

AUROVILLE TODAY

Number 95 December 1996

Celebration

Both in India and the West this is the time of year that the most exuberant celebrations and festivals take place. In this issue we present an overview of the rich and colourful festival year of our neighbours, the people of Tamil Nadu. These festivals, of course, are religious in origin. But Auroville aspires to pass beyond religions. So what do we celebrate here? And how? We try to find out.

In November we welcomed a new Secretary to the Foundation to Auroville. In this issue we profile Mr. Bala Baskar, the man in one of the hotter seats of this hot subcontinent. Finally, we share the extraordinary experience of how Tsering, who is now an Aurovillian, escaped from Tibet: an ordeal by ice rather than by fire.



PHOTO: SVEN

What do we celebrate?

“There’s no joy here, you don’t know how to celebrate together.” We hear it quite often from visitors. They come expecting to find a New-Age kind of caring and celebratory community, but instead encounter stone-faced Aurovilians, jaws forward, hurtling along dust roads or crashing the line at the ‘Pour Tous’ vegetable counter in their hurry to get to their next appointment.

Are Aurovilians incapable of enjoying themselves, of celebrating together? It’s not through lack of opportunities: bonfires in the Amphitheatre, fairs, cultural events, parties, picnics, full moons at the beach, Deepavali, Christmas are all occasions when something joyful, something other than the jaw-jutting attitude is evoked. Yet it’s also true that many of these events happen infrequently, and none of them—not even the bonfires—attract all ‘flavours’ of the community. Maybe there’s some truth, then, in those visitors’ perceptions. Maybe Auroville is not a ‘celebratory culture’, at least in any immediately identifiable sense.

Why not? One reason may be that the community is still too young to have developed forms of celebration that appeal to all its many sub-cultures and personalities. Another possibility is that life here is just too hard for there to be the time or energy for much celebration. Yet in the early days, when the physical reality was much harder than it is today, when there were far fewer people and minimal resources, there always seemed to be time for reviews, happenings, playfulness, in unlikely venues like the Forecomers canyon. Perhaps, as a number of longer-term Aurovilians have noted, there was something very different in the atmosphere then, something more encouraging of such moments: a lightness, a sense of psychic opening, of joyfulness, stemming from Mother’s physical

presence. Everybody was much younger then, they were Her children, and a new world seemed about to manifest. And the conflicts which were to divide some Aurovilians from others were still in the future...

Lack of energy, of a shared culture, of the right psychic conditions—all of these are undoubtedly factors which make it more difficult for a community culture of celebration to take root. But a more powerful factor still may be the doubts in the minds of some Aurovilians concerning the need for celebration. Rolf, who has helped organise a number of artistic happenings and workshops, points out that the organisers of such events never feel supported by the whole community. “Somehow there’s a feeling that celebrations, artistic happenings, are peripheral events and are not ‘serious’ work.” Some Aurovilians go further, arguing that conventional forms of celebration are not appropriate for the integral yoga, as they indulge the vital rather than helping us focus within. Others question whether we should be celebrating at all given their feeling that we are still so far from attaining Mother’s Dream. “We did not come here to enjoy ourselves,” they argue. “We came to concentrate all our efforts on discovering our psychic being, on transformation.” It is an orientation most powerfully expressed in that aspect of Satprem’s writings which emphasises that it is the suffocation which comes from extreme friction with one’s present reality that constitutes the lever for transcending it.

The power of such an argument is that it supports subliminal assumptions that many of us have grown up with which associate spirituality with asceticism and pain. Celebration and spirituality, such arguments seem to conclude, cannot coexist.

This begs a crucial question. What do we mean when we talk about celebration in Auroville? What do we want to celebrate? Is the impulse just like anywhere else—an escape from the daily grind? A holiday from the self? A chance to play out parts of the being that don’t usually see daylight?

No doubt, it often includes the above. But when Juanita remarks that, “We have so much to celebrate here”, she is talking about something else. “It’s such a privilege to know about Mother and to be here, to be part of this experiment.” Celebration, then, doesn’t have to be escapism. It can equally be an affirmation and evocation, a sense of gratitude for the Grace which has brought us together and holds us together for a very special purpose. And it’s also to do with appreciation: appreciation and love for the craziness, pathos yet understated heroism of those who are still hacking away at the messy rock-face that conceals a seam of gold. Agreed, the forms that our celebrations take are often conventional and inappropriate to our deepest needs. Or else, as Johnny puts it, we sometimes want to celebrate but don’t know how. We need new forms, new occasions into which to pour ourselves, new projects like Kalabhumi in the Cultural Zone where Aurovilians can “explore themselves through art and celebrate all day long”. Yet, if we look carefully, there ARE already Aurovilian forms of celebration which may well be missed by the casual visitor. In the past, for example, there were the Matrimandir concretings, hour after hour of bone-hard work, yet also of wonderful connectedness and fun, as when a chetty of concrete came up the line topped off with a packet of birthday sweets. There was the afternoon we followed, in carnival procession, Wazo’s enor-

(continued on page 2)

What do we... (continued from page 1)

mous papier mache firebird from the depths of the Greenbelt to the Amphitheatre. Or the day we put up Roger's windmill, beginning with the lighting of incense and tying 'protection' (bougainvillea) to the tower and ending, many hair-raising hours later, with home-made music under the stars. Celebration. Togetherness. Evocation. They were there in the atmosphere, in the faces, at the 'Good Work Fair', at the children's opera. They are there at countless birthday gatherings, in those moments during meetings when words drop away. And, at a more personal level, they are there in the daily arranging of flowers before Mother's picture, in walks in the palmyra forest, in the inner dance with the shifting tones, colours and moods which are Auroville. In the quiet attempt to hold without spilling the joy that wells up unexpectedly in the midst of the mundane...

Finally, as Rolf puts it, "Our aim is to grow into a way of living where everything is celebration, where everything is joyfully done." Such joy, in its purest and most spontaneous form, is a sign of inner surrender and of the awakening of the psychic being which is the first step on the Sunlit Path. If we cannot yet celebrate that goal, at least we can try celebrating the journey. But that requires something else that Aurovilians are not particularly famous for: the gargantuan, unassailable humour of an Aristophanes or a Rabelais which can look on all steadily—our foibles, our nonsense, our little achievements—and take them up in a cosmic belly-laugh that explodes our seriousness, or amour propre, while loosening us to our larger selves.

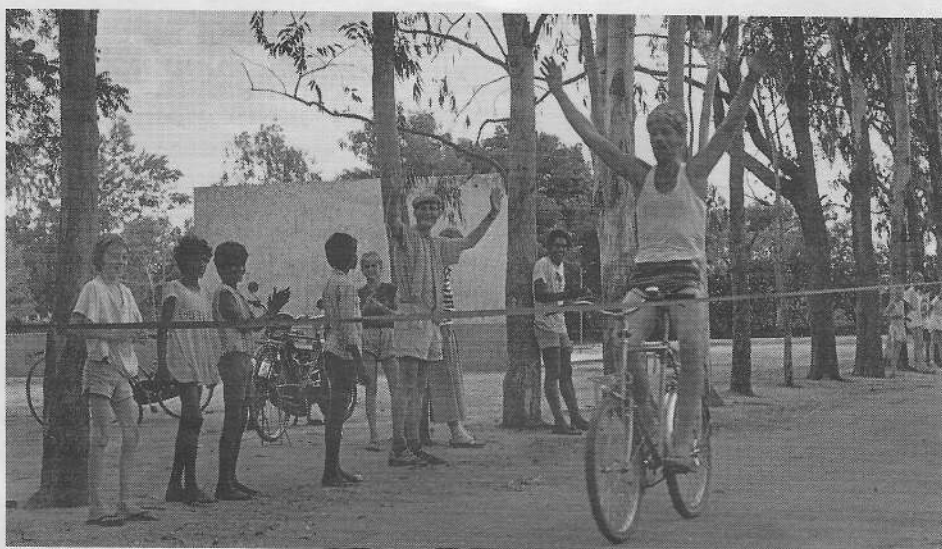
Sri Aurobindo said it all: "If men took life less seriously, they could very soon make it more perfect. God never takes His works seriously; therefore one looks out on this wonderful Universe". **Alan**



PHOTOS on this page (clockwise from top):

1. Paul at his Mambo tea stall during the Good Work Fair (1992)
2. Celebrating Deepavali in Certitude
3. A seminar on Human Unity, during the 1995 "birthday week"
4. A New Year's bonfire in the Amphitheatre
5. Diego wins an Auroville cycle race

Photos: John Mandeem



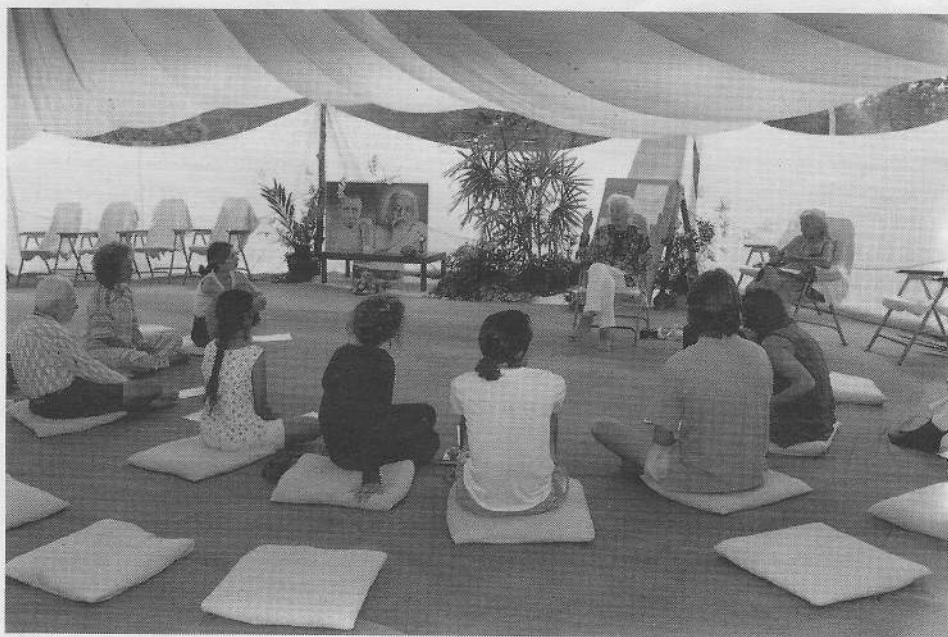
Find the inner sun

The only way to make life perfect—I mean here, life on earth, of course—is to look at it from high enough to see it as a whole, not only in its present totality, but in the whole of the past, present and future: what it has been, what it is and what it will be—one must be able to see everything at once. Because that is the only way to put everything in its place. Nothing can be eliminated, nothing **SHOULD** be eliminated, but each thing must be in its place in total harmony with the rest. And then all these things that seem so 'bad', so 'reprehensible', so 'unacceptable' to the puritan mind, would become movements of delight and freedom in a totally divine life. And then nothing would prevent us from knowing, understanding, feeling and living this wonderful laughter of the Supreme who takes infinite delight in watching Himself infinitely.

This delight, this wonderful laughter that dissolves every shadow, every pain, every suffering! You have only to go deep enough within yourself to find the inner Sun, to let yourself be flooded by it; and then there is nothing but a cascade of harmonious, luminous, sunlit laughter, which leaves no room for any shadow or pain....

And this Sun, this Sun of divine laughter is at the centre of all things, the truth of all things: we must learn to see it, to feel it, to live it..

(Collected Works of The Mother, Vol.10, page 157)



THOSE WERE THE DAYS...

The inauguration of Matrimandir

We walked everywhere in those days—few people had access to a bicycle, let alone a motorbike, and the various vans and jeeps owned by Auroville were kept for working trips.

So on February 21st, 1971, we set off from Aspiration long before dawn. Perhaps there were twenty or twenty five of us in the little convoy—a mix of adults and children from the newly-started school, with Filare and Aurokarl, just four and five months old, in pushchairs. We passed through the deserted streets of Kuilapalayam, escorted by a pack of noisy dogs.

It was completely dark. Someone up front had a flashlight; we stayed close together and steered by starlight.

In those days, the road to the Centre ran directly north from Abri corner to the Banyan tree. Just east of the tree some brick pillars had been erected, and in front of them a fire was lit. Perhaps it was the first of Auroville's celebratory bonfires? I don't have a clear memory of the sunrise, or of Nolini and Aurofilio laying the inauguration stone of the future Matrimandir.

What I remember is the few of us striding out in the darkness—and the sense of being inside some marvellous epic tale, the promise of golden beginnings quivering in the air all around us. I remember thinking, as we turned northwards at the corner, perhaps even saying aloud, "One day we will tell the great-grandchildren about this".

Shraddhavan

The concretings

Auroville never was very "celebratory" in an outward, Western, party sort of way. The Matrimandir concretings were our celebration in the early 70s. Also, teaching sessions with Madhav Pandit or Savitri readings with Narad or after-dinner conversations atop the brick circles under the Banyan were about as "vital" as we got. (Of course, we did have some pretty festive "baricades" parties during our battles with the SAS, and the French—some say they were reborn "revolutionaries"—were well-spirited teachers. The time many of us were thrown in jail for a few days was fairly festive as well.)

We were from those days when Mother was still quite present, if not in body at least in spirit. The lower vital was suspect, and the best celebration most of us could think of was a darshan meditation.

Roger Toll

All-Auroville dinner

On the evening of August 15th, 1974 all Aurovilians were invited by 'For All/Pour Tous' to come and experiment in a first collective holiday dinner in Aspiration. The children were asked to serve it: they all wore their blue sports shorts and white shirts. All the trees around the garden were strung with little white lights, and the single tree in the garden's center had blue lights with a low table next to it for a gigantic birthday cake (Alice baked it and said she would never do that again!).

As you arrived by bus or cycle you followed a candle-lit path (brown paper bags folded half-way down and filled with sand and a candle) into the garden area where the seating was laid. There was a sound system with the gentle classical guitar music of

David who played throughout the evening. And the menu was either vegetarian or mutton biriyani and salad with, of course, a lovely and delicious dessert. Oh yes, everyone sang "Happy Birthday" to Sri Aurobindo and India in One.

As an experiment in collective dining it went very well at no extra cost for food. All the extra expense for the lighting and rental of rugs and dishes was paid by a guest who was so impressed by the evening where several hundred Aurovilians gathered so peacefully and joyously together.

Clare

Joy aplenty

My life story over 25 years of living and visiting Auroville includes many occasions, often unexpected and in an unfamiliar mode, of celebration and attendant joy. There was one occasion I especially remember in Auroville as both joyful, celebratory, and involving the whole community—that was the Good Work Fair at Bharat Nivas organized by Johnny and Bhavana, if I remember correctly. It was in February of 1993. Another I remember under the Banyan Tree was when Madame Ludmilla Zhivkova, Cultural Minister of Bulgaria, came to Auroville and presented a multitude of red roses, and chocolates. Kireet Joshi attended also. Very special, very joyful.

What about the Peace Trees, the first one? And Aurovilians really know how to celebrate birthdays, their own and others... a deluge of goodwill, love, flowers, sweets, special little gifts. One Christmas at Center



Savitri reading in an Auroville canyon, 1970

Kitchen, focused on the children, was another sparkle aplenty... candles, treats, and some little something for each child. It was a celebration done with simplicity and enjoyed by youngsters and adults.

I can see, though, how visitors can come up with the view of not much joy abounding since they land in the midst of the busy, very busy season. Nowadays Aurovilians schedules are full, full with apparently not much room for celebration, slow-paced, and flowing. In the early days I recall events with playfulness, like the drama in the Canyon put on by Bob and Deborah Lawlor at Forecomers.

June Maher

Harmonic convergence

From time to time we do have shared moments of celebration, when people come together in a joyful way, and every-



Aurovilians and Ashramites concentrate together near the Banyan tree, 1970

thing is easy, flowing, playful. Like the night under the stars, April, 1995.

Celebrating the Spring Equinox. The Inca calendar mentioned this day as one of those auspicious days, with lots of planetary stuff coming together. A similar event happening in Mexico, with the Dalai Lama presiding. Universal Harmonic Convergence Day. Aztec dancers, visitors from France, pound out a rhythm with their ponderous ankle bells. You can reach us by music, it seems. Music and a night full of stars. Rabiya and her circle dance to get us started, so we could create something beyond ourselves. No one to lead, just some instruments playing—tambourine, bells, sticks, drums of various sizes. Maybe it was the convergence of the night and the stars and the open sky and the freedom to choose. We got something going. Nobody leading, everybody listening. A terrific tribal happening, having its own time, creating its own space within and without. A nice night.

Jill

The Peace Table

I find the word 'celebration', which implies a joyful collective gathering, too limited for Auroville. Though many events in Auroville's 28 years correspond to this definition, there are those

which go beyond even that to something so sublime that all words feel irrelevant.

I am thinking particularly of the Peace Table inauguration ceremony this past February 29th. That event was beautiful beyond words. Each person who attended received a handful of fragrant flowers. The crowded room focused its attention as Himal began with the enchanting

sounds of an aboriginal digeridoo, followed by inspired readings from Sri Aurobindo, words on the Table's creator, George Nakashima, his daughter Mirra's flute recital, Sunil's music, even tabla players interactively drumming across the resonant Peace Table itself. The atmosphere was golden... as if the whole room was carried beyond... In closing, everyone "anointed" the Table with their handful of flowers.

Yes, the people and occasion provided the *adhar*, but the palpable Presence which filled the room could only happen in Auroville. A collective Opening and a collective Grace. Perhaps this is what I mean by a Celebration beyond the ordinary definition.

And it is these moments which remind me of my gratitude to Auroville and the Aurovilians who struggle through the day-to-day.

Soleil

CARVING THE PUMPKIN

I used to celebrate Auroville bonfires until they became a tourist attraction. This became obvious last year when buses, taxis, Marutis, vans, rickshaws and coaches; lined up in the pre-dawn darkness blocked the road all the way from the Matrimandir Gardens to Edayanchavadi. Next year I wouldn't be surprised if the villagers turned their vendis into makeshift lemonade and souvenir stands. *Faut de mieux*. I have turned to celebrating in different ways.

I used to live in what was for a while the Free Republic Of Central Certitude. This brief-lived attempt lasted all of one Summer. Sometime before my departure from this locality—an event that involved all my possessions, including my bicycle, being rather unceremoniously loaded into a village vendi—I had managed to have St. Patrick declared the patron saint of our community. Those who celebrated his feast day were a select group of *connoisseurs* who cannot be mentioned here for obvious reasons. Well-timed, the wearing of the green happened to coincide with the end of the silly season when the last of the Kinetic Honda workshop breeding crowd of fair-weather tourists had returned home to the real world.

After a not uneventful year in the transit zone I eventually moved to Parthana where I took to seriously celebrating Halloween. Some three years back, on that particular day, I was standing in line at Pour Tous when an eminent member of our community turned to me and inquired with a distinctly mellifluous Indo-Gangetic cadence to her voice:

"Roger, why are you carrying two pumpkins?"

"Because tonight is Halloween—an ancient Celtic festival." A longish meditative silence followed as the Ganges forced its meandering way through Himalayan fastnesses and the line inched ever so imperceptibly forward; a silence that was finally broken by another query:

"Roger, what exactly do you celebrate on Halloween?"

"It's the opening up and meeting of the worlds, visible and invisible." Another silence ensued but the Ganges had now started rolling majestically across the northern plains. And the line was moving rapidly forward. My meditation was brought to a sudden halt by another question:

"Roger, How do you know what worlds you are opening up to?"

But I was ready for that one and Varanasi was in sight.

"It depends on how you carve the pumpkin." Our turn at the counter was next.

As to what transpired that night I refer our readers to my article City Life in Auroville Today #71. It should be mentioned, however, that sometime shortly after displaying my lit-up pumpkin in the stair-well, my neighbour closed off his entrance on our till then mutual landing and muttered something, *sotto voce*, about erecting a cast iron gate on the 1st floor entrance. But that's all one. This year the traditional trick or treat was replaced with a Mystery Night, complete with haunted house and costume competition. It was screaming fun.

Roger

THE TAMIL FESTIVAL YEAR

Photo:
Selling clay dolls for
Navarathri festival



India is a country where festivals and rituals abound in profusion. Almost every month there is a festival which is celebrated with intense social gaiety – with the lighting of lamps, the distribution of sweetmeats, the playing of music and the people, even the poor, wearing new clothes. At home, the celebration tends to centre around the woman. It is she who is responsible for cleaning the house, decorating it with “kolams” (traditional designs drawn on the floor with rice-flour), dressing up the children, preparing all the traditional dishes, presiding over every little detail or ritual.

Loud music from the village temples, often starting as early as four o'clock in the morning and consisting of a medley of Vedic chanting, bhajans and pop-music, remind us of the festivity taking place that day or week or month. Quite a few Aurovillians participate in festivals like Ganesh Puja, Saraswati or Ayudha Puja, Deepavali and Pongal. However, there is little awareness in Auroville or even the villages of the deeper significance of these festivals.

In this article, MEENAKSHI talks to Tineke about the major festivals of Tamil Nadu. At the time of this interview, Meenakshi's house was ritually decorated with a variety of little clay dolls...

Nine nights and the day of success

This time of the year, with the onset of the rains, **Durga puja** is celebrated. It is also referred to as **Navarathri** or nine nights. Only the Mother goddesses, Mahalaxmi, Mahasaraswati, and Durga are worshipped for these nine nights. During Navarathri we arrange dolls on nine steps such that they symbolise human evolution. On the lower steps, the lower forms of life such as animals are kept, then come people, leaders, great people, avatars, then gods and goddesses and then as last a pot of water on the ninth step. The dolls, often made of clay, reflect traditional South Indian art, and usually depict gods and goddesses from mythological stories. There will always be Krishna and the gopis, Radha and Krishna, Rama and Sita, Hanuman, Shiva and Parvathi and Ganesha. These dolls are handed down by the women-folk of the family from generation to generation. New dolls are also added each year. But women carefully preserve their collection of dolls in a box, taking them out on each Navarathri. They invite other women and children to their home to see the dolls and offer them some specially prepared food. Normally this is the season when there are few vegetables, so what they prepare is made from seeds, pulses, sprouts, and sweets made out of nuts.

Towards the end of Navarathri, on the ninth day, there is **Saraswati or Ayudha puja**. “Ayudham” is the Tamil name for

tools and instruments. In the South, Saraswati is worshipped as the patron goddess of the arts and crafts. In Tamil Nadu, the worship of Saraswati is slowly fading out though the tools are still cleaned and blessed. All the tools which allow us to cultivate crops, enable us to earn a livelihood, or form a medium of expression, are worshipped. I remember, as children, we liked this festival, as our books had to be ritually worshipped and we were not allowed to study that day. Similarly, carpenters, masons, mechanics, typists will put the tools of their trade, saws, spanners, typewriters, and nowadays maybe a computer, on a special stage to be worshipped.

The 10th day, referred to as **Dashara**, is the day of success, for it is on this day that the Goddess Durga, after killing the Asura (demon), comes out in a procession of victory. Idols of Durga are carried through the town or village in a magnificent parade, accompanied by the beating of drums and blaring of trumpets. It is considered auspicious to start a new venture on the tenth day, especially in arts and crafts. A guru will accept a new disciple on that day. On that day you will find many signs saying, “We admit students in our school”. Before the English system of starting the school-term in June was introduced, this was the time for schools to start. Quite often the guru would be invited to the house of the student, given gifts and a banana leaf bearing some rice and a golden coin would be placed in front of him. The guru would

then hold the hand of the child and write “Hari Om, Nama Shivaya”. That's how, with the name of the Lord, a child is traditionally initiated into schooling. This tradition is still followed in the villages – a professional carpenter initiates his son into the trade, a barber teaches his son etc. This is the traditional way to hand down customs and learning.

Darkness and light

Following Navarathri comes **Deepavali**. There are many legends about the significance of this celebration. One narrates the return of Rama to Ayodhya after vanquishing the demon king, another the killing of an Asura, while a third tells the story of the union of Shiva and Parvathi, after their separation. In this region it is believed that Deepavali celebrates a battle Lord Vishnu had with an Asura named Narakasura during which the Lord fainted, but thanks to the help of his consort Satyabama who was driving the chariot, the Asura was killed. However before Narakasura died, Lord Vishnu granted him a boon which was that his death would be remembered and celebrated by the people. It is thus an unusual festival where death is celebrated. People start the day with an oil bath before sunrise. Then they eat, including the sweets which have been specially prepared for the day, before sunrise. Everything is done in the dark at the darkest time of the month (new moon). And then, before the sun comes up, firecrackers are set off.

Towards the beginning of December, during the darkest time of the year at full moon, comes the lighting ceremony, **Karthikai**. The festival, devoted mainly to Lord Subramaniam, is named after the constellation of Karthikai. Earthen oil lamps are lit in front of houses, temples, and even in the shopping centres. This is my favourite festival. I love the simplicity of earthen lamps lit by oil. Symbolically, the oil signifies love, while the wick or the flame is aspiration. Then for the whole month, people put a lit lamp in front of their houses. Karthikai is the time when brothers visit their sisters. Greetings are exchanged by all the members of the families. While lamps are lit at all festivals, it is during this festival that you find in the handicraft shops a variety of oil lamps fashioned by craftsmen with great care and skill. Karthikai coincides with the lighting of the fire on top of Arunachala, the holy mountain in Tiruvan-

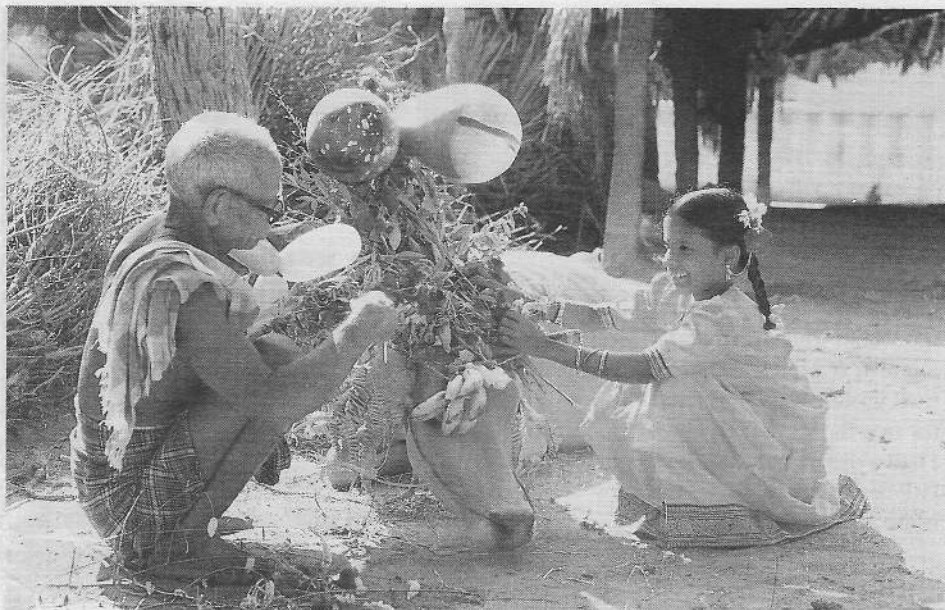
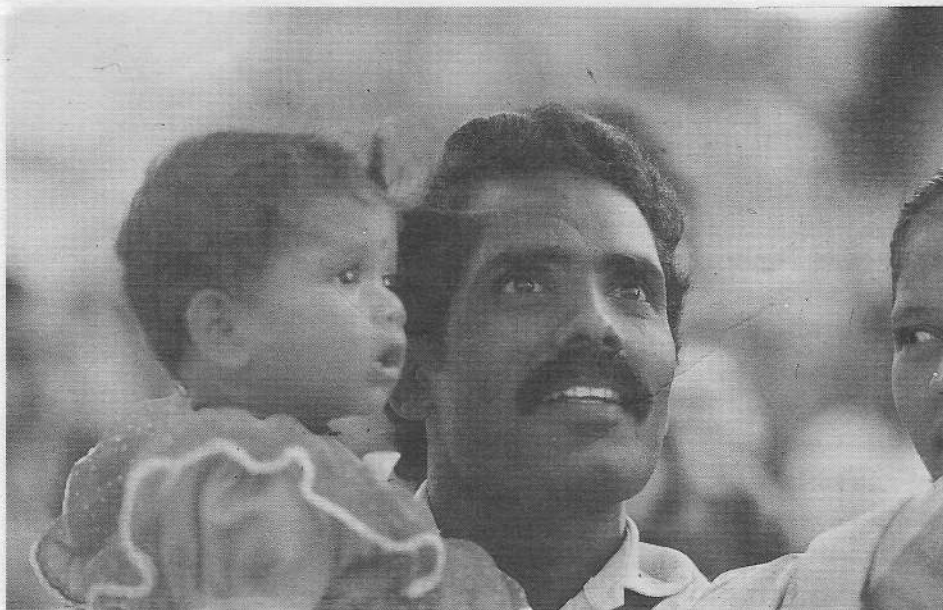
namalai.

After Karthikai, which is followed by the quiet winter month of Margazhi, people get ready to welcome the sun at **Pongal**. Pongal is a harvest festival, a thanksgiving festival characterised by fairs, sports, socialising, and cleaning and whitewashing houses. In the local village of Kulapalayam there is a procession and cow and bullock races, while in Pettai there is always a sports event, like kabbadi (a traditional Tamil sport), and women's kolam competitions. It is a time for new food like rice, sugarcane, turmeric, all typical local produce. There is fresh milk because during the cold month you have good grass.

Renewal and acceptance

In March, at full moon, is the festival **Masimagam**, named after the constellation “Magam.” During this festival for one week all the local gods are brought to a river or well for a bath to be refreshed and to wash away even their sins in the water. In this area, it is a major festival. The gods and goddesses of nearly forty temples around this region are brought to the beach at Muthialpet. It is something unique. The whole region celebrates together. The village is one big fair where all the local handicrafts, plastic bangles, aluminium pots, colourful ribbons, are sold on the streets. People from the villages go to the city for sightseeing and to the movies. It is an occasion to get together. Many others go down to the beach to look at the full moon.

April marks the **Tamil New Year** which coincides with the beginning of summer when the neem trees blossom and many other flowers are in full bloom. The air is filled with the lovely fragrance of neem flowers. The summer is young. A quiet spiritual atmosphere marks the beginning of the new year, the celebration of which is characterised by discourses at the temple. The new almanac which makes the predictions for the coming year, is read out at the temple. People prepare themselves to face the new year. In most temples one is given a preparation of sugar and neem leaves to eat. For on this particular day a dish which contains all the six tastes – bitter, sweet, sour, salt, astringent, and hot – is prepared and consumed. This symbolises that one should accept everything that comes into one's life, one should not pray for only good things: whatever comes to one, one should be able to accept.



PHOTOS on this page (clockwise from top):

1. Man with child, watching festivities
2. Adorning the bullock for Pongal
3. Ganesha statue after immersion
4. Temple gods on the seashore at Masimagam

(All photos by Sven)

Rituals and modern life-styles

A few months later, in September, there is **Ganesh puja**, celebrated all over India. In Tamil Nadu, Ganesh Puja is more of a family affair than a social celebration. Each child will try to make a clay idol of Ganesh. The puja is then performed. After a few days Ganesh will be immersed in a body of water, a river or the sea. Some people put the clay idol back in a corner of their garden so that it will disintegrate in rain water. For the Ganesh puja, people collect wild flowers and fruits which are available during that season. Simple things are offered. The special food for Ganesh puja is steamed rice flour mixed with coconut and sweet, flattened rice, puffed rice, coconut, banana, and boiled pulses.

It is regrettable that due to modern life-styles and the breaking up of the joint-family system, many rituals traditionally associated with festivals are dying out, such as the **Ram-Lila** where sections of the Ramayana are publicly enacted over a period of days. It is sad that in Auroville, too, the celebration of Pongal, Ganesh Puja or Ayudha Puja is carried out to suit office timings. This year, for instance, Ayudha Puja fell on a Sunday, but it was celebrated in Auroville, in most places, on the day before since people could not be bothered to come back to their place of work on a Sunday! Such celebrations are likely to become dead rituals if there is no sincere aspiration fuelling it. If Auroville celebrates the local festivals at all, then it should do it with sincerity, at the preordained auspicious time and day, with real colour, flavour and fervour.

And then, of course, apart from these major festivals, each village has its own particular festival. For instance, Edyan-chavadi and Sanjeevinagar celebrate a ten-day temple festival annually which ends with fire-walking. Celebrations and rituals are also very much part of the Tamil way of life. The piercing of the ear-lobes of a young child, a girl's attainment of puberty, marriage and the first pregnancy are all joyfully celebrated, not only by the family, but almost by the whole village.



My Escape From Tibet

BY TSERING LHADER

I left my village on the 25th of October 1993. As the bus started moving, I was suddenly overwhelmed with great feelings of sadness at the thought of being separated forever from my mother, family members and all my friends. I also felt anguish at what their reaction to my departure would be. I travelled by public bus for five days to reach Lhasa. Upon arrival, I had a distant panoramic view of the Potala Palace. I was filled with a new sense of hope and confidence.

Looking for a lodging place, I ran into two friends who had left my village before me. I asked them why they hadn't already escaped to India and they replied that they had been caught by the border police who confiscated all their belongings and money and had sent them back to Lhasa. We proceeded to the town of Shigatse with my money where we met two men from Amdo who said they could help us in obtaining an official permit to go to India. We gave them 1000 Yuan to obtain permits for the three of us.

My friends then wanted to return to Lhasa one last time to see their mother and brother, but I decided to stay in Shigatse as I suspected I would be taken back to Amdo if I returned to Lhasa. I told them that if we didn't meet again in this life, we should keep our friendship alive in our hearts.

After ten days they hadn't returned. Winter had come and it had become bitterly cold so I found some lodgings in the town. One day, Dhondup, a man who had once been my teacher in Amdo, came looking for me. Back in Amdo I had heard that Dhondup had plans of escaping to India, but I had never imagined meeting with him again. Dhondup was an incomparably brave and patriotic Tibetan freedom fighter. He had unwaveringly opposed the Chinese for their inhuman oppression of the Tibetan people and had organised many demonstrations against the Chinese. He had been brutally punished a number of times. None of this changed his outlook and as a result, they had decided to arrest him again. He got wind of their intentions and fled.

Dhondup suggested that we escape to India as soon as possible. As it was January and mid-winter, I was afraid of the weather conditions and at first didn't want to go. But I couldn't dissuade him as his mind was already made up.

I bought food rations tsampa (barley flour) and butter. We left Shigatse for Sakhya. Buses did not proceed further so we hitched a truck ride to a border village. Vigilance was very tight. We got off five kilometers before the town and using our map began to walk. The path zigzagged through high cliffs and we found a cave where we decided to spend the night. But as the sun was setting, a shepherd came by and saw us. Later, ten Chinese soldiers with guns surrounded the cave. They proceeded to kick and beat us with their rifle butts before taking us to their camp. The next day we were taken to the town for interrogation. Fortunately for us, the top army officer was Tibetan. He cross-examined us, but we weren't beaten again. We were kept in custody for three days and then told to return home as soon as possible. We walked out of town pretending to be travelling back to Lhasa on foot. We hid until nightfall and then took another route to reach the foot of the mountains that are the border between Tibet and Nepal.

Tsering was born in the old Tibetan province of Amdo in 1971. He has been living in Auroville two years, after having escaped from Tibet in 1993. The story of how he arrived here began in the 7th grade. The neglect accorded to Tibetan students and studies by the authorities motivated him to participate in demonstrations against the Chinese. For this he was imprisoned and tortured. He then realized that his only hope was to escape to India. Now an Aurovilian, he works in the Bharat Nivas Kitchen and studies English.

We met nomads who told us we were one day away from the border, but all the surrounding mountains and passes were covered in snow. We found a small cave but within a few hours noticed to our horror Chinese soldiers with guns approaching our cave. We knew that if we were caught a second time, we would spend a few months in prison so we decided to play a trick. When they arrived they slapped us and roughly asked us what we were doing. Dhondup pretended to have dislocated his ankle, but said he would walk to the police station the next day when he was better. He also mentioned that no one could escape to India in such weather conditions anyway. The soldiers then took our bags and extra clothing and said that if we weren't at the police station the next day, they would come back and shoot us.

The next morning we started walking at 4 a.m. The snow was deep and our moustaches and eye-brows froze. Every time the wind blew, drizzles of sleet seemed to pierce our bones as if nails were being driven into our bodies. Around dawn an ice sheet broke under Dhondup and his feet plunged into the icy water beneath. We kept walking and then we finally rested under a rock near the border. Dhondup took off his soaking shoes as his legs were giving him pain. Half his foot had frozen and had become rock hard. He then told me that if we returned now, we would not escape torture at the hands of the Chinese and there was no alternative but to go on. I felt the same, preferring to die in an attempt to escape than returning to suffer at the hands of the Chinese. I tore up a piece of cloth and a woollen pant leg, and tightly bandaged Dhondup's feet. I used some books I was carrying to make a fire to keep us warm. After a while we began to walk again but soon the pain was so intense that Dhondup couldn't even stand up, much less walk. However we had reached the top of a pass ("Drithang La"). I felt helpless. The way ahead was full of sharp cliffs and snow drifts. He was bigger than me and I couldn't carry him for very long at one stretch. Sometimes as we were crossing dangerous ridges I carried him on all fours. On top of that, the brightness of the snow hurt my eyes and I couldn't see properly. At night we stayed in caves that animals had used. We pushed on, sometimes cracking jokes, and sometimes sharing our fears and pains. Our friendship deepened.

After carrying him for seven days without coming across a soul, we heard a dog barking and we met a Sherpa nomad with his three small children. He gave us tea which was our first hot drink in seven days. We stayed with him but Dhondup's condition was getting worse and worse. We

set out to get to a hospital. It snowed and that night Dhondup came down with fever. He was sweating and in great pain. He couldn't raise his head and could only talk very slowly. Dhondup realised that he wasn't going to live much longer and spoke to me for the last time. "Ever since I got frost-bite, I thought of stabbing myself because otherwise you might have also died because of me. But I then thought that you might get the blame for it. So I didn't go ahead with it. Now I no longer have the hope of getting the blessings of his Holiness The Dalai Lama, but I pray to him from the depths of my heart." As he said this he was holding my hand tightly. Tears were rolling down my cheeks. I sat next to him until he died. It felt as if a cup I had been holding in my hand had broken. Not knowing what to do I just hugged his body for a while. I made an offering and said a few prayers I knew by heart. After two days, I hid the body at dawn by covering it with a lot of pine needles.

In a nearby village, the local people and a couple of Tibetans who had settled there treated me very kindly, and even the soldiers there who had initially planned to hand me back to the Chinese eventually sent me on to Kathmandu.

I left from Kathmandu disguised as a

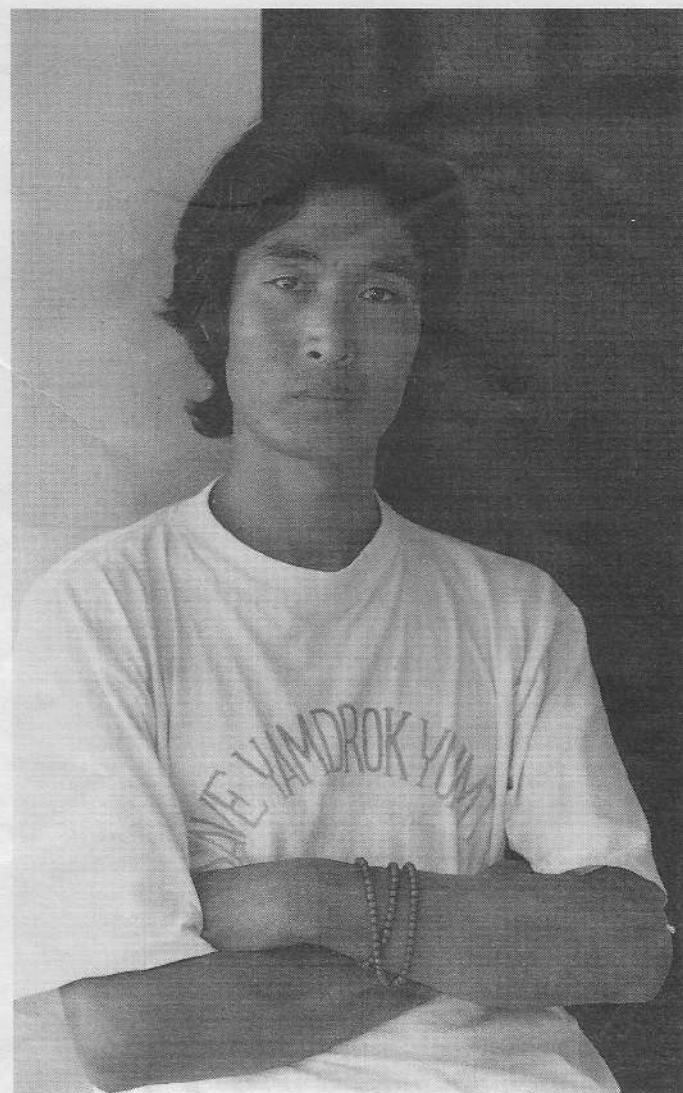


PHOTO: JOHN MANDEEN

Nepali in the company of a local man. When I arrived in Dharamsala, I was overjoyed. My family in Tibet thought I had died, as they had had no word from me for so many months. Then I met my aunt in Dharamsala. It was like a meeting between the living and the dead! Next I had an audience with his Holiness The Dalai Lama, and when I met him I wept and asked him to pray for my friend Dhondup. I experienced an intense surge of faith as well as conflicting feelings of joy and sadness. I joined a school for newcomers in Dharamsala where English and other modern subjects are taught. After eight months, I had the opportunity to come to Auroville. I have now been living here for two years and very much enjoy the wonderful spiritual and material environment of the place.

(This article was edited by Auroville Today from the original longer story in Tibetan.)

"The 21st Century will be the century of dialogue"

EXTRACTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DALAI-LAMA

Q.: When Tibet becomes free, will it be the beginning of peace in the world?

Dalai Lama: "I don't know. But on my last trip to Europe when I was in Sweden and Norway I said that this century has been the century of war, but that the next century should be the century of dialogue. Problems will always be there—we cannot expect that there be no more problems. The only thing we can do is shift the methods we use in solving them. Up to now we have used force. In the next century we can shift, and use dialogue. The 21st century will be a century of dialogue.

In that respect, if we succeed in our freedom struggle through non-violence, and find solutions to co-existence on the basis of compassion, then perhaps some good could still come from the roof of the world. My hope for the future is that the Tibetans and the Chinese will live side by side as good neighbours, in peace and friendliness with no more traces of the last forty years of conflict and suffering. Having a vision, or a long-term view could be seen as idealistic, but through long-term planning and education, we should try to achieve it. To us Buddhahood is idealistic, but it is positive, and no one argues that it is too idealistic.

Dharamsala 7.6.96

(From: a forthcoming collection of interviews by Ann Riquier, entitled Tibet: The Return.)

BRIEF NEWS

Dr. Karan Singh Resigns

Dr. Karan Singh has informed us that, under legal provisions, the post of Chairman, Auroville Foundation is incompatible with being member of the Rajya Sabha. As he has filed his papers for election, he has resigned as Chairman of the Foundation with immediate effect. Dr. Karan Singh added that these six years as Chairman have been an invaluable learning experience for him, and that he has, despite numerous difficulties, thoroughly enjoyed working with this unique community and successive Working Committees in order to bring to fruition the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Silent Gathering

About sixty Aurovilians gathered silently under the Banyan Tree to express solidarity with Gilles on 1 November, on the eve of his departure. Gilles was forced to leave Auroville as the Government of India refused to revoke his Quit Notice.

Mourning

Bonaventure, a long-term Aurovillian, succumbed to rabies this month. At another silent gathering under the Banyan Tree on 7 November, Aurovilians mourned his passing away. He will be remembered by the community as a gentle soul.

Danaan Parry, a great friend of Auroville, suffered a fatal heart attack on November 14, 1996. Danaan founded the Earth Stewards Network (together with Rabiya) that launched the citizen diplomacy effort with Russia, conflict resolution work in Ireland and the Middle East. Together with Savitri, he organized the first Peace Trees event in Auroville in 1987 and has since become a world movement having trained more than 3000 participants. He was currently involved in a project of cleaning the minefields of Vietnam and planting the demilitarized zone with trees. Danaan demonstrated with his life that impossible dreams can be organized in a way that they really happen.

Blue Planet Prize

Hanne Strong (member of the International Advisory Council) and Dr. Swaminathan (member of the Governing Board) have nominated Auroville for the Blue Planet prize 1997. This award of about US \$ 600,000 is given by the Japanese Asahi Glass Foundation to persons and organisation who have demonstrated a deep understanding of today's environmental concerns and who believe in the importance of international co-operation in the search for solutions. The Dalai Lama has endorsed the nomination.

Baby Boom

Auroville's one and only practising midwife, Hilde, had to go through sleepless nights and work overtime in the months of October and November as five babies were born within a time-span of a few weeks. Three of the babies decided to make their entry into the world in the same week. Hilde said, and her partner concurred, that she would be happy if future parents plan their offspring at different intervals!

Brazilian Concert

Aurovilians were led to the "heart of Brazil" on a warm and dry October night by an outstanding concert by some Aurovillian musicians. The lead singer, Eliane, a

Brazilian, led the band through swinging Bossa Nova rhythms with Veronique and Tine serving as backup vocalists. French, German and Italian musicians accompanied the singers on guitars, the tabla, the saxophone and electronic violin.

Violence in the village

Kuilapalyam, a neighbouring village, witnessed violence and a death in late October, following a clash between two rival political parties after the "panchayat" (village administration) elections. Some Aurovilians, who have strong connections with their friends and families there, are accused of having played a role in the elections. The Working Committee and the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation are looking into the situation.

Deepavali Celebrated

Deepavali, the festival of lights, was celebrated with gusto by both the young and the old alike. The festivities included, the lighting of lamps, the bursting of fireworks, a parade complete with a live band, fire-juggling and partaking of tasty Indian sweets and savouries.

Halloween Celebrated

Instead of the traditional Halloween trick-or-treat night, Aurovillian kids were treated to a Mystery Night this year. The Mystery Night held at Transition School consisted of a costume party where both adults and the children were dressed in costume. Prizes were awarded for the best costumes and the judges had a difficult time in coming to a decision. Squeals of delight and occasionally of fear, followed as the children encountered the unexpected "horrors" of a dark and "haunted" house.

Lively Grandmothers Meet

Fifteen grandmothers gathered together on a full moon night in October to celebrate the second Auroville gathering of Grandpersons United. The grandmothers, three of whom were from local villages, represented five nationalities. The grandmothers of Auroville work at various activities which include milking cows, teaching village kids, working at Auroville services such as Auroville Archives and the Information Centre. On the day of the gathering, as the full moon rose, there was a collective meditation at the Banyan Tree followed by chanting and a Native American Dance for Universal Peace.

SPECIAL FESTIVAL OFFER

Gift Auroville Today to someone you love this festive season. We offer a special discount (Rs. 100 within India and Rs. 500 abroad) for a six-month subscription to Auroville Today. This offer is available till 28 February 1997.

With warm greetings for this holiday season and the coming New Year, Editors, Auroville Today.

A note to our subscribers: You will receive a renewal form along with the last issue of your subscription. Please return it as soon as possible directly to us in Auroville. In case you have a doubt about the time for renewal, look at the address label of your copy of *Auroville Today*. The number of the last issue of your subscription is printed there.

BOOK REVIEW

THE INVASION THAT NEVER WAS, by Michel Danino and Sujata Nahar, 1996, 127 Pages, Rs 80.

But the oblivion that succeeds the fall
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
And old experience laboured out once more."

(Sri Aurobindo, Savitri I.1)

The riddles of pre-history embedded in stone or myth tease us with enigmas that mock our pretensions of grandeur, scientific or otherwise. In 1991, geologists involved in restoring the Great Sphinx of Egypt, discovered dramatic weathering and erosion patterns on the front and side of its body. These patterns could not be found on other structures in the area, and could push back the date of the construction of the Sphinx to a period between 10,000 and 5,000 B.C. when the Egyptian climate was much wetter.

When the magnificent stone circles of Avebury, far older than Stonehenge and located some 40 miles to its North, were rediscovered in the 18th Century, William Stukely, an amateur antiquarian of the time, was to remark: "To take in all the beauty of Avebury we must widen our imagination and think with the ancients."

Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Human Cycle* of the symbolic mentality that pervaded human society's earliest stage, a phase that "is always religious and actively imaginative in its religion; for symbolism and a widespread imaginative or intuitive religious feeling have a natural kinship and especially in earlier or primitive formations they have gone always together... If we look at the beginnings of Indian society, the far-off Vedic age which we no longer understand, for we have lost that mentality, we see that everything is symbolic." Latter day interpretations, for instance, of the Vedic ritual of sacrifice as being a mere propitiation of nature gods are hopelessly off the mark; the misunderstandings of a later humanity that "could no longer enter into the ancient spirit".

In terms of the ancient history of India, the misunderstanding that has declared itself most famously in the last 150 years, based on misinterpretations of the Vedas, is the academic myth of a supposed Aryan invasion of the sub-continent some four thousand years ago.

Sri Aurobindo argued forcefully against such an interpretation and Michel Danino in his highly readable and concise book, *The Invasion That Never Was*, analyzes the birth of this myth in the nineteenth century.

ry. He shows how it was fostered by pioneering German scholars, and how it managed to take a general hold of the modern scientific and historical mind, both Indian and Western, with a few notable exceptions such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

As to the much proclaimed Aryan/-Dravidian divide, it is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo considered Sanskrit and Tamil to be related languages, both derived from the same original Mother language that has since been lost. And a legend—cited by Danino in his book—is both delightful and instructing in this regard. Acons ago, people from the South flocked to the North to attend the wedding of Lord Shiva and Uma on Mount Kailash. The crowd was so great that it was feared that the earth might tilt over. Appeals were made to Lord Shiva who asked the Rishi Agastya to go South and, through his spiritual power, restore the balance of the earth. Agastya agreed to go with his wife Lopamudra but asked Lord Shiva to instruct him in the mysteries of the language of the South. Lord Shiva placed the Rishi Panini on his right and the Rishi Agastya on his left and then began to beat a drum with his two hands. The sounds that flowed from the right gave birth to Sanskrit and those from the left to Tamil.

The chapter on the Indus-Saraswati civilisation and the sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro makes for fascinating reading. With 1,500 sites discovered so far this civilisation, which flourished from about 3,500-1,900 BC, derived much of its prosperity from commerce, with evidence of important trading links with Oman, Bahrain and Sumer. The great Saraswati river was its lifeline, and it covered an area of over two million square kilometres. The religious seals of this culture depict deities in yogic postures, as well as magnificent representations of a bull—a symbol both of Agni and Indra in the Vedas—and a deity standing beneath an arch of flame. Another seal depicts a yogi taming a tiger. All the excavations undertaken in the last fifty years have, as yet, not unearthed any evidence of an invasion, Aryan or otherwise. What all this points to is an unbroken continuity from earliest times of a remarkably high level of civilisation on the Indian sub-continent, with the Vedas as its base.

Roger

Distributed by: The Mother's Institute Of Research, C-141 Preet Vihar, Delhi-110092, India, and MIRA ADITI, 62, "Sriranga, 2nd Main, 1st Cross, T.K. Layout, Saraswathipuram, Mysore-570009, India.

How to subscribe

Subscription rates for 12 issues of Auroville Today are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250; Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 56, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by air-mail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

Auroville International Centres:

Germany: AVI Deutschland, c/o W. Schmidt-Reinecke, Mainstrasse 75, 28199 Bremen. Tel.: 0421 594220
Spain: AVI España, c/o Kibzu and Yolanda, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra. Tel. 048 50720
France: AVI France, 6, rue du Cail, 75010 Paris. Tel. 33 1 40364367, fax 44729467.
The Netherlands: AVI Nederland, c/o M. Berden, Lobelialaan 51, 2555 PC Den Haag. Tel. 070 3251160
Canada: AVI Canada, c/o Denis Henley, 847 Chemin Perry, Aylmer J9H 5C9 (Quebec). Tel. 0819 648 0328.
Sweden: AVI Sverige, c/o Ulf Carlberg, Borgholm, Broddebö, S-59700 Atvidaberg. Tel. 0120 22026
U.K.: AVI U.K., c/o M. Littlewood, Canigou, Cot Lane, Chidham, W. Sussex PO 18 8 SP. Tel. 02435 74099
U.S.A.: AVI USA, c/o Megan Thomas, P.O. Box 162489, Sacramento, CA 95816. Tel. 0916 452 4013

Auroville Today provides information about Auroville, an international township in South India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

BRIEF NEWS

Dr. Karan Singh Resigns

Dr. Karan Singh has informed us that, under legal provisions, the post of Chairman, Auroville Foundation is incompatible with being member of the Rajya Sabha. As he has filed his papers for election, he has resigned as Chairman of the Foundation with immediate effect. Dr. Karan Singh added that these six years as Chairman have been an invaluable learning experience for him, and that he has, despite numerous difficulties, thoroughly enjoyed working with this unique community and successive Working Committees in order to bring to fruition the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Silent Gathering

About sixty Aurovilians gathered silently under the Banyan Tree to express solidarity with Gilles on 1 November, on the eve of his departure. Gilles was forced to leave Auroville as the Government of India refused to revoke his Quit Notice.

Mourning

Bonaventure, a long-term Aurovillian, succumbed to rabies this month. At another silent gathering under the Banyan Tree on 7 November, Aurovilians mourned his passing away. He will be remembered by the community as a gentle soul.

Danaan Parry, a great friend of Auroville, suffered a fatal heart attack on November 14, 1996. Danaan founded the Earth Stewards Network (together with Rabiya) that launched the citizen diplomacy effort with Russia, conflict resolution work in Ireland and the Middle East. Together with Savitri, he organized the first Peace Trees event in Auroville in 1987 and has since become a world movement having trained more than 3000 participants. He was currently involved in a project of cleaning the minefields of Vietnam and planting the demilitarized zone with trees. Danaan demonstrated with his life that impossible dreams can be organized in a way that they really happen.

Blue Planet Prize

Hanne Strong (member of the International Advisory Council) and Dr. Swaminathan (member of the Governing Board) have nominated Auroville for the Blue Planet prize 1997. This award of about US \$ 600,000 is given by the Japanese Asahi Glass Foundation to persons and organisation who have demonstrated a deep understanding of today's environmental concerns and who believe in the importance of international co-operation in the search for solutions. The Dalai Lama has endorsed the nomination.

Baby Boom

Auroville's one and only practising midwife, Hilde, had to go through sleepless nights and work overtime in the months of October and November as five babies were born within a time-span of a few weeks. Three of the babies decided to make their entry into the world in the same week. Hilde said, and her partner concurred, that she would be happy if future parents plan their offspring at different intervals!

Brazilian Concert

Aurovilians were led to the "heart of Brazil" on a warm and dry October night by an outstanding concert by some Aurovillian musicians. The lead singer, Eliane, a

Brazilian, led the band through swinging Bossa Nova rhythms with Veronique and Tine serving as backup vocalists. French, German and Italian musicians accompanied the singers on guitars, the tabla, the saxophone and electronic violin.

Violence in the village

Kuilapalyam, a neighbouring village, witnessed violence and a death in late October, following a clash between two rival political parties after the "panchayat" (village administration) elections. Some Aurovilians, who have strong connections with their friends and families there, are accused of having played a role in the elections. The Working Committee and the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation are looking into the situation.

Deepavali Celebrated

Deepavali, the festival of lights, was celebrated with gusto by both the young and the old alike. The festivities included, the lighting of lamps, the bursting of fireworks, a parade complete with a live band, fire-juggling and partaking of tasty Indian sweets and savouries.

Halloween Celebrated

Instead of the traditional Halloween trick-or-treat night, Aurovillian kids were treated to a Mystery Night this year. The Mystery Night held at Transition School consisted of a costume party where both adults and the children were dressed in costume. Prizes were awarded for the best costumes and the judges had a difficult time in coming to a decision. Squeals of delight and occasionally of fear, followed as the children encountered the unexpected "horrors" of a dark and "haunted" house.

Lively Grandmothers Meet

Fifteen grandmothers gathered together on a full moon night in October to celebrate the second Auroville gathering of Grandpersons United. The grandmothers, three of whom were from local villages, represented five nationalities. The grandmothers of Auroville work at various activities which include milking cows, teaching village kids, working at Auroville services such as Auroville Archives and the Information Centre. On the day of the gathering, as the full moon rose, there was a collective meditation at the Banyan Tree followed by chanting and a Native American Dance for Universal Peace.

SPECIAL FESTIVAL OFFER

Gift Auroville Today to someone you love this festive season. We offer a special discount (Rs. 100 within India and Rs. 500 abroad) for a six-month subscription to Auroville Today. This offer is available till 28 February 1997.

With warm greetings for this holiday season and the coming New Year, Editors, Auroville Today.

A note to our subscribers: You will receive a renewal form along with the last issue of your subscription. Please return it as soon as possible directly to us in Auroville. In case you have a doubt about the time for renewal, look at the address label of your copy of Auroville Today. The number of the last issue of your subscription is printed there.

BOOK REVIEW

THE INVASION THAT NEVER WAS, by Michel Danino and Sujata Nahar, 1996, 127 Pages, Rs 80.

But the oblivion that succeeds the fall
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
And old experience laboured out once more."

(Sri Aurobindo, Savitri I.1)

The riddles of pre-history embedded in stone or myth tease us with enigmas that mock our pretensions of grandeur, scientific or otherwise. In 1991, geologists involved in restoring the Great Sphinx of Egypt, discovered dramatic weathering and erosion patterns on the front and side of its body. These patterns could not be found on other structures in the area, and could push back the date of the construction of the Sphinx to a period between 10,000 and 5,000 B.C. when the Egyptian climate was much wetter.

When the magnificent stone circles of Avebury, far older than Stonehenge and located some 40 miles to its North, were rediscovered in the 18th Century, William Stukely, an amateur antiquarian of the time, was to remark: "To take in all the beauty of Avebury we must widen our imagination and think with the ancients."

Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Human Cycle* of the symbolic mentality that pervaded human society's earliest stage, a phase that "is always religious and actively imaginative in its religion; for symbolism and a widespread imaginative or intuitive religious feeling have a natural kinship and especially in earlier or primitive formations they have gone always together... If we look at the beginnings of Indian society, the far-off Vedic age which we no longer understand, for we have lost that mentality, we see that everything is symbolic." Latter day interpretations, for instance, of the Vedic ritual of sacrifice as being a mere propitiation of nature gods are hopelessly off the mark; the misunderstandings of a later humanity that "could no longer enter into the ancient spirit".

In terms of the ancient history of India, the misunderstanding that has declared itself most famously in the last 150 years, based on misinterpretations of the Vedas, is the academic myth of a supposed Aryan invasion of the sub-continent some four thousand years ago.

Sri Aurobindo argued forcefully against such an interpretation and Michel Danino in his highly readable and concise book, *The Invasion That Never Was*, analyzes the birth of this myth in the nineteenth century.

ry. He shows how it was fostered by pioneering German scholars, and how it managed to take a general hold of the modern scientific and historical mind, both Indian and Western, with a few notable exceptions such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

As to the much proclaimed Aryan/-Dravidian divide, it is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo considered Sanskrit and Tamil to be related languages, both derived from the same original Mother language that has since been lost. And a legend—cited by Danino in his book—is both delightful and instructing in this regard. Aeons ago, people from the South flocked to the North to attend the wedding of Lord Shiva and Uma on Mount Kailash. The crowd was so great that it was feared that the earth might tilt over. Appeals were made to Lord Shiva who asked the Rishi Agastya to go South and, through his spiritual power, restore the balance of the earth. Agastya agreed to go with his wife Lopamudra but asked Lord Shiva to instruct him in the mysteries of the language of the South. Lord Shiva placed the Rishi Panini on his right and the Rishi Agastya on his left and then began to beat a drum with his two hands. The sounds that flowed from the right gave birth to Sanskrit and those from the left to Tamil.

The chapter on the Indus-Saraswati civilisation and the sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro makes for fascinating reading. With 1,500 sites discovered so far this civilisation, which flourished from about 3,500-1,900 BC, derived much of its prosperity from commerce, with evidence of important trading links with Oman, Bahrain and Sumer. The great Saraswati river was its lifeline, and it covered an area of over two million square kilometres. The religious seals of this culture depict deities in yogic postures, as well as magnificent representations of a bull—a symbol both of Agni and Indra in the Vedas—and a deity standing beneath an arch of flame. Another seal depicts a yogi taming a tiger. All the excavations undertaken in the last fifty years have, as yet, not unearthed any evidence of an invasion, Aryan or otherwise. What all this points to is an unbroken continuity from earliest times of a remarkably high level of civilisation on the Indian sub-continent, with the Vedas as its base.

Roger

Distributed by: The Mother's Institute Of Research, C-141 Preet Vihar, Delhi-110092, India, and MIRA ADITI, 62, "Sriranga, 2nd Main, 1st Cross, T.K. Layout, Saraswathipuram, Mysore-570009, India.

How to subscribe

Subscription rates for 12 issues of Auroville Today are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 56, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by air-mail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

Auroville International Centres:

Germany: AVI Deutschland, c/o W. Schmidt-Reinecke, Mainstrasse 75, 28199 Bremen. Tel.: 0421 594220
Spain: AVI España, c/o Kitxu and Yolanda, Apartado de Correos 36, 31.610 Villava, Navarra. Tel. 048 50720
France: AVI France, 6, rue du Cail, 75010 Paris. Tel. 33 1 40364367, fax 44729467.
The Netherlands: AVI Nederland, c/o M. Berden, Lobelialaan 51, 2555 PC Den Haag. Tel. 070 3251160
Canada: AVI Canada, c/o Denis Henley, 847 Chemin Perry, Aylmer J9H 5C9 (Quebec). Tel. 0819 648 0328.
Sweden: AVI Sverige, c/o Ulf Carlberg, Borgholm, Broddebö, S-59700 Atvidaberg. Tel. 0120 22026
U.K.: AVI U.K., c/o M. Littlewood, Canigou, Cot Lane, Chidham, W. Sussex PO 18 8 SP. Tel. 02435 74099
U.S.A: AVI USA, c/o Megan Thomas, P.O. Box 162489, Sacramento, CA 95816. Tel. 0916 452 4013

Auroville Today provides information about Auroville, an international township in South-India, on a monthly basis and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the community as a whole.

BY AIRMAIL
BOOKPOST

AUROVILLE TODAY

CSR Office
Auroville 605101
Tamil Nadu, India

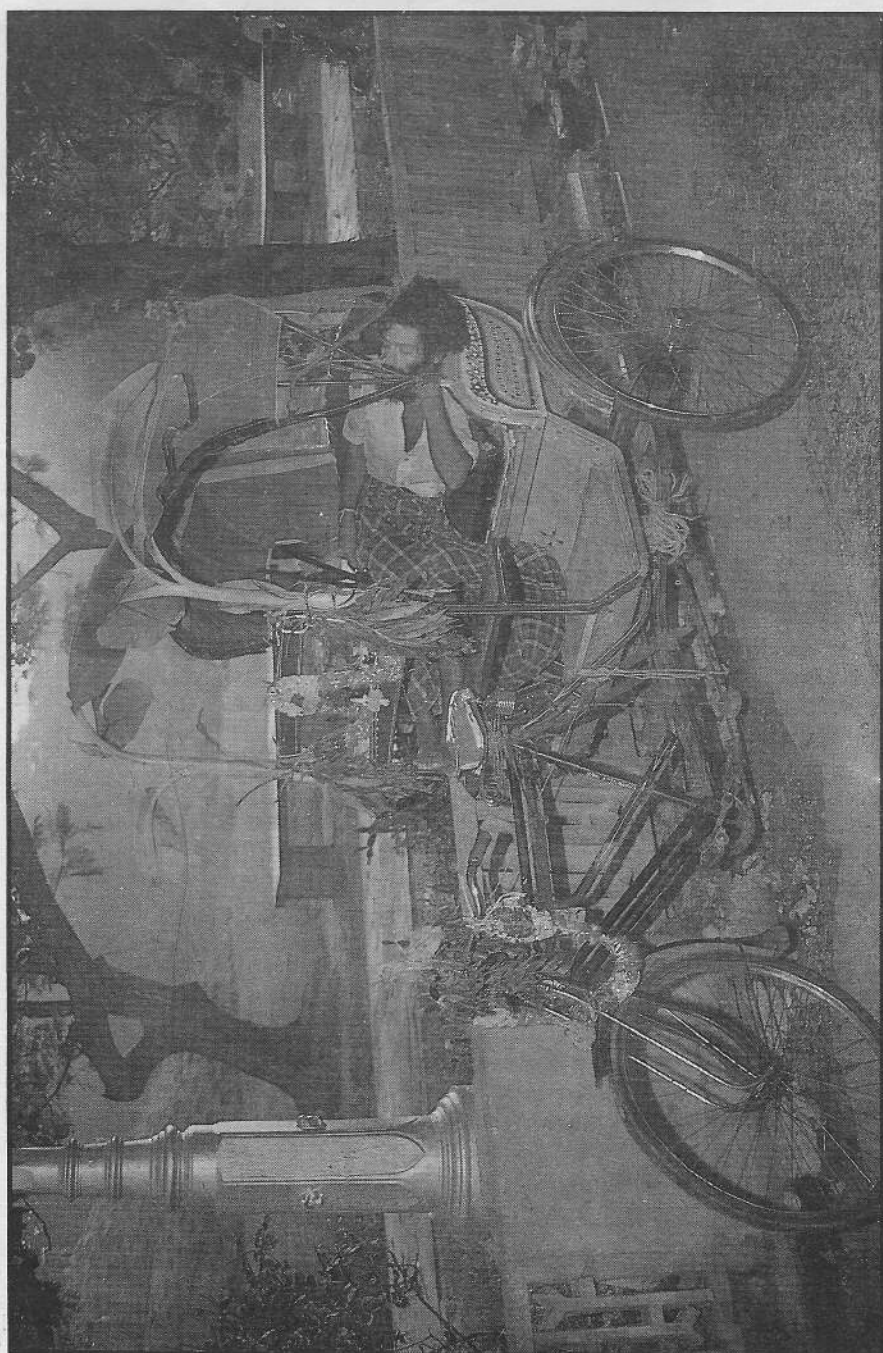


IN THIS ISSUE:
WHAT DO WE CELEBRATE?
ESCAPE FROM TIBET
NEW SECRETARY

Exp. # 109

KRISHNA TEWARI
AUROMODELE
AUROVILLE

December 1996
Number Ninety-Five



After the celebration... (Photo: Sten)

Quiet, very quiet...

"...but behind a lot of disquiet. That's my first impression of Auroville," smiles Mr. N. Bala Baskar, I.A.S., who joined Auroville on October 24th as the new Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. The disquiet refers to his immediate involvement in the problems at Kuilapalayam village: the new *panchayat* (village administration) elections had ended with violence and a death, and he became involved as the losing party lodged a complaint that a few Tamil Aurovilians had been involved in the elections. Violence is not new to him. "One man was murdered in front of my eyes during one of my jobs in Haryana" Mr. Baskar recalls, "where I got acquainted with the rougher aspects of life". However, it was the loss of his son in May this year that made Mr. Baskar decide to leave Haryana and look for a job closer to home.

Home is the city of Madras, where he was brought up as a Saivite. [Saivites are traditionally followers of Shiva]. Later he turned to the teachings of Krishnamurthy. He received a Masters degree in Chemistry at the University of Madras in 1970 before embarking on a varied career: tutor in his Madras college, probationary officer in the State Bank of India, one year training for the Indian Police Service, further training for the Indian Administrative Service which concluded in 1977. Allocated to the Haryana cadre of the I.A.S., he worked for 9 years in the field as a sub-divisional magistrate, Additional Deputy Commissioner and Collector in the southern districts of Haryana. After that he moved back to Madras where he became Secretary of the Handloom Export Promotion Council and then the General Manager of the Handicraft and Handloom Export Corporation of India.

"Then I needed time off," he recalls. "I took a year's sabbatical, and did a Masters in Finance at the Scottish School of Business, University of Strathclyde, at Glasgow. When I came back I was appointed as chief administrator of the Haryana Agricultural Marketing Board. Then I joined the Central Government as private secretary to the Union Minister for Food and Civil Supplies in December 1990. After 6 months, I became Director of the same Ministry and then Joint-Secretary in the Ministry of Civil Supplies, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution. In February this year I went back to Haryana and a period of frequent transfers due to changes in the Government followed: as Transport Commissioner, once again chief administrator of the Marketing Board, then Managing Director of Haryana Minerals Ltd. And then I came here."

Mr. Baskar has travelled widely. Once, in Adelaide, he even chanced upon an old Aurovilian. "That was in 1985. I had gone to Adelaide, and was exhibiting Indian handloom products as part of a promotion campaign. A small girl came in, and someone called her "Tulsi", which is an Indian name. A huge man entered who, when I enquired about the name, replied to me in Tamil that he had been living in Auroville. And that was Cow John [who started the Aurobrindavan Dairy in the early 1970's]. He told me about his experiences in Auroville."

He met another Aurovilian in 1994. "I was part of a group of people who wanted to promote microlight flying in India, and we created the Indian Microlight Association in New Delhi, which organised the first national air rally in 1994. ("I do not know how to fly a microlight, but I have flown piggy back on a microlight. It is very exciting!") At that rally, I met with Joel and

his wife, two other Aurovilians." Thereafter he twice visited Auroville. "We visited the Matrimandir, but it never occurred to us that we would ever come to live in Auroville."

Reflecting on his career with the Indian Government, Mr. Baskar says, "It would not be correct to say, 'I have consciously



Mr. Bala Baskar, the new Secretary of the Auroville Foundation

chosen to work for the Indian Government for whatever reason.' I am always reminded of the poem by Robert Frost about the road not taken: you take one road and always speculate that the other road might have been better. I toyed with the idea of settling abroad when I finished my Masters degree. At that time there was a great migration, a great brain drain to the USA. Out of my graduating class, 9 of the 11 students left for the States and still live there. I thought I should stay back as I had lost my father and was the eldest son. I had another opportunity when I was in Glasgow and received an offer to stay on and work for a PhD. But I thought it would disrupt the continuity in my life. I do not know really. If tomorrow an opportunity comes, I would not mind working abroad, but I definitely would come back to India."

When asked if he is daunted by the situation of Indian politics and bureaucracy, Mr. Baskar smiles: "I would not venture to comment on it, but I took great consolation after reading the USA National Performance Review commissioned by Bill Clinton. That review has many more horror stories, and since then, being part of the Indian Government is no longer so nightmarish for me! (laughing) India is a democracy, and I keep telling people, that such a report should also be prepared here. There is a healthy attitude in the Civil Service about trying to improve the governing of India."

On October 30th, Mr. Baskar was welcomed to Auroville at a public reception at the Information Centre. In the welcoming speech by a Working Committee member, Mr. Baskar was reminded about the fact that Gilles, one of our long-term residents, had to leave India indefinitely, maybe permanently, and that four more Aurovilians face similar expulsions. What would his attitude be towards the recommendation of of visas and residential permits? Mr. Baskar replied: "I will restrict myself to the role of the Secretary in this whole business. I do not think that the Secretary here is an independent authority, the Secretary is not a managing director, but appointed by the Government of India and responsible to the Governing Board, and he takes his orders from the Governing Board. In case the Secretary feels that a person's visa should not be extended, such a recommendation from the Foundation should not be made without the approval of the Chairman of the Governing Board."

Interview by Carel.