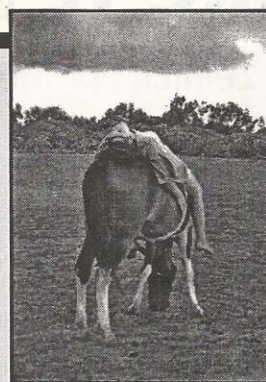


Auroville Today

FEBRUARY 2002, No.157

MAIN THEME: Personal reflections pages 1, 4 and 5

- Journey into my Self
- Evolution cannot be stopped
- Another door
- In flux
- A year of big changes



For many, the year 2001 was something of an annus horribilis. Yet disasters, both natural and man-made, can also be powerful leverage points for change. How have Aurovillians responded, both to global events and personal challenges? What were the moments which were most powerful in changing attitudes and perspectives, and what kinds of change were evoked?

In this issue a number of Aurovillians talk about what was important to them in 2001. In the process they reveal an aspect of Auroville which, while rarely publicized, is one of the most powerful motors for change in the community – the intensity with which individuals work upon understanding and transforming whatever confronts them.

Circles in the sand

It's a weird thing, this growing up business. I am still trying to grow up, but my life clock tells me I'm all grown now. I experienced life in Auroville and India as it wove a rich tapestry of archetypes in surreal situations. Ultimately we are seeking the thread of sense in our own life. Being a child in Auroville is to know the ground beneath your bare feet, and that, is to own your world. We roamed the landscape and water holes discovering. Later, I remember the discomfort of pre-pubescent existential angst; I sat with a stick in the cashew topos drawing in the pink sand, wanting the waves of life to carry me away from myself. Growing is changing. I left the world I knew and ventured to America.

Walking bare-foot in Oakland was a pokey affair of industrial "mulus". Our woodworking shop produced a quantity of: screws, sharp wood and metal filings, all unpleasant to step on. The glass blowers and polishers in the adjacent building also spilled waste glass that glistened in the aisle ways, not to mention Bruce, who made frivolous yet inspired art from an disorderly old mess that leaned around haphazardly in and out of his room. We lived above our workshop in a lovely, dilapidated compound of warehouses that are rented as studios. It is located in the industrial part of the West Oakland ghetto. I learned to work for a living; which means being organised to survive away from familiarity. Preferring to leave office work for the satisfaction of physical work I became a house painter and then a carpenter's helper. I met Paco and joined his team. Years later, I would work in our office paying bills and haggling the various insurance agents we were forced to maintain. My life was fulfilling an endless list of priorities. I began to think I was leading an insect's life, of bringing in the food and taking out the garbage.

Across the street Mad Dog, Brown and some other homeless folk, began living in an abandoned camper. They occasionally worked for the Cole Brothers (Floyd and Maurice), the Auto wreckers' our other neighbors. Their yard is filled with cut up car bodies, spilled engines, burning tires, and heaps of parts, the soil in their yard is a greasy grey black. An old truck loaded with slightly compressed cars' lives in front of their yard.

Brown failed to maintain any order or cleanliness in his domain, and finally, despite the friendship his proximity had encouraged, I remember wishing that he be gone. I had been reminding, and threatening him for many months to maintain some form of order in vain. In the end I saw myself, pregnant shoveling his rubbish, while unsuccessfully trying to coax him into helping me, as he sat in his house, probably drinking beer and shooting up. Well, it wasn't too long after that that the city came down and towed the van and scraped the dirt bare of debris. We took this as a godsend, so together with our neighbor Steve the granite sculptor and Katherine, we began landscaping the area. Holes were drilled through the remnants of the concrete sidewalk for the camphor trees, which we planted shortly after Isa's birth. We periodically sowed seeds of Californian Poppy, sunflower and clover along with random plantings of excess garden plants.

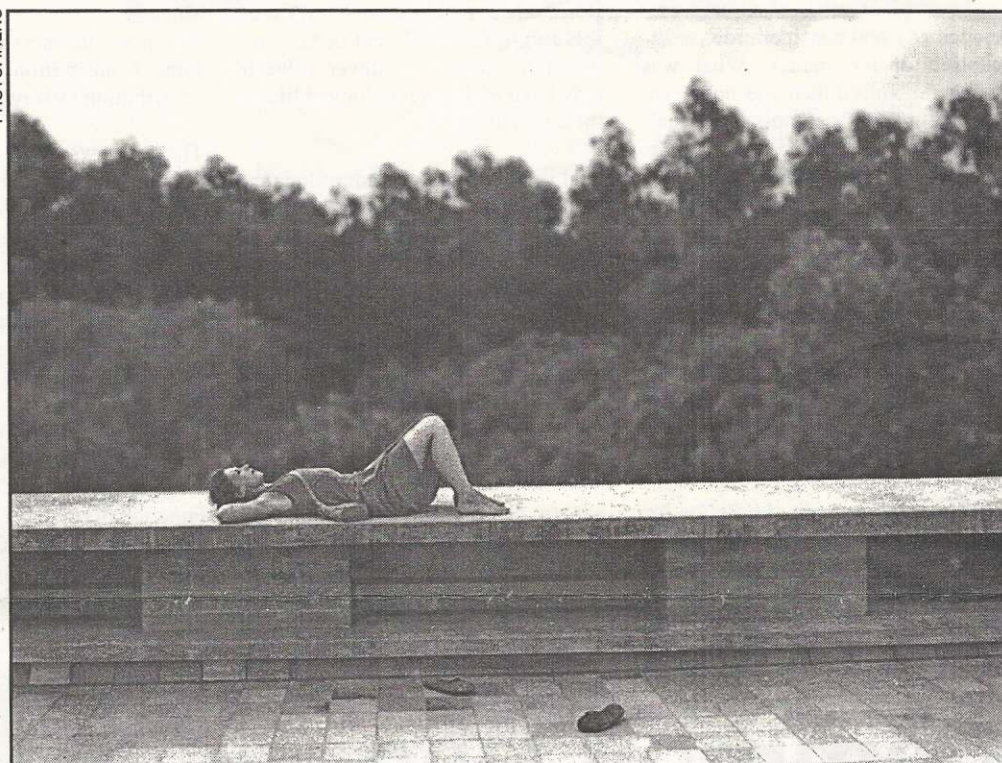
I never felt far from Auroville. The stream of Aurovilian friends and acquaintances passing through our loft was continuous. Despite my apocalyptic environment, I lived a parallel existence with Auroville in my head and heart, and treasured that I had actually been given the chance to "live" and not just survive, like so many I saw. My peers were so beaten by life's heavy stick and

molded by TV's expectations that Auroville's promise was like a fairy tale on a cynic's shelf when I spoke of it. I missed the clarity of the absurdity in the life I had lead, I now longed for the waves of life to carry me back to myself. After fourteen years, I am more than grateful to embrace my childhood kingdom once again, and to watch my children unfold in it.

My beloved Auroville, to know the orange earth, the mulus and weeds, to drag a stick through the pink sand.

Renu

PHOTO: IRENO



Looking Forward, Looking Back

2001 was an extremely interesting and highly personal year for me. I embraced the longest, deepest period of inner focus and self-reflection of my life to date, assisted by a physical affliction that left me wholly incapacitated for weeks and in slow motion for months. Even before this however, I knew that I needed to "go in", re-balance and re-tune. Auroville has a tendency to devour people who have skills. It takes a strong commitment and considerable will to maintain good health, in all its aspects, here.

As I was getting back on my feet, my 21-year-old son came to visit for a couple of weeks. This contact was extremely catalytic for me – as if he brought back to me pieces of myself – pieces that had somehow seemed irrelevant to Auroville but that I was not whole without. Listening to him reminded me of the "self" who had raised him. It was very much of a gift, and made me realize that if I cannot (i.e. it is not desirable or acceptable to) be my whole self here, then this is not my place. It has been both an inner and an outer movement of staking out a right to be, as well as a willing desire to serve. It's made

me stronger and ready to rediscover Auroville from this renewed wholeness.

And, of course, there was Sept 11th (and its ongoing aftermath). As an American, I felt the event very strongly – not at all in a victimized way – the U.S. has been slowly engraving the invitation for this event through 50 years of foreign policy. But it was somehow strange to be American and not be there when it happened. When I was living in the States, I didn't feel very American – there was so much that I didn't resonate with and I was always protesting (against foreign policy, nuclear arms and energy, environmental policies, etc.). Auroville and India has shown me my "american-ness" in a way that has caused me to appreciate the positive aspects of my (earthly) origins more. So politics aside, when Sept 11th happened, I did share a sense of kinship.

Looking ahead, I see Auroville progressively opening up. Lots of new voices, inputs, ideas, presentations, resources finding expression. Since the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is so broad, so inclusive, this feels very

healthy to me. Especially as all the "new information", scientific discoveries, etc. offer supporting evidence to the incredibly pioneering and "ahead of their time" evolutionary work done by these avatars. I find it very exciting – like more pieces of the whole coming together. Breaking the deadlock at Matrimandir has probably helped this movement tremendously. Such a heavy sense of territorialism and division has been hanging over our "center" for so long! I can feel the borders and boundaries dissolving both within and without.

Yes, the immediate future will probably be a bit messy. The Earth is in "transition," and anyone who has ever experienced the birth process (even as an observer) can attest to its intensity. It's not a subdued or elegant process, but it results in a new being that is nothing but a divine expression of infinite potential. I for one am entirely willing to endure, breathe with, clean up after the messy part, for the hope and possibilities offered by this collective, evolutionary birth.

Kathryn

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The Economy Group should tell it like it is

Michael Zelnick clarifies the Central Fund contribution is voluntary, not a tax

The AV News of December 29th carried a letter that I had written in reaction to an announcement that had appeared in the preceding week's News. That announcement informed the community that the Economy Group proposed that, from the 1st of January, 2002 the Central Fund contribution be raised from Rs.1100 to Rs.1200 per month.

In my letter I observed that a "proposal", by definition, holds something up for consideration or discussion, whereas the timing of the Economy Group's announcement, one week before the new regime was to be implemented, obviously precluded any real consideration or discussion of the matter. What was being announced then was not a proposal, but a fait accompli, and I challenged the Economy Group's authority to act in such a fashion.

I also pointed out that while the Economy Group's announcement seemed to suggest that the rate increase was indexed to the rate of inflation, "in order to keep the value of the contribution the same", such was not actually the case. Come January 1, 2002, the Central Fund contribution would have increased by 20% in the preceding eight months, while the rate of inflation for the whole of 2001 is officially put at less than 5%.

In the days since the publication of my letter, in part because I was promptly invited to write this follow-up piece for Auroville Today, I have thought a good deal about the Central Fund Contribution program, the way it is being implemented by the EG, and my own feelings towards it. One thing that I discovered pretty quickly was a substantial chunk of insincerity in the position I had taken. For there I was calling for the Economy Group to go to the Resident Assembly for debate about and a communal decision upon their "proposal" when I know full well how rarely I myself attend such meetings, having long since dismissed the Resident Assembly as an utterly useless forum for intelligent debate and decision making, whatever value it may have in the psychological life of the community.

And yet, even as I was admitting that one of my most cherished objections was essentially bogus, I continued to feel that there was something seriously amiss with the Central Fund Contribution program, something that I knew had to do with freedom, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it...and then, I could.

It seems perfectly self-evident to me that the Central Fund contribution has to be a free contribution, an offering made by the individual to the Mother, to Auroville (to whoever, or whatever he makes his truest

offering) entirely without compulsion or pressure of any sort. Can anyone, however heavily the burden of having to raise the funds to pay Auroville's bills weighs upon him, honestly imagine that something True can be built with funds not freely offered, but coerced from contributors? Nor do we lack for guidance on this issue. Consider: if the Central Fund Contribution is not a free contribution, if it is a forced, or compulsory contribution, then it is, by definition, a tax. And on that subject the Mother has expressed Herself most unequivocally, "NO TAXES IN AUROVILLE" (emphasis in original).

The good news is that the Central Fund Contribution really is a free contribution (always has been).

The bad news is that fewer and fewer people in the community are aware of this fact. Discussing the Central Fund Contribution program with the team at Quiet last June, on the occasion of the then Economy Group's latest rate increase "proposal", I was amazed to discover how many people in the group were totally unaware of their freedom in this matter. "I thought they just took it out of your account," said one. Indeed.

Functionally, the Central Fund Contribution regime recognizes the individual's freedom, but puts the burden of asserting that freedom on

the individual himself. In fact, you are free to reject proposed increases, to choose to contribute at whatever rate you wish, to decline contributing at all. But the onus is on you to betake yourself to the Financial Service and express your wishes: if you fail to do so, the system assumes that you accept to contribute at the proposed rate and then, no doubt, the money will be taken from your account: silence implies consent.

Many years ago, at the beginning of the Central Fund Contribution program, everyone was aware of how it worked. But over the years this has ceased to be the case as people have left, lots of new people have come, and a hundred rupees here or there just isn't a big enough deal these days to catch one's attention and make them say, "Wait a minute. What's going on here?". So, as I said, as time goes on, fewer and fewer people in the community understand how the Central Fund Contribution program actually works.

For its part, the Economy Group has evidently decided that educating the population on this matter is not its responsibility and has scrupulously avoided doing so. And really, who can blame them? Imagine what it costs to keep this community going from one month to the next. Where's the money going to come from? Will there be enough? There is never enough. Now imagine the convenience, the incredible convenience, of having your tax base simply not realize that they don't have to pay taxes because there are no taxes. And one hasn't even had to do anything naughty to accomplish this wonder! Indeed, one hasn't had to do anything at all. Just to remain silent (usually the best course anyway) and let things develop quite naturally. It goes so smoothly one might take it for the working of the Grace, if we didn't happen to be talking about a movement of increasing unconsciousness.

I believe that in acquiescing (silence implies consent here too, baby!) to this growth of unconsciousness, which is also the nefarious creep of taxation into Auroville, the Economy Group does the community, which it otherwise serves so brilliantly, a serious disservice. The vision of a splendid economy to which each contributes in freedom and with joy must not be abandoned in the misguided service of immediate needs, no matter how pressing. For this, at least, is certain: in Auroville only the truth will work.

The Economy Group should recognize that part of its role in administering the Central Fund Contribution program is the responsibility of making sure that Aurovilians understand the actual nature and workings of that program. An explanation of the same should be published in the AV News at once and republished periodically hereafter, at least on each occasion that a change in the contribution rate is proposed.

As for myself, I am craving the opportunity to contribute Rs. 1200 per month to the Central Fund. But I am not going to do so until the Economy Group tells me that I don't have to.

Roger

Common Dignity

Fraternity proves stronger than fear

On Sept 13th, two days after the day it felt that time, like those clocks that stopped forever, had come to an end, I flew from Paris to Shannon. Charles De Gaulle airport had a surreal pre-apocalyptic feel to it. Plain-clothes security outnumbered stranded or flying passengers, and the computer screens and arrival departure panels listing all the flights to or from the US as cancelled made the ramifications of the unimaginable act of horror that had just occurred even more immediate. That evening in a crowded pub in a small village in County Clare I observed a white haired man trying to explain to a young girl the meaning of the terrible footage being rerun on every news channel. His task could not have been an easy one. The next day was a day of mourning throughout Ireland and all shops and businesses closed down. I spent the three minutes of silence at 11 am gazing from across the street at the Irish flag at half-mast in the middle of a small park that contained a memorial to the local Republican dead from 1916 on. The feelings of a shared sense of shock, grief and sympathy for those affected by the attacks in New York and elsewhere, cut across all boundaries and perhaps even united the island for a brief while in a common surge of humanity. For what had occurred was quite simply an attack against humanity and it is perhaps in the response that

it generated in a majority of people of all colours, creeds, classes and persuasions, that those intent on spreading fear faced their most massive defeat. People lost their sense of complacency as freedoms and even just simple pleasures, long merely taken for granted in Western societies, had suddenly not only to be valued, but cherished and upheld. Back in Paris in the Marais district suddenly everyone, from the clochard to the young skate-boarder, from the post office worker to the bourgeois, had a role to play and played it by simply being themselves. There was tension in the air, but also an unaccustomed sense of fraternity that for a brief moment cut across all social swathes, and proved stronger than fear.

Ideology of whatever sort, even an idealistic revolutionary one can divorce us from the mainsprings of our common, shared humanity. When ideology hardens into fanaticism it leads to the aberrations and horror that prevailed on such a wide scale throughout the twentieth century – aberrations that are still with us. And perhaps this is the challenge of the 21st century: to refuse the perversion of terror whilst at the same time taking on the tremendous task of globally combating its roots, which more often than not lie in injustice of one form or the other – much of it institutionalised – whether economic, social, cultural or political. The spirit as well as the

methods used to achieve this will be of foremost importance. For as Albert Camus once wrote:

"Is it possible eternally to reject injustice without ceasing to acclaim the nature of man, and the beauty of the world?" Our answer is yes. This ethic, at once unsubmitive and loyal, is in any event the only one that lights the way to a truly realistic revolution. In upholding beauty, we prepare the way for the day of regeneration, when civilisation will give first place – far ahead of the formal principles and degraded values of history – to this living virtue on which is founded the common dignity of man and the world he lives in, and which we now have to define in the face of a world that insults it."

And Sri Aurobindo foresaw what he called a religion of humanity – a term first used by the 19th century political philosopher Auguste Comte – as being a common binding force that might unite the human peoples at the onset of a spiritual age. Perhaps the challenge that faces all of us now is to free ourselves from old mindsets whether personal, political or religious, valid in their time, or at a moment of our lives, but now a hindrance through their very rigidity to the forces of acceleration and change at work throughout the world today, whether on a personal or a global scale.

In brief

PM's New Year Reflection

India's Prime Minister, Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee, referred to Sri Aurobindo in his new year reflection. "Nations achieve greatness when their people learn to dream lofty dreams and to strive hard – and make sacrifices, when necessary – to realize those dreams, without getting disheartened by the difficulties along the way and without ever letting their faith in their nation's destiny falter. I am reminded here of the inspiring vision of Maharshi Aurobindo, which he set out in his historic radio broadcast for August 15, 1947."

Land matters

A flea-market, in which children and adults, villagers and Aurovilians, participated with much glee, was organized in January in the Eucalyptus Grove. Unfortunately, on the same day, in the most aggressive salesmanship ever, banners advertising land for sale in the greenbelt were put up by the rural landowners. This land along a major tar road has been marked out for smaller plots. Negotiations are on between the Land and Estate Management of Auroville and the landowners.

Auroville land appeal

Meanwhile, Auroville Land Fund issued a renewed appeal for funds to buy the lands for Auroville. "Our dedication to Auroville's Body is still needed today! About 195 acres have to be purchased in the City Area and, in a first phase, at least 800 acres out of the remaining 2,130 acres in the Green Belt, including the crucial lands along Auroville's endangered access roads" is the central message of its recent newsletter. Info: Fax: + 91 413 622057, E-Mail: landfund@auroville.org.in

International Conference

Auroville's Future, under the Asia-Urbs project, is hosting an international conference titled "City Networking for a Sustainable Future and Human Unity" at the end of February. Town-planners, scientists, and other professionals from 30 Indian cities and 30 European cities, representing a selected delegation of Asia-Urbs project holders, will participate in the conference.

New School Building for Ilaignarkal

The Ilaignarakal Education Centre inaugurated its first building complex (Phase 1) in its new premises near the village of Kottakarai. Ilaignarkal operates two non-formal educational programmes for Auroville workers and young children.

"Lively" Boutique

"Lively" the sewing workshop attached to Life Education Centre opened a small boutique in Kottakarai. Along with the products of the sewing workshop, "Lively" offers ceramics, woodwork and other handicrafts from Auroville and rural industries.

The "Message from Water"

Rolf Brockmeyer and other Aurovilians put on a slide-show based on the Japanese scientist's Dr. Masoto's book, "The Message of Water." The slide-show proved how water can be charged with consciousness as is depicted by its crystallization patterns.

Revisiting the Visitors Centre

Who is it for, and what do we want to convey?

The Visitors Centre is proof-positive of the fact that development in Auroville is rarely logical or linear. Constructed in 1988 with funds provided by HUDCO and The Foundation for World Education among other organizations, it seemed to have much going for it. The site is spacious, it's in a good location on a main access road into Auroville, and the architecture combines cloistered corridors with open spaces, verandas and rooms of different sizes in an interesting and imaginative way. Indeed if, as I have done, you have ever taken the tour organized by the Pondicherry Transport and Tourist Development Corporation and spent much of a sultry afternoon hurtling around the dustier corners of Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu, the cool light-coloured buildings of the Visitors Centre greet one like a blessed oasis.

In spite of these advantages, for many years the Visitors Centre remained rather neglected and underused. While a small team soldiered on –

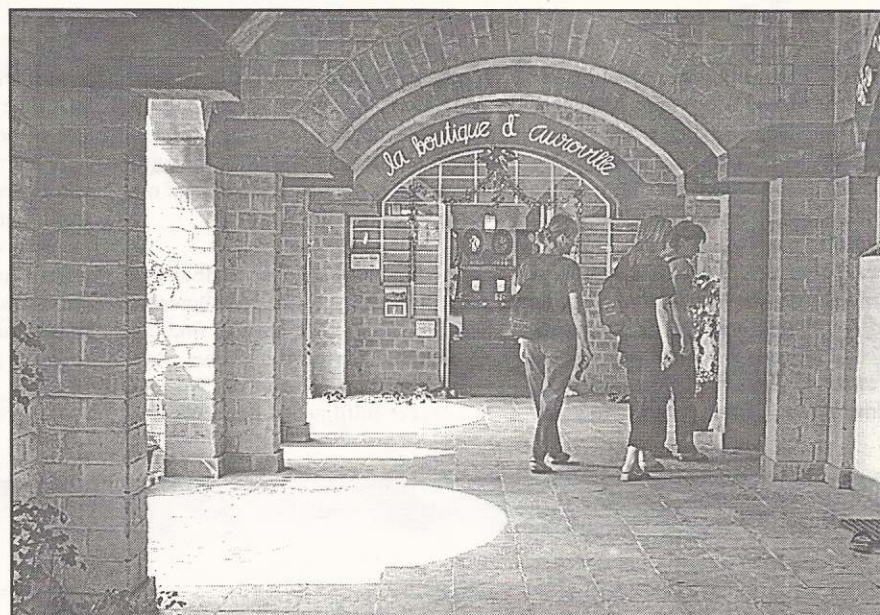
International Zone as a whole.

Today the consequences of this are evident, not only in plans to build new pavilions in the International Zone but in the transformed energy of the Visitors Centre itself. Whereas before one walked into something of a black hole, now the range of facilities provided include the information center, two boutiques, a bookshop, a cafeteria and wholefood counter, a picnic area and kiosk for light refreshments and, upstairs, a video room and two permanent exhibitions – one on Matrimandir, the other based upon Sri Aurobindo's writings about the need for the spiritual renaissance of India.

More than all this, however, there is a pervasive atmosphere of cleanliness, light and quality. The photos in the information centre are beautiful both in content and presentation, the exhibitions upstairs are tasteful and well-supervised, the video showings are now supervised by committed Aurovilians who give a short introduction and answer questions, and the

presents information as well as in the prices it charges in the cafeteria and boutiques it clearly caters for the better-educated and well-heeled. Significantly, the one area where the simpler and less well-off may feel at home – the picnic and kiosk area to the left of the parking lot – is the area which feels most neglected in terms of development and energy. (At present, the kiosk offers a somewhat surreal mix of cheap tea and highly expensive pots of Auroville jam.)

Clearly, quality should not be jeopardized: in one sense it is one of Auroville's chief calling-cards to the world. Yet if every visitor is to take away something of lifelong importance from his or her visit, new ways have to be found of communicating what Auroville is about to those who can't 'tune' easily to beautifully-designed exhibitions or ravishing videos. Simple leaflets in Tamil are already being provided. But much more could be done in the way of 'hands-on' or walk-through exhibits and practical demonstrations of, say, renewable energy systems that have been developed or are in use in the community.



Cloistered shopping

resources", comes the pat reply. But if money can be found for building a beautiful new boutique and mounting high-class exhibitions, why not for something more modest? Mainly, I suspect, because providing such facilities interests Aurovilians less than mounting high-class exhibits. More than this, however, it may betray a certain assumption that Auroville – and therefore, by implication, the yoga – cannot be grasped by and is therefore not for 'the uneducated', an assumption we should urgently review.

And what exactly are these exhibitions and videos conveying? While there is an attempt in the photographic exhibition in the information center to give a sense of the texture of life in Auroville, there is an unmistakable tendency – both here and in the introductory videos which are shown upstairs – to favour the photogenic over the 'actual', the finished product over messy process, and harmony over any hint of discord. Natural, perhaps. But it gives a dangerously one-sided view of Auroville, for it suggests, among other things, that Auroville is product rather than process. Moreover, by ignoring the process it makes it harder for visitors

to understand and therefore enter into what is going on here. There are no gateways, only beautiful products mounted on beautiful pedestals, to be gaped and wondered at.

One argument is that Auroville should only present itself at its height, should only display its finest achievements and creations so as to inspire others; that even those who do not understand will somehow be touched. There's something in this. But it is also arguable that one of Auroville's greatest achievements is to have come so far while preserving such diversity of thought and action. And this cannot be illustrated without some reference to the frequently messy and frustrating process by which we manage, juggle or transcend our differences.

Perhaps the real question is whether Aurovilians, after 33 years, are confident enough now not only to present the ideal but also the actuality – in all its dimensions, seeming contradictions and blind alleyways – trusting that, even if we don't always see it ourselves, the grace which protects and guides this experiment through multifarious pathways will shine through.

Alan



New Year's Day: a busy afternoon

meeting visitors, fielding questions, handing out information – they could not get other Aurovilians to assist them. Everywhere were signs of a general lack of energy and initiative. The cafeteria food was ordinary and overpriced, nobody seemed capable of solving the power deficiency which resulted in a noisy generator blasting away many hours a day, the photos in the exhibition area were old and well-thumbed... The immediate losers, of course, were the visitors who could frequently be seen disconsolately wandering the corridors and terraces like lost souls in Purgatory.

All this began to change one and a half years ago when Nicole and Gillian took up the management of the Visitors Centre. Their plans to energise the Centre coincided with the beginnings of a shift in attitude to day visitors by Auroville as a whole. Before, such visitors tended to be looked upon as unwelcome intrusions: most Aurovilians experienced them only on the road as their cars and coaches flung up dust. But when Dr. Kireet Joshi suggested that the concept of a learning community should be extended to visitors – that whoever visits Auroville should go home with a feeling of having learned something of great importance – it struck a chord in many Aurovilians' hearts. Suddenly there was renewed interest, not only in the Visitors Centre, but also in the development of the

cafeteria is now more akin to a Mediterranean bistro than an Indian railway station, if still a tad expensive. Meanwhile the opening of the Mira Boutique has provided another outlet for some of the commercial units, more airy and light than the Boutique d'Auroville which more and more resembles an Aladdin's Cave perfumed with exotic scents and stuffed with shadowy treasure.

How do visitors respond to all this? A survey conducted over two days recently suggests with a mixture of pleasure, awe and incomprehension, depending upon the cultural background and level of education. One young couple from Bombay appreciated the cleanliness and the quiet atmosphere: "Everything is beautiful, artistic, but, in the boutiques the products are far too expensive for our means". Two visitors from Germany were still trying to make sense of it all – "But what is it for?" – while many of the people who pour off the 'Pilgrimage' buses walk round dazed, clinging to each other for reassurance, as if their pan-chewing drivers had taken a wrong turn and suddenly deposited them upon another planet.

There are deeper issues here. One relates to the purpose of the Visitors Centre. Who is it for, and what we are trying to present to them? For while it is generally agreed that the Centre should be for all visitors, in the way it

This was one of the original concepts of the Visitors Centre. Why has it not yet been realized? "Lack of

MATRIMANDIR

When will it be ready?

Quite often visitors to Matrimandir ask one pertinent question: 'When will it be ready?' And who can give the answer? Nobody, because working under the circumstances prevailing here in South India presents one with quite some surprises. The story of the construction of the Matrimandir is full of such instances. This month's tale is about the finishing of the ramps, leading up to the Chamber.

Once you climb the granite steps up to the first level of the Matrimandir, you come to the conical staircase, which leads you to the second level. It is lined with intricate white marble mosaics, and covered with Mother's symbol, also crafted out of white marble. This phase of fixing the marble is almost finished.

Once you are on the second level a double helix-shaped ramp leads you

up to the Chamber. This sloping access will be covered with a white woolen carpet of the same type that covers the floor inside the Chamber.

After many discussions about what kind of material to use for the curved parapet that runs the length of the ramp, it was decided to go for glass. A factory in Calcutta, "The Hindustan Safety Glass," was chosen to execute the work. Templates for the glass moulds were made at the Matrimandir workshop, and Sukrit took them to Calcutta. The ramps sections have different curvatures, which means that three different moulds are needed for the inside curve and three for the outer one. A satisfactory test piece was then made out of the available glass.

In order to achieve the transparent beauty, which this feature of the Matrimandir demands, diamond white glass was imported from

Europe and sent directly to the Calcutta factory. Sukrit went several times to check on the work. During his visit in April 2000, he learned that the factory was having labour problems and was about to close. He quickly made all the needed moulds on the spot, hoping that the work could be carried out before the closure. But only one portion of the lower ramp was completed and is now at the Matrimandir. Since then the factory has been under a lockout, with workers sitting outside the closed building, and the Matrimandir glass locked inside.

As long as this glass bending work is not completed, the ramp work cannot be completed, nor can the finishing of the second level go further. This is just one more story along the path to building the temple of Mother.

Tineke

My journey into my Self

2001 was my year of disillusionment, and I don't think I am alone on this. I finally realized how incomplete people become when they do not place reason and faith on an equal basis, which is what has happened to many Aurovilians. This past year I have experienced a sense of separation from the identity and meaning of Auroville; these days my conception of sadhana is not connected to the destiny of Auroville, as it was some time before. I have peered into many

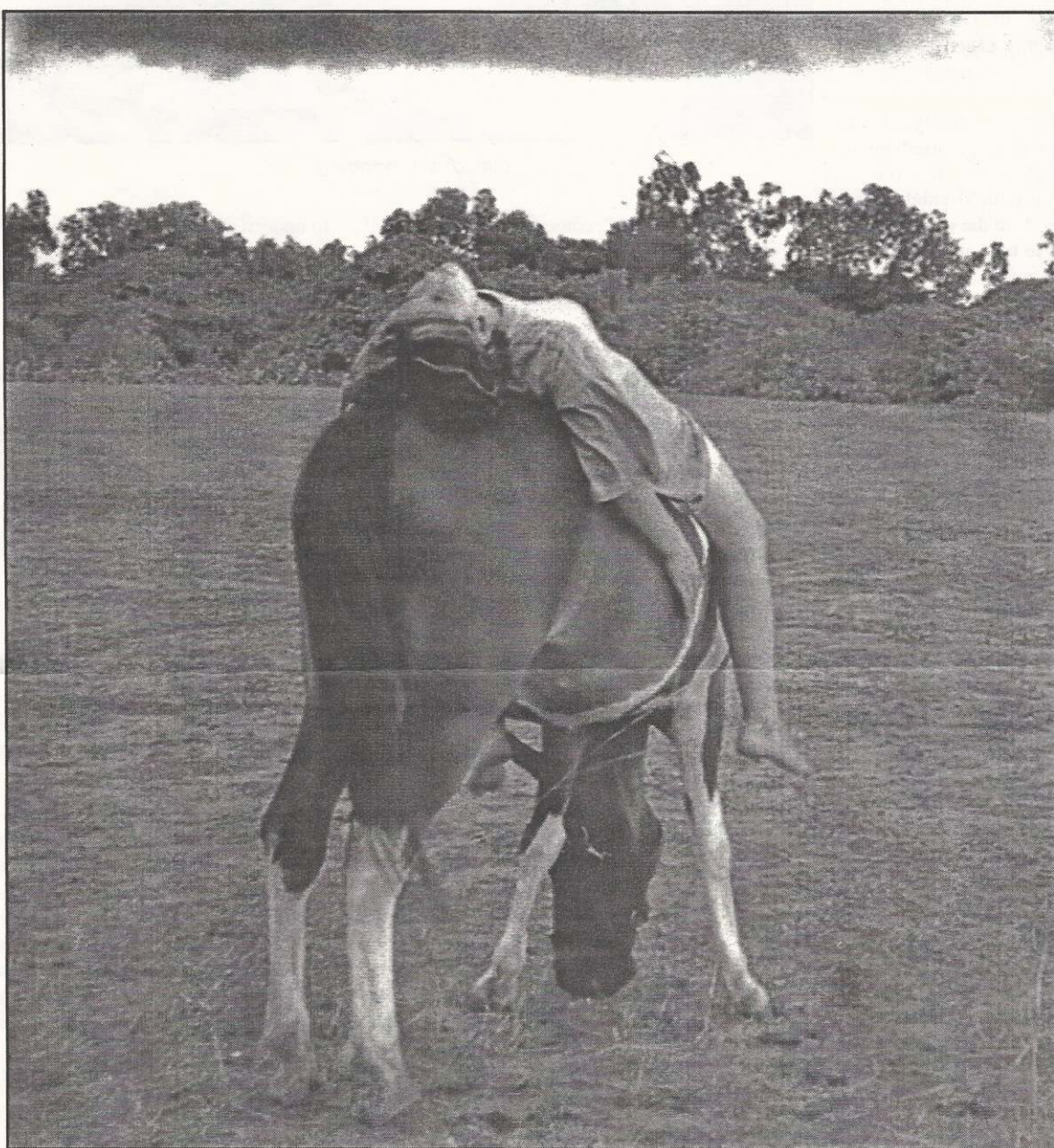
means to be able to adapt our perceptions, ideas, will, emotions and body in the full authority of our inner being – adulthood means to me when the spiritual being is playing with life and not being suppressed by it.

Our collectivity like its individuals goes through cycles of re-structuring and re-building. We have to find the community spirit in our own love manifested as creative action. We cannot expect fulfilment from our com-

mon life or expect much when it still isn't time yet for the hard individualism of the past to melt. Let's keep our faith but not without the guide of reason or the subliminal powers of the spirit. Let's be completed by all those faculties which nature has given us to govern ourselves. Let's live a balanced life and accept these few breaths and be grateful for our creative power and ability to participate in its beauty. Hari Om.

Swetaketu

PHOTO: IRENO



corners of Auroville and felt our lack of culture, ethics, self-questioning and vitality.

This is not to say that I am not optimistic about Auroville's future but rather to simply note that I have grown from a highly idealistic teenager into a more pragmatic young adult, not necessarily in the way I conduct my own business but in the way I understand the principles of evolution which are tied to the cycles of nature instead of to our own whims. We make the mistake of thinking that we have free will, that our ego can master our human destiny with abundance of activity or through a flurry of planning aiming at controlling external factors. We ultimately forget to be receptive and wind up deceiving ourselves.

I now value the seeking after the fulfilment of my own dharma not as a process of self-actualisation but rather as just being a part of things, a process of playing my part in the universal play, no questions asked. Self-acceptance has come hard for me and the whole transition to adulthood has been really slow, I certainly don't feel in union with my center. Adulthood

Another door

This summer I was staying in London with my mother. Every morning I had three to four hours on my hands. And so I began writing.

At first there were vague ideas, but as I wrote I began to catch the thread of something. Gradually it assumed shape, then a life of its own, refusing my clumsy attempts to steer it. This was the first of many surprises. Another was the subject matter. I would have expected that I would write about India, probably Auroville itself. But I found myself writing about Cornwall, and, later on, a café in Stepney, London. I was revisiting or exploring a culture which I thought I had long left behind. At some level it was a celebration of the textures of those worlds, but also of the possibilities of them containing the seeds of transformation.

'Writing' is a pale word. In fact I had

to inwardly inhabit these places, as well as the psyches through which the story is told. I was continually discovering things within me, either things that had been taken up once then lain long neglected, or ideas, capacities which I didn't know I had. And so I was often on a kind of a high. I'd walk the rather uninspiring streets near my mother's home and everything – the houses, the wet pavement, the people, the cars – was fresh, sharp, full of grain.

On September 10th I attended my mother's funeral. On September 11th I walked up to my local newsagent and was told that America was under terrorist attack. In both cases I felt I was inhabiting something unreal. The events were real enough, but the responses, both within me and within others, didn't seem adequate, didn't seem to comprehend what had happened. I felt I had to discover another space – beyond clichés, perhaps beyond language itself – if I

Evolution cannot be stopped

It was three years ago when I first visited Auroville, meeting an old friend from my home town in Belgium. I had learned about Auroville through my teachings on sustainable living in the US. After having lived for the last 20 years in 7 different countries, being involved with environmental education and sustainable development projects, I felt ready to commit to one particular place to better embody the vision that I was aspiring to. Having played with the idea of starting my own intentional community in the Southwest of the US, I was also eager to visit other intentional communities that offered an alternative to the consumer-driven society of the West. So it was with this mindset that I arrived in Auroville in December 1998.

Now, three years later, I am slowly putting my roots down into this unique place. For the first two years after my first visit to Auroville, I came here in the role of a teacher, guiding young American adults through a semester abroad program which focuses on sustainable living, including the ecological, social and spiritual dimensions of sustainability. And then on New Year's Eve 2000, while contemplating the 1000 lamps at the Tibetan Pavilion, a voice arose within, inviting me to make Auroville my new home on this precious planet.

This year has been a journey within and without. Deeply appreciating the privilege and opportunity given to me to participate in this adventure called Auroville, the last 12 months have been a progressive deepening of tasting an inner peace and gratitude towards life and opening up to the possibilities lying ahead. At the same time, this year was a year of disappointment and sadness, as I felt that world events in the last 12 months had widened the gap between what is and what is possible, between division and hate versus unity and love.

For me what happened on September 11 was the ringing of a global Bell of Mindfulness, a painful reminder to humanity that all things are interconnected. In this age of globalization,

whatever happens in one part of the world has a ripple effect widening all around the world: as long as there is ecological degradation, social injustice or economic disparity in one part of the world, it will increasingly express itself in devastating ways in other parts of the world: interconnections of interconnections.

While my personal journey during the last 12 months has been a journey of falling in love with a new place and its aspiration to serve something immensely bigger than our small mental selves, world events have woken me up to the reality of how much of the world is still so caught up in the false projections of their mental selves, creating the us vs. them mentality. Overriding these two streams of perceptions, the personal and global, is a universal stream of truth that that has increasingly become the fundamental note of my journey during these last twelve months: the dawning of a realization that whatever the rising and falling of events, be it in my personal life in Auroville, or be it in the global scene of world events, the force of evolution cannot be stopped. The last 12 months have accelerated my aspiration to aspire more intensely towards a global consciousness, respecting diversity and difference but deeply knowing the oneness of things. Also, my decision to move to Auroville within the global background of war and violence have pushed me to become more and more aware of the simple truth that the essence of all human beings living in this more-than-human world is a mysterious Presence which unfolds itself as a Conscious Evolutionary Force.

Today, at the beginning of a new year, I can only feel gratitude for being in a place which aspires to consciously participate in this ongoing adventure of evolution, despite the fact that it faces many of the problems the rest of the world has. May the journey continue.

Wim

itants of this zone tend to assume that Auroville can be understood best, and even that it is defined by its public face – its meetings, talks, seminars, politics. At the same time I realized – perhaps as a result of pushing deeper into myself through my writing – that I no longer felt part of that zone: that it no longer held any reality for me. I wanted, I wanted, to be part of another Auroville. Less public, less 'ordered', more open to paradox, contradiction, to spiritual whimsy.

I don't know how far this Auroville can be experienced through words, language. But it's clear to me that, as one of Auroville Today's most important and essential roles is to communicate Auroville's public face, its predominant mode is no longer mine. I say this without judgment or regret. Just that it's time for me to open another door...

Alan

In flux

When I close my eyes to reflect on the year that has gone by, what comes up unbidden are not reflections of personal growth, not reflections about the challenges and achievements of Auroville in this period, but an undefined pain and anguish at the state of the world.

Never before, as has been the case last year, have global events left so deep a mark in my consciousness or personal awareness. Perhaps not enough months have passed yet for the images to fade away, perhaps the fact that, even at this moment as I write, India and Pakistan are teetering on the edge of a possible war make the pain and the accompanying uncertainty about the future, real and tangible.

My reasoning mind tells me that the world is always changing for the better, that humanity is always evolving...but it is still sad that changes happen at the cost of so much wanton destruction, at the loss of so many innocent lives. I guess it requires an unshakeable faith in the Absolute to be able to flow with ease with the evolutionary time-spirit.

A sense of evolution, the feeling of gradual inner growth and change, has always marked my years in Auroville. And so it has been in this year gone by. Relaxing into a new relationship and addressing the public at international meetings were some major signposts of change this year.

What was significant about my relationship was that for the first time, I introduced my companion to my parents. I have come to accept relationships as a means for personal growth. But as I have been brought up as an Indian woman with fixed centuries-old ideas about relationships and life-long marriages, I could never share my views with my parents. Could never fully liberate myself from the shackles of tradition. Consequently I led a double life and made a split between my past self (the one that I was conditioned into) and my present one (the one that I had chosen). My parents' complete approval and support of my ideals about life tremendously helped to bridge the split, to integrate my selves.

The Aditi-AVI conference in St. Petersburg, to which I was invited as a public speaker, was a truly memorable event as all the participants attested. To me the days at

St. Petersburg were similar to my first days in Auroville. I felt a remarkable opening to Her Presence within me and in all around me. I had never spoken in public before and was initially nervous about facing a sea of strange faces. But when I got up on the podium, all that I cared about was to speak from the presence that I felt in my heart. The crowd and their reactions to my words did not seem to matter in the least. How I wish I could always act from this presence!

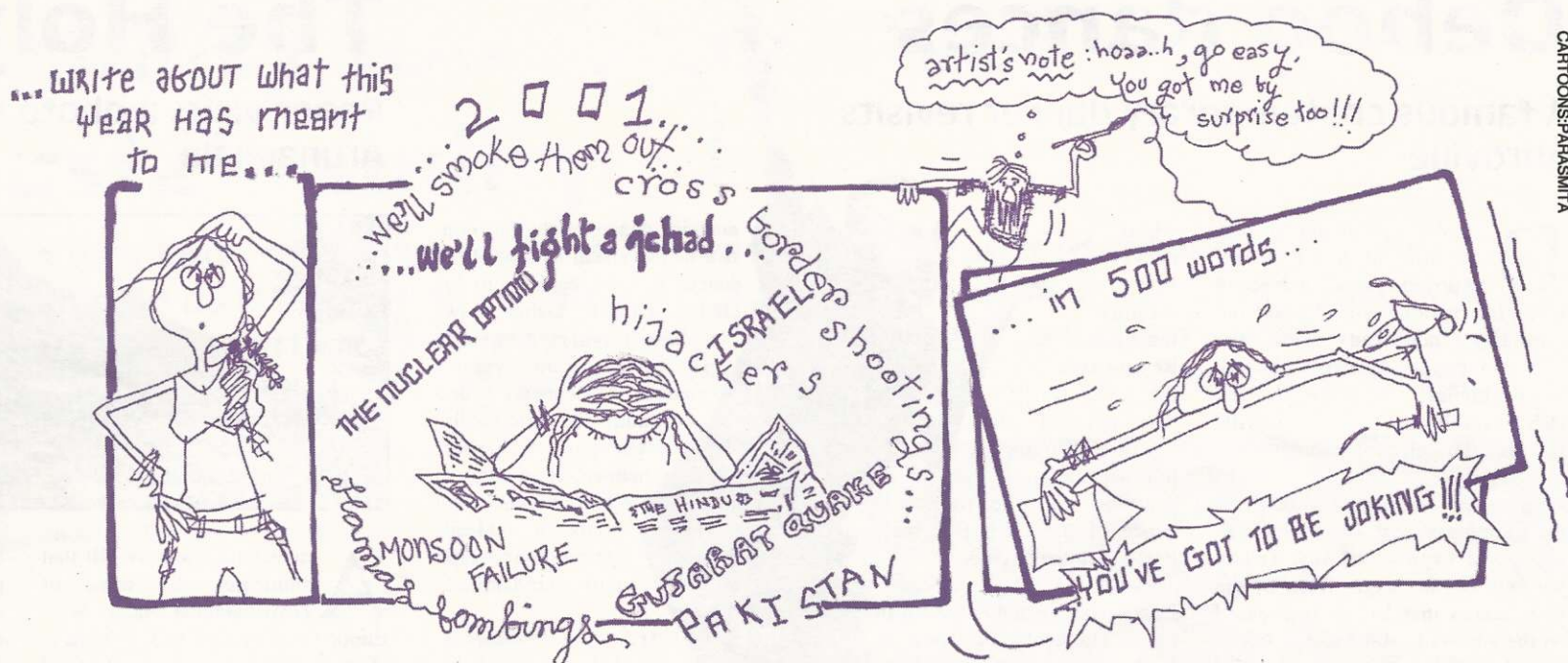
as an editor from *Auroville Today*. I have been with this magazine as a writer and an editor since I first stepped into the community seven years ago. In the initial years, I felt it was a great way to get to know the community. Later, I felt that it was the best way that I could serve the community – that is offer my writing skills to report on the community's activities. Also daily work gave a sense of meaning and purpose to my life.

ture of my work. This was marked at the same time by a sense of tiredness with the outer Auroville – the meetings and the events that our magazine focuses on. I found myself wanting to be alone. I stopped going for lunch to the community kitchen, preferring instead to dine alone. And above all, thanks to the Life Divine classes at Savitri Bhavan, my interest in Integral Yoga greatly deepened. Now I feel marked by a thirst to understand more and to practise better, this philosophy

that has been part of my life since childhood. There is also a desire to express myself through my writing in a different way – to be more conscious of it, to truly make it a vehicle for the practice of Karma Yoga. These are the reasons for my withdrawal from my work with Auroville Today. This change, which continues to unfold, has not been an easy process, marked as it has been by personal fears about the uncertainty of the path I have chosen, and pressure from the team to continue as an editor. Only time will tell how this change manifests itself.

On the eve of the new year, and on the verge of completing this article, I participated in the 1000-lights-mandala meditation at the Tibetan Pavilion. Watching the flames dance in the air to the sound of Tibetan hymns, their suffused glow lighting the faces of hundreds of faces, of Aurovilians and guests who had gathered there, I felt the power of peace. The new world is already born. It only awaits our recognition.

Bindu



But above all, the most momentous decision that I took was to withdraw

But then this year, something within me started to chafe at the rigid struc-

A year of big changes

It was a year of big changes on many levels, at the global level and for Auroville. At the global level, September 11th and what happened afterwards comes immediately to mind. This disaster was clearly not only a terrorist attack on the USA but on humanity itself. From a larger perspective, the progress that the human family has made so far was clearly being put under severe threat. Something similar happened during the first and, even more so, during the second world war. In many ways, this is a continuation of the occult battle between the forces of progress and

the destructive forces, which try to prevent a new world to emerge and the next step in mankind's evolution to happen.

About Auroville, I felt that there was a tangible change in Auroville's atmosphere. There is much more light and joy, as if the whole vibration is less heavy than it used to be. People are much more open and kind and loving. Sometimes I go to a meeting, knowing that there are very difficult issues to be dealt with, and I think, 'how are we going to get out of this?' But somehow solutions emerge

almost miraculously! I truly believe that something is working in us and through us, pushing us to a more refined and higher way of being and working and living together in this place.

It feels as if Auroville and the world at large are moving towards a new stage. Significant changes are likely to happen in the next five to ten years, at a planetary and at an individual level, which will open us to a new way of life and a new type of being.

Guy

Ever upwards

At each capital step of Nature's ascent there is a reversal of consciousness in the evolving spirit. As when a climber turns on a summit to which he has laboured and looks down with an exalted and wider power of vision on all that was once above or on a level with him but is now below his feet, the evolutionary being not only transcends his past self, his former now exceeded status, but commands from a higher grade of self-experience and vision, with a new apprehending feeling or a new comprehending sight and effectuating power, in a greater system of values, all that was once his own consciousness but is now below his tops and belongs to an inferior creation. The reversal is the sign of a decisive victory and the seal of a radical progress in Nature.

The new consciousness attained in the spiritual evolution is always higher in grade and power, always larger, more comprehensive, wider in sight and feeling, richer and finer in faculties, more complex, organic, dominating than the consciousness that was once our own but is now left behind us. There are greater breadths and spaces, heights before impossible, unexpected depths and intimacies. There is a luminous expansion that is the very sign manual of the Supreme upon his work.

Mark too that each of the great radical steps forward already taken by Nature has been infinitely greater in its change, incalculably vaster in its consequences than its puny predecessor. There is a miraculous opening to an always richer and wider expression, there is a new illuminating of the creation and a dynamic heightening of its significances. There is in this world we live in no equality of all on a flat level, but a hierarchy of ever-increasing precipitous superiorities pushing their mountain-shoulders upwards towards the Supreme.

(Sri Aurobindo, c. 1927)

Deboo dances

A famous contemporary dancer revisits Auroville

December saw a singular performance by Astad Deboo, the doyen of modern dance in India. Internationally-acclaimed and nationally honoured with the Sangeeta Natak Academy Award, India's highest award for artistes, Deboo is well known to the Auroville audience through earlier shows.

Words seem inadequate to describe the stunning variety of movements, poses and expressions that Deboo presents on the stage. Each of the three pieces that Deboo showcased on the Auroville stage had a unique appeal. His first piece was muted with contained slow movements. The next, "Interpreting Tagore", was inspired by a poem of Rabindranath Tagore addressed to the Mother Goddess. In it, Deboo with the props of a mask and a robe, skillfully weaves classical dance elements and expressions from Indian traditions with modern movements. The last piece, "Every Fragment of Dust is Awakened" was clearly the audience's favorite. In a climatic act that was sheer poetry in motion, Deboo dressed in a flowing white gown

whirls non-stop for a breathtaking 2.5 minutes. Reminiscent of the whirling dervishes of the mystic Sufi tradition, the act captures the yearning and the transcendence of the spirit that seeks union with the Divine.

Deboo was trained in the North Indian classical dance form of Kathak as a child, but since then he has been travelling around the world and constantly learning from dance traditions as diverse as those of South America, Japan, Indonesia, Europe, China and USA. Consequently Deboo's dance vocabulary ranges from the exuberance of narrative-based dance drama forms of South Asia to the intensity of abstract contemporary dance of the West. His more recent training in the theatrical dance form of Kathakali from Kerala imparts an

amazing degree of physical control to the visual beauty of his dance. Equally eclectic in his choice of music, Deboo draws inspiration from contemporary performers from various nations. As he mentioned to the audience during a dialogue after the performance, it is often a piece of music that haunts him and leads him to choreograph a particular dance.

At 54, Deboo shows no sign of slowing down and has already promised to come back to Auroville in February with a troupe of Manipuri martial art dancers. When asked how his aging body coped with the physical rigours of dance, Deboo with candid simplicity replied that, "The Lord has blessed me with a strong body to allow me to continue to serve Him."

Bindu

PHOTO: F. CHOTHIA

Of Birds and Borders...

A new French play is written and produced in Auroville

It has been many years since a French play was performed in Auroville.

The script of "Les Roses du Ciel", performed in January, was written in 1997 by an Aurovilian, Pavitra. Besides being a writer he is also a painter and musician. Some three months ago, a group began working on the text. Estelle, a French comedian who settled in Auroville six months ago, took up the direction.

the most naïve, believes he hears birds...yet they have forgotten what birds are. From the very beginning of the story, there is an atmosphere of war, yet what has preceded the present situation remains unexplained. Viktor and Emile want to move on, they want to reach 'The Border'. Viktor is ill with a lung disease, he has become cynical, is weighed down by his past. Emile has remained more innocent, he has

told Pavitra the story was too dark, too negative. He feels it wasn't really understood. "In the beginning, the atmosphere certainly is heavy, almost painful, but that is also very much what the reality we live in is about. And yet, for me, from the very beginning, from the moment the birds enter the scene, although one doesn't hear them, it's already an opening. And then, when Max enters the story, it is she who brings the new world with her. For me, there is hope from the beginning of the story. It's really about the experience we are trying to live out here, in Auroville, that is what I've tried to base the story on."

Jean, who plays Emile, puts it like this: "The theme of the story as I see it, is the overcoming of one's limits...The author has put the scene in a certain frame, yet it is easy to identify myself with the character, because for me, the essence of the story is the experience we are living here. It is what I live on a daily basis."

Jacky, who plays the character of Viktor, continues: "We can say that it is two beings who have reached their own limits. And yet, they remain very human. It touches upon, our ideal, our 'raison d'être', in Auroville."

The atmosphere is apocalyptic. At the end, Viktor feels something is about to happen. He believes everything will blow up, will be destroyed. Max tells him that yes, something is about to happen, but not in the way he thinks.

"We do not know what has happened, in the end," continues Pavitra "There was a man who was ill, he is no longer ill, there was a wall, there is no longer a wall, there was a bor-

The Holy Hill

Roger visits a photo exhibition about Arunachala

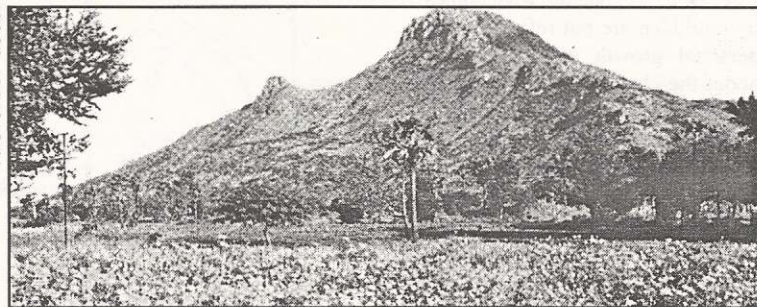


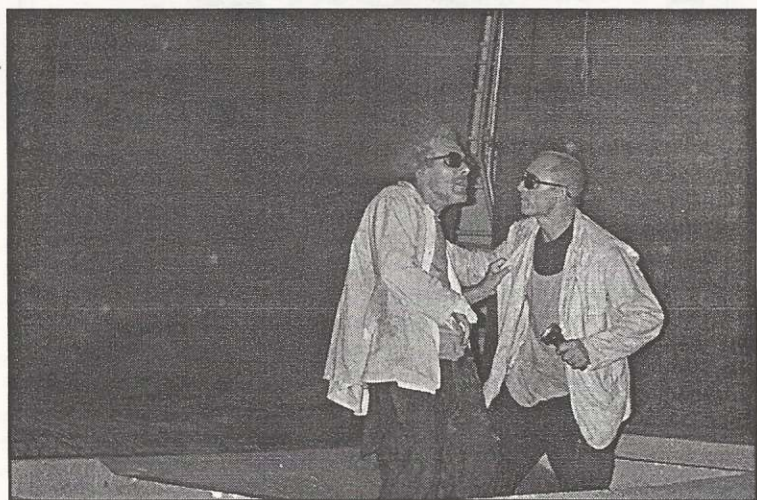
PHOTO: DEV GOGOI

Arunachala, the holy hill that dominates the town of Tiruvanamalai and is worshipped as a form of the God Siva, is older than the Himalayas. Legend has it that a dispute arose between Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as to whom was the greatest God. Siva became a column of fire and challenged Vishnu and Brahma to reach its top or bottom. Vishnu took on the form of a boar and burrowed deep into the earth but could not reach the bottom and returned admitting his defeat. Brahma took the form of a swan and returned with a flower that he said he had found at the column's summit. The deception was however exposed, and both Vishnu and Brahma recognised Siva's greatness. The column of fire was however too bright for humans to behold, so Siva took on the form of a hill – Arunachala – that would be easier for humans to worship and approach. Once a year, in the full moon that falls in late November or early December, an enormous beacon, visible for miles around, is lit on the hill's summit to commemorate its origin, and hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and devotees converge on Tiruvanamalai to either climb or circumambulate the mountain.

The colour photos of Dev Gogoi, a long-time resident of Tiruvanamalai, which were exhibited for a month at the Savitri Bhavan

in Auroville, capture both the tranquil seasonal rhythms of the villages around Arunachala as well as the devotional fervour it invokes amongst pilgrims. The hill's special atmosphere and presence is also captured in different seasons and from a variety of angles – in the play of horizontal lightning above its peaks and ridges, the blue white and yellow colours of an evening sky reflected in a village tank, the Deepam beacon seen from close up and afar; or the peculiar disc-shaped cloud cover above Arunachala's peak caught against an early morning orange sky.

One of my two favourite photos shows villagers winnowing and threshing grain: two women bend to gather stalks as bullocks trample the grain and a man sifts it, against a background of green paddies, palm trees and the North West side of the hill. The other one shows Yogi Ram Surat Kumar giving darshan to devotees that line the side of the road as he is driven in his ambassador car into his ashram. Hand upraised from behind the window of the car he seems to be blessing not only the photographer but in a wonderful way all those who might see the photo. The exhibit is the visual equivalent of pradakshina, or circumambulation of the hill, and leaves the viewer, even after just a brief visit, with a sense of inner upliftment.



Jean (left) and Jacky: underground men

The cast of actors includes Jean, Jacky, and twenty year old Anandamayi, who was born and grew up in Auroville. Aron took care of the stage set up and costumes.

"One day, when I awoke, a dialogue began in my head" explains Pavitra, on how the story was born. "There was a man who hears birds, he believes in birds, but he is not sure, because he has forgotten what birds are..."

And that is how the story begins. Two men, Viktor and Emile, are in an underground world. Emile, the older of the two, who has remained

visions, dreams. They walk towards the border, their road lined by a high wall. The atmosphere is heavy, dramatic. Then Max, the woman, enters the scene. She has returned from the 'Border'.

"It's about this character, Max, who has gone beyond death, who has become immortal. The 'Border' is death. But one also needed the very real border for the two characters who want to move on to situate the story. And also, it is symbolic on another level, it is also about their own, individual limits..." explains Pavitra. Some people who had read the script

der, there is no longer a border..." It all remains unexplained, ...yet something has happened.

"I was very interested to work on a story, which had been written in Auroville", says Estelle, "and go through the experience with Aurovilians of different generations. It is the circumstances that interest me here: each person is something more than an actor, there are life experiences which are strong for each, and that makes rich actors, who come together to have an experience, to search, and discover together."

Estelle's approach, as director, is about starting from nothing, from a void, together with the actors. "The experience has to happen in the body", says she "We discover the text together. It is an interactive work, we build up the play together. Starting from this void makes it possible for the play to keep evolving, changing, remaining alive, until the last moment."

Continues Jacky, "It is by starting from this void that important experiences come. They sometimes cannot be grasped, and carried to the end but it is these experiences that build up the character." "As the experience continues", says Jean "beyond all this undoing, some-

thing builds up." And Jacky adds, "The importance and beauty of the play is in all that remains unsaid, unexplained...It's the experience that is beautiful. It's the birds..."

Characters like those in "Les Roses du Ciel" cannot be played out on the surface; they have to be lived out. Throughout the performance, there are many moments, images, of great intensity... some of pain and despair, some of dreams and hope. The actors, Jean, Jacky and Anandamayi, carry us through the story; they are very present, vibrant, giving the best of themselves at every instant. The stage set-up is minimal, but contributes, together with the lighting, in creating the scene. The atmosphere is intense, pulsates, the voices are powerful, the dialogues resonate...

As a spectator, the only way to explain what I felt about the story and the performance, is by using the French expression, "Ca coupe un peu le souffle!..." (It takes one's breath away...)

Emmanuelle

A bilingual edition (French/English) of the play is available for sale in AV for information contact pavitra@auroville.org.in.

Sustainability too expensive?

Try unsustainability

Dr. Norman Myers is a well-known environmentalist. He was also a member of the International Advisory Council which held its last meeting recently. Dr. Myers was unable to attend that meeting. However, he agreed to write an article for 'Auroville Today' and chose a topic which is extremely topical, not only in the wider world but in the context of Auroville itself-the cost of living unsustainably.

We hear much about sustainability, whether of the economy, the environment, or of development overall. Plainly we need sustainability in the long run, otherwise we shall simply run out of planet. So why haven't governments, businesses and other major players got on with the job? Answer, it is considered too expensive. But as so often, political leaders, corporate chiefs and others highlight the costs of action while ignoring the concealed costs of inaction.

Let's look at a few illustrative costs of unsustainability:
 Burning a gallon of petrol costs Americans much more than the \$1.5 paid at the pump. It causes grand scale pollution; several times more people are killed by traffic exhausts than by car accidents. It causes road congestion and thus wastes huge amounts of workers' time. Together with several other "externalities", these problems cost the global economy \$600 billion per year. Burning fossil fuels other than petrol for cars causes acid rain, urban smog, particulate pollution and related environmental problems costing roughly \$200 billion worldwide. The most important pollutant from fossil fuels is carbon dioxide, which causes half of global warming. While the overall final costs of global warming remain unknown, there is broad agreement that they could well exceed \$1 trillion per year, possibly several times more. Even without global warming, just these two sets of unsustainable activities cost the world's economy at least \$800 billion and Japan \$45 billion.

There are many other environmental problems with heavy costs. They include soil erosion, desertification, agricultural pests and mass extinc-

tion of species. Altogether they cost at least \$850 billion per year. This, like the other estimates, is very cautious, with actual costs possibly several times higher. Note too that many of these problems could be overcome in highly cost-effective manner. For instance, desertification causes annual food losses of \$42 billion worldwide, whereas prevention would cost only \$22 billion. Soil erosion in the United States costs \$44 billion per year, whereas soil conservation would take only \$8 billion.

Consider an alternative calculation, this one centring not on particular problems but reckoning the total benefits received from all our environments, including grasslands, forests, oceans, the atmosphere, and wild species. Insects pollinate our crops with benefits of \$200 billion per year, while total biodiversity benefits, supplied free, are around \$38 trillion per year. Hence the world's "gross natural product" is roughly the same as the world's gross economic product.

Despite all this, political leaders insist that the sustainability bill is too large. The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 presented a budget of \$600 billion per year, whereupon the 163 governments assembled protested they could not possibly afford anything so large. Yet they could have found funds aplenty if they had looked in the right place. They dispense huge amounts of subsidies that adversely affect both our economies and our environments. Leading categories include agriculture, fossil fuels, road transportation, water, fisheries and forests. These "perverse" subsidies amount to at least \$2 trillion a year worldwide, hence they severely distort our

economies and degrade our environments on every side. On both counts, they foster unsustainable development. The total of \$2 trillion is well over three times more than the Rio budget for sustainable development.

To illustrate the sheer perversity of these subsidies, consider marine fishing. To bring the yearly catch of around 90 million tonnes to port costs \$100 billion, whereupon the fish are sold for \$90 billion. The shortfall, plus fishermen's profits, are made up by government subsidies of \$25 billion per year. These subsidies send to fishermen the wholly false message that fish are still plentiful. Result, each year sees more and more fishermen chasing after fewer and fewer fish. Further result, fish stocks collapse and fishing businesses go bankrupt. In 1992 one of the richest fisheries in the world, that of the Grand Bank in northeastern United States, had to be closed because of sheer shortages of fish. Many businesses went bankrupt and 42,000 workers lost their jobs. If the United States' main fishing grounds were allowed to recover, sustainable harvesting would boost the economy by \$8 billion per year and supply 300,000 jobs.

Our present way of exploiting the Earth and its environmental resources – wholly unsustainable exploitation for the most part – suggests that we view our planet as a business liquidating its capital, even though the "interest" available could increase indefinitely. Or, to put it another way: should we not live on our planet as if we intend to stay, rather than as if we are visiting for a weekend? In short, the goal of sustainability need not prove too expensive. It will often put money into our pockets.



Unsustainable Auroville? Motorcycles at the Solar Kitchen

Environmental Education

Aurovillians Minh and Auroasha participated in "Planet' ERE 2", the second forum on Environmental Education of French-speaking countries, which was held in France.

In the first phase, participants were separated into groups in ten regions of France. Each region according to its climate, topography and ecosystem focused on a different topic. People working in organisations related to environmental education, activity leaders (often youth in their mid-20's), schoolteachers and environmental specialists presented their work, held workshops (on site in nature, e.g. a river bed or nature reserve), debates and discussions. Some of the various methods and material they use in their educational activities are: visits to botanical gardens, nature walks, games, books, posters, etc., on a wide range of topics from botany to pollution to the need for preserving heritage monuments. A recurring subject for discussion was the question of environmental awareness and how to encourage it.

Minh went to the National Park of the Cévennes in Florac (mid-elevation) where the focus was on the issue "local mobilisation for environmental education". Auroasha was in the Narbonne area (Aude) on the Mediterranean coast, where the emphasis was on environmental education related to the watershed.

During the second phase, 950 participants gathered in Paris at UNESCO headquarters for an intense programme of conferences, seminars, round table discussions and workshops.

Reports Auroasha on her experience: "I was a little saddened that the watershed theme was not treated in detail during the first phase. In Auroville I have learnt about this subject through real life with the approach of bringing consciousness into matter.

I could see, coming from India, that despite the enthusiasm and energy

present in most of the participants, their approach is very much centered on man's preeminence over his environment. Not only is he apart but also he is the master. In India it has always been clear that man is a part of the Divine whole and one with his environment. There lies perhaps the strength and the root of the possible contribution of India for the future development of a true environmental consciousness for the entire world.

Growing up in the early days of Auroville and having faced the ecological struggle of regenerating a desertified barren land, my perception of environmental education is of course different as it was part of my life education. Not everyone has had that privilege. Environmental awareness is finally spreading but unfortunately it still remains a fuzzy mental notion even in the most advanced parts of the world. It is clear that a change of consciousness towards Nature is needed from mankind if he is to go on with the evolution on this planet.

Planet'ERE2 renewed our hope. It would be beneficial if the bit of ecological knowledge present in Auroville, along with the help and contacts established in this forum, were put into practice here in the form of better-structured environmental education for the future generation. However, it was inspiring for both of us to see so many young people involved in environmental education and the enthusiasm, dynamism, and creative diversity in their experiences. Our participation was a worthwhile experience in many ways. We plan to share with others here what we learnt, by forming nature clubs and taking up environmental education projects."

Asha

CULTURE

Lucifair

This year's Christmas fair was dubbed "Lucifair". Obviously the devil or the lord did not like the association, and in response inundated us with rain, making preparation near impossible. We postponed the date, and the satisfied parties produced sunshine on Christmas and the new date. This year's fair was organised by the AYA gang. For several Saturdays we worked on cleaning the brush, pruning trees and leveling the land near Kalabhum. Banners were painted, the equipment cleaned and repaired, prizes and money fundraised, diabolos printed and food ordered. Not knowing any better I volunteered to make tacos, so apart from a few hurried forays into the crowd, where I glimpsed the tambola fervor and managed a tattoo sticker, I only heard the fair was a success! I wouldn't know because I could barely keep up with the clamour for tacos from our tribal hordes competing with the live jazz that

Matt, Suresh and Txuma were churning out from the nearby stage. The sterling engine even worked briefly, propelling the merry go round. The usual booths of "Bandishoot" "Dunker-shurn"

seemed well visited. Later on we showed a movie that though dopey, held good promise for further outdoor theater fun.

Taco Belle (aka Renu)



Fair fervour

"Don't feed the Aurovilians!"

David Clouston worked as a writer at Auroville Today last summer. He returned for a brief visit in December. Here he gives us a taste of his first week

Day One:

The first thing is that the crane has gone. In its place is a strange little metal whisker. With so many of the disks now present, the slightly elliptical shape of Matrimandir is very apparent. Visually, She has taken a quantum leap towards completion in the fifteen months since I left. Spectacular. Amrit endorses my 1997-issue Matrimandir pass (no. 10758). I pass

silent, pure, out of time.

It has waited for me with perfect equanimity.

Day Two:

Carol takes me to the Creativity building-site near Vikas. I am amazed and impressed by the progress that has been made. Fifteen months ago, this project did not seem even a twinkle in God's eye for any practical purposes. There were any number of difficulties to begin with – financial difficulties, development difficulties, difficulties with prospective residents. I had even lent a (not very helpful) hand with

Nehru is my second-favourite street corner in the world. Last year I watched two water buffalo amble the wrong way up Nehru Street, scratching their shaggy heads against the handlebars of parked motorcycles. Oncoming traffic just edged past them. (This is not a common sight in Sydney.)

Today I stand there happily, the benevolent chaos swirling around me. One should probably not derive contentment from such superficial things, but there it is. I love India.

Day Four:

I have been thinking about my tour of building-sites. Such tangible evidence of progress causes me to review some conclusions I had reached about Auroville. What were they?

- Things get talked about endlessly... Over the summer of 2000, the subject of housing had been much discussed. The "closure" of AV by the Entry Group – itself largely a response to the housing situation – was still in force. I had attended a series of general

called to resolve these issues. The issues were not resolved. Instead, the format, timing, scope and even the legitimacy of the meeting themselves were debated at length.

- ... but nothing can ever be finally decided. No one has any authority to decide anything, or decide how anything might be decided. All existing decision-making models are regarded with hostility because they exist. Anyone can hold up a decision at any stage in the process. Very inclusive and admirable. But don't expect any results soon.

- Q. E. D. Nothing will ever get done. It now seems that I



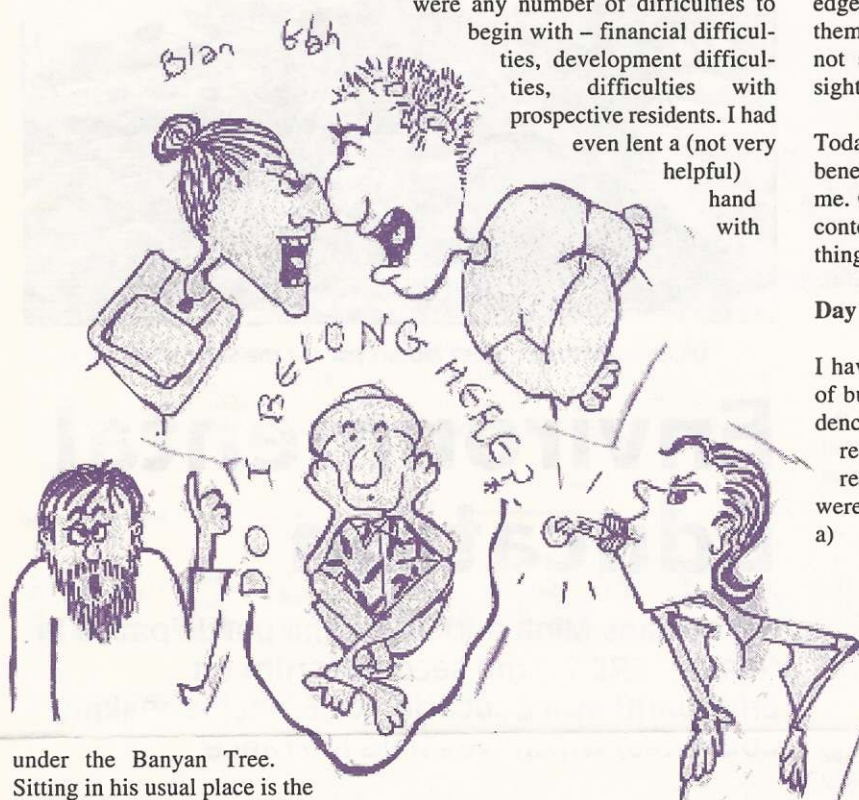
CARTOONS:PARASMITHA

Day Five:

Sunday at the revamped Visitors' Centre for lunch. Much larger crowds of visitors than I remember. As I leave, a man stops me and asks if he can wear my Australian straw hat for a moment so that his partner can take a photograph. Okay. He also wants me in the photo. Fine. Click. Thank you.

I feel slightly as though I am the guest inhabitant of a zoo. What must it be like to live in the zoo all the time? People come a long way to see you; they buy souvenirs of you at the Boutique; probably they poke sticks through the bars of your cage.

I suggest putting up a sign at the Visitors' Centre: "Please do not feed the Aurovilians".



under the Banyan Tree. Sitting in his usual place is the Keeper of the Book. I approach, and the following brief dialogue is enacted...

Jayram: So. You're back.
David: Yes.
Jayram: When can you start cleaning? Tuesday?
David: Yes.
Jayram: (Nods me through)

Well, I hadn't expected a delighted shout and a full-body hug. But I feel welcomed. Since last year, Jayram has witnessed perhaps a hundred thousand visitors to Matrimandir. It's nice to be recognised.

Also, nothing helps the feeling of belonging somewhere so much as being given responsibility. I feel absurdly proud of being entrusted with the task of helping change the Chamber cushion-covers on Tuesday nights.

Aurovilians naturally concern themselves with Matrimandir's future. But for me, now, as a work in progress, She provides a perfect metaphor for my own body and mind. Her outer skin shows the imperfections and blemishes of construction. Inside is the grim confusion of grey walls, scaffolding, building materials, coconut matting and dust-sheets. But deeper inside still is the Chamber,

one draft of the proposal to a prospective European source of funds: it was turned down. I would have bet a year's income that Creativity would still be in the discussion stages by Christmas 2001. But now brick is being laid on brick. Phase One will soon be complete. An even greater surprise awaits me at the Line of Force building next door. This existed only as a model in the architect's office last year. In conversation, he himself had referred to it in the terms one uses for an impossible dream, beset on every side with complications and problems. Now it, too, is nearly finished. I can touch the walls.

As Carol and I clamber over ladders and sand-pits, I mentally review the planning and development obstacles, the opposition from certain sections of the community even to the construction materials to be used. What has happened?

Day Three:

Being in Auroville necessarily means being back in India, thank heavens! Today I am off to Pondy with Dakshina, who needs to buy school supplies.

The intersection of Mission and

CELEBRATION



PHOTO:IRENO

Pongal Pongalo!

Pongal, the winter harvest festival that marks the beginning of the Tamil New Year, was celebrated by villagers and Aurovilians in the neighbouring village of Kuyilapalayam in a riot

of colours and sounds. Houses and temples were decorated with colourful "kolams." Bulls festooned with flowers and balloons were raced down the road. And children, dressed in their festive best, participated in a day-long fair.

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