



the ascent

CFIL's Newsletter | December 2025

Ascent: An opening upwards, the ascent into the Light and Consciousness.

"The ascent or the upward movement takes place when there is a sufficient aspiration from the being, i.e., from the various mental, vital and physical planes."

-Sri Aurobindo



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Here we are with the fifth edition of *The Ascent*, in the first month of the year 2026.

The year 2025 has been a happening and eventful one for us. We are at an inflection point. In hindsight, it was a year when certain decisions mattered the most. This essentially means that our direction and speed are changing; new decisions, friendships, announcements, associations, and partnerships await all of us.

December was wholly dedicated to the preparation and hosting of our biggest event — Sports Day. The venue was new: a large ground with ample space to host people and a big set-up. Sports Day has become our biggest puller of people — our parents, their friends, and relatives. It is one large gathering that we look forward to every year, and it continues to grow year after year. In the "At The Integral School" section of the newsletter, you will find a summary of everything that went into the preparation and the event itself.

In this edition of *The Ascent*, we have two articles. The first — "Amongst the Rats and the Extinction of the Population" — explores whether life is only about survival or if there is something more to it. It reflects on how meaningful interactions, or the lack of them, impact life, and how the overcrowding of everything — people, space, and stimuli — influences our behaviour, especially that of our children.

The second article — "Śarīram khalu dharma-sāadhanam" (शरीरं खलु धर्मसाधनम्) — offers a more academic orientation to Physical Education at The Integral School. We felt this was a fitting opportunity, as December is all about sports, to share with our readers the basis of our physical development programme and how essential and critical it is to the growth of our children. The capacities of the human body are immense and unlimited. This short article may ignite interest in exploring physical education far more seriously, rather than limiting it to "games, sports, and exercises."

In continuation of India that is Bharat, this edition includes an extract which, although written by Sri Aurobindo decades ago, serves as a reminder of the direction the nation must take — to carve out a future rooted in her profound spiritual character, or risk being overwhelmed by outer influences. The only way she can truly serve human progress is by holding on to the truth and not giving up the highest she knows. A new creation of the old Indian *svadharma* remains our best way to serve the world.

There is a new addition to the newsletter from this issue onwards. The new section is called "Invitation to Notice" — a gentle call to pay attention to things we usually overlook. The intent is to share facts, information, trends, and news that are worth pondering for our collective and conscious future.

We enter 2026 with much promise, perseverance, and aspiration for a more conscious, meaningful, and fulfilling year ahead. This year brings with it many announcements, changes, and developments that will shape not only what we do this year, but also the years to follow.

Let the future unfold for all of us.

—Editor

Amongst the Rats and the extinction of the population

What if everything needed to live were available—food, shelter, no disease? Would we live happily? Would we multiply?

Core research findings from John B. Calhoun's work on Population Density and Social Pathology (often referred to through his "Behavioral Sink" experiments) makes us think about life, is life about survival or more?

John B. Calhoun's experiment was about what happens to social behaviour when population density becomes very high, even when basic needs are fully met.

In simple terms:

Calhoun wanted to understand this question: If food, water, and shelter are not a problem, can overcrowding alone damage a society?

What he did

- He created enclosed environments for rats and mice.
- Food, water, and nesting material were unlimited.
- There were no predators or diseases introduced.
- The only limiting factor was space.

These setups were later called "rat utopias" or "Universe" experiments.

What he observed

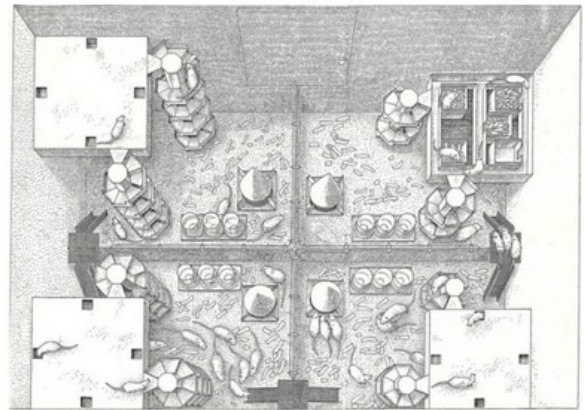
As the population increased:

- Social order began to break down.
- Normal behaviours like mating, parenting, and cooperation deteriorated.
- Aggression increased in some, while others withdrew completely.
- Maternal care collapsed, leading to high infant mortality.
- Eventually, reproduction stopped altogether

What the experiment showed

The experiment demonstrated that:

- Survival is not only about resources.
- Social structure, roles, and space for meaningful interaction are essential.
- Overcrowding can lead to psychological and social collapse even in "ideal" physical conditions.



An illustration of one of Calhoun's early rat habitats from his 1962 *Scientific American* article, "Population Density and Social Pathology."

National Library of Medicine

So, what is our "utopia"?

Speed in life, careers, property, money? As we move towards hyper-urbanisation, where more becomes less, what happens to us and our children? An overload of stimuli.

Our children grow amidst crowds, constant noise, rigid schedules, social conventions, and endless "must-haves."

What are the trade-offs? What moves the individual and the collective? The trade-off is simple: the loss of meaningful experiences and a sense of belonging.

Children need more than "exposure." They need to be heard. They need real experiences, not templated workshops or expert-driven knowledge. When everything becomes transactional—schedules, outcomes, compliance, performance—children withdraw.

Children are not moved through systems; they grow within communities. Parents are not "adults who know all of life," but partners in inquiry.

Calhoun's work is not a warning against cities. It is a reminder that human beings require social meaning, not just physical space.

In crowded environments (too much of everything) when relationships become anonymous and responsibility is diffused, even if resources are abundant, we struggle with our roles:

"We don't know what to do."

"Our children do not listen to us."

These are signs of withdrawal in children.

Is there something beyond survival and growth?

—Editor

India, that is Bharat - It's Spirit and Mission

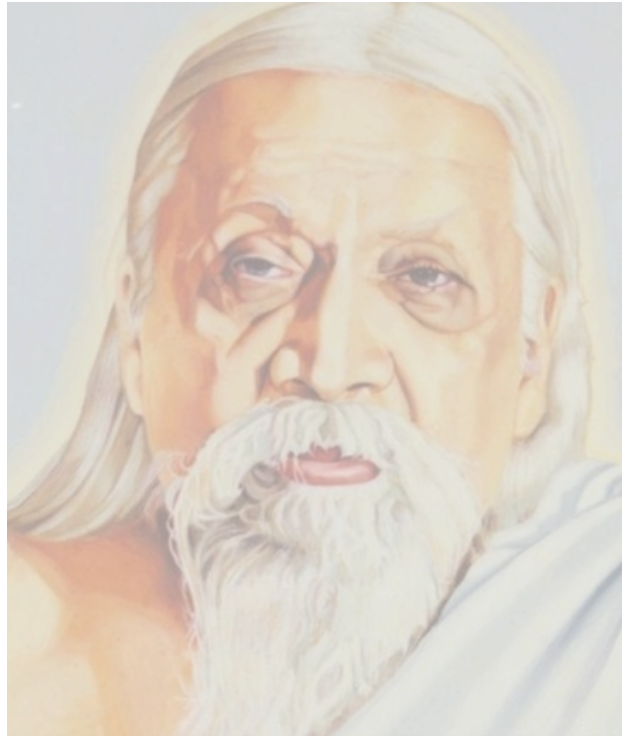
Where does India stand?

"Where then does India actually stand in this critical hour of her necessity and how far can she be said to be still firmly seated on her eternal foundations?

Already she has been largely affected by European culture and the peril is far from over; on the contrary it will be greater, more insistent, more imperatively violent in the immediate future. Asia is rearing; but that very fact will intensify and is already intensifying the attempt, natural and legitimate according to the law of competition, of European civilization to assimilate Asia.

For if she is culturally transformed and conquered, then when she again counts in the material order of the world, it will not be with any menace of the invasion of Europe by the Asiatic ideal. It is cultural quarrel complicated with a political question. Asia must become culturally a province of Europe and form politically one part of a Europeanised if not a European concert; otherwise Europe may become a province of Asia, Asiaticised by the dominant influence of wealthy, enormous, powerful, Asiatic peoples in the new world-system...

India is indeed awakening and defending herself, but not sufficiently and not with the whole-heartedness, the clear sight and the firm resolution which can alone save her from the peril. Today it is close; let her choose, - for the choice is imperatively before her, to live or to perish."



Europe and the spiritual and the Psychic impulse of India, are needed for the completeness of the human movement.

But if the spiritual ideal points the final way to a triumphant harmony of manifested life, then it is all important for India not to lose hold of the truth, not to give up the highest she knows and barter it away for a perhaps more readily practicable but still lower ideal alien to her true and constant nature. It is important too for humanity that a great collective effort to realize this highest ideal-however imperfect it may have been, into whatever confusion and degenerating it may temporarily have fallen, should not cease but continue. Always it can recover its force and enlarge its expression; for the spirit is not bound to temporal forms but ever-new, immortal and infinite.

A new creation of the old Indian *svadharma*, not a transmutation to some law of the Western nature, is our best way to serve and increase the sum of human progress"

How best can India serve human progress?

"It may well be that both tendencies, the mental and the vital and physical stress of

Śarīraṃ khalu dharma-sādhanaṃ" (शरीरं खलु धर्मसाधनम्)

In the integral learning framework, the body is seen as an instrument for expressing the divine working within us. Nothing is possible without the body functioning efficiently.

"If the transformation of life upon earth – and the perfection of our existence which this implies—is the aim of evolution then a deep change in the functions of our physical body is required – for obviously this human body, enslaved as it is to the needs and instincts of animality, cannot be the evolutionary summit of our life. For the body to be so changed, a systematic process of education is needed, and this education can only be initiated in the earliest years, for it is in the earliest years that the body is most supple and free of habits and can be moulded in any way. This development continues throughout the growing years and even into adulthood" (The Mother on Physical Education)

The human body possesses tremendous capacities but is rarely allowed to evolve along the lines of its own genius. A physical education program work to develop such capacities by addressing:

The physical abilities, Physical skills, Physical culture and Physical organization

Developing of Physical abilities relates to the following:

Strength: It refers to that capacity of the body which empowers the muscles in the body and enables one to lift, throw and carry heavy loads.

Stamina: It refers to the capacity of the body which enables one to work for a longer period without feeling exhausted. Building stamina to run etc.,

Agility: It represents quickness, nimbleness and dexterity in all the parts of the body.

Balance: It means finding one's centre of gravity and maintaining the posture either in stillness or in motion.

Endurance: It represents the capacity of the muscles and the nervous system along with the will power to take a particular load for a certain duration.

Flexibility: It means the suppleness and plasticity in the body. It helps in giving the body more agility



Developing Physical Skills relates to the following:

Kicking, dodging, catching, dribbling, throwing, aiming, cycling, skipping etc.,

Physical culture relates to the following:

Food: Quantity, taste, digestion, need, desire

Posture: Straight, sitting and walking

Habits: Movement, walking, sitting

Cleanliness: Space, equipment etc.,

Rest & relaxation: Sleep, not doing anything etc.,

Physical organization

Material organization: Material, objects

Team organization: Helping others, Coordination

The Integral School annual sports day is an exhibition of a child's physical abilities and skills.

–Editor

At The Integral School

Here's a glimpse of what our children at The Integral School explored, learned and loved in the month of December

Progress



During the month of December, our children were actively engaged in preparations for the Sports Day event. Alongside practice sessions, they enthusiastically participated in various classroom activities whenever time permitted. A strong focus was placed on physical development through the "Jungle Fun" activity, which included jumping from logs, crawling under bushes, cliff mountain jumps, sack jumping, climbing monkey bars, hopping, and zig-zag running. These activities helped children learn how to follow sequences step by step while improving coordination and confidence.

The Umbrella Dance was a favourite among the children. Practicing both with and without music, they developed concentration, flexibility, stamina, patience, and synchronicity while remembering movements and coordinating within the group.

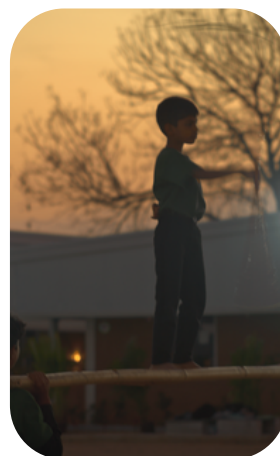
Children also explored Hula Hoops, which challenged their balance and control. Through repeated practice, they enhanced concentration, stamina, and flexibility. They created formations such as Earth, Flower, Mouse, Bird, and Crocodile! After Sports Day, children proudly helped organize and clean their classroom, sharing responsibility and nurturing teamwork.

Courage

The month began with Sports Day practice sessions, where children practiced diligently, patiently, and with great enthusiasm. Their favourite segment was the jungle-themed sequence, which allowed them to showcase a range of physical skills that included skipping, jumping, crawling, climbing and much more. This was beautifully complemented by a lively umbrella dance and an engaging hula hoop sequence.

Children eagerly looked forward to their regular sandpit time, where they connected with their friends and enjoyed collaborative play. As Sports Day approached, excitement grew as they prepared to perform for their parents, proudly displaying the skills they developed through discipline and regular practice.

After Sports Day, the children regrouped and reflected on their performances, enthusiastically sharing their experiences. Many expressed their wish to perform the jungle-themed story again and happily recalled enjoying tasty pakodas and samosas, making the day truly memorable.



Aspiration

Sports Day preparations filled the month of December with excitement and enthusiasm. The children participated in regular practice sessions and creatively prepared invitation cards, decorated hula hoops with colourful ribbons, and enhanced silambam sticks with glitter tapes. To help them stay calm, quiet time was practiced daily a week before the event. The children were thrilled to receive their Sports Day T-shirts and took great care of them after alterations.

A day before Sports Day, the children enjoyed a photoshoot and shared videos expressing their excitement. The Sports Day event featured hula hoop yoga, ladder climbing, taekwondo, silambam, and cycling. The cycling performance included various stunts such as ramp riding, group formations, and reading while riding. The children performed confidently, supported one another, and showed great teamwork, even while momentarily distracted by drones. The silambam fire show left them amazed. The event concluded with medal distribution, a handball match for parents, snacks, and later reflections and experiences written by the children wrapped up a fulfilling month.



Gratitude

December began with intense and focused Sports Day practice sessions as the final day approached and the children worked on perfecting the final sequence with their four drills. The excitement was evident, especially as children eagerly tried on their new T-shirts and enthusiastically discussed this year's colour! Alongside practice, Gratitude Group took part in creating Sports Day props for the Progress and Courage groups' jungle hurdles. The children enjoyed this so much that they requested to keep the props to decorate their own space with a jungle theme, which was beautifully done after Sports Day. They also thoughtfully made Sports Day invitation cards for their parents.

During practice, children showed remarkable enthusiasm and resilience. Even after minor falls, they encouraged themselves, saying, "Nothing happened, I can continue." They were punctual, motivated and extremely immersed in the whole process. Post Sports Day, children expressed creativity through tissue and clay artwork on glass bottles and reflected on their Sports Day experiences through writing, capturing their pride and joy.



Humility

Group Humility was buzzing with great excitement as Sports Day approached, energising the children for their final practice sessions. Performing silambam stunts with real fire was the highlight for the children and they couldn't wait to perform in front of an audience! The journey demanded patience and resilience, with long practice hours, a few falls, and minor injuries becoming part of the learning process. Initially, the girls felt nervous during their first fire practice, but with mutual encouragement and determination, they overcame their fear and built confidence with each passing practice session. Beyond sports, December became a time of togetherness and growth. The children learned valuable lessons in teamwork, care, and cooperation while supporting one another. On the day before Sports Day, they decorated the school with colourful painted plates and paper link chains, creating a beautiful ambiance all around. On the final day, their performance reflected balance, courage, and unity, leaving them exhilarated yet with a sense of great achievement.



Goodness

This month saw the children deeply engaged in Sports Day practice sessions, which became increasingly intense as the event approached. They eagerly looked forward to rehearsing fire acts in Silambam, Taekwondo, and Cycling. All this preparation culminated in the Grand Finale on Sports Day, where the children showcased their boundless capabilities with remarkable focus, confidence, and dedication.

Darshad and Tanmay explored the Mahabharata through a podcast and thoughtfully shared their insights with the group. They expressed curiosity about the deeper occurrences of the epic, discussed similarities between characters, and reflected on the significant and lasting impact of pivotal figures in the story. In Science, the Peripheral Nervous System was completed at a foundational level with clarity. Diagrams were labeled minimally to aid recognition without overwhelming detail. In Mathematics, children revised key topics through practice papers. Art sessions featured bilateral drawing, scribble art, acrylic pour painting, and the creation of vibrant decorations for Sports Day culminating the month with their vivid experiences and stories.



A Parable



Nan-in, a Japanese master during the *Meiji* era (1868 - 1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen. Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring. The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself.

"It is overfull. No more will go in!"

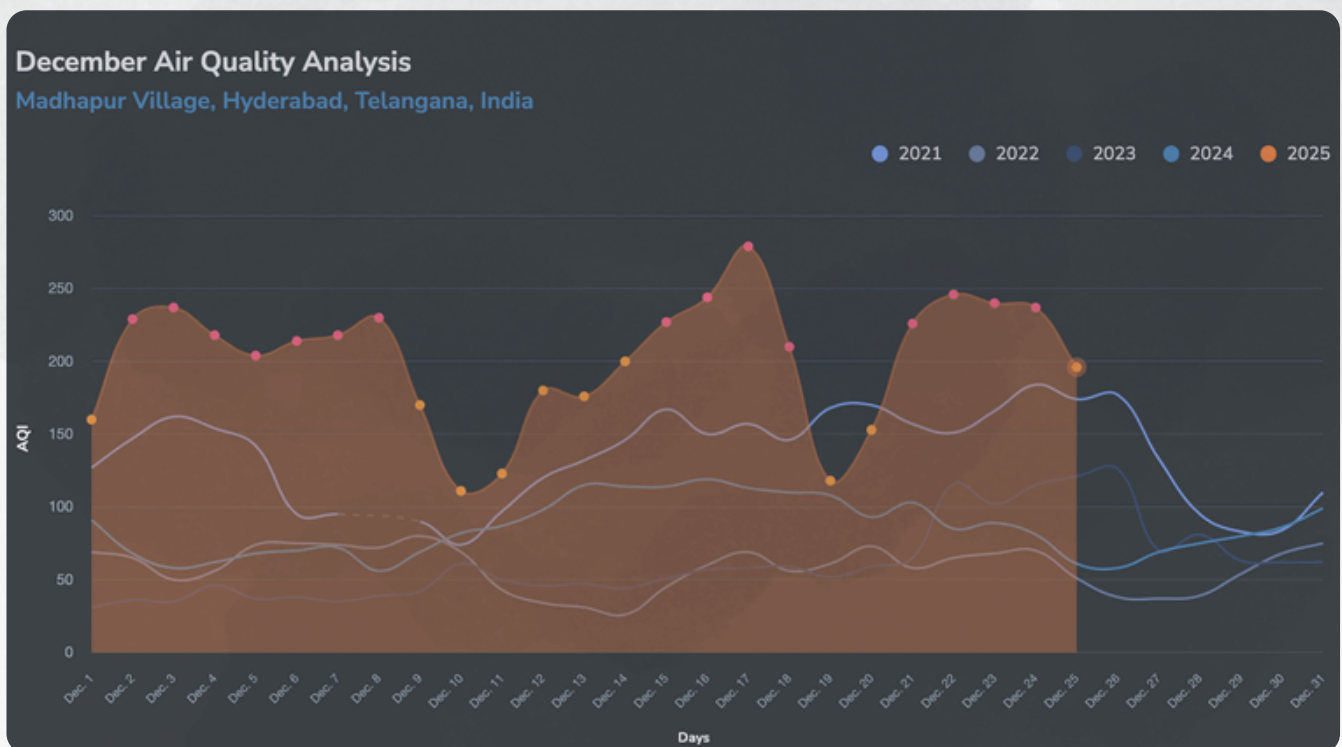
"Like this cup", Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

Invitations to notice

A gentle call to pay attention to something we usually overlook.

- Hyderabad is quietly entering dangerous territory, with air quality levels now consistently crossing into triple digits.
- On January 1st at 8:22 AM, the AQI in Madhapur Village, Hyderabad, was recorded at an alarming **343** — firmly in the Severe category.
- At the same time, the Central University area recorded an AQI of **338**.

These are not isolated readings; they invite us to pause and reflect on the kind of physical environment being created for ourselves and for our children.



December Air Quality Analysis
<https://www.aqi.in/>



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CFIL's Expressions:



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