

## Background on the relation of Auroville and the Villages.

In about 1983, the community of Auroville became aware that more directed steps needed to be taken to build up a truer relationship with the surrounding villages. It was decided to interrelate with them as complete social units, and not just with the individuals who came for work or education. The Auroville Village Action Group began with this intention, and continues to maintain this important network among the communities of the area. Bhavana recalls the history: -

### Chaos caused by urbanisation

On going out to meet the villages, the presenting situation was found to be nearly as chaotic as the Aurovilian 'divine anarchy'. It took a while to understand what had happened, not only in our local villages, but in villages all over India. We discovered this as we worked to help the villagers with their clearly stated lacks: they asked for our help because they lacked money, lacked water, lacked health care, lacked education... In trying to secure the *lakhs* (funds) to assuage these lacks, we began to work with youth and women, helping them to organise themselves into Village Development Clubs. And as we worked, we learned how, since the onset of urbanisation and modernisation, the coherent social fabric of the villages (a society which had four distinct levels: teachers/advisors; leaders/organisers; tradesmen/artisans/farmers; and labourers) had been eroded by migration to the cities. The top three layers were missing, gone to the city for good jobs, better schooling for the kids, a new life, and left behind were a population bred and conditioned to take orders - not to take responsibility for the village commons. Aurovilians recognised that the seeds of grassroots democracy could find fertile soil here, as the people were driven by poverty to seek new ways of managing, and were already of a fairly horizontal social profile. However, basic human rights were not in evidence: oppression of women and heavy caste prejudice, along with patriarchal clan organization and its resulting feuds, prevalent alcoholism and use of violence, widespread illiteracy and neglect of children's education all exacerbated the prevailing poverty.

### Auroville as 'catalysing agent'

The Auroville Village Action Group is based on the idea of Auroville acting as a "catalysing agent" - sparking in the people the wish to improve themselves, and encouraging their own dreams. Auroville, as a new city, can be seen as a young urban entity working to remain conscious and considerate of the land and population on and with which it is growing. Auroville is growing, and demonstrating to the people new technologies, new methods, new ways. The goal is that the village communities become partners with Auroville in planning for the development of the bioregion. To do this, each village has to develop its own village council that represents not just the male clan leaders, but the interests of women, children and dalits as well.

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