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In *The Ideal of Human Unity* Sri Aurobindo, while noting that attempts at world unity have always failed, also avers that "The unity of mankind is evidently a part of Nature's eventual scheme and must come about." But that unity will be effected not by external means, by a pressure towards uniformity, but through "the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one..."

From the very beginning, Auroville has been intimately connected with the ideal of human unity. Even before its physical inauguration, Mother saw Auroville as, potentially, an occult force for peace in the world, and she hoped that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. would join hands to participate in its construction. And, of course, it's all there in the Charter: "Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity"

After thirty years, then, how do Aurovilians relate to and perceive this ideal? Is it a part of our daily lives? What are the major challenges to unity, and how far do we feel we have progressed towards achieving it? Here are some responses and reflections which, in themselves, illustrate something of our unity in diversity.

"Although I had begun practising integral yoga individually some time before, I came to Auroville because of the collective dimension of this experiment. When I arrived, in 1972, I was disappointed not to find much hap-

Towards Unity

**Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.
What does this mean in Auroville today?**

pening in this line. Since then, I have always tried to involve myself in every practical attempt to create that 'actual human unity'. This includes working at Matrimandir, being involved in the Free Store from the beginning, helping with the setting up of Prosperity Caring Service, and participating in various common account experiments.

When Mother saw Auroville as a place of continual research into human unity she gave us a very big responsibility. For many years, I think that, in spite of abundant goodwill, we did not take up this task seriously or systematically enough. However, with the setting up of CIRHU, and now plans for SAWCHU (see box on p.2), I believe that it is really emerging in the Auroville consciousness.

More than anything, I hope these new initiatives will make us wake up to the necessity of actually practising among ourselves, in our daily life, the simple things which Sri Aurobindo and Mother advised us to do to arrive at human unity. These include various mental exercises to make our mind more flexible, re-educating ourselves into seeing our differences not any more as opposites but as comple-

mentarities, which is how the supramental consciousness sees things: as a whole. And we should practise also 'listening with the heart': in other words, learning to go behind the words that are spoken to reach what somebody is really trying to express (something which is very important everywhere, but especially in this multi-cultural community).

Finally, I feel that 'team spirit', the ability to work in teams here, is crucial to understanding how others can embody different aspects of the truth so that a more complete truth can be manifested. This is why, I think, Mother called collaboration 'the true spirit of Auroville'. We ought all of us to feel that, as humanity, we are part of a huge team playing together the great game of evolution, 'The adventure of consciousness and joy'! (Bhaga)

"The beginning of Auroville was very nice. In those days, there was really a sense of togetherness. In fact, my image of unity comes from those days: it's the Matrimandir Camp, where people from all cultures lived quietly together, took turns cooking

in the kitchen and, above all, smiled at each other! Today, I feel people are much more separated from each other. We all have our own work, our own little circle of friends, but we lack occasions when we can all meet together, there is nothing (in a material sense) common to bind us. We are all carrying the spirit and the light but, too often, we tend to feel that we are carrying it alone.

One thing that would be useful would be to have occasions when we re-dedicate ourselves to our ideal. This happens in the villages—the real purpose of fire-walking, for example, is to re-dedicate oneself, to surrender to something higher.

This brings up another aspect of human unity: our relationship with the local villagers. I would put it like this: if we want Auroville to develop in the right way, we have to consider our neighbours. We cannot go on building high-rise buildings next to where people have little to live on—this is not the way to manifest a golden world. Auroville should go more into the villages, not just to help materially but also to educate the villagers about Auroville. Then, if they choose to join the community, they will be aware of the ideal and we can all go forward together." (Raman)

"On New Year's Eve we gathered at the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture. It was an intense and inspiring evening. No programme. Just 1000 oil

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lamps lighting up the mandala of the foundations of the pavilion-to-be. In silence people came and looked, in silence sat down, in silence held the incense sticks silently distributed. Not even a child cried. It seemed like an hour. It seemed like all the little 'moments of silence' with which we start our meetings, and which always have to be cut off too soon because there is work to be done,



PHOTO: IRENO

came out to express themselves fully! Even when people got up to leave, it was in silence and concentration. There was silence and in the silence deep peace. And in the peace, unity.

On New Year's Morning, we gathered as usual at the Amphitheatre. The centre hillock behind the pile of wood was covered with a mass of local children from the villages. And it so happened that as the fire was lit, the flames only began on the side which threw the sea of children's dark faces and skinny legs into the lime-light. There they were, Auroville's future neighbours, come to remind us on New Year's morning of our task for the year. After wriggling and giggling in the heat and the sparks for quite a while, they flowed out—some to Matrimandir and some to the Cuisine Solaire where they ate up all the breakfast! But they left behind the quiet. Aurovilians—who'd remained quite concentrated almost in contrast—could arise and go about in their own atmosphere, greeting each other and welcoming in the new year.

human unity to me seems to be more than the international aspect, even more than the Essential-Oneness-of-All aspect. human unity is also about these village children, and their woeful lack of opportunity to develop their humanity, and Auroville's role in bringing some light to the situation. (Bhavana)

I see human unity as a planetary issue. If you read the newspapers, you see that there are a lot of con-

flicts based on division and intolerance, as in the Middle East, Bosnia, South Africa etc. But in the same places people are forced to find a solution to their conflict and the solution seems to lie, first of all, in a reciprocal acceptance and understanding. Auroville is another way of looking at the issue. A different one, deeper maybe? I do not know. But in our attempt 'to be a true Aurovilian' we are trying to find an answer to the origin of human division.

In one sense we have the advantage of dealing with the issue of human unity without the necessity of going through conflict. (I consider discussions about Matrimandir and the Master plan as disagreements about local problems and not as something relating to the process of human unity.)

Anyway, for me human unity means primarily understanding, respecting and accepting people of different cultures. The fact that we can't always accept differences between us is normal, there is no reason to get upset about it, it is something we have to work on. My feeling, however, is that the key to changing this lies in how young children are educated. If today's children grow up with children of

other cultures they might not feel stuck to a particular nationality or cultural group: on the contrary they may grow up with a new culture which comprehends and goes beyond limited nationalistic ones. It is already happening in Auroville, though still on a small scale. But it is a long process and probably will take a generation or more." (Santo)

Theatre, which is a particular focus in my life, is about transformation. It is about finding yourself and touching the deepest part of yourself in order to offer it up—to the Divine, to the audience. You are there for them—enacting this miracle of transformation for them (some would even say we performers stand in their place). And how do we open our hearts for this transformation to take place? We use the strongest power that we know—the power of love.

What is this love? It is the love which can change you, open you, widen you, clean you, make you strong. It gives you a voice, two arms, two legs, a strong, flexible, responsive, energised, dynamic body and, most of all, a heart. It opens your heart, yes, until you think it will break.

During this theatre work, every obstacle comes up, every resistance. 'No, no, it's not possible. I can't say that, I can't be that.' But we can. We contain multitudes. What is not possible is to do it alone. For this act of transformation we need some help. Some help! We need each other, for support, for encouragement, for a kind

word, a hug.

It is not a mysterious process. And yet it contains the essential mysterious question of life—how can love transform? What is this power? Every day, we come and start again. And every day there is some progress, some understanding, some laughter and even some tears. Because you cannot change without pain and frustration and denial and resistance. Then the love has to be there, even stronger than the strongest resistance, because ultimately this process leads to the discovery of one's psychic being, to a feeling of connectedness, of light and a great, great joy. And we are here for that. I don't mean only we are here in Auroville but, finally, we are here on earth to make it happen, to allow the spirit to work in the world. And we can do it. We must do it. Together." (Jill)

My overall view of Auroville's growth and progress towards unity is very positive. The troubles that we have been through in the past were enough to have destroyed us, but we've survived through our inner strength and our faith in the Mother's work and what she said about this place. There is no straight line to Auroville's progress—the dips follow the ascents to prevent us becoming too complacent. It would not do if we level off too soon because we need the difficulties, as opportunities for us to make real and lasting progress towards true unity.

I have often been asked by senior government officials, 'If this is a spiritual project, then why do you people have fights?' I tell them it's because we are still human, working (or being worked upon by a higher force) in what Mother called a 'living laboratory' where Karma Yogic experiments are going on to achieve certain ideals—the most important of which is human unity. In a laboratory some experiments may fail, but so what? Every individual has the complete freedom to choose what he wants to do and where.

I see the meaning of Auroville as being the attempt to create unity through the utilisation of every single thought and endeavour for the best advantage of the collective. There are challenges galore for us at present which are not being faced up to. For example, individualised money power has taken a hold in Auroville, obviously for some solution towards a true collective utilisation to emerge.

I am 76 years 'young', and maybe I would like to see results sooner. Yet I know the process cannot be rushed or pushed, it must evolve from within. How clearly She had said, 'Auroville will be built by what is invisible to you. The men who have to act as instruments will do so despite themselves. They are only puppets in the hands of larger forces. Nothing depends on human beings, neither the planning nor the execution—nothing!' (Krishna Tewari)

If we had a more collective economy in Auroville it would definitely contribute to human unity here, but the present situation is very mixed. On the one hand, we have the Central Fund which maintains services and collective assets, but on the other hand we can't at present make the next step to an 'in-kind' economy—which would provide more service for everybody—because not enough people are willing to involve themselves in making this happen, and also because those who provide the financial resources are not willing to fund those who they feel are not working for the community. So the only concrete step we can make now is to try to take care of those who are fully involved in working for the community. Others with resources may have to pay more in future for community services.

Actually, while this is a step backwards in terms of a collective economy, it may make people think harder about how they relate to the community, and

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WHO'S HU?

From CHU to CIRHU to SAWCHU

Where's CHU? And what's happening to CIRHU now that SAWCHU has been born? And, first of all, who's who in the institutions focussing on human unity (HU)?

It certainly looks like an avalanche of acronyms. Let's have a look at what lies behind them.

CHU: Centre for human unity: A twin unit of the Laboratory of Evolution; the latter concentrates more on the individual aspect of the future evolution of mankind, while CHU focusses on the other side of the same evolutionary coin: the collective side. Its main visible output is *Auroville in Mother's Words*—a 300-page compilation of all that could be collected of what Mother has said about Auroville.

CIRHU: Centre for International Research into Human Unity. This centre was first launched in 1988 but has been actively functioning for three or four years, with a small group of dedicated Aurovilians. So far its main activity has been the publication of CIRHU Papers, a bi-annual magazine exploring the concept of human unity in its various aspects. CIRHU will remain as a resource body for helping launch a new World Centre for Human Unity (see below).

SAWCHU: Sri Aurobindo World Centre for Human Unity. A few months ago, the idea for an all-encompassing university-like World Centre for Human Unity was launched by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation. SAWCHU will bring a holistic evolutionary approach to the world's quest for human unity and wishes to provide a material and spiritual platform for discussion and research. A seminar on human unity will take place on February 1, 1998 to dedicate the Centre.



PHOTO: IRENO

make them understand better that there has to be an interchange of energy: if everybody just takes, it can't work.

At present we have a vicious circle. Some individuals feel that Auroville can't possibly provide for their needs, and so they set up their own support system by doing things which may not be of direct benefit to the community. This, in turn, makes those who provide financial resources to the community unwilling to fund these people. The only way to break out of this deadlock is by establishing a

certain confidence and trust between us which means, as a first step, providing for those who do the work.

As to Auroville in general, I think there is a core of people here who are dedicated to the ideal of Auroville, and that core is strong enough to keep Auroville on track, even though there is quite a lot happening on the fringes of Auroville which is not exactly contributing to human unity! But who knows? We don't see the big picture, and everything may be happening exactly as it should." (Otto)

We have been told by Sri Aurobindo and Mother that to bring our psychic being to the forefront of our consciousness is the key to the realisation of oneness. The process of becoming aware of the different parts of one's being, of attaining a level of mastery over them and letting them be guided by the psychic being, is a process of growth that people here are subjected to with far greater intensity than elsewhere.

The process takes place at different levels of our personality. At the physical/vital level, the way that different nationalities and cultures live and work together here broadens one's view of the many ways in which a situation can be lived and acted

upon. At the level of thoughts and ideas, the interactions with others help us to perceive how the same thought can be cast into a different mould depending on the language or culture, and we learn to go behind the expression to the idea itself. When there is a clash of ideas, although the first reaction is to struggle against what we cannot see the truth of, we eventually learn to go higher and higher for, as Mother put it, 'Each one must rise to the summit of his consciousness; it is on the heights that harmony is

created'.

The effort to be in contact with our inner psychic being is made in many different ways. The contact, once established, brings about a spontaneous feeling of identity, oneness and love between people. It is at this level that true unity is attained. At all other levels, while there may be a mutual understanding, mutual accommodation and a peace in our relations it is always fragile.

Auroville is an unprecedented experiment with no fixed organisational framework. What further complicates matters is that there are no objective criteria for determining the suitability of those allowed to participate. Auroville seeks to organise life free of the many stresses of hard work and competition that exist elsewhere, in order to allow the Aurovilians to concentrate upon making another kind of progress. However, such a lifestyle also attracts those who simply want an easier life. I believe that this admixture of sincere and insincere elements is at present pulling Auroville away and down from its task of experimentation and research into a new way of life." (Sanjeev)

Imagine you wake up one day and you see Auroville differently. Instead of the usual sense of inconsequence and randomness, of individuals going about their individual ways, you suddenly see—as if a formerly invisible pattern is projected upon a screen—

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A central premise of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's teaching is that Unity is the fundamental nature of reality; a condition to be realized rather than a situation to be created somehow by human effort. This realization is represented in all the world's great traditions. The Buddha spoke of overcoming the illusion of a separate self and the Upanishads proclaim that Atman is Brahman – the 'I' is already unified with the universal Reality.

A completely unexpected outcome of scientific research, particularly in the last century, is that modern science now completely supports this—mystical or esoteric—perception of unity. The scientific story has arisen, not as a result of the insight of an enlightened individual, but owing to the collective investigation of thousands of the brightest minds the planet has produced over the last three centuries.

In the 1600's Galileo laid down the rules for this game of inquiry. Say anything you want about how the Universe is, but your theory must be in accord with observation.

In 1859, Charles Darwin introduced his theory of Evolution—the idea that the Universe is not a static, fundamentally unchanging entity, but rather a dynamic self-transforming process. No longer could the world hold on to the notion that things are as they always were.

In 1905, Albert Einstein shocked the scientific world by introducing and mathematically proving the famous equation $E=mc^2$. He demonstrated the equivalence of matter and energy—he showed that matter is energy, matter is made out of energy. No longer can science see a world made up of solid objects, but made up of energy, held together by invisible

forces producing the illusion of solidity. Ten years later, with his theory of General Relativity, Einstein demonstrated that gravity is a function of the geometry of space-time.

One mathematical consequence of the theory of relativity is that the Universe should be either expanding or contracting, but that it is impossible for it to exist in a fixed or steady-state. In 1929 Edwin Hubble, using the most powerful telescope available at the time, found evidence that the universe is indeed expanding—the most distant galaxies are seen to be moving away from us at nearly the speed of light! If the Universe is expanding, it was postulated that by playing back the unfolding of time, one might arrive at a single point—the common birth of everything!

In 1964, two scientists at Bell Laboratories (USA) who were just trying to build a microwave receiver without distortion, kept coming up with unaccounted-for readings which remained uniform no matter which direction they pointed their receiver. They didn't know how to account for their findings, but some astronomers did. They knew that Penzias and Wilson had found the evidence, postulated thirty-five years earlier, for the cosmic birth (sadly misnamed the 'big bang') of everything!

So where does that bring us today. The scientific story affirms that you and I are beings of pure light. And we are be-

ings of the same exact light, birthed along with all the rest of the Universe from the same Cosmic egg at the beginning of time. Whatever we take ourselves to be, whatever the Self is, it cannot in any fundamental way be separate from the rest of the Universe.

One question has puzzled scientists throughout the unfolding of this story. What is the nature of that light? It seems to be a wave, continuous with all the other waves in the Universe, but looked at from another perspective, it has the nature of a particle, with its own definite amount of energy. Only recently, due to advances in physics called quantum electrodynamics, is it being understood that the true nature of light remains a complete mystery. Whether light is seen as a wave or a particle depends entirely on the nature of the observation! Look for a wave and you find one. Look for a particle and there it is!

So, too, it may well be with the Self. Look for a separate individual self and you find it. Look for a process, integrated with the whole, and you find that. The fundamental nature of Self remains a mystery. But humans have fallen into the bad habit of seeing ourselves exclusively as particles, as separate individuals, never as integrated parts of the whole. The habit has become so pervasive and so destructive, from both a view of human suffering and from an ecological perspective, that it should probably be treated as

a communicable disease. The challenge of the transformation of consciousness then, becomes a challenge of perception. Can we learn to see ourselves as parts of a larger whole?

One practice I use is to simply sit quietly and remind myself that I am a being of light. I am not separate from anything. If I am not separate from anything, what is there to fear? Certainly I can't ever be excluded from the embrace of the Divine. And if I am one with the whole of this magnificent Universe, how can I possibly justify feeling bad about myself? So I breathe, and let go into the all-pervasive nourishing womb of the Mother.

The Lakota Sioux, native people of North America, teach their children to say "O Mitakuye Oyasin"—"We are all related"—whenever they enter or leave sacred space, which for them is most of the time. Related to each other, the animals, the plants. Even the rivers, the mountains and the sky. And now science echoes their refrain: We ARE all related. We are all beings of light arisen from the same cosmic egg at the beginning of time. It would be equally scientifically valid to say, "We are beings of light, continuously arising from the same cosmic egg, each moment made anew." For the first time in history, humans know with their rational minds that unity is a fact. Now the challenge is to learn not just to know it rationally, but to perceive it in our beings, as ourselves and as the world.

Peter

(Peter Thurrell has a Masters Degree in Environmental Science and presently teaches at Last School and Transition School. This article is based upon a speech given by him at an environmental conference in Delhi.)

Unity is a fact

Even modern science says so!



A day in the life of the Solar Kitchen



After a short peaceful walk through the trees next to my house I enter the compound of the new Solar Kitchen (or "Cuisine Solaire" as some people prefer to call it). Apart from the watchman's children who are playing around their little house, it is quiet, just a handful of motorbikes and several cycles standing around. I try to enter the main dining room but the yellow steel doors are firmly locked. I walk around and find another entrance. It feels like entering the engine room of a ship. Smilingly, Jean Claude receives me wiping his hands with a cloth. He is in charge of the kitchen's maintenance. "This is the engine room of the Cuisine Solaire. That big machine over there is a steam engine. Don't be afraid; you'll hear a big noise!" He opens a valve and steam pours loudly out of a pipe in the ground. We both grin at each other. Once the big solar bowl situated on one side of the roof is ready, this machine will be powered by the sun's heat. For now it runs on diesel. "We will anyway use diesel on days when there is no sun." The engine provides steam to a large box inside the kitchen, and there the cooking takes place in large flat pots that stand on its shelves.

Dozens of rubber chappals are waiting outside another door. I hear chatter, laughing and chopping sounds. I enter a big space: the kitchen where, every day except Sundays, between 400 and 650 lunches are prepared for the Auroville

schools, Aurovilians and guests. Next to the door hang cloth and plastic bags with the familiar stainless steel lunch boxes, the so called 'tiffin carriers', waiting to be filled for those who prefer to eat at home.

Ramalingam looks into his cooking pots, stirs the sauce, asks for certain ingredients. He is the new chef. "I used to work at the Bharat Nivas kitchen, preparing the school lunches until Giuseppe took over. Now after five years of doing other jobs, I'm really happy to be back behind the cooking pots again! This new kitchen is a gift!"

There are 27 people working in the kitchen, 13 volunteers and 14 paid *ammass*. Asked whether a large number of meals is a problem for him, Ramalingam answers that he can easily provide a thousand or two thousand meals. "But for that we would need larger vessels and some more kitchen equipment. For me it is new to use this steam cooker. I'm trying to prepare 80% of the food in it. The taste is really good! I even made a Christmas cake in the steam cooker!"

I hear a shout and see Laxman jumping up to a bar which hangs from the ceiling. The bundles of bananas are hanging here. One of the girls, while taking down a bundle, disturbed the balance of the bar. Luckily Laxman saw it in time and now he is hanging up there in the air. Everybody laughs.

"The *ammass* are happy to work here, because they are learning new things,"

says Ramalingam. "They also appreciate the collective work atmosphere which is organised by the team of Aurovilians."

Fred, a professional cook from France, is responsible for the provisions. "I don't want to cook anymore. I've done that for too long." He is grating cheese while his Italian partner Catia is in the process of making whole-wheat noodles.

As much as possible all the vegetables grown in Auroville will be used in the kitchen, "provided prices are reasonable," says Ilse, the overall coordinator of the kitchen.

When I walk into the open dining area, a large and pleasant space, I meet Didier. He is in charge of organising the dining hall. "But I also chop vegetables whenever necessary. I do whatever is needed. *Je suis très content!*" He checks that there are enough plates, cutlery and tumblers. Just before the lunch is served, he checks that all the chairs are in the proper place and the rugs are on the floor in the area where there are low tables. "First this corner was conceived of as a quiet space, but that did not work. Now it is being used by those who prefer to sit on the floor." He is responsible for the plants and flowers inside the hall. He also receives complaints, like, "Why are there no pickles today?" and then he tries to incorporate them into the menu. He likes the work atmosphere. "There is not much of a hierarchy here."

Suhasini, the architect, and her husband Gilles designed the kitchen on the lines of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram central kitchen and dining room. "Unfortunately our choice of food is different from theirs," says Ilse. "In the Ashram they always serve the same meals without much change in menu. There rice is the staple food, while here we often have noodles. This requires a different set-up in the kitchen. Also while serving meals in the Ashram dining hall, people don't have to think about what they want to eat. The menu hasn't changed in years! But here sometimes people want to make a choice and that slows down our way of serving. There are some other minor inconveniences but we are all working on im-

proving them. The main thing is that the people are very happy to come here."

Juanita and Aurosylle are in charge of the gardens around the building. They are growing plants which later will end up as potted plants inside the hall. They are also thinking of making a kitchen garden. The leftovers, which are not good enough for the Auroville cows, will be used for making compost for the garden.

It's 11.55. Didier checks the last chairs. Tumblers are being filled with drinking water. The first dishes are appearing from the kitchen. Panic! There is not enough space for them. "Get a trolley," Ilse calls to the kitchen. The first diners, mainly children, are arriving, playing outside. The serving area starts to look like a colourful painting: the orange of the grated carrots, next to the light green of the cucumbers and the yellow of the raw pumpkin salad. Two different kinds of rice, an orange tomato sauce with beans, and the yellow of the custard pudding.

It's 12.15. Ilse and Didier check whether everything is there. "Are we ready to open?" "No, not yet." They still have to prepare a few plates for those people who will come late. "Everybody happy?" asks Ilse. "Where are the pickles?"

The doors open. There is a big line all the way outside. "No noodles today?" "Can I eat here today?"

Ilse sits at the entrance to the serving counter, ticking off the names of all those who are coming to eat. People who have made reservations get served first. "If people come just like that without reserving first, they have to wait until one o'clock. Only then do we know whether we have enough. I have to be strict, otherwise it becomes a mess!"

The Aurovilians eating here seem very happy with this new community centre. "Even if there would be tension in the kitchen, it does not come across at all," remarks someone. "The atmosphere is really harmonious here."

It's 12.25 and the line is still pretty long. I sneak in and get my plate. What a choice! I find a table where I join some friends and enjoy my first meal at the "Cuisine Solaire."

Tineke

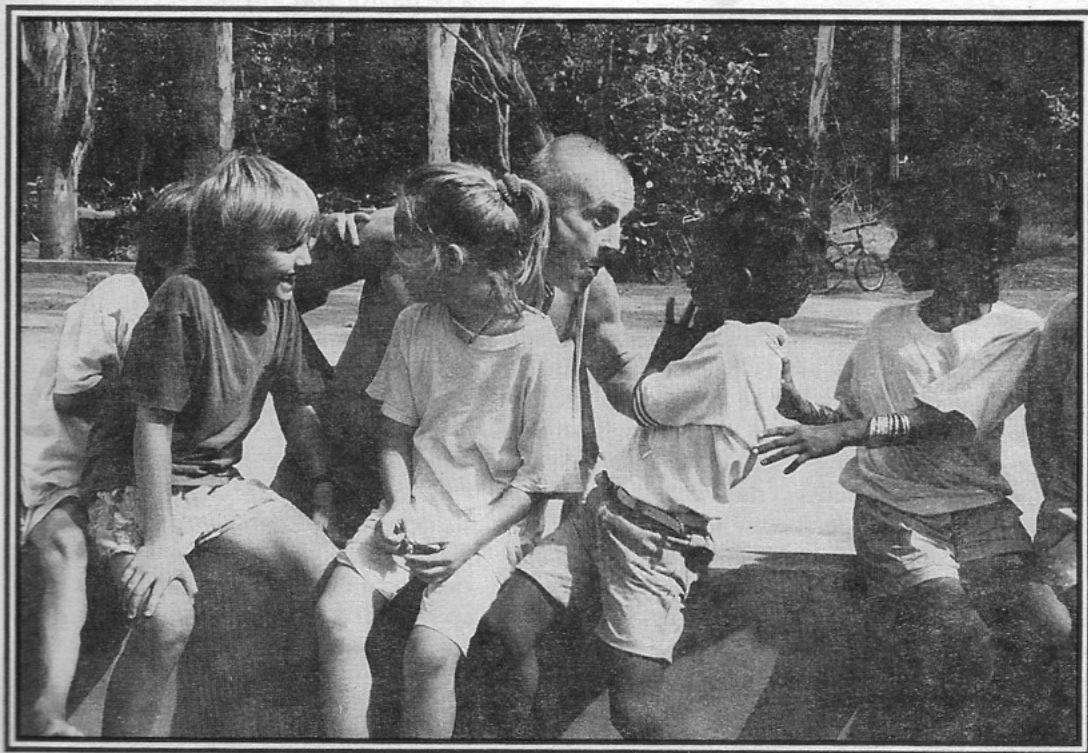


The Solar Kitchen
Anti-clockwise from top: Ramalingam and helper stirring the pot; part of the dining space; behind the scenes.



"Not only windmills"

Ireno's photo exhibition



"With a big smile on my lips... thanks"; "It's the bit of fresh air we all seem to need at the moment"; "Your photos capture the hidden link between us"; "Thank you for opening my eyes to the spirit of Auroville"; these were just some of the enthusiastic comments on the recent exhibition of Ireno's photographs entitled "Auroville: Not only windmills". Ireno's photos capture facets of the Auroville experience which often pass unnoticed or fall through the cracks of "official" reports. Above all, they capture PEOPLE: the joy and togetherness of Aurovilians at a bonfire, villagers bargaining with Auroville kids at the monthly flea-market in the eucalyptus grove, Aurovilians practising T'ai Chi in a field, a pony cropping grass while its rider lies languidly across its back...

There's a sense of spontaneity in these shots, of them being shot "on the wing", which is accentuated by the unfinished quality of some of the photos. The result is they have a freshness, a sense of vitality that more "classically" composed photos do not have: in some magical way, they seem to escape the frame.

There's also a great deal of humour. Sometimes it's obvious: in the front row of a solemn inauguration crowd a young boy yawns luxuriously; on a muddy construction site, a tiny model of the Solar Kitchen perched on a wheelbarrow in front of him, Gilles is earnestly explaining the arcane mysteries of solar steam cooking to a group of politely incredulous officials; a herd of village cattle drink from the pond of a fashionable new Aurovilian villa. But sometimes you have to work at it. For example, in a seemingly inconsequential shot, a circle of Aurovilians are practising T'ai Chi in a field. But when you look closer, you notice that each Aurovilian is solemnly interpreting the movement in his or her own way while, just inside the circle, a bewildered dog stares up at one of the participants in this strange human rite.

A number of photos defy easy analysis, resonating long after the viewer has passed on. In one beach shot, a man is doing a headstand while, some way away, a group are talking together. It seems simple, but this grainy photo has a Bergmanesque quality of desolation, aloneness, and you ache to know more about what is happening. Another haunting shot which, untypically, seems almost classically composed, shows two people

sitting on steps drinking tea while light streams past them into the basement of Bharat Nivas kitchen, illuminating, in the basement beneath, what appears to be an OM sign made out of flowers. What is it all about? Why are the figures there? The resonances ripple on...

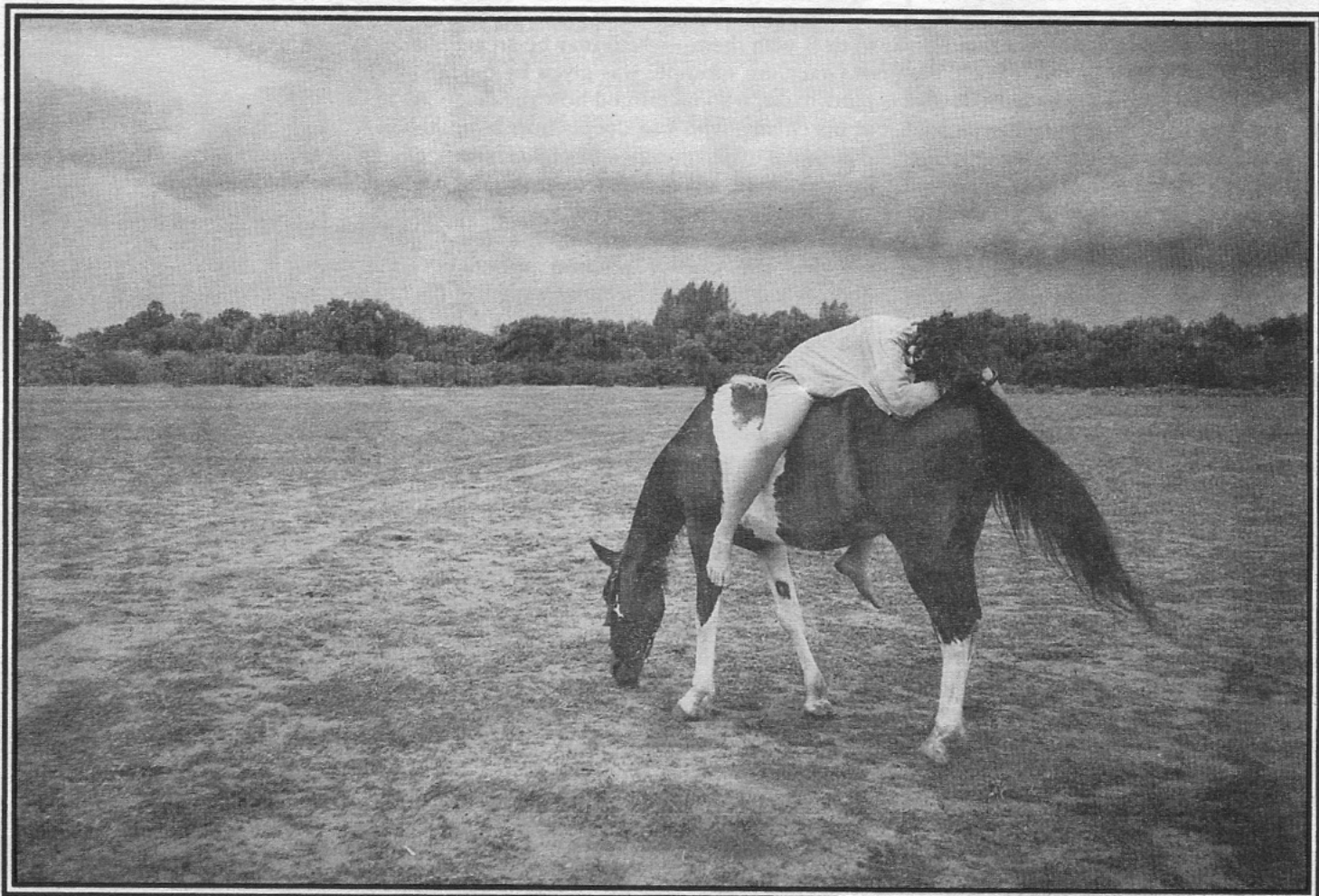
Ireno is, by no stretch of the imagination, a "political" photographer: he is more concerned with capturing the heartbeat of the moment. Yet there are times when he also appears to be making some kind of statement. Take those Matrimandir shots, for example—of a monkey on top of a pile of earth with Matrimandir behind, of a soldier in full battledress blocking the main entrance into the building (this photo is printed very hard, its sharp edges and detail accentuating the shock of the statement), of visitors sprawled on the grass and photographing each other near the Banyan Tree...

Ireno captures something of the incongruity, the un-



finishedness, the unexpectedness, the connectedness, above all, the deep, elusive joy of the Auroville experience in this exhibition. As one enthusiast wrote after viewing it, "You make me feel proud to be an Aurovilian."

Alan



Conflict Along the Road to Human Unity

Vérité is a settlement in Auroville that was literally born out of conflict. In the early 1980's, a group formed to start a new community in Dana and it was to be an ecological settlement project of the newly-founded Centre for Scientific Research. The group split because the ecological and communitarian nature of the new settlement was rejected by some members of the group who wished to develop differently. The others had to begin again from scratch on another site in order to maintain their vision.

The community process that they evolved during the last ten years went through several stages. At first, the pioneer group had to work closely together to establish accommodation, a water source, renewable energy systems, the garden and protection of the land. Even the money was shared and actually conflict did not arise over monetary issues as might ordinarily be expected, but more over the standards of cleanliness in the kitchen and where to build what. During this stage, the community tended to try and decide about even the smallest matters in a collective way. You know: "Can we really afford butter this week?" This

got to be too much after a while and more flexibility came in. Members began to take more into their own hands and be responsible for different areas of work. Materially, a certain infrastructure could then emerge more efficiently but tensions and conflicts arose that the community could not deal with.

The stage to handle these deeper issues took a few more years. Because they were allowed to build up, the community broke up to a certain extent—from my perspective as one of the members—because of these unresolved emotional issues and the lack of understanding of each other. Vérité then had to re-group with more people and go through another shift in its way of working things out. That shift tended to recognize conflict as normal, acceptable and something to be processed before it could grow too dramatically. When people are falling in and out of love with each other and the cou-

ple dynamic has to interface with the core group, quite some processing is needed. Then, as happened in Vérité, when a couple has a child the dynamic becomes more complex. Because of our ordinarily intense and busy lives, Vérité learned that it is essential to set time aside to work on the issues coming up for each one individually and communally. Practically this means that the Vérité Community meets twice a week all together. Once in the evening, at the beginning of the week, for what we call personal sharing. Each one has a safe space to share whatever they wish about what is going on personally for them. One can also be silent, there are not necessarily questions or exchanges between people except when that feels appropriate. A couple of days later, in the morning, is the business meeting. This means all the practical details of the functioning of the community. Occasionally some issues

overlap into both meetings, but essentially the personal sharing meeting creates a basis for the other meeting. Both meetings have short moments of silence and reflection. The business meeting has a facilitator and involves record keeping of decisions taken and evaluations.

The community consciously intends its process to be research in human unity — how to live together in a way that the individual is honoured but the common good is also evolving. Now in Vérité there is a family, couple dynamics, an age range from five to eighty-four, and a variety of personalities plus guests. Of course it is an unending story, funny, sad, miraculous, crazy and all the rest. Such living experiments sound perhaps somewhat bizarre when described, but in practice tend to be more of an amazing grace. When energy becomes focussed with a certain goodwill, the effects can be quite surprising. While the road still stretches way beyond our comprehension and certainly conflicts are still arising, it does seem that we can continue along this road to human unity with a sense that we are on the track of the future. For another version of this story, just ask anyone else living in Vérité.

Bill

TRUE UNITY IS WITHIN

Report of a workshop

On Sunday December 28th, about 25 people gathered in the Hall of Harmony at Quiet, the Auroville Healing Centre at the beach, to explore the concept of Human Unity. "You must be mad to want to organise such a workshop when there are so many disputes, when there is so much distrust in the community at present" was only one of the discouraging comments which the organisers received. Nevertheless, the workshop was very stimulating, perhaps most of all because of the key question which the participants tried to address: how does each one of us deal with feelings of disunity, separateness and even hatred in the daily life. Some reflections by Carel.

Auroville is a small community with a past of often fierce disagreements. Old hatreds die hard, old disagreements and broken relationships are not easily forgotten and many Aurovilians still have psychological scars from the clashes of the past and carry in themselves a collection of hurt feelings. Added to that are the fresh hurts from the problems of today.

Do Aurovilians "work" on their pain, do they make serious attempts to overcome it? Not normally. That is, that there seems to be a tendency—common to all humanity—to store away one's hurt feelings because the very memory of them is so painful... and the very thought of looking them full in the face, letting the light of reason or love shine on them, is repulsive—as if we are secretly in love with our own pain, or lack the courage to confront it. The fact that we as individuals may have grown in consciousness since the hurt was caused, that the other person has also no doubt grown, and that from the standpoint of our increased consciousness the hurt could possibly be removed from the body of our beings, is often not considered. And so we contin-

ue to cherish our wounds in silent suffering, because we believe that the other person is not open to reconciliation. One participant in the workshop mentioned the particular problem of trying to reach unity with those who hold on to their point of view based on something resembling a religious conviction. For example, those who believe that others have betrayed Mother or have betrayed Auroville. This type of conviction, which is a hidden root-cause of feelings of separateness, distrust and disharmony among Aurovilians, is still very much alive and has never really been tackled.

Sometimes life does not allow one to bury one's problems and one is forced to deal with them—which may be an act of Grace. An example was given by one participant, who recounted how the face of his enemy, who had deeply hurt him, continued to haunt his thoughts and dreams, until he decided to pray and "put light" on that person whenever those thoughts occurred. After a few months, the enemy phoned spontaneously and proposed to renew the old friendship...

It also happens frequently in Auroville that circumstances conspire to bring people together in a common area of work. These circumstances too are blessings in disguise: for they force one to review one's mental and emotional image of the other, to open the door to that hidden pain, and let it be modified by the new experience. And if both persons allow for such modification, they also allow for the pain to disappear and a sense of brother- and sisterhood, of an underlying unity or even of a hesitating beginning of a new and deeper friendship, to emerge in its place.

Mother offered another way to solve problems. "Instead of quarrelling, the best thing to do is to enter into the

other's consciousness, and ask yourself why he says things like that, what is it that pushes him to do this or say that? What is the inner reason, what is his vision of things which makes him take this attitude? It is extremely interesting. If you do this, immediately you stop being angry."⁽¹⁾ "When you enter his head, suddenly you enter into his way of thinking, and next, just imagine, you understand why he is speaking to you thus! And then, if you have a fairly swift intelligence, and put what you have just come to understand alongside what you had known before, you have the two ways together, so can find the truth reconciling both... You must not look and then make a mental effort, telling yourself: 'Why does he say that?' You will never arrive at anything. You won't understand, you will imagine all kinds of explanations which will be worthless and teach you nothing at all except to tell yourself: 'That person is stupid or else wicked'—things that lead to nowhere. On the other hand, if you only make that little movement, and instead of looking at him as an object quite alien to you, you try to enter within, you enter within, into that little head that's before you, and then, suddenly, you find yourself on the other side, you look at yourself and understand quite well what he is saying."⁽²⁾

Mother spoke of an effective human unity as one of the aims of Auroville. As true unity comes from within, it becomes evident why she described as the first essential condition for a true Aurovillian to have made "the inner discovery, to find out who one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the centre there is a being, free, vast and all knowing who awaits our discovery and ought to become the active centre of our being and life in Auroville."⁽³⁾ On that level, terms like "mutual understanding and brotherhood" lose their academic connotation and become what they should be: household words of human unity.

(1) Questions and Answers 1954

(2) Questions and Answers 1953

(3) Message of 13-6-1970

Towards unity (continued from p.3)

that everything is beautifully arranged for a particular purpose: that every thought, every act, every success, every failure, every conflict, every new initiative, every seemingly chance encounter ineluctably serves the one end: human unity.

Of course, you had always known this was the ideal. But your ordinary experience seems to tell you that it is far, far away; or even (when you have had a bad day) that it had packed its bags and gone looking for sunnier circumstances elsewhere. Your new vision, however, reveals something else. For you suddenly see that, because we are of a certain spiritual density, and because the whole world of personalities has to be represented on this tiny plot of earth if progress is to be integral, the process of unification which is underway will take—at least to our understanding—some time.

What else do you see now? You see that each individual receives precisely the correct dose of stimulus that enables him or her to escape the gravitational pull of security and atavism and to strive towards a greater inner and outer harmony; you see how each encounter—whatever value our superficial self places upon it—contributes to the intricate dance of insight and knowledge that we all participate in and all gain from; you see how, as we come together and move apart and come together with others, we develop and integrate aspects of our selves, gradually weakening our ego boundaries and extending and strengthening the many intricate links between us. And you see how the sheer variety of personalities and cultures we encounter here keeps us fully alive, prevents us deifying our own perspectives, while forcing us deeper, deeper, until we reach the point where difference dissolves into identity.

Imagine how it would be if we all experienced Auroville like this. Imagine... (Alan)

INTO THE LIGHT OF 1998

A thousand lights for Peace

On New Year's Eve, a meditation for World Peace took place inside the construction site of the Tibetan Pavilion. One thousand tiny oil lamps lined the foundation of the Pavilion which is in the form of a mandala. Within this thousand-lights mandala sat a concentrated group holding lighted incense sticks distributed by Tibetan Aurovilians. The pillars to hold the upper floors of the Pavilion rose up and disappeared into the night sky creating the effect of some ancient Stonehenge, or some Greek or Vedic temple. The intense silence could contain the comings and goings of people, the occasional cough or whisper of a child or dog barking in the distance. One remembered the Dalai Lama's visit and the brick from Tibet that he laid as a foundation stone. One saw the faces in the lamp light, faces reflecting so many countries of the world, and there was peace.

New Year's Eve party

The same couldn't be said of the (alcohol-free) New Year's Eve fancy-dress party which, a

little later that evening, started on the roof of the Solar Kitchen. Many Aurovilians danced till the early morning, and Diego won the first prize with his startling disguise as a belly dancer. The first minutes of the new year showed outbursts of universal brotherhood, when everybody hugged everybody else. The generally sweet atmosphere was temporarily disturbed later in the morning by drunken youth from outside Auroville who vandalised some vehicles.

New Year's music

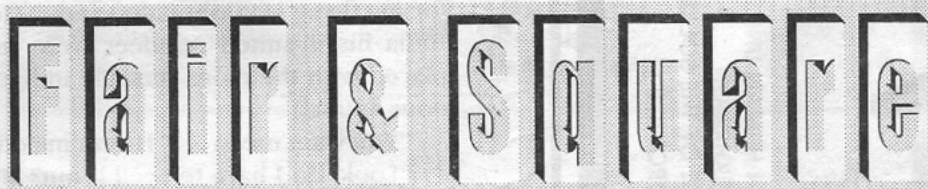
Another, by now traditional, celebration took place in Pitanga Hall, where at midnight some seventy people listened to Sunil's New Year's music. The high pressure under which Sunil must have been creating the music this year (he was regularly brought from the Ashram Nursing Home to his studio in order to complete the work in time) must have added to its intensity and richness. The music was not only profoundly appreciated by all, but also provided many with a base for an intense re-dedication at the dawn of

the new year. Afterwards there was, here too, some quiet and intense hugging. Wishes for a good new year were quietly expressed while in the background the music of the New Year's party continued to thunder into the night sky.

Dawn Bonfire

The Dawn Bonfire at 5 a.m. that morning turned out to be a little more noisy than usual, as many children from the surrounding villages had turned up to be part of the fun. The huge bonfire roared up into the night sky and seemed to kindle the gentle light of '98 as it so very gradually dawned and stirred the thousand or so people in the Amphitheatre into greeting each other in all kinds of languages.

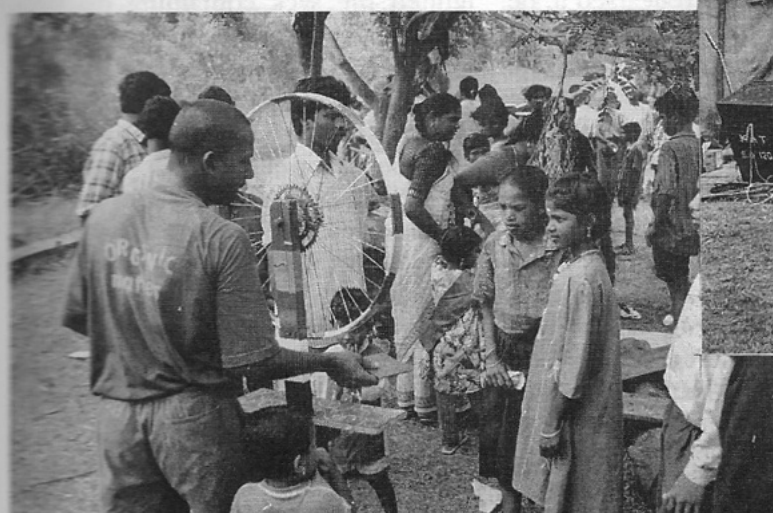
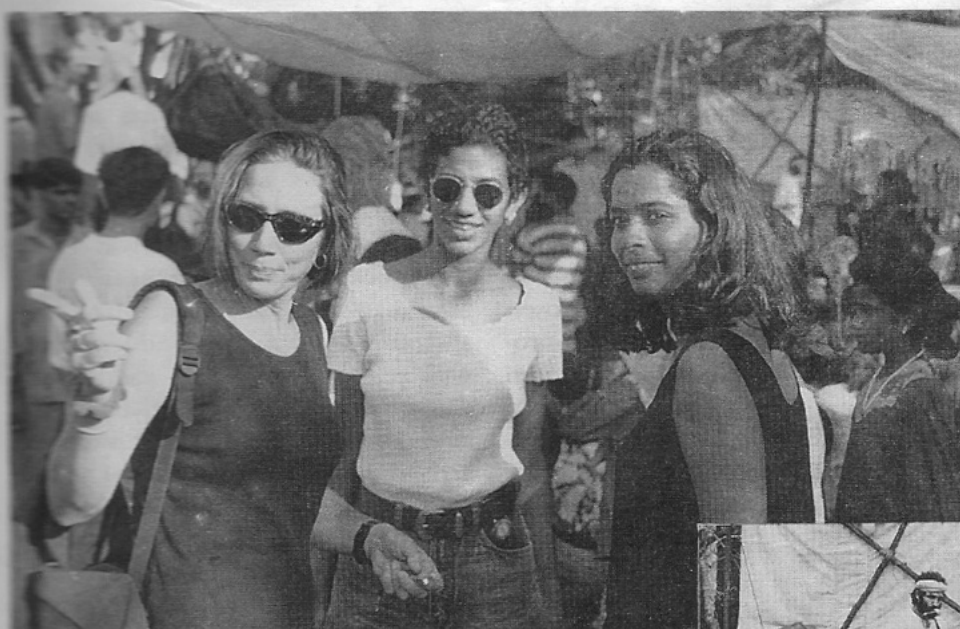
As the first rays of the new year sun came in shafts through the trees of the Matrimandir gardens, the crowd strolled over to the nearby Cuisine Solaire. They overwhelmed the recently inaugurated Solar Kitchen by sheer numbers, but almost everyone received some tea, a croissant, and a banana.



On X-mas day the traditional Christmas fair was held—this time Fair & Square. This year's event was not only the most well-organised fair yet but also drew record crowds. All the standard Fair games were running plus a few new ones. This year saw Himal pioneer rooftop rides in his three-wheeled propellor-driven car and a live performance of Johnny baking cakes and biscuits in a woodfired mud oven.

This year the main area (a vast grassy space

beside the Information Centre) featured a covered stage integrated into the body of the Fair. (Previous years had seen the stage some distance from the main body of the event.) There was an almost continuous program of live music headlined by Deadpan and The Cardboard Cut-outs performing Elvis numbers. Live music was interspersed with death-defying magic acts (sawing a child in half), high-energy dance performances from Isaiambalam School and New Creation School dance troupes, traditional Tamil shadow puppets with Rajappa and Rajamma and their two pet squirrels, and also belly-dancing. Dinner was provided, after which the 1997 "Johnny Play"—now an institution—went on stage. With offstage rhyming-couplet narration and on stage scenes improvised to match, The Square Wall defied its scant nine day rehearsal to produce entertaining theatre. The evening from there continued with live music from Equinox. At around 11.30 a mirror-ball was hung from the canopy of the stage and dance music was played until the generator threatened to overheat at one o'clock in the morning. An hour later those of us who had remained to clean up went home.



The X-mas Fair

Clockwise from top:

Fair ladies (l. to r.) Ange, Anita, Suhasini; a band in need of an audience; the Whoopie Wheel of Fortune.

In Brief

Odissi Grace

"Seemingly effortless charm of movement, subtle elegance and perfection of expression," this is how one could describe the Odissi dance recital of Madhavi Mudgal on December 27th which enchanted her audience. If there was any complaint, it was that Madhavi was dancing to recorded music, as live music would have been so much more rich. In spite of that, Madhavi's performance was a treat to connoisseurs and a joy for all those who, ignorant of the deeper meanings of the dance poses, nevertheless realised that they were witnessing one of the greatest exponents of this ancient dance form.

A harmony of hums

Singing in Auroville's choir might score highest on Auroville's list of contributions towards human unity. The sheer joy of singing in harmony forces you, normally, to look a little more benevolently at the person next to you, someone with whom you may even have had a serious disagreement. The result of this harmony was audible on December 23rd, when Nuria convincingly guided forty-odd adults and twenty children through Vivaldi's "Gloria" and a number of other songs. Most touching was a song without words, "Earth's Aspiration Chant," a melody given by The Mother which was set for four humming voices by Nuria. The harmony of hums showed profundities of depths perhaps symbolical for Auroville, where words often cloud the underlying unity. The audience, as might be expected, was greatly appreciative.

Environmental award for AV

At the 6th World Environment Congress in Delhi, organized by the Indian Institute of Ecology and Environment, two Aurovilians, Ann and Peter Thurrell, gave presentations and received an environmental award on behalf of Auroville. They had been invited to attend by Dr. Asiananda (Rajiv Gandhi Chair for World Order Studies), a good friend of Auroville.

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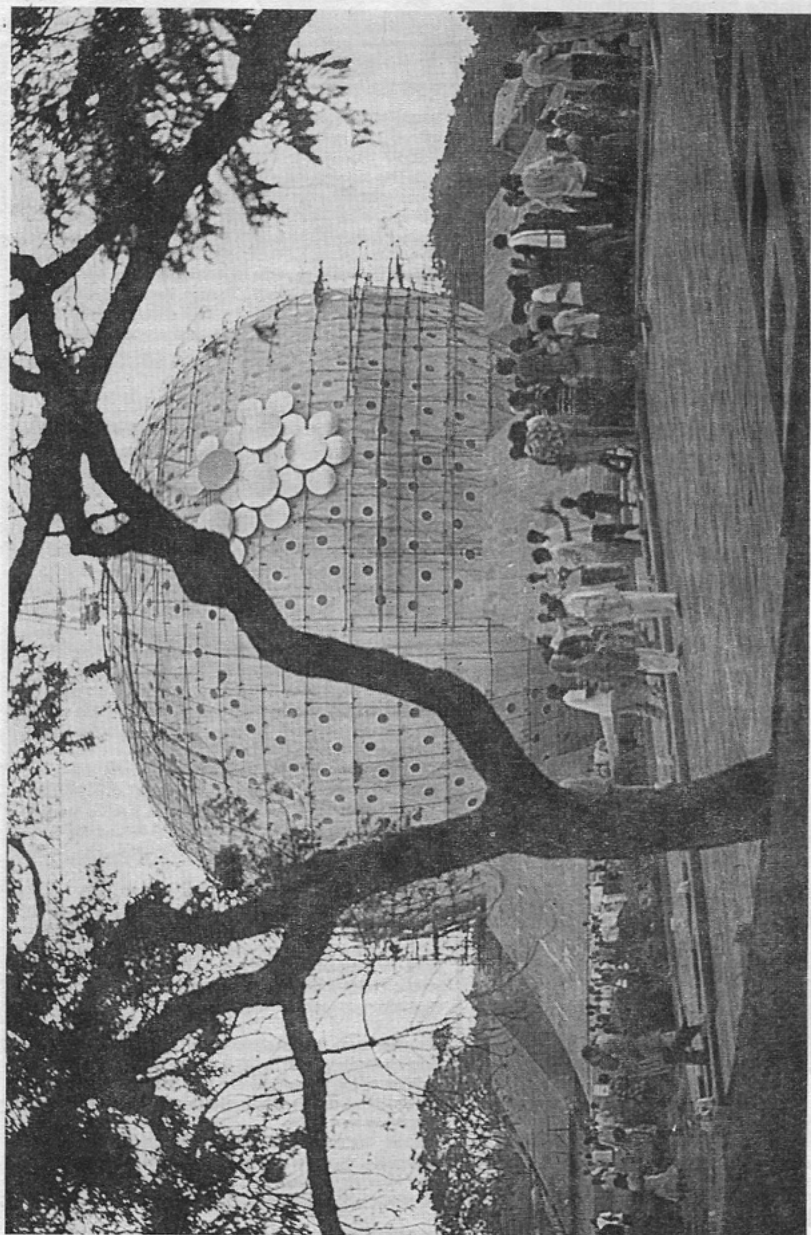
Unity

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- A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE SOLAR KITCHEN
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C/O KRISHNA T.
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Dawn at Matrimandir on New Year's day

Santa visits Auroville

How water-buffaloes landed on a balcony...

At 3 a.m. the phone rang. "Yes?" I croaked into the receiver. "Hey, ciao, this is Santa." His accent, thick from travelling the globe, sounded strangely Italian.

"Santa?" I responded disbelievingly.

"Ya, ya. Look I'm a busy man, I don't have much time so I speak quickly. The children in Auroville have been so good," he said with a chuckle in his voice, "that I'm going to visit them three times."

"Three times?" The surprise in my voice was evident. Santa's flagrant departure from convention jolted me suddenly awake.

"Ya, ya, get over it. Okay, I need your help to find suitable landing areas for my flying water-buffalo vandi." (In India his ill-suited reindeer were replaced with the more versatile indigenous animal)

"You want me to..." He cut me off.

"Look, do I have to spell it out? My first stop is at Ayesha and Milan's house on Saturday. I need a place to land. Can you handle it?"

"Well, I suppose so, but..." The receiver went dead. Santa was gone, off on another present-giving mission leaving me to make sense of his garbled instructions.

That Saturday at Ayesha and Milan's house I arrived to find many children, big and small, playing, eating, crying, laughing—generally having a good time. Perfect Santa territory I thought to myself. How does the old codger figure it out? He was spot on—these kids definitely wanted presents. The question was: would he come? Sure enough, as darkness fell, over the noise downstairs, a thump followed by the sound of heavy bells was heard upstairs. All fell silent and all looked in the direction of the noise—a first floor balcony I had earlier chosen as a landing site. (Santa failed to provide me with water-buffalo minimum runway-length statistics, so I guessed a balcony would do.) A moment later, to our amazement, a red rotund figure with white beard and tall pointed hat descended the spiral staircase beside the balcony.

"Ho, ho, hooo" came the trademark guffaw, "Merry Christmas!" and almost as if he had previously rehearsed it, he expertly made his way to a swing seat a few metres from the balcony where he settled himself. Over his shoulder he carried two or three large burlap sacks (with some difficulty) which he placed beside him on the seat. The children gathered so close around him that a couple of times I heard him ask them to move back because the little ones at the front were getting squashed. Then he called out the children's names one by one, said a few words to them and gave them a present of fruit and sweets. When all the children were happy, he rose to his feet and made his

way as unobtrusively as a fat guy wearing a red suit and pointed hat could across the crowd. When he arrived at the spiral staircase again, he waved farewell, paused for photos and left, not without giving me a wink. Later I thought I could hear him calling to his water-buffalo across the sky: "On Danalakshmi, on Babu, on Rajendran..."

The next night he called me again. Our next rendezvous was at Transition school on the last day before its vacation began. There Santa had to land in a millet field. Heavy rain had reduced visibility to almost zero and hampered early landing efforts but his water-buffalo took it in their stride. He appeared to everyone's surprise including mine, behind a large circular door in the school's main hall. Everyone was singing when he finally knocked (the door was locked). The singing ceased and he was let in. We said a loud hello. Then he said a few words about how he believed Santa can be anything you want and he just wanted to be a happy guy who handed out presents. A sharp-eyed youngster down the front told Santa he'd forgotten to take his shoes off! Santa quickly complied, removing his boots and throwing them out the window. Then he almost forgot to hand out the presents. But the children made sure he quickly remembered. This time Santa forgot no one. Everyone got a present—there were special presents for smaller children and bigger children and all the people who work at the school including the ammas and the teachers. Even I got a present.

The third and last time Santa visited Auroville in 1997 was at the Rock Garden near the Matrimandir. Under a frangipani tree surrounded by candles and festooned with paper lanterns and shimmering Christmas stars, Santa arrived to the sound of children singing. This time he arrived with so many presents he had to cart them up the hill in a wheelbarrow. He needed help to clear a couple of larger-than-usual bunds. A candle perched on the wheelbarrow's front lit his way. All went well until the candle ignited the sack containing his presents. There were a few tense moments whilst Santa struggled to control the small blaze. Fortunately his beard did not catch fire too and none of the children were any the wiser. Two hundred children of differing ages sat quietly and received presents and blessing-packets from Santa and his band of beautiful Christmas angels. There were even presents given for brothers and sisters who were not there. For the third and last time, Santa quietly left, promising to return in 1998.

Jesse