

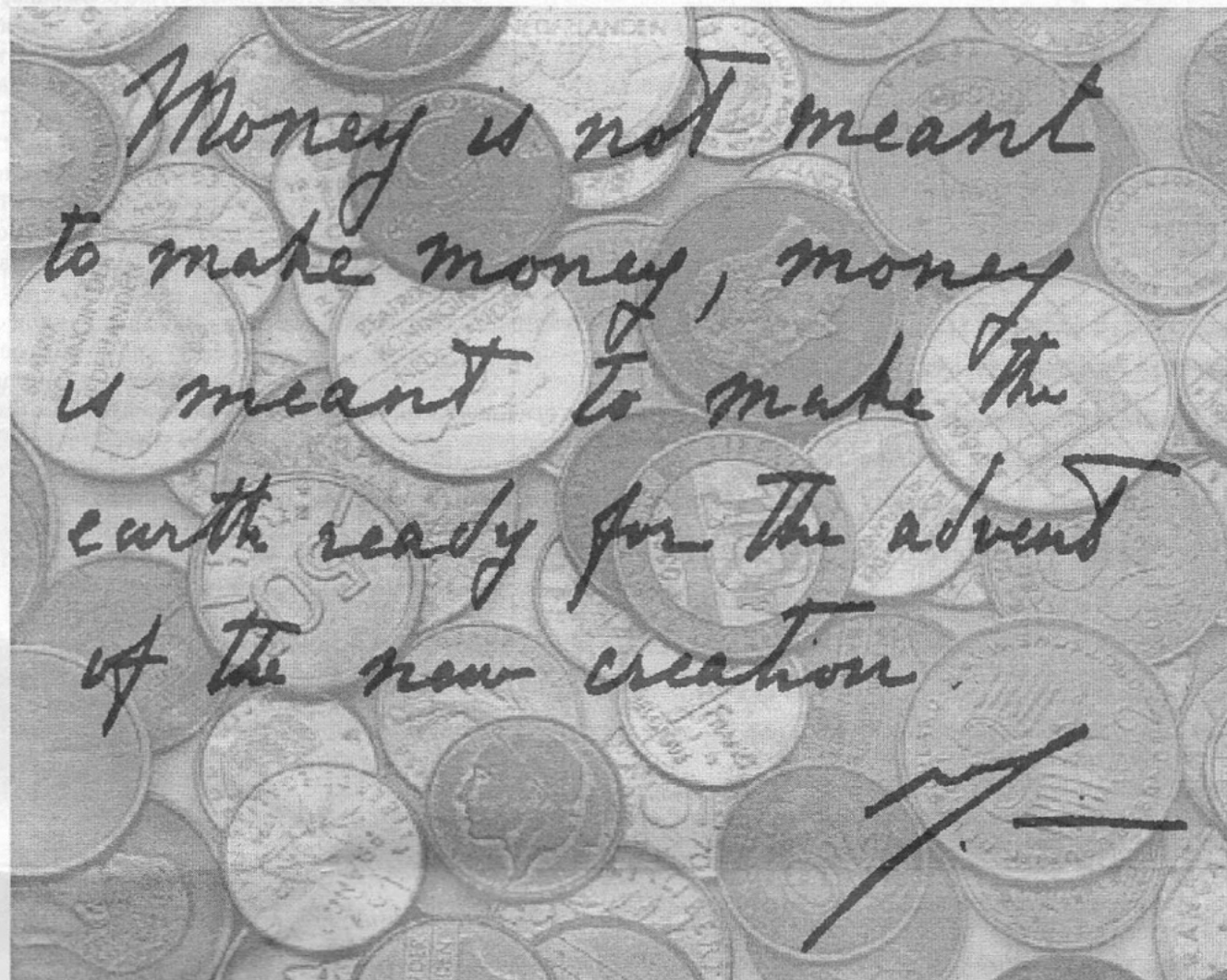
# AUROVILLE TODAY

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*"The love of money," it is said, "is the root of all evil." Why? What is the true nature of money and how should we relate to it? In this issue we examine what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wrote about money, we look at how Auroville is experimenting with it at present, and we identify some of the challenges we face in moving towards the ideal of a transformed money power.*



## UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF MONEY

*In the vast writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, the issue of the role and use of money occupies only a small space. Sri Aurobindo wrote a chapter about it in his book The Mother, (excerpted elsewhere in this issue) and in his Letters on Yoga one finds a few answers on the topic. But what he wrote, in essence, says it all.*

*Money is a Force.*

The Mother, in dealing with the practical life of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, spoke and wrote more about money and its true role. Answering to questions from Ashram children in 1951, She commented on this chapter. "Money in itself," She says, "is an impersonal force, and the way in which you acquire money concerns you alone personally. It may do you great harm, it may harm others also, but it does not in any way change the nature of the money which is an altogether impersonal force: money has no colour, no taste, no psychological consciousness... money as a terrestrial force is not affected by the way in which it is obtained." In other statements Mother stressed the role of this force: "Money is a force intended for the work on earth, the work required to prepare the earth to receive and manifest the divine forces..."<sup>(1)</sup>

### **These are the burning questions**

Recently, a proposal from Chandresh Patel, who lives in the USA, was published in the AV News.<sup>(2)</sup> Briefly, Chandresh proposed to set up a large and ever growing endowment fund "with the purpose of understanding, harnessing and

re-channeling" this terrestrial force, in order to win it back for the Divine. Stressing Mother's statement that "The power of money is at present under the influence or in the hands of the forces and beings of the vital world" and "it is because of this influence that you never see money going in any considerable amount to the cause of Truth," Chandresh introduced this proposal as a "battle plan for future action". "What does it mean to win the money power from the asuric<sup>(3)</sup> forces? What can we, the (hopefully) humble practitioners of the Integral Yoga of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, do to win back the money power from the giant players in the financial markets? These are the burning questions which got us started on the project and we have put a kind of battle plan for our collective action," writes Chandresh.

Burning questions they certainly are. The topic raised so much discussion and argument on the e-mail forum of Auroville International that two separate e-mail fora were started to deal with it in depth.<sup>(4)</sup> The discussions deal with many aspects of the money force, not in the least the aspect of the very creation of the foundation proposed by Chandresh. Some participants pointed out that money is a force, and that it should flow. Does it serve a purpose to create yet another foundation which would collect money but dam the flow and spend only the trickle of interest on projects which can be said to serve the Divine? And would the people who would manage this money have the required level of consciousness?

The question of interest, the result of 'money making money', was addressed in various ways by the forum participants. Unintentionally, Auroville's position was expressed by the Economy Group<sup>(5)</sup> in the same AV News and again in the issue two weeks later.<sup>(6)</sup> "We are very much aware that Mother spoke about 'money not being meant to earn

money', wrote the Economy Group in an almost apologetic tone, "but the Financial Service<sup>(7)</sup> has become one of the 'productive units' of Auroville." What has happened? In 1996, the Economy Group appealed to all individual Aurovilians and units to deposit their funds, which were kept in current accounts with various Indian banks, in their accounts with the Financial Service. "As current accounts do not yield any interest of importance, we propose that all of you deposit your money in your accounts with the Financial Service. That also will not give you any interest. But we intend to put what is not necessary for daily or short term use in interest bearing deposits, and the interest we get on the totality of all that money will be used to augment the income of the Central Fund<sup>(8)</sup>, which will benefit us all."

### **In Mother's hands money would flow**

And benefit it most certainly did. In 1998 the monthly income from interest was Rs 220,000, an eleven fold increase as compared to 1996. "There could be other, and better ways to handle our financial resources," stated the Economy group "and hopefully, over time, we will be able to develop these other ways. In the meantime, we can continue putting our resources together as much as possible, while building trust and confidence."

Why was Mother against interest? If one studies her writings, it becomes evident that She objected to blocking the flow of capital. "During her lifetime, interest was never made," says Jayantilal, head of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives. "Mother dealt with money with the greatest care and economy and would always spend what came in for the

(continued on page 2)



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many needs of the Ashram without concern for the future. If any money was kept, it was kept in a current account, for spending in the short term. In Mother's hands money would flow." "Nowadays things have changed," continues Jayantilal. "The Ashram has become a public charitable trust and we keep excess income in term deposits." And he explains, "Nowadays it is just 'normal' people doing the work."

## Abolish inheritance

Mother's objection to "money making money" is a constant one. Take for example the following statement pertaining to Auroville, which She made in a conversation with Satprem: "Here is the basis on which Auroville is established: Money is not meant to make money. Money is meant to prepare the earth for the new creation." And She added to Satprem: "I wrote this in English very long ago, and sent it to America: it caused a revolution! Most people were indignant that one might think such a thing!"<sup>(9)</sup>

Other publications too bear witness to Mother's objection to interest. Ravindra, a disciple who joined the Ashram in 1938, proposed to her in September 1969 to deposit some money he had received as donation on a fixed account and with the interest send free copies of a magazine to schools and libraries. Mother's reply was clear: "I am not for getting interest on money." But She added the next day: "What I see is the world of tomorrow, but the world of yesterday is still alive and will still live for some time. Let old arrangements go on so long as they are alive. Upon earth, the changes are slow to come."<sup>(10)</sup>

That money as a force should flow and not be hoarded, can also be inferred from Mother's views on borrowing and on inheritance. "Mother only borrowed when absolutely necessary, and then only from devotees" recounts Jayantilal, "and She would never pay interest." "I am quite against borrowing," She wrote to a disciple, explaining once again that 'money is not meant to make money'<sup>(11)</sup> and Gerard who manages Auro-orchard, one of Auroville's farms, remembers: "When the farm became independent I proposed to Her that I would borrow some money. She looked intently at me and asked me if I would like to have her advice, and then She told me: It is better never to borrow." On inheritance there is an undated statement from 1958 published in Mother's Agenda: "Money is a force and should not be an individual possession, no more than air, water or fire. To begin with, the abolition of inheritance."<sup>(12)</sup> And it is not difficult to imagine the tremendous amounts of money that would be freed if this would ever become law in any country.

Finally, listen to what Mother told Satprem: "Money belongs to the one who spends it; that is an absolute law. You may pile up money, but it doesn't belong to you until you spend it. Then you have the merit, the glory, the joy, the pleasure of spending it."

## Money is meant to circulate

Money is meant to circulate. What should remain constant is the progressive movement of an increase in the earth's production – an ever-expanding progressive movement to increase the earth's production and improve existence on earth. It is the

material improvement of terrestrial life and the growth of the earth's production that must go on expanding, enlarging, and not this silly paper or this inert metal that is amassed and lifeless. Money is not meant to generate money; money should generate an increase in production, an improvement in the conditions of life and a progress in human consciousness. This is its true use."

And shortly afterwards She added:

"We want to be an example of true living in the world. It is a challenge I am placing before the whole financial world: I am telling them that they are in the process of withering and ruining the earth with their idiotic system; and with even less that they are now spending for useless things – merely for inflating something that has no inherent life, that should be only an instrument at the service of life that has no reality in itself, that is only a means and not an end (they make an end of something that is only a means) – well then, instead of making of it an end, they should make it the means. With what they have at their disposal they could... oh, transform the earth so quickly! Transform it, put it into contact, truly into contact, with the supramental forces that would make life bountiful and, indeed, constantly renewed – instead of becoming withered, stagnant, shriveled up. A future moon. A dead moon... The movement should be the opposite: the earth should become more and more a resplendent sun, but a sun of life. Not a sun that burns, but a sun that illumines – a radiant glory."<sup>(13)</sup>

The experiment of Auroville's Financial

be given immediately, and there would be no need for investment. But other participants pointed out that this system, effective though it may be to help realise certain projects, still has a major flaw for those who wish to dedicate their lives to the Divine in accordance with Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's views. "Keeping separate accounts for Mother's work and for ourselves," wrote one of the participants while sharing a personal experience, "continued the process of thinking in terms of 'Mother's money' and 'our money'. It did boost our ego and made us feel good about it." But when scrutinized more carefully, it appeared that the step was not sufficient. For if all belongs to the Divine, there is no place for 'giving' something which already belongs to the Divine. One can only be a trustee of what is in one's possession. Then the question of 'what is a good trustee?' has to be answered. Some participants suggested interesting ways to learn how to be a good trustee and how to deal with those "little portions of the divine energy" that pass daily through our hands.

The system of pooling donations for specified projects would also dispel another fear of forum participants: that those who manage the fund are not up to the job. "A little money corrupts a little, a lot corrupts a lot" said one of the participants, and others pointed to the potential abuse of power when unspecified or undedicated money is concentrated in the hands of a few people. Concentrations of "discretionary money" become spheres of influence attracting others to compete or beg for available funds. This

Money is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation on earth works on the vital and physical planes and is indispensable for the fullness of the outer life. In its origin and its true action it belongs to the Divine. But like other powers of the Divine, it is delegated here and in the ignorance of the lower Nature can be usurped for the uses of the ego or held by Asuric influences and perverted to their purpose. This is indeed one of the three forces – power, wealth, sex – that have the strongest attraction for the human ego and the Asura and are most generally misheld and misused by those who retain them. The seekers or keepers of wealth are more often possessed rather than its possessors; few escape entirely a certain distorting influence stamped on it by its long seizure and perversion by the Asura. For this reason most spiritual disciplines insist on a complete self-control, detachment and renunciation of all bondage to wealth and of all personal and egoistic desire for its possession. Some even put a ban on money and riches and proclaim poverty and bareness of life as the only spiritual condition. But this is an error: it leaves the power in the hands of the hostile forces. To reconquer it for the Divine to whom it belongs and use it divinely for the divine life is the supramental way for the Sadhaka.

Sri Aurobindo

"The Mother," chapter 4, paragraph 1

last observation also holds good for Auroville, where rich individuals, or commercial unit executives after having discharged their agreed contributions to Auroville in general, have great liberty to use excess funds at their disposal to stimulate projects of their choice or to invest them for gaining interest.

This brings up the question of what qualities an individual should have to manage money. In the same conversation of 1951 Mother mentions that power, money and sex are interdependent, and that all three have

to be conquered to be sure of conquering one, as each of these things leans for its realisation on the other two. "I have related to you that vision, that big black serpent which kept watch over the riches of the world, terrestrial wealth – he demanded the mastery of the sex-impulse. Because, according to certain theories, the very need of power has its end in this satisfaction, and if one mastered that, if one abolished that from human consciousness, much of the need for power and desire for money would disappear automatically. Evidently, these are the three great obstacles in the terrestrial human life and, unless they are conquered, there is scarcely a chance for humanity to change." When asked if a personal transformation would suffice without there being at least a correspondence in the collectivity, She replied that She did not believe it was possible. In 1958, again in conversation with Satprem, She mentioned that the condition of terrestrial mastery over the sex-impulse had not been fulfilled, and that Sri Aurobindo had come to the conclusion "that only the supramental power will be able to rule over everything."<sup>(14)</sup>

## No place in the world is safe

Mother stated repeatedly that the supramental force is working in the world. And it is perhaps because of the working of this force that discussions such as initiated by Chandresh on the true use of money take off with such liveliness. All over the world attempts have started to deal differently with money. Writes Devan Nair, former President of Singapore and one of the forum participants: "You may not have sufficiently appreciated that you have advanced the money power project in the grim context of a global economic meltdown which has already passed its early stages. It is a gigantic explosion which we even now witness in slow motion on the screen of unfolding reality. Investors in all continents, not excluding the Americas, are running scared and busy looking for safer places to secure their largely ill-gotten gains. They will eventually realise that no place in the world is safe; in fact that nobody is safe unless all are safe. This is the major reason why so many prominent economists world-wide have begun a serious questioning of the fundamentals of the dominant free market philosophy of our times. They have begun to suspect that these so-called 'fundamentals' probably constitute the most stupendous hoax perpetrated on mankind by Asuric forces."

And he continues: "What is of the utmost significance is that a large number of highly respected economists world-wide are already publicly questioning the moral and practical relevance of economic growth based on free market principles. Institutions like the International Monetary Fund have come under microscopic examinations that reveal that billions of dollars used to help out countries in deficit are in reality primarily used to bail out billionaires and high-end currency speculators, while calling on the mass of underprivileged people to tighten their belts and eat less." In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "The industrial, the commercial, the economic age – another kind of barbarism – is progressing towards its culmination and its close." And He explains: "This economic barbarism is essentially that of the vital man who mistakes the vital being for the self and accepts its satisfaction as the first aim of life. The vitalistic or economic barbarian makes the satisfaction of wants and



# THE AUROVILLE MAINTENANCE SYSTEM

Trying to keep pace with a changing mentality

desires and the accumulation of possession his standard and aim... To arrive, to succeed, to produce, to accumulate, to possess is his existence. The accumulation of wealth and more wealth, the adding of possessions to possessions, opulence, show, pleasure, a cumbrous inartistic luxury, a plethora of conveniences, life devoid of beauty and nobility, religion vulgarised or coldly formalised, politics and government turned into a trade and profession, enjoyment itself made a business, this is commercialism... His idea of civilisation is comfort, his idea of morals social respectability, his idea of politics the encouragement of industry, the opening of markets, exploitation and trade following the flag... (15)

## Dual citizenship - an ideal solution?

"As we approach the Gnostic scheme of things, we are bound, indeed will be compelled to find means to alter the present global financial schemata in radical ways" writes Devan. "But we can't reach there in one bound! Auroville hasn't, after so many years of existence, because they too have had to survive right in the midst of contending barbarisms." Devan touches on a true point. For many Aurovilians still don't feel secure on many levels. Says Mukul, an Indian Newcomer to Auroville who lived abroad for a long time: "You cannot expect Aurovilians of foreign origin to bring all their reserves to Auroville if there is no guarantee that they can stay in India. But the Indian Government is studying the possibilities of allowing dual citizenship to non-resident Indians, and this might be an ideal solution for Auroville as well." But internally too, Auroville needs to develop a publicly accessible, very clearly articulated statement of its relationship with money, including among other things, how the community will provide for the well-being of its citizens, and what the responsibilities of its citizens are.

Like everybody else in the world, every Aurovilian needs food, shelter and basic amenities in order to live. But contrary to many other parts of the world, the ideal in Auroville is not just to work for a living. For in Auroville, "work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action." (1)

As of today, the community of Auroville provides for the basic subsistence of about 270 Aurovilians and their families through its Auroville Maintenance Fund. The needs of the other Aurovilians are covered either by themselves, or by the commercial units for whom they work.

The Auroville Maintenance Fund is man-

ices are provided freely to all Aurovilians. Last but not least, there is the magnificent living environment: for Auroville is partly surrounded by beautiful forests.

There is a tendency to think of maintenance only in terms of cash allotment and to forget all that is freely accessible, says the Maintenance Group, and people do not sufficiently appreciate that Auroville has already gone a long way towards realising other aspects expressed in Mother's Dream: "Beauty in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, would be equally accessible to all; the ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited only by the capacities of each one and not by social and financial positions."

According to the Maintenance Group, Auroville is covering the basic needs from the material point of view. Nobody need starve or want for clothing, shelter or education or op-

development. But some members of the Maintenance Group attribute the change of mentality to a far more fundamental problem: they feel that many Aurovilians do not have, or do not have sufficiently, an inner dedication to the aims of Auroville, and that they turn instead towards security and the satisfaction of desires.

"People sometimes forget what they are here for," is another observation which is frequently heard. One doesn't come to Auroville to "make money." One cannot compare what is available in Auroville in terms of cash allowance to what one could earn outside. This question particularly comes up when addressing the needs of the Auroville youth. The Maintenance Group observes that Auroville has, generally speaking, failed to motivate the youth, who often feel that the cash allowance is insufficient to cover their needs, to give their energy to Auroville. The Maintenance Group considers that those youth who feel unsatisfied in Auroville should be helped to go out and experience the larger world.

The lack of "sufficient" maintenance is sometimes a reason for people working in services to shift to commercial units. Is it also a reason why people do not contribute in work to the community? The Auroville Maintenance Group replies to this question with a categorical no! They point out that there are very few people in the Maintenance Fund whose contribution to the community can be questioned, and that this observation is often misused to justify not contributing to the needs of the Maintenance Fund. It follows then, that those who do not contribute to the community in work are to be found amongst those who have an income of their own.

Is the money available to cover the necessary increases? And how are those increases to be made? The questionnaire showed that a large majority is in favour of more payments "in kind." This implies that instead of a full cash allowance, an allowance of cash and basic goods - such as, for example, meals at Solar Kitchen and clothing at Nandini - would be made available to an individual. The Maintenance Group is at present studying how to effectuate such a change, but points out that at a first glance the money needed to cover the increases in cash and kind isn't there. (2) Though it has become easier to meet basic needs as there has been an increase of income over the last five years, the proportion of what is needed and what is available has remained the same. But if the increase is beyond what is available at present, does this imply it cannot be made available by individual Aurovilians and other Auroville activities, projects and units? A note from the Economy Group in the Auroville news of September 26th gives an insight: "For rather a long period during Auroville's economic history, Aurovilians with personal financial resources were expected to (and did in fact) contribute at least 10% of their income to Auroville as 'unspecified.' Recently, this form of contribution has almost disappeared, even though it seems that the proportion of Aurovilians with personal resources has increased rather than decreased..."

The maintenance mentality that has been in practice for many years is gradually changing. It seems that a community-wide discussion would be useful to see if there is any consensus upon what the maintenance system should be maintaining.

Carel

(Based on information provided by some individual members of the Maintenance Group.)

(1) The Mother: A Dream (August 1954)  
(2) Starting November the economy group has increased the maintenances and appealed to Aurovilians to help financially.



The traditional nexus: money and power...

aged by the Economy Group. The maintenance allocation is done by a sub-group, the Auroville Maintenance Group. This group has, for the last four months, also been working on evaluating the maintenance system and studying how maintenances can be increased, as the outcome of a recent questionnaire showed that about 85% of those who depend on the Maintenance Fund - most of whom work in the Auroville service units - consider that they cannot make ends meet. Does this mean that the system needs to change? Or does this dissatisfaction point to other imbalances within the community?

The Auroville Maintenance Group, struggling as it does with an unpopular job, defines maintenance however as being much more than the allotment in cash. There are numerous services that are freely available to children and adult Aurovilians, such as education, dance and music classes, body awareness classes, sports, theatre classes, semi-subsidised health care and so on. Aurovilians also avail freely of an infrastructure that is extraordinary for a village of a mere 1500 inhabitants. There is the big auditorium at Bharat Nivas, where world class dance, music and theatre performances are given free of charge; there are video rooms; there are free film performances; there is a beautiful healing centre at Quiet where all types of healing are given free of charge; there are dance and hatha yoga rooms at the Pitanga building; there is a world class electronic telephone exchange; there is a Solar Kitchen; and many more serv-

portunities to put their energy into Auroville. And everybody knows that if they have a true need, they will be listened to. Still, the result of the questionnaire speaks for itself. Why do 85% of the 270 people who receive on average Rs 2,500/month feel that it is insufficient? A simple reason is that the cost of living has increased due to inflation, and maintenances have not been adjusted accordingly. But a deeper reason may be the perception that other Aurovilians who are not depending on the community for their living often enjoy far more comfortable lifestyles. At least part of the change of mentality can be attributed to this factor. Five years ago, only those who would really need support from the community would ask for it. Nowadays, with the increase in general prosperity, people see that there is money around and wonder why they shouldn't have a better share; so everyone seems to be asking for maintenance which is looked upon increasingly as a salary. But for the time being, only the maintenance for those who really need it can be provided.

Another reason for this change of mentality appears to be the fact that many Aurovilians are now in their mid forties and fifties, and issues of security are coming up. There is a growing tendency to feel that an Aurovilian should be maintained at a level considered proper by that individual, in view of the amount of years that person has served the community and what he or she has contributed to the community in terms of energy and sometimes money. This too is a new

Carel

(1) The Mother, Questions and Answers 1950-1951, CWTM vol 4, pp. 375-383

(2) Auroville News, September 26th, 1998

(3) Asura: hostile force of the mental plane

(4) m-pp@collaboration.org and money@collaboration.org

(5) Economy group: Auroville working group that monitors Auroville's internal economy, in particular the Central Fund.

(6) Auroville News, October 10th, 1998

(7) Financial Service: Auroville's internal financial system, which primarily deals with maintenances of individual Aurovilians.

(8) Central Fund: Fund maintained by the Economy group. Its income from various sources such as contributions from commercial units, individuals, guests, projects and others, is used to cover approximately 40 community budgets. Monthly accounts are published in the Auroville News.

(9) Mother's Agenda volume 10, 27 August 1969, p 311

(10) More Answers from The Mother, CWTM Vol. 17 pp. 325-326

(11) More Answers from The Mother, CWTM Vol. 17 pp. 396

(12) Mother's Agenda, October 4th, 1958, Vol. I., p. 206

(13) Mother's Agenda, October 4th, 1958, Vol. I., p 204-205

(14) Mother's Agenda, July 6th 1958, Vol. I. p. 177-178

(15) Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle p. 72-73.



# Perspectives on Village Action

## Introducing Village Action

*Unlike most cities, which draw into themselves all the raw materials and creative people from the rural area, Auroville wants to grow by nurturing the human and material resources of the surrounding area. AVAG, which recently completed 15 years, is one of the groups which helps to make this happen.*

*Here we highlight some of the activities of AVAG, and publish excerpts from a personal report by Rannveig Rajendran, a young Sri Lankan-Norwegian woman, who spent 9 months in 1995 as a voluntary worker at AVAG.*

Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) was formally founded in 1983. During the last five years, due to assured funding, AVAG extended its operations to 35 villages benefitting 2,000 people directly and 30,000 people indirectly. The main purpose of AVAG is to create awareness among the local people regarding their social, cultural and environmental conditions. It does this primarily by promoting the material development of the villages, women's empowerment, and education of children and the youth.

AVAG differs from most NGOs in that its team of twenty or so development workers all hail from the local villages. Equal numbers of

local young men and women are carefully selected and trained for two years before they join the AVAG team as development workers. This is in keeping with AVAG's policy that any change is lasting only if it is done with people's participation. AVAG takes up a particular activity in the village only if the villagers themselves come forward to enlist AVAG's help.

**A** key feature of AVAG is its emphasis on women empowerment. This is partly because women have been traditionally oppressed and also because women, as the mainstay of the family, are the harbinger

of change. Women's groups have been set up by AVAG in 29 villages. These groups meet regularly, initiate and implement community projects, operate savings clubs, and support each other in crisis. In the savings clubs organized by women's groups, each member agrees to put in Rs.25/- each month. AVAG gives a matching grant to the club when the amount reaches Rs. 3,000 (US \$70). From these savings, loans can be provided to the members. The group decides for itself who will be the beneficiary of the loan. This project is aimed at liberating the women from usurious moneylenders and is a precursor to a women's bank.

**A**uroville Village Action Group also runs two crèches and 23 night schools, and supplements the primary education offered in the villages by its PEP programme. Like any

other Auroville organization, AVAG is not perfect. And sadly enough, like most other Auroville groups working in the bioregion, AVAG functions more as a satellite than as an integral unit of Auroville. And yet one hopes that this situation will change and the realisation of an actual human unity in the Auroville region become less of a dream and more of a reality.

Bindu



A Village Action meeting

## Working with Village Action:

a personal impression from a voluntary worker by Rannveig Rajendran

**E**quipped with several litres of drinking water, I arrived at the Auroville Village Action Group office in Isaiambalam on a (for me) extremely hot September day. I don't know what I had expected, but I was surprised to find an office building with electricity and even computers. I was also surprised to find that Bhavana, with whom I had been corresponding previous to my arrival, was an energetic and smiling American woman on a bicycle, and not the north-Indian middle-class woman that I had imagined. She made me feel that a newly graduated sociologist from Norway could actually contribute to the organisation. I was eager to be told what to do and where to start.

That was the first day. The following days were quite different. I soon realised that if I had come to Auroville with expectations about being given a clearly defined role and specific work to take up, I would be disappointed. And in a way I was. Auroville is very much a "do-as-you-do-it-truthfully-place." That was also the attitude of Auroville Village Action Group. I was told to look around, get to know the place and people and then decide where I'd like to put my energy. What?? Had I really worked and saved money for months, left my friends and family and travelled half the world around to find that no-one had thought about where I could be needed?

A few frustrating days went by. I tried to get a picture of what Auroville Village Action Group was, what kind of projects it was involved in, and to learn about the area. So I looked through all Auroville Village Action Group archives (from which I didn't learn much), talked to people at the office (who were all very sweet but too busy to chat) and I visited the Auroville Library (which had rows of books on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's teachings, but hardly anything on the historical and socio-cultural traits of Auroville's surrounding area). I started to secretly regret having turned down a tempting job offer from University for this chaotic scene, where no one seemed to be able to tell me what was going on.

**B**ut then everything changed. Because that's when I met the coordinators, Anbu and Moris, and the Development Workers. They were all seated on the floor in a circle, and in the beginning I couldn't make out who were the teachers and who were the students: Pandyan facilitated the meeting with efficiency and creativity, and the other students participated with an openness and eagerness I had never experienced among Norwegian University students.

From that day on I followed Anbu and Moris around wherever they went. Very soon I realised that it would take weeks or even months before I could make myself useful. There was too much I didn't know about village life in Tamil Nadu and my Tamil wasn't as good as I had hoped.

A few days later Anbu told me it was time to work, and would I please take up English classes for the Development Workers? I didn't dare saying anything but yes! So I went to the library and prepared classes—twice a week for the female workers and once a week for the guys.

After a while I took up classes in socio-economical surveying. The Development Workers had already carried out an extensive survey on their own and one neighbouring village, and my classes were dedicated to analysing and discussing the results. Through these classes I discovered a kind of thirst for training in analytical thinking among the Development Workers. They told me quite frankly that they needed to improve their ability to see things from more than one side—both in their work and on a more personal level. One of them put it like this: "I'm so used to being told what is right and what is wrong. In the village it's always the ones with power who decide what everyone else should think. After I met 'Akka' and 'Sir' (Anbu and Moris) I have learnt that I have the right to disagree, and that I can try to convince others too. But it's not easy..."

Sometimes when I facilitate meetings in the villages I know for sure that what some people say is wrong, but I don't know how to express myself. And then I start to believe that maybe he is right after all. But I always regret it afterwards—that I didn't think fast enough."

**A**s an answer to this need, I started experimenting with organised discussions on various topics, often with an element of a role-play. All the topics were presented in a form where there wasn't necessarily one right and one wrong answer, but where the complexity of the subject could come up. Let me give just one example of how those classes proceeded: I gave an introduction about child-labour, presenting facts and figures on the situation internationally, and in India and Tamil Nadu, and also covered international legislation and policies. Then I presented a imaginary but, sadly enough, realistic "plot".

*There is a factory in a very poor part of Tamil Nadu that employs young children, because they are "cheaper" than adults. Many households in the area depend on the salary that their children bring home from the factory, and no one dares to challenge the owners of the factory, by, let's say, demanding that he hires adults instead. The work is hard, the pay is bad, the child-workers don't have proper clothes, and the lunch they are served (as a part of the salary) is both insufficient and unhealthy. In short: The children suffer tremendously.*

*A Norwegian humanitarian organisation hears about the tragic situation and offers to fund a project to help the children to a better life. The proposal involves plans to put up*

*camps where the children will get beds, clothes and proper food. A night school is also planned. In the beginning everyone thinks this is a great idea, but after a while voices are raised against the whole project.*

The discussion went on for hours, and didn't end after the class. Whenever I met the Development workers later on, they would have thought up some new argument—both in favour and against the project.

**S**ome weeks later I expanded my teaching activities, and gave spoken-English classes for the crèche-staff in the two AVAG-financed crèches in Bommayar-palayam and Kulapalayam. In this way I could take off some of Anbu's work-burden, and also get a direct experience with village work. I don't know how much English they learnt from me, but I learnt a lot of Tamil! And I learnt much about village life. About children, about working mothers, and about those wonderful women who have taken up teaching in far from perfect surroundings, and for a salary most of us could never manage on.

Showing interest and asking questions is often enough. I was, for example, extremely disappointed to find that hardly anyone from Auroville Village Action Group showed up to celebrate the crèche anniversary. The symbolic effect of spending an hour watching the children perform in their best clothes should be worthwhile considering, even if everyone is—I know—extremely busy. I took some Auroville friends to one of the celebrations, and the children, teachers and parents were talking about it for weeks later.

Ever since the first time I visited Auroville in 1980 I had an uncomfortable feeling about the way Aurovilians talk about and deal with what one person characterised as "the Village Problem". But realising that this relationship is complex, I have tried to "stay quiet", to observe and learn and not to pass premature judgments. However, having visited Auroville eight times in fourteen years, I think I can now allow myself to voice my frustrations. For there have been a sufficient number of incidents to prove that the relationship between Auroville and the villagers is far from perfect.

**W**hat is needed is ways of addressing this problem—or should I say challenge—in a more organised and systematic way. Everyone is familiar with Mother's statement, that the villagers are the first Aurovilians, but the statement needs to be more than an empty phrase...

Having said this, I do feel there is lot of goodwill. I have met people both in and outside AVAG who sincerely want to improve the state of things.



**H**ow many people can Auroville sustainably support? This is a difficult question to answer for at least two reasons: First, lifestyles and material standards vary greatly in and around Auroville—some individuals, in effect, live “larger” than others. So, are we talking about supporting individuals living in thatched huts and getting around on bicycles or people who own large houses and cars? It makes a difference. Second, Auroville is not an island unto itself, but rather depends upon exchanges of goods and resources within both regional and global economies. Such trade tends to blur physical boundaries and makes it difficult to determine exactly who is being supported by Auroville’s activities.

Matters become clearer if we turn this question on its head and, instead of asking, “How many people can Auroville sustainably support?” we pose the question, “Given the various lifestyles among Aurovilians, how much land and water area is being used to sustain this population?” This is the question posed by Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees in their book *Our Ecological Footprint* and is the subject of a new research project begun by the Geocommons College Program (see box on this page).

One way to visualize the “ecological footprint” of Auroville is to imagine a transparent dome a dozen times taller than the Matrimandir covering all of Auroville and its 1,400 residents, not unlike the Biosphere II project in Arizona. Imagining this dome to be elastically expandable, how large would it need to be in order for Auroville to indefinitely sustain itself solely utilizing the natural ecosystems and energy sources available within the dome? This dome would then define Auroville’s ecological footprint upon the Earth. Another way to look at it:

if one were to take all of the bits and pieces of land from all over the planet that are currently being appropriated to produce the goods and resources used by Auroville and/or assimilate its wastes and gather them together in one place, together they would equal the area under this dome.

Why is this an important issue to consider? Because as a species we are quickly reaching the limits of our finite biosphere and we need to acknowledge some basic ecological realities. On the Earth today, there are approximately 10.4 billion hectares of productive land and water available for human use. If we divide this area equally among the 5.9 billion humans currently alive on the planet, we end up with almost 1.8 hectares per person. We can call this 1.8 hectares our “fair Earthshare.”

**N**ow as we all know, the Earth’s productivity is not shared equally among all its human inhabitants (not to mention other species). For example, the average per capita footprint in India is 0.8 hectares, making it one among an increasingly small group of nations that are using less than their fair Earthshare. On the other end of the scale, the U.S. weighs in at a whopping 10.3 ha/cap. Thinking globally, Wackernagel and Rees calculate the average human’s footprint at 2.8 hectares which is over

50% larger than our fair Earthshare of 1.8 ha/cap. This is solid evidence that the human enterprise has exceeded the natural carrying capacity of the Earth. Our planet is simply not big enough to sustain our current levels of consumption.

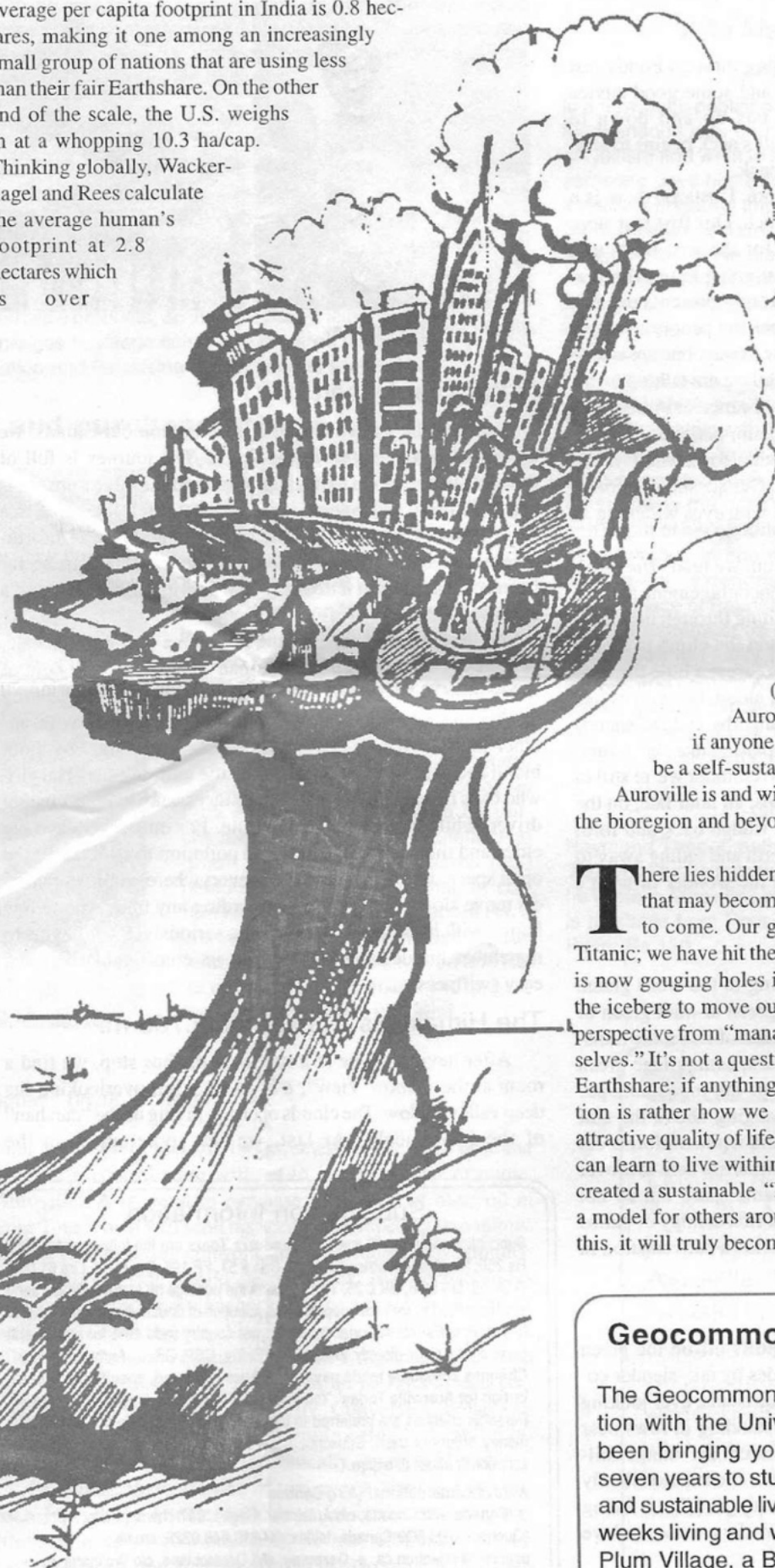
**G**etting back to Auroville, the Geocommons College Program is attempting to track the resources consumed and wastes produced by Auroville. This has proven to be an exceedingly complex task and much work remains to be done. So far, initial questionnaire data have been collected from 36 settlements, 102 individuals, and several organizations. While it is too soon to estimate the average Aurovillian’s ecological footprint, it is likely somewhere on the lower end of the scale (but steadily rising). Over 40% of the 36 settlements conserve resources through using some form of renewable energy and about half have a collective kitchen. Furthermore, about 50% of the Aurovilians are vegetarian which makes less of an impact upon global resources than a meat-based diet.

Let’s conservatively estimate the average Aurovillian’s ecological footprint at 2.5 hectares (around the same level of material comfort as in Mexico or Costa Rica). This would mean that, together, the current 1,400 residents of Auroville appropriate about 3,500 hectares of productive land and water area. That’s already quite a bit more than the 1,300 hectares currently owned by Auroville or even the approximately 2,500 hectares that Auroville could ever plan to own. A city of 50,000 living at this level of comfort would need 1,250 square kilometres to sustain all of its activities (that’s almost 70 times the area of Auroville, including the greenbelt). So if anyone was ever envisioning Auroville to be a self-sustaining city, they can forget about it; Auroville is and will always be intimately linked with the bioregion and beyond.

**T**here lies hidden here an opportunity for Auroville that may become increasingly apparent in the years to come. Our global human enterprise is like the Titanic; we have hit the iceberg of ecological limits which is now gouging holes in the ship’s hull. We can’t expect the iceberg to move out of our way. We have to shift our perspective from “managing resources” to “managing ourselves.” It’s not a question of how we can increase our fair Earthshare; if anything, it is going to decrease. The question is rather how we can squeeze the highest and most attractive quality of life out of our 1.8 hectares. If Auroville can learn to live within its ecological means, it will have created a sustainable “lifeboat” that would surely become a model for others around the world. If Auroville can do this, it will truly become the city the earth needs.

# Auroville’s Ecological Footprint

A preliminary report  
by Daniel Greenberg



Drawing from: “Our ecological footprint: reducing human impact on the earth” by Mathis Wackernagel and William E. Rees

## Number of persons per item in Auroville

1.5 people per bicycle	7 people per computer
3 people per motorcycle	14 people per VCR
3 people per refrigerator	15 people per television
4 people per phone	33 people per automobile
5 people per moped	47 people per airconditioner

## Geocommons College Program

The Geocommons College Program, in cooperation with the University of New Hampshire, has been bringing young adults to Auroville for over seven years to study ecological community design and sustainable living. Students typically spend nine weeks living and working at Auroville and also visit Plum Village, a Buddhist monastery led by Thich Nhat Hanh in SW France and Mitraniketan, a Gandhian community in Kerala, India. Future programs are planned at Green Kibbutzim in Israel and other ecological communities in North America and New Zealand. For more information, contact: Geocommons, Derbyshire Farm, Temple, NH 03084, USA. email: geo@ic.org; tel: (603) 654-6705; fax: 603-654-6987



# Two on One Trail to the Himalayas

*Journeying across India together, Swar and Jill had a unique perspective of the country and their relationship to it. Like many residents of Auroville, as "Indianised Westerners" they no longer feel like tourists, but more like natives travelling through a familiar landscape. However, to most Indians, they are seen as foreigners, and are expected to behave like tourists. In these excerpts from their diary of a month travelling through Kerala, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, we can see how curious it is to be in between two worlds.*

## Letting go...

Letting go of Auroville early, passing through Pondy just long enough for a coffee, the camera and some good advice from Auroson. Then bouncing by bus up and down to Cuddalore, where we try our legs and Jill's neck begins to ache with the first great weight of the backpack.

The only real restaurant in Cuddalore. Upstairs, there is a view, a friendly waiter and a decent lunch. Our first rest stop, first photo. "Where are you from?" for the first time, too. "Where are you going?" "Why are you going to the Himalayas?" The answer to "where are you from?" presents the first obstacle. In Cuddalore, it's not unusual for people to know about Auroville. Later, as we get further away, our answer to this question will vary. It depends on who we are talking to. To some, we simply say our native place—France or America—and let it go at that. For others, we explain, patiently, that we are residents of India, living in Auroville for several years. Then we try to explain what Auroville is. Our questioning friend tries to understand what we are saying, with eyes widening as surprise increases.

Waiting at the Cuddalore train station, we read *The Snow Leopard* by Peter Mathiessen for its encouragement and insight into the beauty and terror of travelling through unknown territory. The descriptions of the land and the climb to Dolpo (in Nepal) are magnificent, and make us forget a little the long wait for the train. We take turns reading aloud, two voices in a recitation, like a song of longing, in sympathy and the sounds fill the time and space. The snow leopard stalks the station watchfully, and the too sweet coffee is a reminder we're still in Tamil Nadu. Where is the train? It comes, an hour late, on the night edge of time, and half asleep we trudge back and forth on the platform, finding our sleeping berth and fading away to the sound of the wheels revolving and the wonder of what's ahead.

## Kerala Green

The Kerala forest gives new meaning to the word green. What do we mean by green? Emerald green or mint green or forest green or dusty green or the soft green of moss, the translucent green of banana leaves, or the dark, camouflage green of the high trees that still cover much of the mountaintops? Grey rain clouds pile up behind us, hanging above the soft green paddies. Schoolgirls in crimson and white uniforms cut through a field thick with rice where women are bent low over their work; the two worlds share the same space but do not connect. Further on, two women under a rich canopy of palms talk beneath their black umbrellas. It seems a conversation in Paradise.

## Backwaters of Kerala

The boat from Quilon to Aleppey puffs off on the green mirror of the canal, bordered on both sides by tall, slender coconut trees. Some hawks circle above our heads, ever looking for fish, as do the Chinese fishing nets standing in rows near the shore. We slip past a Krishna-blue church; the village children wave and shout to us from the shore, then stand silently watching as we glide by. Who is watching? Who is being watched? We disturb for a moment, we make a noise, and we are gone.

When we stop for lunch, a Bombay businessman and his teenage son engage us in conversation, talking about football—with children and other relatives in America, the old man speaks knowledgeably of Rochester, Kansas City and making money. He is happy and his son is full of enthusiasm and laughs easily. "Where are you from?" he asks Jill. When she answers "New York", he sighs. His son replies, "Yes, Bombay and New York—once Bombay is in your blood, it is hard to let go." But it's been a long time since Jill was in New York. When we explain that we live in India now, the father looks at us quizzically. "What business are you in?" he asks.

## Onward to Rajasthan

Finally on the train to Udaipur, Rajasthan. We share a sleeper section with a family who have brought a Gujarati feast with them and unpack the food, preparing to settle in and eat a ten course meal at 11:00 p.m. not heeding our too obvious yawns. We wait for a while, until we can't bear it anymore and we decide it is time to say something, or this party will continue for another hour and we will never be able to sleep. We have, of course, to put down our beds, and this cuts the festivities short. A gloomy silence results from the gourmets. Tired and dirty from travelling by train for two days, we are asleep in seconds. This experience reminds us that sometimes we still react as Westerners, with a different sense of time and propriety.



Jill and Swar in Bombay

## In the Thar Desert

Leaving the walled city of Jaisalmer atop our camels, we are on a two day safari in the desert. The journey is full of thoughts that respond to the landscape and the adventure. "Finally," Jill says, "I wanted to know what it felt like to be in a desert, where there is nothing but the sand and you." Unfortunately, this small journey in the Thar does not take us so far from civilisation, but it does provide us with a little taste and a beautiful setting.

All day we ride across sand and stone and purple shale, past scrub bushes, thorn bushes, than an oasis, a small pool of water from the monsoon rains, a miracle after the unrelenting desert landscape. Sometimes, we are nose to nose with another tour party, two English travellers, a girl and boy, both blond and getting a good burn under the mid-day sun. The girl, who calls her camel "Johnny" chats incessantly with her camel driver, while the boy plays his flute. For once, we leave the cities and their turmoil, chaos and pollution to experience the open space, its silence prevailing everywhere, while our camels move slowly, in waves, disregarding any trail. After a few hours, with his back starting to ache seriously, Swar begins to remember his dear motorbike with its comfortable seat and easy swiftness!

## The Himalayas: Narkanda, 2,705 m.

After having coffee at a stall near the bus stop, we find a room at the "Snow View", a hotel up a hill overlooking the deep valleys below. The clouds open up, giving us the "darshan" of the snow peaks. At last, we see some snow on the

mountaintops! The room is simple and cold—no heaters here and hot water is given by the bucket. In the evening, while taking a stroll through Narkanda, we are stopped by a friendly fellow from Delhi who invites us to join him for tea in the house of an acquaintance nearby. The building is an ancient, roomy, two storey dwelling with a Tibetan inscription of welcome above the doorway. Even though it is ramshackle, it has charm, and the owner turns out to be the descendant of one of the pioneers of Narkanda.

As we talk, we learn a little about the history of the place. There was an American, a Mr. Stokes, who came to India as a priest, but he married a local woman, became a Hindu, and with seeds from America, he scattered apple trees everywhere in Himachal Pradesh. Our hosts tells us he owns 150 acres of orchards, has too many apples and doesn't know what to do with them all. He even suggests sending some south to Auroville! The visit is wonderful for us, a warm respite from the official welcomes of hotel managers and merchants. Over a cup of tea, our host asks us the usual questions, but we can answer at a deeper level. We are able to explain Auroville, and we can discuss the Aurobindo Ashram in Delhi with people who have been there.

## Coming Home

From the rivers up to the big city, over the desert, through the mountains, down into the valleys, across the sweltering plains to the vast, open sea. How do we feel coming back? Not too excited, still full of fresh Himalayan mountain memories, clean air and water. A month without e-mail, telephone and moped, walking in the sunshine, across rain puddled roads and above incredibly shiny, luminous green rice paddies, past small Shiva temples, for Shiva's presence is felt everywhere from the bus cabin to the mountaintops. We felt the presence of the mountains as massive, but not indestructible, for we also saw evidence of landslides and boulders strewn across the road. From the rivers we learned about sheer energy in movement, uncontained and uncontrolled—from the desert we experienced the silence, wideness and rugged beauty of limitless space. From the Big Cities of Mumbai (Bombay) and Delhi, the end products of civilisation—dirt, noise, pollution.

We were affected by the journey in the sense that, personally, we had come through it together, stronger and with a better understanding of our strengths and weaknesses, and with a more serene outlook upon daily circumstances. Life is a flow and changes all the time—like the river, like the mountain, like the shifting desert sands. The paradox of our unique status as foreign residents in India remains: our trip reminded us we are still living between two worlds. In some moments of our journey, we were caught in a confusion of identity created by the bureaucracy and our own resistance to being labelled French, American, foreign, resident, Aurovilian—which should we choose to describe ourselves? And yet, in some wonderful moments, we could transcend our "official" status and, simply as seekers, children of the Mother, touch something of the beauty and truth of India.

Jill and Swar

## Subscription Information

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### Auroville International (AVI) Centres

◆ **Canada:** AVI Canada, c/o Antoinette Gagné, 847 chemin Perry, Aylmer (Quebec), J9H 5C9 Canada. tel/fax: (1)-819.648.0328, email: psabran@videotron.ca. ◆ **Germany:** AVI Deutschland, c/o Wolfgang J. Schmidt-Reinecke, Mainstrasse 75, 28199 Bremen, Germany. tel:(49)-421.594220/705289, fax:(49)-421.594240, email: wjs@euro.hb.north.de ◆ **Spain:** AVI España, c/o Kitxu and Yolanda, Apdo. de Correos 36, 31610 Villava - Navarra, Spain. tel:(34)-48.227514, fax:(34)-48.131972, email: kty.mk@teleline.es ◆ **France:** AVI France, 6, rue Cail, 75010 Paris, France. tel/fax: (33)-1.40364367, email: avifrance@compuserve.com ◆ **The Netherlands:** AVI Nederland, c/o Wim de Jong, Zwanewater 5, 2715 BH Zoetermeer, The Netherlands, tel: (31)-79.321067, email: wimdejong@gironet.nl ◆ **Sweden:** AVI Sverige, c/o Staffan Kleiner, Rörålggarvägen 53, S-16146 Bromma, SWEDEN, tel. (46) 08-7048153, email: staffan.kleiner@swipnet.se ◆ **U.K.:** AVI U.K., c/o Martin Littlewood, Canigou - Cot Lane, Chidham, W.Sussex, PO18 8 SP, U.K. tel/fax: (44)-1243.574099, email: aviuk@compuserve.com ◆

**USA (1):** AVI U.S.A., PO Box 877, Santa Cruz, CA 9506, U.S.A., tel: (1)-831 425 5620, email: aviusa@aol.com ◆ **USA (2):** Auroville Information Office, PO Box 676, Woodstock NY 12498, U.S.A., tel:(1)-914.679-5358, fax:(1)-914.679-5853, email: avinfo@aol.com

### Addresses of AVI Liaisons

◆ Anandí E.Fernandez, Catamarca 510 P.B., 1231 Buenos Aires, ARGENTINA, tel: (54)-1.932 5460, email: anandi97@hotmail.com ◆ Jan Allen, 5/4 Walker str., Lavender Bay 2060, NSW AUSTRALIA, tel/fax: (61)-2.99557769, mail: janallen@scamedia.com.au. ◆ Sylvia Koerber, A-3532 Rastendorf 201/5, AUSTRIA, tel/fax: (43)-26.684, email: sylvia.koerber@blackbox.at ◆ Carlos Gohn, Rua J.E. Caldeira Brant, 139 Itapoa, 31710-200 Belo Horizonte, MG - BRAZIL, email: cargohn@dedalus.lcc.ufmg.br ◆ Dorith Kalish-Teichman, 53 Sokolov Street, Tel Aviv 62284, ISRAEL, tel: (972)-3.5467511 ◆ Patrizia Ghezzi, Via Morali 13, 24100 Bergamo, ITALY, tel: (39)-35.250781, email: manarada@ns.spm.it ◆ Fabienne Feldmann, Gutenberg 18, 1800 Vevey, SWITZERLAND, tel: (41)-21.922 0663, email: jbilon@dtus.com

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## Nobel Prize for International Advisory Council member

Professor Amartya Sen, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and recently appointed to the International Advisory Council of the Auroville Foundation, has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Economic Science. Dr. Sen's work has focussed upon issues of welfare, inequality and poverty, and he has shown how government policies can cause starvation even when food is available. In its citation, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said that he had "restored an ethical dimension to the discussion of vital economic problems".

## Helping to save the ozone layer

Two week-long training workshops on the maintenance of CFC-free and solar refrigerators took place in September at Auroville's Centre for Scientific Research. They were held at the request of the World Health Organization (WHO), South Asia, in collaboration with IT Power, a NGO in Pondicherry. The participants hailed from India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

CFC gases, traditionally used as a "coolant" for refrigeration, deplete the ozone layer. In keeping with the Geneva/Montreal Convention to stop the use of CFC gases by the year 2000, WHO plans to replace the CFC coolants in all its refrigerators and cold-storage chambers with CFC-free coolants. And this workshop, inaugurated by the President of WHO, South Asia, was a first step in this direction. IT Power and CSR have been chosen by WHO as the key organizations for providing training in this field in India.

## Visiting environmentalists

Joanna Macy, international environmentalist and author of books like *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age*,

gave an inspiring talk and led a participatory discussion on the state of the global environment at Vérité on 6th of October. Joanna spoke of what she termed "The Great Turning," the process by which individuals and groups are consciously making the effort to change from an "industrial growing society" to a "light sustaining society." An avowed Buddhist herself, Joanna spoke of the need of a shift in consciousness to effect this change in society.

Alan Watson, member of the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland and founder of the Trees for Life organization, also spent some time in Auroville in October during which he presented two beautiful slide shows on his work on regenerating the Caledonian Forest in Scotland.

## India: unity and diversity

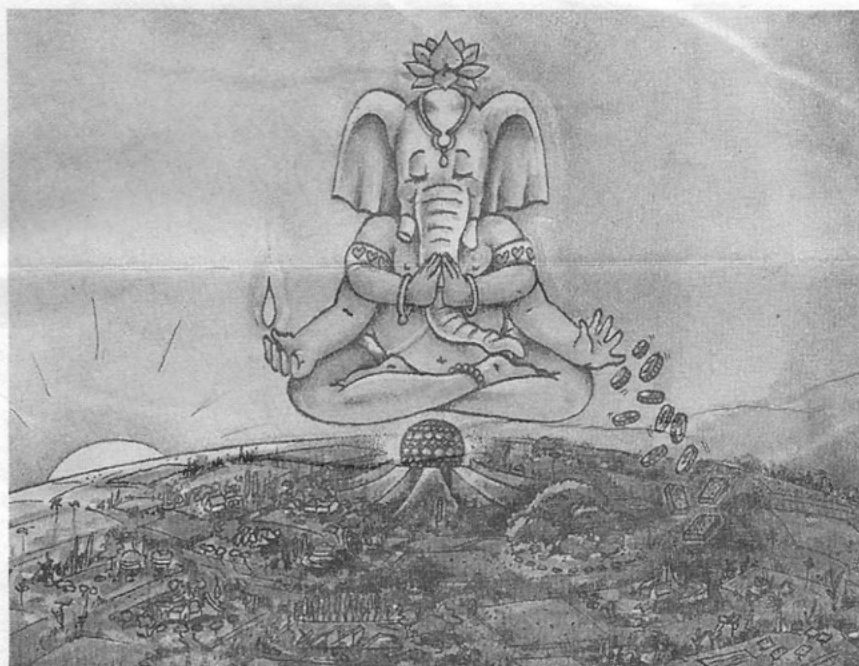
An exhibition and seminar was held on this theme over the weekend of 17th-18th October. The seminar was inaugurated by Professor Dikshit of Annamalai University. It began with priests from Chidambaram Temple chanting Vedic verses, and continued with Aurovilians and friends discussing their relationship to India and how India presents a unique example of unity within diversity.

## AURONET! 2005

Recently, the AuroNET! team, who run the internal intranet communication system, invited Aurovilians to brainstorm about how they would like to see it developing in the future. Ideas included using it for referenda and other ways of polling the community; electronic work group meetings; Pour Tous online shopping; electronic commerce for marketing Auroville products; an internet-based telephone system; and linkages to village schools in the area for purposes of education and for raising environmental awareness.

## Land purchase update

Over the past 18 months, Auroville has purchased 95 acres of land, of which 27 acres are in the city area and 68 acres in the green belt. This was due to substantial contributions from Aurovilians, friends of Auroville and the Dutch foundation "Stichting de Zaaier". In cooperation with the Secretary, the Land Service has also been making efforts with the Tamil Nadu State Government to hand over or to lease Peramboke (government) land in the Auroville area to the Auroville Foundation. In the city area a total of 259 acres (105 hectares) still needs to be purchased; the figure for the outstanding green belt land is 2,325 acres (950 hectares). It is estimated that, at current land prices, it will cost about Rs. 5 crores (US\$ 1.2 million) to acquire the remaining land for the city area and Rs. 35 crores (US\$ 8.35 million) to acquire the remaining green belt land.



## A modest proposal "I sing the body electric." (Walt Whitman)

After attending the AuroNET! visioning meeting (see separate report), I happened to read an article in *The Guardian Weekly* which made me realise how uninspired our AuroNET brainstorming had been. For this article was about how a professor of cybernetics at Reading University had a silicon chip implanted in his arm as an experiment in 'smart engineering'. This means that the chip connects him up to his electronically-intelligent office which, on recognizing him, opens doors as he approaches, greets him, turns on his computer, adjusts the thermostat to his ideal temperature etc. etc.

Imagine this transplanted to Auroville. For a few moments of mild discomfort as the chip is implanted, so much of the valuable energy which the new Aurovillian lifestyle requires could be saved. Our four-wheel drive Sierras would start up as we approach, automatically selecting our favourite CD, the microwave would begin to heat up our genetically-modified curry as we turn in the gate, the Jacuzzi in the basement would already be running at precisely the correct temperature while we are still peeling off our Pierre Cardin underwear. Ah, Shangri-la!

But there are even more interesting possibilities, because the implanted chip also offers the opportunity for others to monitor and control the person who is hosting it. Imagine the scene. A control room manned (or womanned) by a small group of Aurovilians. On huge monitor screens they are able to observe not only what each Aurovillian is doing (by that time, every Aurovillian will be required to host an electronic implant as a condition for being put on the Mastered List) but also

thinking! Most of this will be extremely boring. But, now and again, the control team will get to intervene. For example, Aurovillian A is about to purchase a large tin of olive oil in Pour Tous which will send his account scampering into minus. One of the observing control team will immediately administer, via his implant, a mild electric shock. If A persists in his undesirable urge, stronger shocks can be administered until he walks (or is carried) away. Similarly anti-social intentions, like planning to jump the queue at the Solar Kitchen or to question the routing of the Crown Road, can be monitored and corrected before they manifest overtly. Conversely, behaviour which is deemed by the control group beneficial can be rewarded by varied doses of electronically-generated bliss.

Of course, there are one or two minor drawbacks to this idea. It might be a trifle difficult to select the control group (the only ones without implants), we may all hum electronically in the rain, and we'll have to get used to some Aurovilians being twitchier, or more blissed-out, than usual. (There may also be problems with airport security, but that's another story.) Medically, the implantation of chips in the arm should pose no great problems, although the implantation of chips in the brain—which I see as the logical extension of the initial experiment—may require an overnight stay in JIPMER.

So let's seize the day. Let's make Auroville the smart community for smart people. The fast-track, wired-up, cutting-edge electronic cradle of the superman.

AuroNET! take note. And do the needful.

Alan

In April last year, an Auroville Land Fund information and fund-raising centre was set up at CSR office to enhance communication with donors and to increase the inflow of donations. If anyone has any ideas for directly or indirectly raising funds for land purchase, please contact this office (tel.622168/622277 email:landfund@auroville.org.in) or the Land Service in Bharat Nivas (tel.622170).

## Bass-baritone recital

Sponsored by the Dutch Government, the Dutch bass-baritone Dick Hollander, accompanied by the Indian pianist Nauzer Daruwalla, gave a recital of baroque and romantic songs and folk music. Dick's warm and deep voice, and Nauzer's smooth piano accompaniment enthused the Auroville public. Before leaving, Dick gave an inspiring master-class to the adults choir.

## Books

### *With Medhananda on the shores of infinity*

is a new book published by the Sri Mira Trust, Pondicherry. Medhananda was born in Germany but left during the rise of Nazism and went to live on an island near Tahiti. In 1948, someone gave him Sri Aurobindo's book 'The Mother' and it made a profound impact upon him. In 1952 he joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram where he became the librarian of the Ashram Library. He died in 1994.

This book consists of autobiographical material, drawn mostly from conversations with Yvonne Artaud. The early sections refer to his remarkable relationships with animals, both real and totemic, and his ability to access what he calls "archetypal relationships"—those that link us with our past lives and which provide guidance in the present. The middle section deals with his inner experiences on Moorea, the sister island to Tahiti, and the final section is about the Ashram and the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. What makes the book so readable, apart from the interest and depth of his experiences, is that it is shot through with a quiet humour. In one snippet, for example, he talks about leaving—or exteriorising himself from—his body in the market place of Papeete. When he wanted to return to it, he couldn't remember on which earth, solar system or galaxy he had left it! Finally he remembers it is 'Sri Aurobindo's planet', and contact was re-established with this poor body standing in the middle of the marketplace.

*With Medhananda on the shores of infinity* is available from SABDA, Pondicherry. Price Rs 125.

### *Prison buissonniere*

Raymond Thépot, author of *Réelles utopies* and *Houle de Terre*, has just published a collection of French poetry which he wrote in Auroville between 1982-83. The book (81 pages) is available from Pour Tous and the Boutiques d'Auroville. Price: Rs.130.

## A letter

Thanks for sending us "The Auroville Adventure", a wonderful compilation of ten years of Auroville Today. The book is beautiful both in contents and layout and shows that Auroville is very much alive and growing wonderfully. It is good to look back from time to time and realise that indeed we are living in the City of the Future.

With love,  
Meenakshi and Toine

*The Auroville Adventure* is priced at Rs 250 (India) and US\$ 15 (all other countries). The price includes packing and mailing (by airmail to all foreign countries). Send your cheque, made payable to Auroville Fund and specified "Auroville Today" to Auroville Today at CSR Office, Auroville 605101.  
email:avtoday@auroville.org.in  
Fax \*\*91.(0)413 622057



# AUROVILLE TODAY

CSR Office  
Auroville 605101  
Tamil Nadu, India



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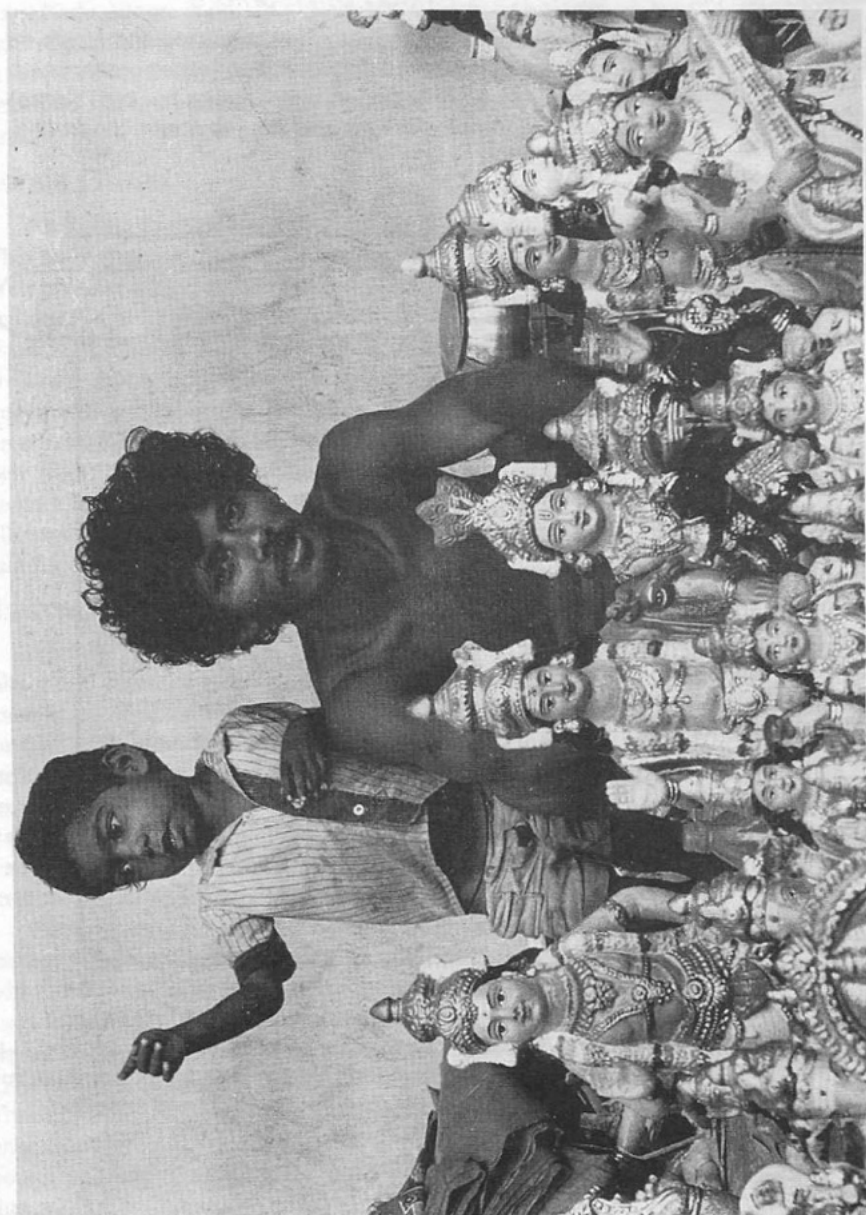
THE TRUE ROLE OF MONEY  
PERSPECTIVES ON VILLAGE ACTION  
TWO ON ONE TRAIL  
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AUROVILLE ARCHIVES  
C/O KRISHNA T.  
BHARAT NIVAS  
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BY AIRMAIL  
BOOK POST



Images of Pondicherry: father and son selling folk art at the Sunday bazaar

## Don't bother us on the roads

When you grow up in Auroville—a relative paradise by most accounts until you hit your teens—how easy is the experience of integrating into the workaday adult Auroville? Is the issue of youth integration of any concern to an adult community preoccupied with a plethora of far more pressing and important topics?

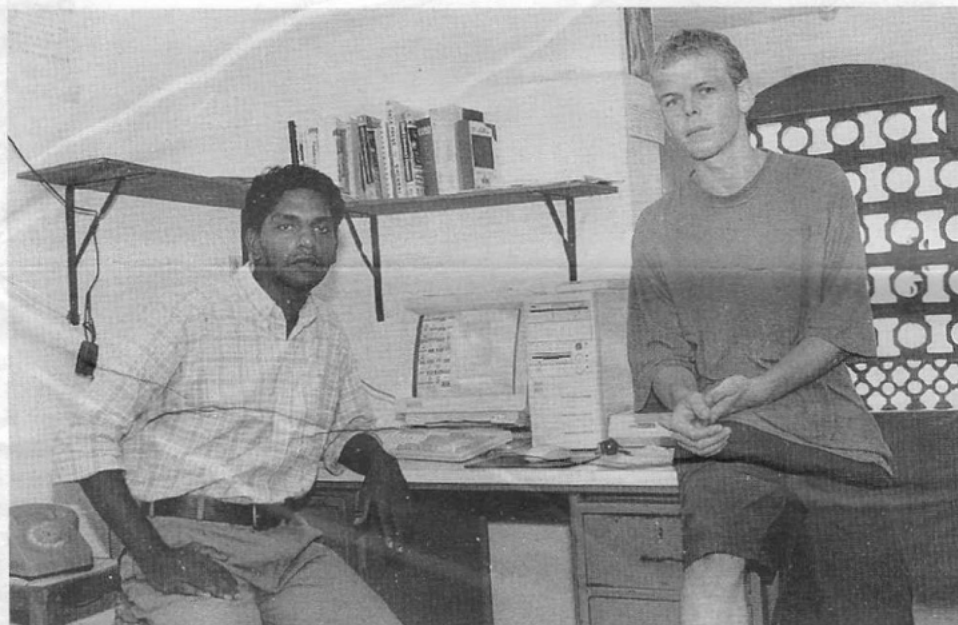
Ritam and Muni are in their early twenties. They both grew up here, but Ritam—who was born here—only recently came back after a number of years away. Both now run the AV News, our weekly bulletin board of opinion and meeting reports, and seem to be enjoying what for many would be a thankless task. They were more than willing to talk about their work as well as their experience of the problem of youth integration in Auroville.

According to Ritam: "Someone gives us a long article, far too long for us to publish in one go, so we tell him that we'll publish it in two parts. He then says 'No, it's all or nothing'. So we don't publish it and he goes to the Executive Council to complain." Muni adds: "It's hilarious! People's egos can really get hurt when you don't publish their article. Then we get individuals who start lecturing us on their point of view. We are going to print it, but no,

they have a complaint they can come to us but they say 'no', they're going to the Working Committee, and so we just laugh. We're young, we laugh a lot."

All this doesn't seem to phase Ritam: "Auroville is small, you know every one, and you know who the crackpots are who you have to deal with at the News. Do I feel fulfilled in this work? Yes, but if in six months I feel I'm stagnating, then I'll try something different, like languages. I was teaching English at New Creation before. I'd do something different from a regular job like supervising in a unit. There are not many options for people our age. If you are completely business-minded you start a unit. It sounds good but not many people our age can do that. So you drift from here to there. Lots of young people I know, friends of mine, would work but it's not easy to find something. Jobs for young people don't really exist here. For some young people it's really tough. They have to move out of Auroville for financial reasons. I'm pretty happy I found this."

"The thing about units," Muni adds, "is that they don't really want Aurovilians working there because they don't want to get has-



Muni (l.) and Ritam at the news desk

they have to come behind the desk and try to convince us of how their point of view is the only right one. You can get quite drained after a couple of hours. Or there are others who stop you on the road, come to your house, phone you... There's also the fear—there's a lot of fear—that printing certain stuff will harm Auroville even when it concerns issues that are being dealt with publicly in Auroville."

Ritam continues: "Some people will come and check on the computer that the article they submitted is there, and if there is a reaction to it they want to read it so they can answer it. And this is before the issue has even come out!"

"It's good for character building," says Muni, laughing. "After a while you get immune and look beyond it. At first, I would be sucked in by everyone's different point of view and would just say 'yes', no matter what. But you can't make everyone happy. Recently we refused a cartoon for instance—we had published the first one this person had submitted—but we didn't find the second one funny and thought it snide. So we asked a few other people about it. They felt the same way so we didn't publish it."

"You laugh when you see how our minds are so petty, so given to squabbling, and here I'm including myself. We tell people that if

sled. It's easier to hire and fire outsiders. We have to tap the talent of the youth. We're building a community here but there's no real possibility for people to come together. I cannot remember this happening except perhaps when the Dalai Lama came. It's something we have to work on in the next few years. I'm actually pretty hopeful about the Auroville youth. I don't say they don't hang around, but nonetheless, most of my generation are either in school or working. They make their own way, manage on their own. I never wanted to go into business but now I've opened up a unit called 'Weather'. We're doing graphic designing. And my main reason is that I'd like to encourage more youth activities. Right now we're making T-shirts and our profits are going towards Auroville Youth 2000."

Has Auroville changed much? Not according to Ritam. "Here things change slowly. It's pretty backward really. The roads changed, that's about it. A few extra people, groups have changed—but it's the same old story in different forms. But I am happy to be back, for me it's special here. You guys came here when you were twenty or twenty-five, but we were born here. And then people ask us 'Why are you here?' I answer: 'It's our home'."

Interview by Roger and Tineke