannies. But finally everyone was on board and the buses, in convoy, moved off. Still it wasn't until we'd turned onto the dirt road that we realized how many of us there were. I'm tempted to say that there were a hundred buses but that couldn't be, could it? All I know is that it seemed that every available vehicle of every conceivable description had been put into use that day. And if it hadn't been for the fact that the road had been watered before we got there we'd have raised a cloud of dust to rival the one caused by the eruption of the Krakatoa.

The road sort-of ended near the present-day Matrimandir parking lot. How could they all fit in there? You're forgetting that there were no trees, none at all, except a scraggly grove of palmyras and a young banyan giving shape to a wide open space.

We all descended and began to shuffle our way through the sand across perfectly flat ground to what looked like some raised earthworks topped by a temporary structure of casuarinas and cloth. Blue, I think, the cloth. Closer we could see it was the lip of a circular depression in the earth, the covered shelter circling the rim. Down in the depression, off-centre, clearly significant, was the stylized lotus bud, the only thing with any look of permanence to it. Settling without speech some sat in chairs, some on mats in the shade, some out in the sun. A section had been reserved for the people from the nearby villages, and although it was a large enclosure already you could see it was going to be inadequate. You could see people coming from every direction across the fields.

Red earth, green from the tree, people in white, orange balloon against the blue sky, the billowing blue cloth giving an occasional explosive clap above us....

You know I could be making all this



Kiran Poddar (left) carrying Mother's flag and Vijay Poddar with the stainless steel container with Auroville's Charter

up. For really I don't know; I'll never be sure. It could all be merely a striving to put myself back into a place the significance of which I shall, I suppose, never be able, fully, to comprehend. I'm tempted to put down the names of people I know were present in the belief that there is safety in numbers. But I don't actually remember who I sat next to. I don't know to whom I spoke. I don't know who I met. Something I wonder what part of me was present....

It was all so simple, really, so splendid.

As 10:30 approached silence fell. There was, I think, the sound of a gong. And then The Mother's voice. It was transmitted live, directly from her upstairs room in the Ashram, a fact which seemed to add immediacy to the message.

Have I given the impression, earlier, that laughter, that day, came easy? Well I'll tell you, the day had changed. What was going on now was no laughing matter. If there was a suggestion behind the words it was this: Listen to me. Listen. And listen we did... as if our lives depended upon it.

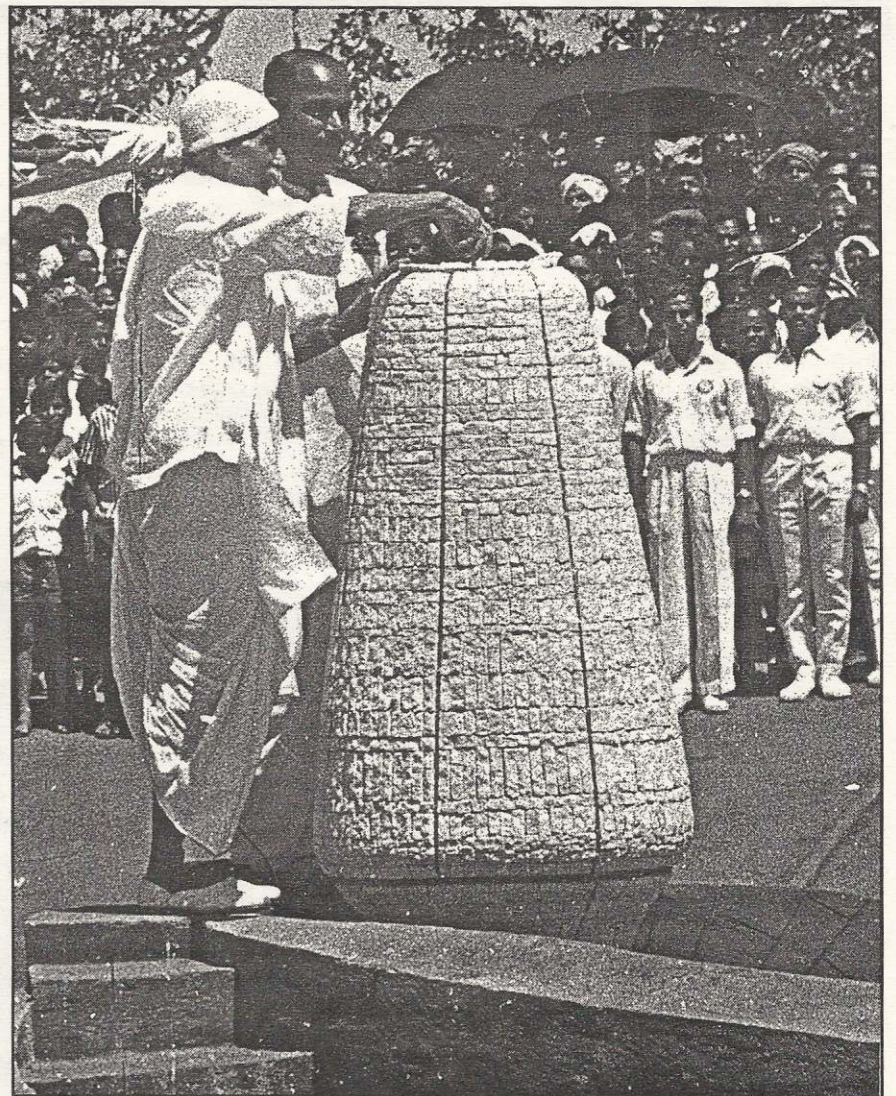
The newspaper said the ceremony lasted 75 minutes. I'll accept that. After all it's their business to measure things. Certainly a lot seemed to have happened by the time it was over. I do remember Mother's flag with its golden wheel resplendent on a blue field being carried up by Kiran in the beginning just when they started the reading of the translations of the Charter into the different languages. And near the end I remember Fabienne and Kalya with the Auroville flag - it was the first time we'd seen it; we didn't even know it existed. In between I remember something of the procession of young people, some of them in their national dress, the boys with their packets of earth, the girls with the signs, beribboned in their national colours, which announced their country. I particularly remember the Russian partic-

ipants for they were little children which somehow seemed most aptly to embody the spirit of the occasion. When the last young couple had come back from the urn Nolinida went up to seal the lotus. He seemed to be up there an awful long time. I got the feeling that Mother was supervising his masonry work. At last, I thought, she's finally got someone who will do what he's told. When he came down I suppose we all came down. Sunil's music ended. The crowds dispersed. We wandered off to the exhibition around the banyan tree. We got fed, every single one of us. We looked up at the balloon, and around at the bleak landscape, and then we got back on the bus. (Isn't it amazing how it always takes more buses to get people home after an event than it does to get them out in the first place?) And so we went back to Pondy, not to come back, any of us, for six months.

So that's the way it was, was it? Well I wouldn't actually swear to it. After all it's a long time ago. And I've got a terrible memory. And I have this habit of what I don't remember I make up. But only in the details. I think. But surely you can tell it was something, can't you? You can feel it was something real, momentous?

You must also have realized, as we did ourselves much later, that while we were squabbling away The Mother was getting things done. Would it have been better, do you think, an even more glorious day, if we had stayed out of her way altogether? Perhaps. And perhaps not. I suppose she knew what she was doing when, in her infinite wisdom, she did something foolish... and let us participate.

(name on request withheld)



Nolini Kanta Gupta, helped by his son, seals the Urn

An electric shock

On the evening of 28th February Hema Arora sent the following letter to Mother:

Douce Mère,

The inauguration ceremony of Auroville this morning was an unforgettable experience. Out of chaos and disorder everything worked towards harmony and beauty.

I had been selected to represent Iraq during the inauguration ceremony but people from that country arrived so I was shifted to represent Yugoslavia. Unluckily for me people from that country also reached Auroville at the last moment. Then I was made a Turk but to my utter dismay people from Turkey also panted in at the last second. Finally I was given the banner of China and that too communist China. You can very well imagine my feelings at that moment! Well, I can at least boast of being the only person to have changed her nationality four

times in a single hour.

Douce Mère, as the ceremony started all the muddle and confusion were forgotten. I could feel your presence among us so powerfully, so very concretely that nothing else mattered. An ardent aspiration mounted upwards for the realisation of this beautiful dream of yours; of Auroville – city of Harmony. It was a moment when “earth grew unexpectedly divine”.

It was no longer of any importance which country I represented or which countries others stood for, what counted most at that time was that we were present at this very solemn and historic hour in our march towards perfection. As I walked into the arena with China's flag in my hands an electric shock seemed to have passed through my being emptying it of all thoughts and feelings and “touching the moment with eternity”.

Nearly everyone present must have felt something for there was a trance-like quality in their gait when they entered the arena.



Maggi Lidchi-Grassi reading the Charter of Auroville in the Spanish language

Douce Mère today was really a very beautiful and memorable day. Thank you and good-night.



Each representative received a lotus after depositing the earth

Mother's magic

Gauri, the daughter of Udar Pinto, recalls:

My friend and I, both young teachers in SAICE, were put in charge of serving meals to the youth who were being sent from the various embassies in Delhi for the inauguration ceremony of Auroville. A young girl and boy, representing their country, had been asked to come. They were mostly teenagers who were not in the least interested in spiritual life and not at all clear about what was happening. To keep them occupied till the inauguration, another of our teachers was given the responsibility of taking them out to see the well-known places around Pondicherry and keeping them out of mischief.

As the Corner House (the new dining hall for our students) was not yet quite ready, we had to rearrange the classrooms of our school during mealtime to feed these youngsters. The food was cooked with special care at a private house and then brought to the school. These children had a good appetite and we were kept busy. Some of them even showed up drunk or in a bad temper. Naturally we were apprehensive about the way these children would behave on the great day. I'd like to

mention here that what impressed me was how dignified and courteous the ones who came from Africa were. Of course, they were older.

On the morning of the 28th of February 1968 there was great excitement. A bus load of our students who would carry the flag and the soil of the many countries that could not send their representatives also went with these foreign children. In fact, there were so many going to Auroville that it was hard to find a seat. But we hopped on to a moving vehicle and eventually reached the place where the lotus bud urn stood.

Soon the ceremony began and it was so beautiful and moving that it will stay in my memory for ever. Mother's voice, arriving live from Pondicherry, reached us at the exact time that the first pair started ascending the ramp towards the Urn.

We of the meal group could hardly believe our eyes. We knew only too well how unruly and unkempt some of these embassy children were. But now there was a transformation. They were so neat and clean and well-behaved, walking up the ramp like disciplined angels. Mother's magic had worked in them.

The rest is well known – how beautiful

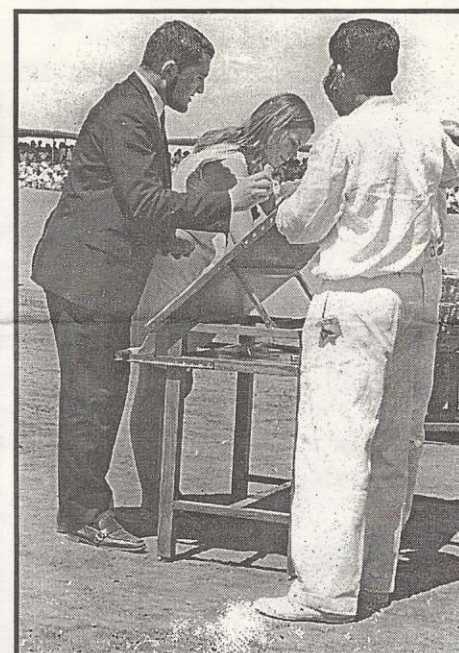
and perfect that day was, so full of a very special atmosphere and presence.

An expectant hush charged the atmosphere

Ramakant Navelkar from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram remembers:

I am glad to tell that I was one of the most fortunate human beings – amongst the million of human beings who were on earth – to be present at Auroville's Inauguration Ceremony on 28 February 1968.

The atmosphere was charged with an expectant hush. It reminded us that “It was the hour before the Gods awake” – the first line of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem ‘Savitri’. The Mother's recorded voice proclaimed the Charter of Auroville to the world. The Mother's reading had such a power that it stunned the minds of the people present. This was followed by the placard-bearers of many countries and all the States of India. Each State of India and each country represented had brought earth from its soil and it was put in the urn of the centre of the amphitheatre. Nolini Kantra



Representatives signing the scroll

Gupta – the Secretary of the Ashram – was the last and sealed the urn. We returned to Ashram, our beings saturated with deep inner conviction about the spiritual destination of humanity.



Each country's earth was put in a small ceramic bowl before being deposited in the Urn

"Let's make our peace now"

One of the visiting delegates recalls his experience

Poppo first heard about Auroville in 1967. He was teaching in Osmania University, Hyde-rabad, and one day the German Consul, Carlos Pfauter, gave a party for all the Germans living in the area. "He said to me, 'You're an architect and some people want to build an international city near Pondicherry. They will send us an invitation to attend the inauguration. Why don't you go and represent Germany?' I said O.K. I didn't expect anything would come of it: in those days so many people promised so many things, and most of them were bluff. But this one turned out to be true!"

At that time Poppo knew nothing about Mother or Sri Aurobindo. However, at Christmas there was a tradition for everybody in his organization to receive gifts. And the previous year one of his presents was a German biography of Sri Aurobindo. "I put it aside unread. In those days, I wasn't interested in reading: I felt that to read was to lose time, to lose life. However, after the invitation to the inauguration of Auroville actually



Spectators watching the ceremony from the shamianas around the amphitheatre

arrived I told myself that as I was going on an official visit to a place named after him, I'd better read the book. When I first came across direct quotations from Sri Aurobindo I got something like shivers – it was the first touch."

A telegram from the German

Embassy in Delhi told Poppo to go to the Consulate in Madras where he would meet the other German representative at the inauguration – a nurse working in the Nilgiris – and pick up the German soil which would be placed in the urn. Later, while waiting at the Madras bus-stand, he met Bibash, the nephew of Nirodbaran. "We talked all the way to Pondy, then he took me to Corner House where all the delegates to the inauguration were eating."

Various tours and talks were organised for the delegates over the next four days, and Poppo just allowed himself to be carried along. The day of the inauguration began with the delegates handing over their soil and getting it back in a small ceramic bowl decorated with their national colours and emblems. During the wait for the bus, Poppo was queuing with the two young French delegates. "We were laughing and joking together. I saw these blue flowers and I plucked one and gave them to the French saying 'Our countries have been at war for centuries. Let's make our peace now.' They immediately agreed. So I put the flower I'd plucked into the French bowl of earth and they put a flower into ours. And those flowers of unity went into the urn with our countries' earth."

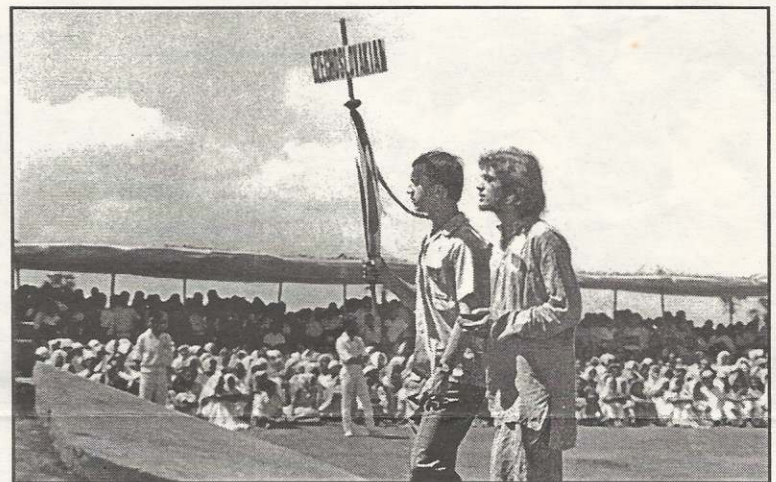
When the buses turned onto the Auroville plateau, Poppo's heart sank. "All I saw was barren sandy soil. It reminded me of Bihar and I was convinced that working here was impossible. At the same time I was fascinated by the idea of human unity and I liked being engulfed in the internationalism of the thing. That was something I'd been looking for all my life."

There was no rehearsal for the ceremony itself. "People in white were running round organizing us into the correct sequence, giving us instructions. Most attendees were sitting in the shades of the shamianas erected around the amphitheatre, but the dele-

There was an exhibition under the Banyan Tree, but after the ceremony all that Poppo and the other delegates wanted was something to drink. "But all the drinks were finished. So when we returned to Pondy we went and had some beers with our French



Petra Erdmann holds the placard while Poppo deposits the German earth into the Urn



Delegates from Czechoslovakia walk towards the Urn

gates had to wait in the sun. And it was hot! Everything went very slowly. When it was our turn to go up to the urn the girl carried the placard and I carried the bowl of soil. I poured it in, and then I bent over and peered inside. I saw a pile of dry sand. At that moment, I heard a muffled giggle go round the amphitheatre. Obviously they were laughing at my curiosity. Afterwards we were guided to a table where we had to put our signature and write our country's name on a large silk scroll. When I wrote my hand was shaking: it was like being at the inauguration of something huge, like the Olympic Games."

friends."

A few days later Poppo wrote to his parents: "I feel strongly that this will be the town of my life because it cannot be otherwise, Auroville, the town of the future. What I experienced here is proof that the direction of my thinking has found a brother..." Back in Hyderabad he talked to everybody he knew about Auroville. "I still didn't think I could actually ever work there but, like a cosmic law, something was coming slowly down. A few years later I was back. For good."

From an interview by Alan

All the villages were present

remembers Damodaran Harikrishnan

Damodaran Harikrishnan from the village of Kuilapalayam, is one of the earliest Tamil men who helped to bridge the gap between Aurovilians and the locals. Now he is almost 60 years old. Some of his sons and daughters are Aurovilians active in the community. February 28th 1968 is a day that stands out in his memory:

"There was a festive atmosphere that day. There was a huge crowd and people came in buses from Pondicherry. The entire village of Kuilapalayam was there. Not just from Kuilapalayam, but people from all surrounding villages – Edayanchavadi, Kottakarai. People were from all

parts of India and from over 120 countries. They brought earth from their lands; it was mingled together in the Urn. This was to be a universal city (*sarvadesa nagaram*) meant for all human beings. It was Mother's vision and what a noble concept it was! To work together in unity, in honesty, and selflessly for all. Now it feels different. I feel people should not be selfish looking for their own gain and just start businesses. Auroville has to be different from the rest of the world. I feel Mother's dreams for this land have to be remembered and the people here have to recommit themselves to its ideals. Only then will this day continue to have meaning and this land can be the universal city it is meant to be."



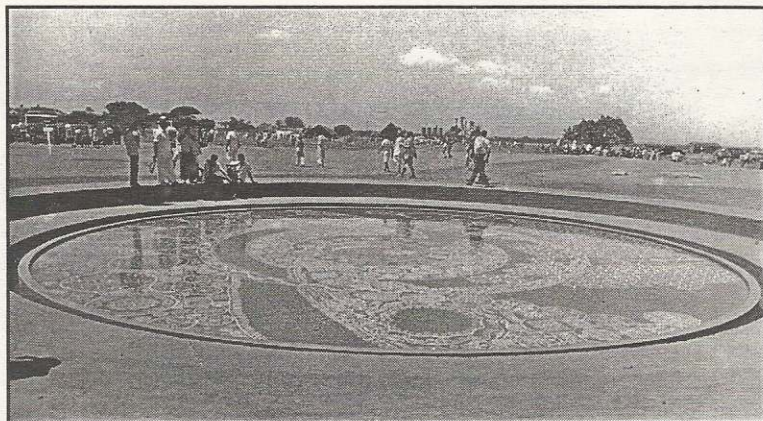
The grandest day of my life

Tapas Bhatt reminisces

My memories of Auroville go back to the years 1965 or 1966. I was a pupil of the Sri Aurobindo International School in the Ashram. In those years Roger Anger used to visit the Mother to talk about Auroville. Afterwards he would sometimes come to our class and give us big sheets and colour pencils, and ask us to make a drawing of how we imagined the ideal city. That play of my imagination was my first contact with Auroville. I must have been 14 at the time. The stories of Mother's ideal city filled us children with incredible enthusiasm.

Late 1967, beginning of 1968, many ashramites joined forces to build the first roads in Auroville. We went by bus, and sweated it out to make the road from Kuilapalayam to the amphitheatre. One night in Pondicherry I dreamt of that landscape of red earth, yellow sun and blue sky, where I was all alone in silence. Somehow, it was an initiation into Auroville.

From Feb 21st to late in the night of 27th the grounds around the urn and the Banyan tree were prepared. Buses took



The 'Kolam Pond' specially made for the inauguration

from the school, had left a message that the next day I was going to participate in the ceremony, representing Syria.

February 28th. We left at 5 a.m. There was a fleet of more than 50 buses waiting for all the delegates and us children near the Ganesh temple in Pondicherry. We boarded, and then started what is probably the grandest day of my life. The buses went to Jipmer hospital, from

would walk up the pathway to the urn, carrying a placard with the name of that country, and deposit the earth of the country into the urn, while the Charter was read out in that country's language. If there was no earth available, we put salt. Mother had selected Ashram children to represent those countries from which there were no official representatives. There was a very powerful atmos-



Delegates and invitees see the exhibition of plans for the future city around the Banyan tree

us every day early morning and we would return late evening. My job was to decorate with kolams the bottom of a big pond, a job that was done together with some village women and Roger Anger. Once the paint had dried, water was put into the pond.

When I came home on the 27th, very tired and covered with red earth, my father told me that Tanmaya, a teacher

there passing Auro-Orchard and Hope to Edayanchavadi and then to the amphitheatre. Right from Jipmer, through the Edayanvadi village all up to the urn, crowds were cheering on both sides of the road. When we arrived, we were seated under the canopies set up all around the amphitheatre.

Pathways were planned out, and then a boy and a girl representing each country

phere, especially when we heard the direct broadcast of Mother reading her message from her room in the Ashram. The entire amphitheatre, full of people, fell silent. There was the red earth, the hot sun, the blue sky, and the buses and people were like little ants in a new cosmos. It was a surrealistic image with a very special atmosphere: a joining of a strong human aspiration that Auroville is going to be a grand dream to work for. And there was an incredible feeling of togetherness – people from all different parts of the world joining in that aspiration.

When we had done our bit, there was a big exhibition around the Banyan tree. There were big blocks of circular concrete for sitting, and everybody was having a good time. Photos were taken and then somebody discovered an image of The Mother in the Banyan tree. While she was reading her Message from her room in the Ashram, she was also present at Auroville.

Then we went back by bus to Pondicherry. There was a big function in the garden of the office of the Sri Aurobindo Society. There was a question and answer session with all the delegates, a lively interaction, which kept us together for a day or two longer.

That ceremony had changed something in me. In the months and years that followed, I kept coming to Auroville, by bus or cycle, for doing some digging or some other work. I wouldn't lose a single opportunity to come. My classmates were equally enthusiastic. For us it was a sense of picnic. Between 1968 and 1977, when I finally moved here, we would often come on Saturdays, doing night duty at the Matrimandir.

Names of the States of India and the countries that participated in the dedication ceremony of Auroville on 28-2-1968

States of India:

1. ANDAMAN & NICOBAR
2. ANDHRA PRADESH
3. ASSAM
4. WEST BENGAL
5. BIHAR
6. CHANDIGARH
7. DELHI
8. GOA
9. GUJARAT
10. HARYANA
11. HIMACHAL PRADESH
12. JAMMU & KASHMIR
13. KERALA
14. LACCADIVES
15. MADHYA PRADESH
16. MADRAS
17. MAHARASHTRA
18. MANIPUR
19. MYSORE
20. ORISSA
21. PONDICHERRY
22. PUNJAB
23. RAJASTHAN

50. INDONESIA
51. IRAN
52. IRAQ
53. IRELAND
54. ISRAEL
55. ITALY
56. IVORY COAST
57. JAMAICA
58. JAPAN
59. JORDAN
60. KENYA
61. KOREA
62. KUWAIT
63. LAOS
64. LEBANON
65. LIBERIA
66. LIBYA
67. LUXEMBOURG
68. MALAGASY
69. MALAYSIA
70. MALI
71. MALTA
72. MAURITANIA
73. MAURITIUS
74. MEXICO
75. MONGOLIA
76. MOROCCO
77. MOZAMBIQUE *
78. NEPAL
79. NETHERLANDS
80. NEW ZEALAND
81. NICARAGUA
82. NIGER
83. NIGERIA
84. NORWAY
85. PAKISTAN
86. PANAMA
87. PARAGUAY
88. PERU
89. PHILIPPINES
90. POLAND
91. PORTUGAL
92. QATAR
93. RHODESIA
94. RUMANIA
95. RWANDA
96. SAUDI ARABIA
97. SENEGAL
98. SIKKIM
99. SINGAPORE
100. SOMALIA
101. SOUTH AFRICA
102. SOUTH YEMEN
103. SPAIN
104. SUDAN
105. SWEDEN
106. SWITZERLAND
107. SYRIA
108. TANZANIA
109. THAILAND
110. TIBET *
111. TOGO
112. TUNISIA
113. TURKEY
114. UNITED ARAB REP.
115. UGANDA
116. UNITED KINGDOM
117. UPPER VOLTA
118. URUGUAY
119. USA
120. USSR
121. VENEZUELA
122. VIETNAM
123. YUGOSLAVIA
124. ZAMBIA

* listed in the Ashram papers as not-independent territories

Name of countries:

1. AFGHANISTAN
2. ALBANIA
3. ALGERIA
4. ARGENTINA
5. AUSTRALIA
6. AUSTRIA
7. BELGIUM
8. BHUTAN
9. BOLIVIA
10. BRAZIL
11. BULGARIA
12. BURMA
13. BURUNDI
14. CAMBODIA
15. CAMEROON
16. CANADA
17. CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.
18. CEYLON
19. CHAD
20. CHILE
21. CHINA (Communist)
22. CHINA (Nationalist)
23. COLOMBIA
24. CONGO
25. CONGO (Kinshasa)
26. COSTA RICA
27. CUBA
28. CYPRUS
29. CZECHOSLOVAKIA
30. DAHOMEY
31. DENMARK
32. DOMINICAN REP.
33. EL SALVADOR
34. EQUADOR
35. ETHIOPIA
36. FIJI *
37. FINLAND
38. FRANCE
39. GABON
40. GERMANY
41. GHANA
42. GREECE
43. GUATAMALA
44. GUINEA
45. HAITI
46. HONDURAS
47. HUNGARY
48. ICELAND
49. INDIA

What the papers said

"The simple ceremony represented history in the making." (Times of India, 28.2.68)

"The ceremony was at once imaginative and moving....It is the chance of many lifetimes to be present at the birth of a city, and of a city, too, that will be in tune with the noblest ideals of India and the world." (Indian Express, 29.2.68)

"Modern Shangri-La in the offing...The township, if it materializes along the lines now envisaged, may well be the dream city of the world." (The Statesman, 28.2.68)

"To bewildered men everywhere the first step to realizing a mighty dream – the laying of the foundation-stone of Auroville – will come as a ray of bright hope amid the encircling gloom." (Times of India, 28.2.68)

"Auroville will be the first world city. Its building could not have been more timely than now when India is riven by petty differences based on State and language....The Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry has done much for India's good, but it is doubtful whether it could have done better than in constructing Auroville." (Indian Express, 1.3.68)

"May it serve as a beaconlight of hope and promise of the One World to be." (Sunday Standard, 10.3.68)

A clockwork ceremony

Hrushikesh Acharya from Bhubaneswar, Orissa, writes:

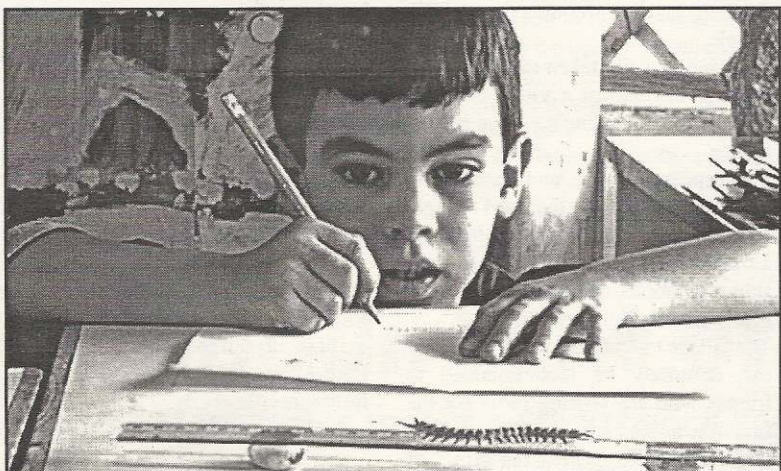
What a unique and memorable opportunity it was to have been able to attend the ceremony on 28th February, 1968. My heartfelt gratitude to the Mother for having chosen me for this privilege. The amphitheatre was a novel shape to us. It was in its original avatar,

without the present linings and steps, and with temporary shamianas all around the perimeter to provide shading from the scorching sun. In spite of the huge crowd a unique peace, calm and silence prevailed and the ceremony proceeded like clockwork. It was a thrilling experience to witness this unique assembly of the nations of the world in joining a programme heralding the unity of mankind for peace and future progress.

Insect-scapades

Encounters with the multi-legged in Auroville

Just four months ago, as a newbie to the rustic keet (coconut thatch) hut experience, I had the royal 'poochi' (Tamil for 'insect') welcome. The keet roof was alive, with hundreds of black-red millipedes. Like a good soul who practises ahimsa, I took out a shoebox, armed myself with a twig and began drawing the critters out of the crevices and relocated them to their new home 20 metres deep into the canyon nearby. No one explained that the precious two hours I had spent would give me no respite. 'Maravattai' as the local people call them continued to multiply even more enthusiastically with all the



Drawing the multi-legged

newfound space.

I am much wiser now. I know that they are only one of the many invertebrate (spineless) inhabitants of Aspiration and perhaps of Auroville itself, and I have learnt to keep my peace. "You had to get accustomed to live with flies, mosquitoes, ants of a hundred varieties..." writes George van Vrekhem in a chapter titled 'First Aurovilians' in his book 'Beyond Man: Life and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother' (New Delhi, 1997). Now when a marakattai lands on my lap perhaps after losing its 'feet'ing on the thatched ceiling, I calmly lift it and flick it out of my window. My neighbour, 3 year old Dinesh has been highly impressed by this demonstration. (Note: Do not ever try this with the black yellow millipede which will leave behind a stink that you can never wish or wash away.)

Then there were the termites or the 'cell' poochis in their sturdy red earth tunnels running endlessly along the length of the keet. In the silence of my first night here, I could hear the eerie sound of their powerful mandibles chomping hard, like a continuous rustling of leaves. It was downright scary, and was I glad that I was not made of coconut fronds myself...

The insect guru

It is time to meet Boris, the insect Guru of the community and a philosopher par excellence. Tall, bearded and gangly, Boris is a fellow Aspiration resident. He comes from Siberia and has a Ph.D. in Entomology (study of insects). His weekly musings in the AV News about his favorite subject – Auroville's invertebrates – in a stream-of-consciousness mode is startling and humorous yet educational, and with deep philosophical undertones. This has won him a devoted fan following. He has much to say about termites. In one timeless musing titled 'Unserious Termites' (October 1998), he writes, "The Working Committee of Aurovillian Termites has decided that all the termites which are residents of the city must work round the clock, all year long, everyday including all holidays and festivals, without any salary. The results are obvious. Now the Housing Group of Termites

successfully competes with the Human Housing Group. In reality, the Auroville land belongs almost equally to man and to insect, although the insects are less serious and do not celebrate Deepavali." A classic sample of the inimitable Boris-style...

Through his eyes, the poochis and their world become strangely fascinating and benign. In 'Night Story' (May 1999), he continues about another avatar of the termites, the amorous winged kings and queens called alates. "Andrey and Svetlana in Djaima have two small children who are often sick. The parents are woken by them during nights. On the night of

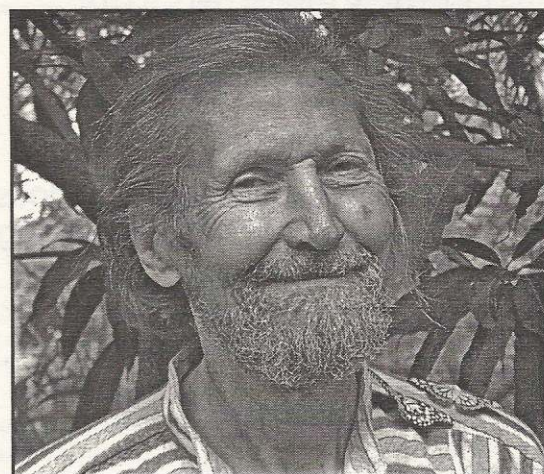
them. Openly he revealed his business plans for bartering the bugs for something more valuable, and then magnanimously offered me one for free. Perhaps a generous gesture as a result of the interest I showed? Of course I could not accept his valuable offer...

François from the community of Dana is Boris's dear friend and shares his passion for the fauna and flora of the bioregion. For the past two years he has been videotaping the bio-treasures of Auroville, just from the life flourishing around his home. He has so far made over half a dozen hour-long videos, and is still continuing the work. A group of children from After School and myself, their science teacher, cycled over one Thursday morning to view one of these beautifully made films. What a treat it was to watch the life of insects unfold before our eyes, intimate and magnified; the actors unselfconsciously living out their life in front of the camera. For perhaps the first time, I witness a quiet bunch of fourteen year-olds, totally immersed and in rapt attention...

François also has the most beautiful collection of insect photographs and they have been circulating in the community. In it is an impressive shot of a green Praying Mantis. Boris was all excitement when he recently saw one

by the dining hall in Aspiration. In the following week, AV News inevitably carried a piece on this encounter.

"...In Aspiration, a curious-looking praying mantis (Gongylus gongiloides) appeared at dinner time. It is found among grasses of South India and has a stick-like body with leaf-like expansions on the legs. In Auroville, this wonderful creature is not common. I have lived here for 10 years and met the species for the first time. This extraordinary creature was a good model for Adil's photos. Usually a praying mantis moves very slowly, but that evening it was excited. I asked it, 'What happened?' The mantis answered, 'All nature of Auroville is angry'. – 'But why?' It explained: 'AV News published a discussion about cultural life of the city. A few unsatisfied people want commercial art in Auroville like in New York. But the Roman empire fell because its citizens liked costly shows (with gladiators, lions, tigers). Let a pseudo culture of the 'stone jungle' stay in its noisy poisonous cities. The garden of Gods has its own art. Every



Insect guru Boris

flower is a masterpiece of beauty, every animal creates harmony and perfection like a divine professional actor or singer. Please, no commercial culture in the city of the Future.' And thus the stories continue, and words of wisdom spill from the mouths of these little creatures aptly decoded by Boris...

Life is abundant in Auroville, not just in terms of insects. Just yesterday as I cleaned my floor, I encountered a baby scorpion who very eagerly lifted his miniscule tail several times to practice his friendly jab on me. I calmly swept him up and let him down gently by the bamboo brush. Call me a sentimental softie if you wish, but I just think I am on my way to becoming a true Aurovillian...

Priya Sundaravalli in collaboration with Boris

Birds of a different feather

Peacocks and a very special parrot...

Between approximately 5 and 6 a.m. peacocks and peahens of various hues and sizes descend with raucous cries from their favourite trees and terraces in Certitude, Sharnga, and Samasti. Having made safe landings, the birds then gather in troops of three or four, usually of the same gender, and delicately make their way to neighbouring Gratitude where Thomas's farm is situated. By 6:15 a.m. the spacious, sand-floored garden near Thomas's house is peacocked to capacity with scores of alert crows waiting in the sidelines. Almost 50-60 peacocks converge here for their morning and evening repast of corn kernels (peacocks also love fresh roses and cherry tomatoes, much to the chagrin of potted-plant owners in Auroville) that Thomas lovingly scatters in their direction. During this ritual, his old dogs – the black mongrel Bonnie and the tiny, sausage-shaped dachshund Cleo – get the chance to sniff out these long-tailed creatures that their master insists on feeding everyday. While not afraid of Thomas's dogs since they have never been attacked by them, the peacocks are still wary of village dogs and the civet cat that sometimes lurk in the dense Auroville undergrowth. If one were to trace the lineage of the several hundred peacocks presently inhabiting the Auroville environs, one would be surprised to know that it all began with just two parent couples brought in the early 1980s from Trichy and from Kerala. The first generation of thirty peacocks born from these couples were necessarily bred in captivity, but when this flock reproduced in their third year, most

of their offspring were able to survive in the wild. Auroville was still not wild enough in those days with its young, (but growing) forest cover, yet it was definitely better than the early days when there was hardly any foliage essential for the protection of these large, beautiful birds. Without adequate tree and bush cover, the birds were easy prey for predators, human and animal. Today, Thomas, the man responsible for introducing peacocks in Auroville and its surrounding bioregion, is relaxed about the safety of these birds. Talking to villagers over the years helped in establishing their respect for peacocks that used to be killed for their meat and feathers. Many villagers responded by bringing stray, abandoned, peacock eggs that were later

when I heard him talking to himself in what sounded like guttural Tamil. He was pacing his perch in a large cage close to the shed from where I picked up my half-litre of milk everyday. On asking the milking assistant what the bird was talking about, I was told that the bird liked to swear in street Tamil, having lived for many years in a house just above a rickshaw-puller stand in Pondicherry.

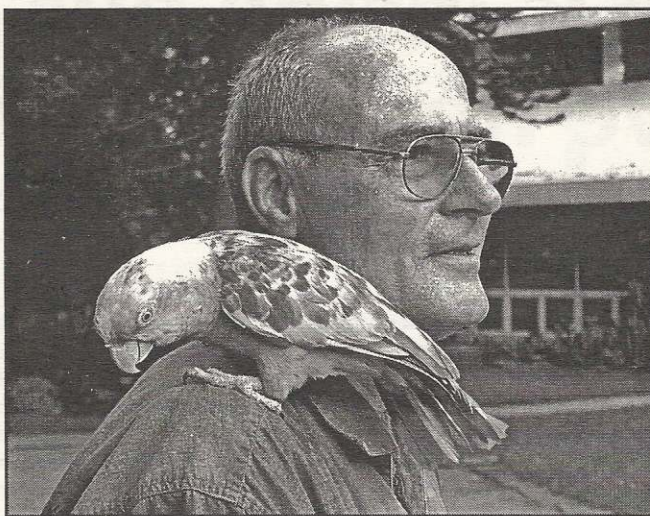
Arturo is thirty-three years old, presumably male (since he has never laid an egg), and loves peanuts, noodles, and tortillas. An Amazon Blue parrot, there is nothing blue about him. In fact he is a flattering mix of green and yellow. Originally from Guatemala, he was brought to Pondicherry and later to Auroville by

Dietra, Thomas's friend, who recently returned to the States. In course of time his Spanish-Mayan dialect gave way to fluent rickshaw Tamil. Arturo is very sociable, his usual, (printable) cheery conversation openers being: "Start the motor" (water pump); "Want to come down?"; "Dirty rat"; and "Thief!"

Two weeks ago Arturo moved in with Thomas. No longer confined to his cage, the parrot has free range of the house and

a captive audience for the most part of the day. The move, Thomas reflects, has favourably affected Arturo's powers of expression. To villagers and their children across the canyon, Arturo is known as the "Watchman" of Gratitude. And Thomas's farm as "Kili Tottam" (Parrot Garden).

Abha Prakash



Artura perched on Thomas' shoulder

able to hatch under his care. Though Thomas loves the peacock, India's national bird whose characteristic cry, according to Sri Aurobindo, represents victory for the divine, he has not kept one for a pet. Perhaps the sweeping-size could have been a problem. But he does have a special pet, a parrot named Arturo. The first time I met Arturo

Taking a Village Tour

If you've ever wondered what goes on in the villages around Auroville, take the village tour run by Sanjeevi Nagar's Mohanam Cultural Centre

One Sunday morning in January, I joined a group of people eager to learn more about Tamil village life. We set off by cycle from Vérité under the direction of Balu and Gnanavel, two young men who have grown up in nearby Sanjeevi Nagar village, and who have been involved in Auroville in different capacities. Our first stop is the pond at

inner chamber to observe the Hanuman deity, and are told that there has been some sort of shrine here for 2000 years. At a granite workshop in Sanjeevi Nagar village, we're met by Ramalingam, a Tamil Aurovilian who previously worked as a supervisor on the Matrimandir. Three years ago he started this sculpture workshop, inviting craftsmen from Kanchipuram to train local people to carve the large

ant dances for us that are a mix of folk and cinema moves. Aurelio from Vérité, who played a role in getting the centre established, tells us that the cultural centre was facilitated through Auroville Village Action Arts, a project of the Auroville Village Action Group that is working for the cultural integration of Auroville and its nearby villages. He recounts how the local youth worked on the restoration in the evenings after working in Auroville all day, often working until 1 a.m.. He points out that the centre is also an opportunity for the young men to learn management and organisation skills, in particular through conducting these tours and learning how to coordinate groups of people.

We are then given the choice to stay at the centre and observe the activities there (cooking, *kolam* drawing demonstrations, children's classes, a talk by two social workers from the Auroville Village Action Group), or to set off for a one and a half hour leisurely tour of the village.

Opting for the latter, a group of about fifteen of us set off on foot with Balu, Ashok and Gnanavel. We visit two ceramic workshops: the first is a simple hut where women are carving decorative patterns with knives into terracotta pots to be sold in Pondicherry; the second is a more sophisticated venture with beautiful glazed pots and vases on display. On our way to a paper lampshade workshop we pass by a cricket game on the village ground, where the local fans sit under the trees cheering the teams madly. After visiting the local pond, we take a walk through the fields, where we are shown crops of rice, peanuts and chillis, and are treated to some sugar cane freshly cut from the field. The young men are happy to answer questions and converse on topics such as local herb medicines, rope-making, garbage collection issues and are other facets of village life.

With the sugarcane whetting our appetite, we head back through the fields to Mohanam Cultural Centre for lunch. We sit on mats in the courtyard as a feast prepared by local caterer Santosh is served up to us on banana leaves. The American university stu-



Young Bharata Natyam dancers waiting for their performance in Mohanam

dents present swoon over the delicious Tamil dishes and we're told that Santosh can cater weddings up to 1200 people.

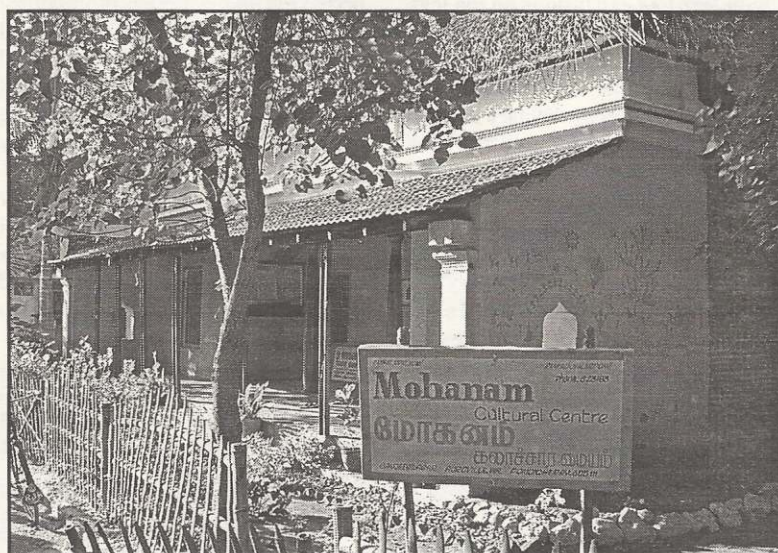
After lunch we're taken to the covered rooftop and shown a video on local cultural life, including a village performance by a traveling Tamil Shakespeare group, and fascinating footage from the Sanjeevi Nagar Cultural Festival of local men dragging a tractor with chains attached to their skin with hooks, as preparation for the yearly fire-walking ceremony.

The village tour is very worthwhile and can definitely be recommended to friends who are visiting India for the first time or who are keen for a glimpse into village life. Whilst the group of approximately 25 people was a little

too large to accommodate at times, the tour coordinators are quickly fine-tuning the skills required to move groups of people around without delays. If joining a guided tour isn't your cup of tea, the Mohanam Cultural Centre is certainly worth a visit to witness the restoration work and permanent art displays, and the best time of all is on weekend mornings when it comes alive with children's activities. The tours will be running on occasional Sundays during the guest season and they cost Rs. 150 including lunch.

To book in, call the Mohanam Cultural Centre on 2623183 or email aurelio@auroville.org.in

Lesley



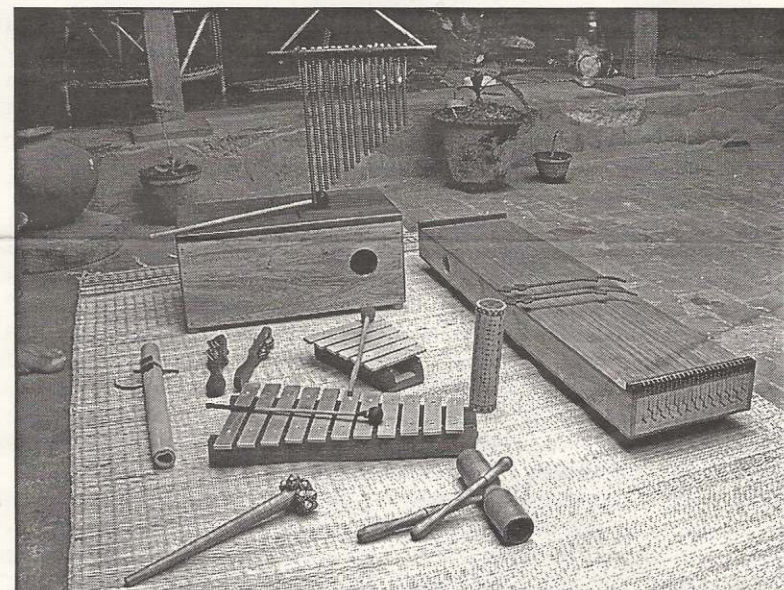
The Mohanam Cultural Centre in Sanjeevi Nagar

Alankuppam, a village on the northern border of Auroville. Balu explains that every village has a temple and a pond, and that the latter is used for everything from washing dishes to maintaining personal hygiene. He says, "this is the swimming pool for us. We learn swimming here". Whilst the Auroville unit Water Harvest assisted with enlarging and cleaning the pond last year, Balu points out that it is very low right now due to lack of rain. He says, "we are lucky to have Auroville there. If agriculture is not possible due to lack of water, we can work in Auroville. But if this goes on for two or three years, there will be no food and we'll be in big trouble".

Next stop is the Sanjeevaniperumal temple in Alankuppam, where we're met by a Brahmin priest whose family has been worshipping at this shrine for four generations. We cram into the

blocks of granite that are brought from 300km away. This is not a traditional local craft, but the sixty workers have quickly adapted to their new trade, and are now filling orders to export from Germany, France and the UK.

We then proceed to the Mohanam Cultural Centre in Sanjeevi Nagar, which is the realisation of a group of young men from different villages surrounding Auroville. They have restored one of the oldest traditional houses in the village, creating a meeting place that offers activities in arts, crafts and education. The centre is seen by the youth as a bridge between traditional and modern cultures, where new skills can be learnt and the cultural heritage can be kept alive. Local youth come here for classes and workshops in painting, dancing, karate, instrument making, carpentry and sports. A group of girls perform some exuber-



A selection of the musical instruments crafted at Mohanam

RESEARCH

"Yoga is inside our body, all we need to do is enquiry"

Sama Fabian, a London-based hatha yoga teacher, gave a two week intensive Hatha Yoga workshop for her own students and invitees from Auroville.

"Yoga is inside our body, all we need to do is enquiry," says Sama Fabian, a hatha yoga teacher who recently visited Auroville to give a two week intensive Yoga workshop. "You have to understand how to follow your own body, and how to ask questions. The moment there is a question in the body, the answer comes," she continues.

Aimed at deepening practice and improving teaching skills, this course brought students from Sama's London-based teacher training course and teachers from Ireland to Auroville, working together with Auroville's own teachers and practitioners. "Hatha yoga integrates all levels of enquiry. An essential aspect of hatha

yoga is the aspiration to become more conscious through movement. As a holistic practice, it is about connection, integration, developing a connective mind and a connected body," she says.

Sama talks of a new movement in hatha yoga practice, which integrates contemporary issues and preoccupations. She believes hatha yoga has the potential to open up a space in which we can reflect on the social, political and spiritual layers as well as the personal consequences of that practice. "It has to do with how we bring spiritual consciousness into the reality of practical life, how our practice impacts on the world, on our outlook and responses to situations."

Sama started her life in Yoga after

having discovered the writings of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and Satprem. She has been teaching hatha yoga for the past eighteen years. As she says: "I consider myself as part of a continuum of transmission. We do not develop in isolation: my approach, practice and teaching have been inspired by various people." With a Vinni and Iyengar Yoga background, Sama then completed an advanced study programme with Dona Holleman and Orit Sen Gupta. She was also influenced by the teachings of Ma Ghandi, Andre van Lisbeth, Satchitananda Yogi and Angela Farmer.

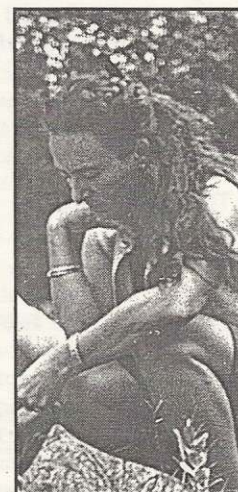
In 1999, Sama conceived the "Aurolab Yoga project", in her own words, a 'laboratory for experiential yoga', which includes a four year teachers'

training course and on-going study and awareness programmes for teachers. She writes: "Aurolab seeks to promote Yoga in its original wholeness, freed from allegiances to particular schools of thought, styles and methodologies. Here we want to bring together several aspects of classical Yoga, and present them in the light of contemporary psycho-spiritual developments through the understanding of structural alignment in the practice of asana and the broader meaning and implications of the concept of alignment; the refinement of mental and emotional patterns through the practice of Pranayama; the cultivation of a sharp and connective intellect in the practice of Svadyana, an integration of self-study and the study of ancient and

modern texts; the recognition of internal conflictual forces and the access to a place of stillness through relaxation and meditation.

"Teaching in Auroville has been a rewarding experience," she says, "One feels that 'enquiry is at the heart of most peoples' lives here. It is a beautiful experience for teachers to have people in front of them who are so present and receptive. In such an environment, the teachings come into resonance."

Emmanuelle



Sama Fabian

Echoes

Matrimandir is a place where present and past merge

Linger while my small toes melt into the wet earth, allowing the sticky red to gather between, I eye the huge man-made crater and wonder if it is fit for swimming. Aurolice, Mukta, Chandra, Aurassi and my sister Lunaara run forward with shrieks of glee – our cycles left scattered aimlessly behind. We are free. Monsoon rains have provided us with a new and very large swimming pond. Granted the water is thick with mud and the early stages of Matrimandir's scaffolding protrude skyward, but we are not concerned. Our parents, neighbours and friends are working to build this almost incomprehensible huge Mother dome and we are its children coming to play. I run toward the water, splashing in with the others, letting my hair become thick with mud and drops of monsoon rain. Afterwards, we would climb the

banyan where the King Cobra dwells, pass through the rocks and shrubs on our racing wheels or mud-stained feet and find a friendly house to fill our tummies full...

Twenty-some years later, this memory comes alive as I make my way toward early morning chamber duty. I follow the path that leads through the ancient Banyan's arms, reaching out to give one a hug while wondering what has become of the King Cobra. All around me sprinklers water the short, neatly-cut green grass and lines are drawn out on the ground for the twelve gardens to be. In front of me, still barely comprehensible, stands the Matrimandir – its golden disks glimmering in the light of the morning sun. Looking at it, I find it difficult to imagine when it was but a hole in the ground. The years of love, sweat and work that have gone into its creation are

impossible to miss.

Checking in with Jayaraman, I take the keys to the inner chamber and begin my climb up the concrete steps. I remove my shoes after the second flight of stairs and look around. A handful of Aurovilians and devoted workers are cleaning and chipping the white marble walls. Someone somewhere starts an electric drill, clashing with the echoing silence. I try and set the noise aside as I begin walking up the slanted entrance ramp.

Finally at the chamber doors, I promise myself for the 100th time to quit smoking, while I slip on a pair of clean white socks. I unlock the door and step inside, letting the cool air swim over me. I glimpse the sunray shooting downward, lighting the huge crystal ball. The light seems to radiate out from the crystal's center and then quietly dims as a cloud passes over-

head. I am in awe each time I come. I am alone in a chamber of white marble, crystals and Divine love. What a blessing to be part of such a place. Suddenly I feel like a small girl again.

I resist the urge to swirl around in the magic space and instead make myself a comfortable sitting spot with the white-clothed cushions. Resting into the Chamber's atmosphere and my own inner space, I let go...

The Matrimandir is the heart of our community. Whether or not the rhythmic energy pulse is heard, it continues to be. We continue to be challenged by its existence. As the workers and builders, we struggle amongst ourselves to find the perfection we each individually see. But, ultimately we are not the creators of the Matrimandir. Its life energy comes from the Divine and it is this energy that keeps the pulse beating.

Sunaara

CULTURE

Embodiment of Shakti

Sonal Mansingh's recent performance in Auroville

Internationally-acclaimed Odissi dancer Sonal Mansingh's performance at the Bharat Nivas auditorium on January 3 was both creative and intellectually informed.

Although Mansingh's repertoire for the evening centred on the representation of Shakti (the Female Principle that energises the Hindu universe) in its several manifestations, the cultural program was introduced to the audience as another, more inspiring path towards engaging with the theme of the recently concluded conference on the "Sense of the Infinite." According to Aster Patel, the main organiser of the conference, Mansingh's dance performance promised to carry the theme forward by communicating it to the audience through "sound, movement and body, instead of words."

But words there were. The program

tation of the Oneness of Shakti, the Giver of Prosperity according to the Rig Veda. Resplendent in a traditional costume of yellow silk with heavy jewelry encircling her neck, arms, and waist, her feet and palms delicately tinted with vermillion, Mansingh's stage presence was striking from the start. The dancer, was however, (and understandably so) soon disturbed by the uneven strains of Oriya music flowing from her group of four accompanying musicians. In the next few minutes the audience, at least those who could understand Hindi, were treated to Mansingh's brusque requests (on stage and off) to her musicians, and later the sound engineer to reset the controls affecting the overall musical resonance. Perhaps an earlier sound check could have avoided this technical problem. With the sounds soon restored to their correct modulation, Mansingh too regained her composure for the next item



PHOTO: AVINASH PASRICHA. COURTESY SONAL MANSINGH

the "Pallavi" or "Nature in Full Bloom." This was a lively dance

involving strenuous movements of the torso, arms and feet, frequently interspersed with pirouettes that simulated the life force in young creepers, trees, and flowers. This was followed by an equally interesting representation of "Nayika" – commonly translated as "Heroine" but in etymological terms meaning "One who Leads Forward, the Female Energy at the Forefront of Creation." Mansingh chose to render this aspect of Shakti through the role of Radha, the consort of Krishna, both in her mundane, feminine form (introspective, jealous of Krishna's other love interests) and in her supreme, inimitable female embodiment (as the singular, irreplaceable Radha, confident of her power of Shakti). Mansingh returned to the stage after a brief musical

interlude of traditional Oriya music played to perfection by her musicians. For the final long piece, the "Nava Rasa" composed and written by Mansingh herself, the dancer led the spectators through nine moods of Devi encompassing the love between Parvati and Shiva in "Shringar," the compassion and wonder of motherhood, the wrath of Parvati at the yagya when she becomes "Sati," the heroism of "Durga," and finally the peace engendered in "Shantam" with which the dancer ended her sensitive rendition.

With a career that began in her late teens and that has spanned close to forty years, Mansingh's performances continue to draw audiences both in India and abroad. A friend of Auroville, she has performed here at intervals over the last eighteen years with untiring vigor, grace, and enthusiasm. For this and for her own multifaceted moods that never fail to disappoint we extend to the artist our praise and support.

Abha Prakash

On January 26th 2003, the Republic Day of India, it was announced that Sonal Mansingh was awarded the Padma Vibhushan for exceptional and distinguished services to the nation in the field of art classical dance. The Padma Vibhushan is the second highest award India can bestow on its civilians.

began with the dancer's graceful rendition of the "Devi Sutra" – represent-

Yak dance in Auroville



The last few days in December 2002 saw Auroville hosting a group of young Tibetans who are currently studying at various colleges in Chennai. Members of the Tibetan Students' Association, Madras (TSAM), the guests presented a stunning show of dance and music on the evening of the 28th December to a full house at the Sri Aurobindo Auditorium in Bharat Nivas. Michel Seguy, the new French Consul-General presided over the event. Dressed in colourful traditional Tibetan costumes and masks, the young women and men performed songs and dances from different provinces of Tibet. The photo is that of the energetic Yak Dance, depicting the powerful and bold disposition of the divine yak and its supernatural power to drive out evil.

AVToday not arrived?

The Indian post sometimes returns to the Auroville Today office copies of the magazine from which the address labels have been removed. Subscribers who have not received their copy of Auroville Today are requested to send an email or write to us, so that we can send a complimentary copy. For addresses see the box at page 12.

In brief

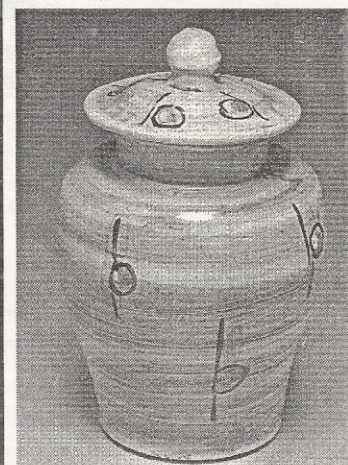
Film festivals

In collaboration with the Embassy of Italy in India and the Italian pavilion three Italian films were shown at Bharat Nivas. A few days later there was a four-day Indian film festival showing 2 films per evening.

Irumbai full moon celebration

On January 19th of 2003, full moon day, the ancient temple of Irumbai was the place of a one-day celebration organised by the Headman and devotees of Irumbai village and Aurovilians. The main event was a singing about Lord Shiva.

Colour and fire



Aurovilian ceramics artist Supriya Menon Meneghetti showcased her first solo studio pottery exhibition "Colour and Fire" at the Amethyst Gallery, Chennai. Sponsored by the British Council, the exhibition had a successful run from January 4-15.

Water courses

Gianni de Stefani, a teacher from the Worldwide Aquatic Bodywork Association, gave workshops in WATSU (a treatment that combines stretching and relaxation in warm water together with gentle pressure on some acupressure points) and Aqua Wellness (a treatment in water that combines light movement and stretching with massage).

Odhuvar

Sri Odhuvar Sankarnarayan from Madurai offered a rendering of Tamil and Sanskrit Hymns as an invocation to bring peace on earth at the Tamil Heritage Center site.

Nanditani

Students of Nanditadi, accompanied by Shri Somnath Nandi from Pondicherry on the tabla, presented an evening of songs, Bhajans and classical Indian music at Pitanga.

Musical piano journey

Newcomer Hartmut improvised at the piano at Pitanga to an enthusiastic audience.

Silent Lotus

"The silent dance of universal lotus" was the theme of an exhibition of paintings by Korean-born Aurovilian Sarasija.

Western music

Zadislav, violin, and Pushkar, piano, gave a well-attended concert in Pitanga playing works by Vivaldi, Paganini, Debussy, Saint-Saens and Ravel.

Subscription rate correction

In AVToday # 168 the subscription price of € 35 was given. This should be € 37/€ 67 for one resp. two year subscriptions.

Following Auroville's dirt roads

Is there a solution to the dust and the pot-holes? The Road Service is doing its best...

Won't it be great when we invent our eco-friendly sky glider or better still, in my opinion, how about magic carpets? Ones that could fly us luxuriously through the breeze at the tips of the trees, landing us safely at our chosen destination! But, back to earth, reality finds us on two and four wheels making our way down dusty hole-ridden roads. So while our inventors work on our future transport, let's discuss the Auroville roads of today. To get a better understanding, I met with Muniandi from Aurodam who works as our head guy for the Auroville Road Service.

For seven years Sukrit, an Auroville born "youth" with lots of creative energy, supervised the Auroville Road Service. Muni filled in for Sukrit while he was abroad and eventually took over the position full-time. "Most of the work," explained Muni, "involves patching up and fixing existing roads in Auroville's central and most traveled areas, such as the stretches between Certitude and Auroshilpam or Matrimandir and the Information Center." The Auroville Road Service team, which includes seven full-time employees, also repairs smaller roads and on occasions assists with the creation of new roads. The Indian government is responsible for the main tar roads such as the one leading from Kuilapalayam to Edayanchavadi. Ultimately, the Auroville Road Service cares for the rest of Auroville. But with only an old tractor, plow, leveller, road rammer, mumpies and chetties and a small crew, it's not so easy to monitor

and repair all the holes and ruts created by rains and heavy amounts of varied traffic. Muni and the road team prioritize their work according to the road damage that is affecting the community traffic at large. But as we are dealing with dirt roads this can sometimes feel like a never-ending cycle. "It's like building a sand castle on the beach," explained Muni. "You build a beautiful sand castle and then the

return to cycling," which some of our community would be more than happy to do. So the question comes...can we make our roads more durable and less prone to dust, (which by the way is not only mixed with those horrible exhaust fumes but aluminum particles as well), or do we just suffer until our jet-flying inventors come around? The conclusion is still to come, but there have been a few experiments in

The rammed earth experiment has not proven to be so successful after the first few hard rains and the increased traffic. The concrete slabs show better results and the fact that they can be moved is important. "Concrete slabs," explained Muni, "are not new and are not alternative. But if we pave these roads with tar, we will eventually have a huge mess when we have to break them up, as many of these roads are only temporary. With concrete slabs, at the end of the day you could take them out and move them around."

Another proposal came a few months ago when a representative from a Dutch-based company came from Chennai to introduce a product they have used on dirt roads in various parts of the world. It is molasses-based (I know that sounds strange) and supposedly keeps the dust down by 80%. Not only that, but one application lasts for up to seven years. Makes me wonder how frequently their experimental roads are traveled. But, one never knows! Muni went down south to visit one of their experimental sites and stated that the results seemed similar to that of rammed earth. But it is possible that the Development Group will give it a try on a small stretch here and we can see the results for ourselves.

We changed the topic from dust to speed breakers, speed bumps or whatever you want to call those mounds of dirt that seem to appear in front of you without announcement as you try to avoid the dust and fumes that have just filled your eyes. "There are many road experts in Auroville," Muni jokes. "Everyone has their idea about where the breakers should go and how



Muniandi

high or low they should be. When someone requests one be put in, we look at the site and if needed, put in a breaker. After that, others will come and ask 'Why here?' I guess you can't please everyone."

Another question that is frequently asked of the Auroville Road Service is why is it that so much roadwork is done during the monsoon. The answer, as Muni explained, is "that this is the time that the earth can best be compacted. If we had the right kind of rammer, we could do it in the summer with the same results." With that and other future advancements in mind, Muni has recently finished a proposal for a JCB machine, which is "like a tractor but bigger. It has a backhoe and a bulldozer shovel in front. Not only would a machine like this benefit the roads of Auroville, but it could be used in various ways for our community, eliminating the need to rent from outside." Muni is also working on a web page to be linked to the Auroville Web site, allowing those interested and concerned to stay updated and informed about Auroville road developments.

Wrapping things up Muni stressed that more helping hands would be greatly appreciated. "I would like not only to maintain the roads, but to make it a bit more progressive." As for me, I'm still dreaming of a magic carpet but, until then, I think I will be a little more grateful for what I've got in front of me...speed bumps and all.

Sunaura



Servicing the roads: The team and the old tractor

rain or beach traffic comes and it's gone and you have to build it again" – frustrating. And frustrating for the drivers too as we are mucking our way about, dodging pitfalls, flying over speed bumps that appeared in the night out of nowhere and shedding our tears of dust as we try to see the oncoming traffic. But, as Muni says, "These are dirt roads, and it will always be like that unless we all

the past. Two of the most travelled experiments are on the stretch between Certitude and the Solar Kitchen, in front of the Eucalyptus trees. The first was an experiment done a few years ago with rammed earth. There is also a part of the road that Sukrit did about a year and a half ago, which are four slabs of concrete with tar binding them together. These slabs can also be moved if needed.

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