

# AUROVILLE TODAY

December 1990

Auroville, Kottakuppam 605104, Tamil Nadu, India

Number Twenty-Four

AUROVILLE aims to be a self-supporting township. But how to integrate the experimental and research oriented aspects of Auroville with its need of evolving a solid economic base? How do we envisage achieving self-sufficiency? What is our attitude to doing business in Auroville?

This issue of *Auroville Today* introduces the topic of business in the community. It provides a brief survey of the range of business units in Auroville and highlights some of the challenges they face. We will continue to examine this topic and some of the major questions it raises in the next issue.

## THE AIM

"Work will not be there as the means for gaining one's livelihood, it will be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side will provide for each one's subsistence and for the field of his work."

*Mother, in The Mother on Auroville, p. 12.*



Photo Sven

## WHAT IS AUROVILLE'S BUSINESS?

Business is alive and well in Auroville! Today there are over 50 Auroville commercial units, large and small, engaged in activities as diverse as fish-farming, construction, candle-making, graphic design and high-tech electronics, producing for markets both in India and abroad, with a total annual turnover of crores\* of rupees.

But... what does doing business mean in the context of Auroville? Are business and Auroville, at root, even compatible? Matthias, the manager of 'Altecs', recalls that when he came in 1983, there was a strong anti-business ethic in Auroville, and Prema, of 'Auromodel Atelier', affirms there was a strong ascetic approach to money in those days, a feeling that spirituality and business belonged at opposite ends of the universe. Today, they agree, Auroville is much more open to business, but a certain undercurrent of scepticism still exists, in spite of Mother's clear indications that business and commerce belong in Auroville. After all, She designated an industrial zone for the city.

So why do doubts persist? Partly, perhaps, because of a certain tendency to see money as unclean, tainted—a tendency reinforced by old spiritual traditions—and partly because of the excesses and wastage generated by mega rich nations and individuals. This leads, as Prema points out,

\* a crore (Ind.): ten million

to a 'closed' attitude to money, a refusal to call it or allow it to flow freely. Whereas Mother always emphasized the positive approach: "Money is a force intended for the work on Earth, the work required to prepare the earth to receive and manifest the divine forces; and it—that is the power of utilizing it—must come into the hands of those who have the clearest, most comprehensive and truest vision."

Ah, there's the rub! For money is power, and the proper utilization of funds generated by the Auroville commercial units has been a matter of some controversy. What proportion of profits should go directly to the community, what proportion to the unit holders and what proportion should be ploughed back into the unit? Do unit holders have the right to specify how those community contributions should be used? There is no clear agreement. What does seem to be agreed by Auroville unit managers is that the Auroville productive units have a crucial role to play in generating funds for the maintenance of community members and services. "Not for the big projects", points out Prema, "for Auroville will be built by the world". "It's crazy", says Matthias, "that Aurovilians should have to rely for their upkeep on donations from their families, or periodic excursions to the Gulf or Sudan to earn

money. This energy should all be used for building Auroville". And the commercial units *have* made a substantial contribution already. Besides providing maintenance for some Aurovilians, at present they provide two-fifths of the total contributions to the Central Fund, which maintains all Auroville services and the major collective budgets.

One last objection should be faced. It's frequently pointed out that Auroville businesses are necessarily brought into contact with a world whose ethics are questionable and where corruption is rife. Aren't they bound to become tainted if they wish to be successful? It's a constant challenge. Matthias: "Some of the 'Altecs' debt is due to the fact that we always refused to pay bribes. If we'd done this, we would have been able to operate much more quickly." And many other commercial unit holders have had the same experience. "What makes it different for us", says Prema, "is that we're not here primarily to make business. It's a means for something else, inner growth. I would shut down 'Auromodel Atelier' today rather than to be subject to corrupt practices."

Why do Aurovilians take up business then? Undoubtedly the need to generate money to maintain themselves is a major factor. But there's much more. "I am not a

business woman", says Susan, who creates beautiful tapestries in cloth, "but I needed this legal umbrella above me so that I can explore the feelings I have to express in cloth." This need to create, to play, explore and express oneself, is a powerful motivation for individuals to take up business in Auroville. "And business", as Matthias wryly states, "is a very fertile ground for Karma Yoga!"

But the Auroville businesses are important in other ways too. In the early days, many units were started to provide employment for people from the local area—and today over 2000 work in the community. In the process, they learn skills, improve their standard of living and acquire a certain spirit of self-determination. And Auroville businesses can act as bridges, carrying something of the spirit of Auroville out into the larger world, while reminding us of the high standards of professionalism and efficiency prevalent out there, qualities which we need to emulate if we are to be competitive in international markets.

And the future? As Auroville continues to grow, it seems likely that commercial units will enlarge and proliferate, making it essential that Auroville businesses cooperate better in sharing resources and drawing up basic codes of business conduct. The community has to decide what

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kind of businesses it wants in Auroville and to formulate minimum guidelines to prevent pollution and environmental damage, for example.

The Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC), set up in 1988 in response to changed conditions created by the Auroville (Foundation) Act, is an attempt to begin working upon these lines. It offers an advisory and accounting service to all business units, and a sub-group administers a revolving loan fund to assist in the expansion of established businesses and the creation of new ones. While it attempts to formulate guidelines, there is a clear consensus that it will, in the spirit of Auroville, fix as little as possible and allow a maximum of freedom.

As for the implications of the Auroville Foundation—still something of an empty box—for business in Auroville, opinions are divided. The 'Aurelec' trustees are concerned that accountability to a Governing Board and, possibly, the proliferation of bureaucratic practices, will not attract businesses to Auroville. Matthias notes, however, that since the Act was passed, commercial unit holders have had increased freedom of action, and he believes it unlikely that government nominees on the Governing Board will interfere in the running of Auroville commercial units.

It's understood, of course, that the success of Auroville will not be judged upon the success of its business—although this may be an indication. As Prema noted earlier, business in Auroville is a means, not an end. It's a field of action, an opportunity for individual and collective growth, for the materialisation of the Dream, and for abolishing those false distinctions between spirituality and money. And Mother reminds us that the true main-spring of money flow is not international demand, supply-side economics or the mumbo-jumbo theories of the economic priesthood. "It is the lack of push towards the future that impedes the flow of money. The push towards the future is to be ready to give up all gains, moral and material, in order to acquire what the future can give us." And the future she speaks of is of a transformed humanity... □

## "For me, money and spirituality go together."

*Auroville Today: Why did you begin Auromodèle Atelier?*

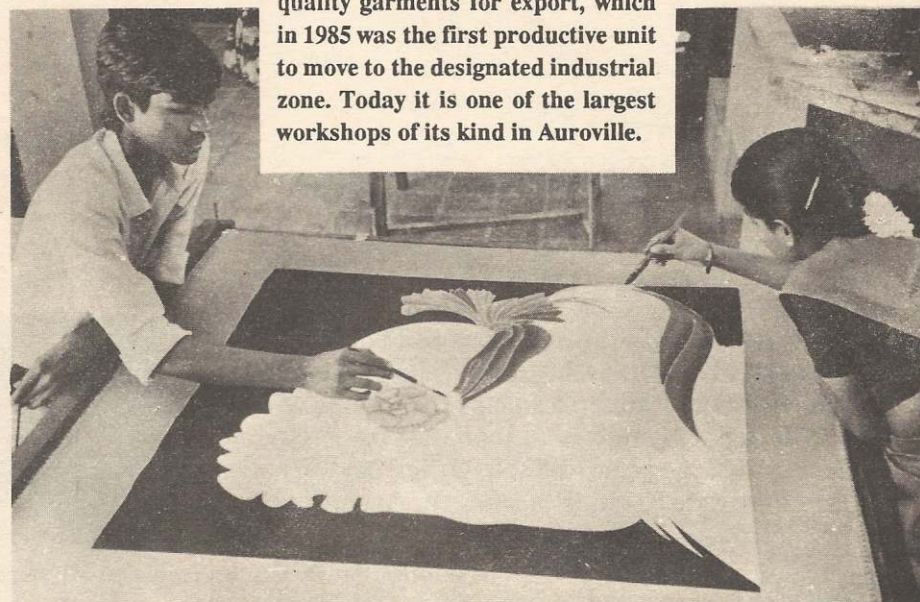
Prema: Because of both inner and outer necessity. Within, I needed to express myself, and dress design was a field I had knowledge of. Outwardly, I needed to live, as I came to Auroville with little money and with no possibility of getting more from abroad.

It began very simply, small-scale. Then one day, someone came from 'German Agro Action', an organization that sells goods from the Third World in the West, and then uses the profits to develop agriculture in underdeveloped countries. He asked us to make 40 dresses for them that year. Next year, they wanted 400, the next year 4,000—and this year we have an order for 40,000! I don't know when it will stop—but I'm willing to follow the movement at the moment. We also make a few garments for Boutique d'Auroville and will supply two new Auroville boutiques which have just opened in Nice and in Spain.

*What are the challenges of producing 40,000 garments a year in Auroville?*

Quality and time. Germany and India are like opposite ends of the spectrum. Germany wants fixed delivery dates—and in India time means nothing. And while the West demands the highest quality, here we have problems with discipline, absenteeism, shortage of materials etc. But we're learning and improving.

In fact, German Agro Action would like to give more work to Auroville, because they're so impressed by the way we treat our workers in Auroville. I've seen Delhi workshops, and they're just like concentra-



PREMA came to Auroville in 1979. In 1981, she began 'Auromodèle Atelier', a workshop producing high-quality garments for export, which in 1985 was the first productive unit to move to the designated industrial zone. Today it is one of the largest workshops of its kind in Auroville.

tion camps—underground rooms, bright lights, no ventilation. Here they get two months bonus a year, and a clean, beautiful work environment.

There is another, more personal challenge. Sometimes I start wondering how to make things easier for myself in my work. But then I remember what Mother said—that you don't come to Auroville for an easy life.

*Why has it taken Auroville so long to begin the industrial zone? Do Aurovilians have hang-ups regarding business?*

I believe it's linked very much to an ascetic attitude to money which used to be strong in Auroville, and a kind of communistic tendency to centralize everything and put everything in one pot. But this is the old spirituality. For me, money and spirituality go together. If you live here, it's necessary to manifest something. And for this you need money. It's all a matter of

attitude. I enjoy business. Perhaps this is the key that opens the door of the money force.

But just as the world is changing, so is Auroville. Communism is dying in the West and that tendency is also much weaker here now. The next thing will be that capitalism will disappear—America already has plenty of problems.

*And then?*

I don't know, but I think the semi-collective economy which we are trying in Auroville now could be interesting. The most important thing is that the individual is not suffocated but allowed to develop in his or her own way. We cannot progress without freedom. If we lose that, it's the end of Auroville.

As we get bigger, there's the tendency to make us follow rules, abide by Factory Acts, etc. But Auroville has to evolve its own procedures which are true to its purpose. We didn't come here to make business, but for something else. If people try to make me follow artificial rules, I would close tomorrow. No problem.

*What role do you see business playing in making Auroville more self-sufficient?*

I don't believe at all that business will be the salvation of Auroville. If we leave it up to business, it's finished for Auroville. Roger Anger once asked Mother if we should have many industries in Auroville, in order to finance the building of the City. Mother replied, "If you choose this way, it will take hundreds of years". She wanted industry here to provide employment for the villages, and to provide for the maintenance of Aurovilians. But not to build the City. The whole world has to be involved in this. The Auroville economy will only grow with the growth of consciousness of the Aurovilians. Industries can help by giving money, and what they are producing. But they can never be the financial solution for Auroville.

*How, then, do you see the role of Auromodèle Atelier?*

I hope to spread something of the vibration of Auroville through what we produce here. And I work for this German organization because they are beautiful people and I believe in what they are doing. Every day it is still a great joy to me to come to work, because it has very much helped with my inner growth.

Interview by Alan.

"Money would be no more the sovereign lord..."

—Mother

## Extremely Taxing

Each month I calculate and pay Sales Tax on the equipment we sell at 'Altecs' (see next page). At the bank in Pondicherry, I buy a demand draft (DD) for the amount and mail it to the Tax Office. However, last time the DD was rejected and sent back as I had made it out for 10 paisa too much: "Paisa amounts have to be rounded off." Back to the bank...

The clerk shook his head. "No, madam, we cannot change the amount of the draft. You have to cancel this draft and then buy a new one." That sounded a long way around to me, but what to do? I politely asked the clerk, who was very busy behind his counter, how one cancels a DD. I learned that I had to first write a letter to the Manager of the bank, asking him to kindly cancel the Draft. Fortunately, I found a small piece of scrap paper in my bag which served as the official letter. The clerk dictated the required text. His face dropped when I told him I had not brought the rubber stamps from my unit with me. "Not possible, not possible, you have to have rubber stamps. Government rules!" he said. Finally he agreed that I could speak personally to the manager of the bank to see if the matter could be settled without

the rubber stamps. The manager was not there. I was sent to the accounts section. There they sent me around to see different people, as nobody wanted to deal with my problem. Each time I had to repeat my story of the ten paisa overpayment to the Sales Tax office. Finally I was given a blue paper called "Application for Cancellation of Demand Draft", to be filled in and given back at a special counter at the other end of the bank. I watched my blue application passing from desk to desk, and then I was informed that for cancellations, Pondicherry Revenue Stamps are needed, which I didn't have! Couldn't they possibly sell me one? The accountant did not know and sent me to another desk. There I found out that the man responsible for the revenue stamps had just gone out. "Please come back in 15 minutes". I left, wishing never to return. However, I did a little shopping and that cooled me down.

Returning, I was able to buy the precious revenue stamp for 20 paisa. But I had only one rupee and they had no change. I told them they could keep the change, but they did not want to keep it. Inquiries began as to who had change. People searched

their pockets, and eventually the correct coins were collected.

After I had triumphantly presented the revenue stamp to the clerk in the accounts section, he began writing illegible graffiti on the DD, his assistant also adding his bit. Then he called me and asked me to glue the revenue stamp with my signature on the back of the DD. I did. At last, I thought, but... "your revenue stamp is upside down!" exclaimed the clerk. "This is not acceptable." What had I done? "You have to buy another revenue stamp and..." he started out, but I interrupted him, trying to control my frustration. "It's finished. No more revenue stamps, sir...!" I tried to put as much force in my voice as possible. "This is a matter of ten paisa, sir." I looked straight into his eyes. He seemed to notice that I was on the verge of murder.

He rapidly concluded that I only had to sign two more times on the revenue stamp to cancel the cancellation. The morning was finished. Me too.

*Time*

\*ten paisa = a tenth of a rupee  
= app. US\$ 0.002

# BIRTH PANGS

Or

## The Trials And Tribulations Of Setting Up An Auroville Commercial Unit

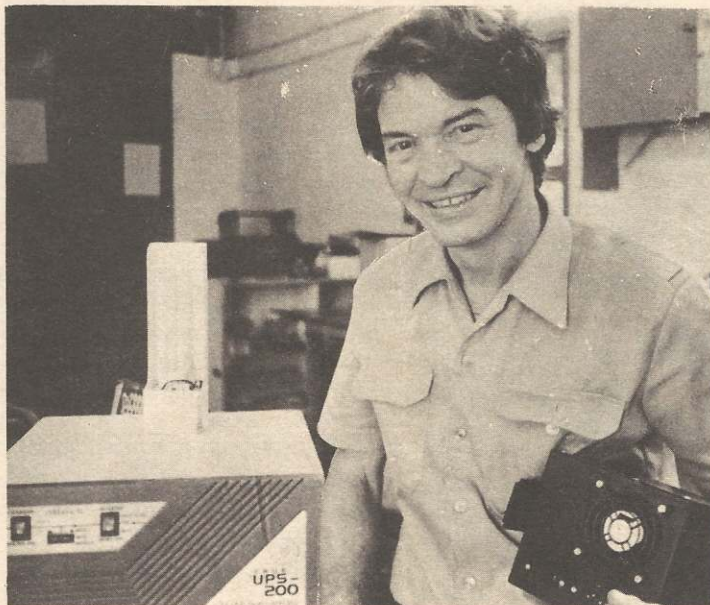
**MATTHIAS** joined Auroville after working five years for the Max Mueller Bhavan in Delhi. Arriving "with a hell of a lot of plans", he rapidly realized that the first necessity was to generate funds from within the community. After helping organize the production line at 'Aurelec' and opening a small electronics workshop called 'Concentration', in February 1986 he and some friends formed Altecs Trust to manufacture electronics equipment in order to finance alternative technology projects in Auroville and provide maintenance for Aurovilians and community services. However, before 'Altecs' could begin operating, certain 'permissions' had to be obtained...

"And that's where the 'fun' began! First of all, we had to get permission from the Reserve Bank of India to operate with foreign trustees. We sent many letters to them over six months, and never received a reply. Finally Sanjeev (another trustee) and myself took a plane to Bombay and marched into their Head Office. Fourteen days later, we had our permission!

"Meanwhile, we had to apply for a small-scale industry permission. For this, we had to write something called a 'Phase Manufacturing Proposal', specifying, for the next five years, what we wanted to produce and which components would be indigenous and which imported. Every week for months, I was driving to Madras on my small motorcycle to try to hurry up the process, without much success. At the same time, we had to apply for an import license which took endless time and, anyway, could not be granted until the Reserve Bank gave us approval.

"On top of all this, some Aurovilians had invested money with us—Altecs has never received a paisa from an Indian Bank, it's all Auroville money—and for us to be able to pay them interest, we had to get another permission from the Reserve Bank. I remember meeting their senior man in Madras. At first he was furious when he heard that I'd already taken investments before getting RBI permission. But when I clarified that the money had not been used while we awaited his authorization, and explained about Auroville, and that we were trying to build the township, he gradually calmed down. Finally, he said "Tomorrow I have a holiday. Why don't I come back with you and see this Auroville?" I told him I was on my motorcycle, that it would take three hours in the night and might be...uncomfortable. But he insisted, he came, climbed to the top of the Matrimandir, met many Aurovilians and enjoyed himself. And two weeks later, we had our permission!

"Finally, I had to get permission to charge Sales Tax, for which we had to pay a big deposit and involve ourselves in complicated games to avoid 'under the table' transactions. It seemed endless—the letters, the paperwork, the mad trips to Madras. But at last, on 20th January, 1987, which was my birthday, we received our temporary small-scale industry recognition allowing us to make our first import and to function. The whole process took one year, and without the financial support from many Aurovilians, we would have been broke before we'd even started!"



Matthias with UPS

### Auroville Today: Why did it take so long?

We heard that the only way to speed up the process was to put an envelope full of rupees on the right man's desk. And we weren't prepared to do this. Now we are opening a second manufacturing unit in Pondicherry, where all these permissions are supposed to be processed much faster, and it's exactly the same problem. After six months, we're still waiting to start operating.

But even when all the permissions were through, it wasn't finished. One of our newest products is an Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) to enable computers etc. to keep functioning during power cuts. It's our own design with good specifications, but at the beginning we found it very difficult to get orders. We couldn't understand it. We'd talk to the Purchase Managers of large firms, and they'd be very enthusiastic and friendly. And then, nothing. Then we heard they also expected an envelope on the table! So I thought, if that's the only way we can sell our products, we'll just manufacture for Aurelec.

But we were lucky. During a computer exhibition in Bangalore, where we displayed our UPS, a man came up and offered to be our dealer there. And he's turned out to be excellent. The next problem was definitely not his fault!

### The next problem?

In the first four months of this year he sold 50 UPS's. But then, in the next few months, nothing. Why? Because they began to blow up! Now, we had done a very fast research and development on that machine—it took us only six months. But we knew it was a good design. So what was going wrong? It took us four weeks of frantic checking and testing to find out what was happening, by which time about 60% of our machines had blown up at least once! Our poor dealer was marvellous—he immediately went to each disabled machine and changed the parts, so nobody asked for a refund. But even after we thought we'd solved the problem, we dared not sell any more machines until we were sure. And meanwhile we had to keep using our profits to repair the machines. It wasn't easy. Now the problem is solved and we are selling machines again—but I realise how important customer support is, and I would rather grow slowly now and know that we can really provide that support.

### And the future?

It often happened that our industrial products threw up by-products that were useful for Auroville. For example, we are making inverters and chargers for Aurovilians with 12-volt solar systems, and they grew out of our UPS design. We also make inverters for PL lamps, charge con-

trollers and voltage regulators for solar systems—I designed them in a few hours on Sunday afternoons.

I'm interested now in producing a wind-generator and CSR has agreed to give us financial support for the research and development. I think we can get a substantial amount of our energy through wind, even though the average wind speed in Auroville is quite low. I'm working on modifying a ceiling fan into a wind generator. If it's successful, it will give at least as much energy as a solar panel, for a quarter of the price. And it's able to generate 24 hours a day as compared to 8 hours for photovoltaics! One day I'd also like to design a successful electro-vehicle for Auroville. We already have some experience with electro-mopeds manufactured elsewhere, but the design can be much improved.

### Was it worth it?

Despite the fact that we still owe money to friendly and patient Aurovilians, Altecs over the past four years has contributed several lakhs to Auroville in the form of maintenance and interest payments. For this alone, it's been worth the struggle.

Interview by Alan

"I like to create things for people"

To express themselves, some people use their body, others play an instrument or use clay or pencil and paintbrush. But for Susan the medium is cloth. With simple handloom cotton she creates kaftans, hangings and bedcovers, each one of them a real piece of art.

She has always worked with fabric, no matter what else she was doing in Canada, where she used to live. When she arrived in Auroville, four years ago, she began taking up jobs, while continuing her fabric designs as a sideline. But then she understood that this was where her heart really was, and she decided to dive into it fully. What started out as a one-woman enterprise has now expanded. "I needed help, so I decided to hire a tailor. I was fortunate enough to find one who can understand what I want and put together my puzzles of cloth. Then he brought me a master embroiderer, whom I did not need, but... I could not afford not to take him! I got a loan to buy materials, we built this small workplace—and now I have a 'business'. I am not a business woman, but I need this umbrella above me (I am part of Janet's 'Joy' workshop) so that I can explore the feelings I want to express in cloth."

It is a joy to walk into Susan's workshop

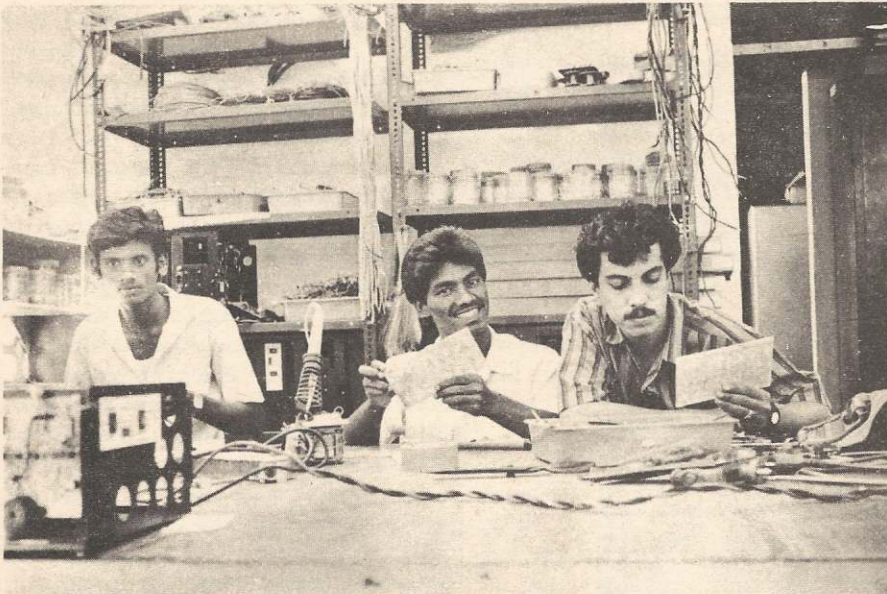


Susan

and to see the tailor create intricate hangings out of all these coloured pieces of cotton. Or watch the embroiderer and his son transform plain wool into shawls with dragons, or waistcoats with lotus flowers or fishes. "We all work closely together. I give some ideas and then I leave him free to use his craft and skill. If he does not get this freedom to play, this craft of rural India will be lost." Each piece which gets produced is unique. "Sometimes people ask me if I want to make several pieces of the same design. Or whether I plan to go into mass production in order to have a successful workshop. But this makes every cell in me rebel. To repeat things makes it too boring for me. I like to create things for people. This direct contact is very satisfying for me—but I don't take orders!"

Tineke

# AUROVILLE'S BUSIN



*'Altecs' electronics workshop*

## CLOTHING & FASHION

### Sunlit Lane

Nature of business: jewelry  
Market: export  
Location: Fertile  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Memories of the Future of Light

Nature of business: jewelry  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Fertile  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Bijou

Nature of business: beedwork  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Kottakarai  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Amadi

Nature of business: shoes  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Kottakarai  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Cocoon

Nature of business: garments  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Certitude  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Auromodèle Atelier

Nature of business: garments, specialising in handprinted silk  
Market: export  
Location: Revelation  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 6

### Aurorachna

Nature of business: garments  
Market: Pondicherry, Mahabalipuram and Auroville  
Location: Hope  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Filaure

Nature of business: garments (in particular children's clothing)  
Market: export  
Location: Revelation  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 5

### Aurosarjan

Nature of business: garments.  
Market: export  
Location: Pondicherry  
Aurovilians working in the unit: none.

## HANDICRAFTS

### Joy Handicrafts

Nature of business: lampshades, embroidered cloth and clothing, interior design  
Market: Auroville and India  
Location: Centre Field  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 3

### Maroma

Nature of business: incense sticks, perfumed candles, research into perfumes  
Market: export  
Location: Aspiration  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Shilpika

Nature of business: pottery  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Dana  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 3

### Lotus

Nature of business: hammocks, hanging chairs, rugs  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Fraternity  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 2

### Ananda

Nature of business: postcards  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Kottakarai  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 3

### Decauram

Nature of business: carpentry, wooden furniture  
Market: Auroville  
Location: Kottakarai  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 2

### Shradanjali

Nature of business: greeting cards, specialising in application of dried flowers and grasses.  
Market: Auroville, India and export  
Location: Aspiration  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 3

*Janet at 'Joy' workshop, showing 'glowball' lampshades*

## FOOD PROCESSING

### La Ferme

Nature of business: cheese and dairy products  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: La Ferme  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 2

### Le Gourmet

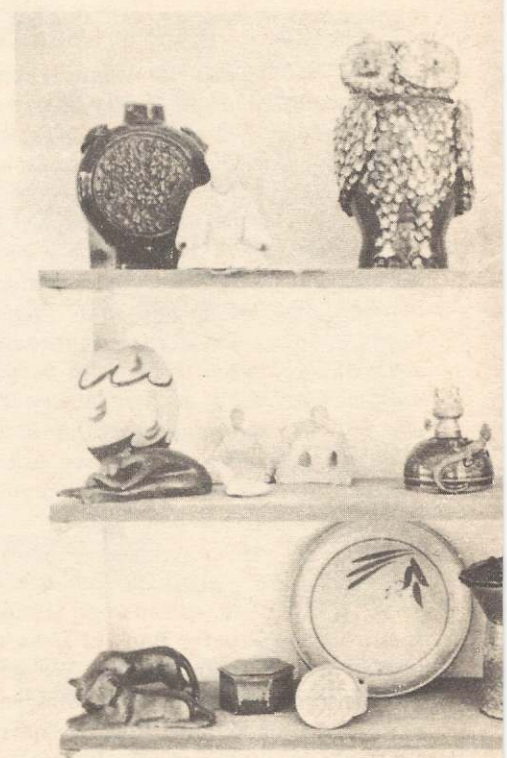
Nature of business: jams, syrups, peanutbutter etc.  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Pour Tous, Aspiration  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 2

### Auroville Bakery

Nature of business: bread, biscuits  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Douceur  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 4

### Delicacies

Nature of business: cakes, jams, biscuits  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Hope  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1



*Lila at 'Sunlit Lane'*



# NESS (AD) VENTURES

## ELECTRONICS & ENGINEERING

### Altecs

Nature of business: manufacturing of components for the computer industry, uninterrupted power supplies, inverters and solar charge controllers  
Market: India and Auroville  
Location: Ami  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 3

### Aurelec

Nature of business: computer industry  
Market: India and export  
Location: Auroville, with branches in Pondicherry, Madras, Cochin, New Delhi and elsewhere in India.  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 10

### Auroservice d'Auroville

Nature of business: engineering office, specialising in town planning  
Market: India  
Location: Pondicherry  
Aurovilians working in the unit: none

### Aureka

Nature of business: manufactures computer boxes, windmills, etc.  
Market: Auroville  
Location: Aspiration  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 4

### Technica

Nature of business: manufacturing of computer boxes, components for irrigation systems and dish antennas  
Market: Auroville and India  
Location: Aspiration  
Aurovilians working in the unit: none

## ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION

### Sumark

Nature of business: architecture and construction  
Market: Auroville  
Location: Arya  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 3

### Atmarati Architects

Nature of business: architecture and construction  
Market: Pondicherry and Auroville  
Location: Transformation  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 4

### Alegria

Nature of business: architecture and construction  
Market: Auroville  
Location: Sri Ma  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 2

### Auroville Building Centre

Nature of business: research in alternative building technologies, manufacturing of ferroccement elements such as biogas plants, doors, channels, water tanks, etc.  
Market: Auroville, Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu  
Location: CSR, Auroshilpam  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 4

## SALES OUTLETS FOR AUROVILLE PRODUCTS

### Boutiques d'Auroville

Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Bharat Nivas and Pondicherry

## OTHERS

### Harmony Stall

Nature of business: food and sundry shop  
Market: Auroville  
Location: Bharat Nivas  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Lumière

Nature of business: silk screen printing  
Market: Auroville  
Location: Fraternity  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Aurosoft

Nature of business: computer software  
Market: Auroville and India  
Location: Dana  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Classics

Nature of business: dealer in antique furniture  
Market: Auroville and Pondicherry  
Location: Pondicherry  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Capability

Nature of business: landscape design and execution  
Market: Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Auroville  
Location: Certitude  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Papyrus

Nature of business: paper and paper products  
Market: Auroville, Pondicherry  
Location: Fraternity  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Golden Tilapia

Nature of business: fish farm (edible and ornamental fish)  
Market: Pondicherry and export  
Location: Auroville, next to Aurobrindavan  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

### Prisma

Nature of business: Advertising, communication and design  
Market: India  
Location: Fraternity  
Aurovilians working in the unit: 1

'Shilpika' pottery



'Bellaura' leather workshop was set up by an Aurovillian and is now an independent co-operative run by the workers themselves.

## ◆ ◆ ◆ To Receive Auroville Today ◆ ◆ ◆

The contribution for the next 12 issues of Auroville Today is for Auroville Rs. 94, for India Rs. 100\*, for other countries: Rs. 350, Can.\$ 27, French F. 145, DM 45, It.Lira 31,500, D.Gl. 50, US \$ 22.50, U.K.£ 13.50. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10%) or to the Auroville Today Office, Auroville, Kottakuppam 605104. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: Contribution for Auroville Today. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville.

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# T A N G E N T Y E R E

The ceremonies never stopped...

*Mervyn Franey and Gary Armstrong are both members of Tangentyere — an aboriginal Community Council based in the town of Alice Springs in central Australia. Recently, they were in Auroville for ten days to study our work in afforestation and appropriate technology. Mervyn is the Land Management Coordinator of the Tangentyere Council (Tangentyere is an aboriginal word for working together) and Gary is involved in their horticultural and tree planting work. Tangentyere serves the 18 different aboriginal camps scattered around Alice Springs as well as some 110 communities spread out over some 750 sq. kilometres of outback. Mervyn spoke to us one afternoon in Pitchandikulam.*

## Impressions of Auroville

"One of the things that activated us into coming here to Auroville was to find out more about your greenwork — the way you have managed to bring back forests to what was almost a desert twenty years ago. Hopefully we'll be able to take back some of the ideas we've picked up here and adapt them to our context, apply them to our outstations. But we have very little rainfall in central Australia: only two or three decent days of rain per year. The international aspect of Auroville is also interesting and our talk at Last School went very well. We gave them a historical picture and a background to our present day struggle and I think the students were quite open to it. It was exciting to bring an awareness there. Who knows what will come of our visit here — we've made some ties with the Tamil people here, meeting them, getting to know their culture and perhaps one day some people from over here could come over to Australia and we could show them around and give them a taste of what's happening over there".



Gary Armstrong and Mervyn Franey

## "An empty land"

History lies by omission. And the history of Australia, it would seem, has proved no exception to this rule. When the first colonists started settling in Australia, following Captain Cook's so-called discovery of the continent some two hundred years ago, it was claimed for the British Crown under the legal fiction of it being a 'Terra Nullis', an empty land, empty, that is, except for the aboriginal peoples who had already been living there, it is estimated, for some forty thousand years.

According to Mervyn: "It is only recently, through aboriginal pushing, that the silent, hidden history of Australia is coming

out; the real history of the colonizing of Australia, that never made it into the history books. Any pretext was enough to round up and shoot aboriginals: they might have killed or hunted cows out of traditional watering holes, and that would have been enough of an excuse to come in and exterminate a whole tribe. The ones they couldn't shoot, they'd usually poison, and the introduction of grazing was to destroy most of the traditional foods the aboriginals had gathered for centuries."

## Dream-time ancestors and the story-lines

The aboriginal culture was a nomadic one, and the hundreds of different native tribal groups of Australia had their well-defined areas within whose boundaries they would freely roam. So as not to use up the resources of an area, they'd travel from one water-hole to the next, burning off the land area they were leaving, which would then regenerate with the next rains. The men hunted game and the women collected fruits and seeds — from which they would make breads and jams.

The boundaries of a tribe were defined by song, and a tradition of stories whose origins go back to a Dream-Time, inhabited by semi-mythic ancestors, who created the continent by naming, or singing, it into existence. The continent was a map of stories and songs, a pattern of sacred sites. "Sacred sites and objects throughout the land are all linked to these stories — the old dream-time stories that still exist today — these stories are forty thousand years old, and through them the different tribal

groups identify themselves with different tracts of land.

One thing we have managed to do over the last two hundred years is keep our cultural sense of belonging, our sense of the land alive, and this has been done through story-telling and keeping the stories alive — the ceremonies never stopped."

There are hundreds of different aboriginal languages and the government policy of forcibly relocating tribal groups away from their traditional areas to different parts of the country, is, according to Mervyn, part of a systematic attempt to breakdown the basis of aboriginal values and prevent them from speaking their lan-

guages and practising their culture. "The stories can't be changed, the culture can't be changed, but a lot has changed, in the sense that we've lost most of our land — even though we're beginning to regain bits and pieces here and there — and the resultant breakdown in our culture, with its ties to the land, has been very damaging."



Courtesy: "It's Aboriginal!"

## The Land Rights Struggle

Despite having fought in two world wars it wasn't until the sixties that a referendum was held to see if the aboriginal people had the right to vote and be considered full-fledged citizens of Australia. It was at this time — particularly under the premiership of Gough Whitlam — that aboriginal claims to prior ownership of the country started receiving some recognition, and in the late sixties and seventies a number of land rights and sacred sites Acts were passed. However, these Bills have been subject to change, modification and watering down by successive Provincial governments.

## Tangentyere

Tangentyere was started 14 years ago as a community council and resource centre for aboriginal town camps that were mushrooming around Alice Springs, a town in central Australia with a population of 25,000 (including an estimated 6,000 aboriginals), site of an American satellite tracking base and whose origins go back to the laying of the first Telegraph lines across Australia. Although Alice Springs is in Arentre country, tribal groups from different parts of the country who were dissatisfied with government-allotted remote communities began moving into the Alice Springs area.

This started creating problems. "If a non-aboriginal from outside would buy a piece of land on which camps were situated, the police would move in, arrest the campers, and then the bulldozers would come in and flatten the settlements. Alice Springs has one of the highest rates of alcoholism in the country — there's a grog shop every hundred yards, but it was bad for tourism to have blacks hanging out in the streets, drinking grog and stuff so they passed a law that aboriginals were not allowed within the town limits after 7 p.m. as well as one forbidding people to drink

within two kilometres of a liquor outlet. Now a lot of bush people would come into town with their families for the rodeos or whatever and with the police patrolling the creeks, they were being pushed into the town camps as well, which was creating tension and problems. Finally people decided not to put up with it any more and

a couple of strong elders with the help of a couple of key white people got together to try and secure some pieces of land under the Land Rights Act on 99 year perpetual threshold leases." Funding comes from a variety of sources and today the services provided by Tangentyere include legal aid, hostels, medical facilities, child-care agencies, a central aboriginal media association with its own radio and T.V., an employment training centre and the Yipirinya school where classes are conducted in English as well as in four of the main aboriginal culture and traditions.

Despite recent setbacks in funding and the ongoing attempt to water down sacred sites legislation by provincial governments Mervyn nonetheless remains confident. "The aboriginal movements in Australia are fairly powerful and I look forward in the years to come to a greater political recognition of the different aboriginal groups in this country. At present our network is in the process of widening and reaching out. We're sending delegations to the U.N., to their indigenous forums, and we're supporting other indigenous groups from around the world and they're supporting us — groups from Chile, Native American Indians and the Philippines.

We are tied to the land; we can't sell it, we have to preserve it and look after it. We're basically holders of the land. It's part of us — all our stories, ceremonies and culture are linked back to it. The aboriginals can't sell their land — they've never sold their land and yet we're no longer allowed to walk on it."

Roger

Auroville Today tries to appear monthly and is distributed to Aurovilians and friends of Auroville in India and abroad.  
Editorial team: Yanne, Tineke, Roger, Carel, Bill, Annemarie, Alan. Photo's: Sven. Design: Prisma. Printed at Auroville Press.

## HI-DESIGN

**H**I-DESIGN. For many Aurovilians it is no more than the name of an exclusive fashion-shop in Pondicherry. But behind is a factory, employing 500 people, which manufactures leather bags and jackets for export. The factory is one of the largest of its kind in South India, and has exclusive distribution networks in England, Germany, Scandinavia, Australia and in the United States. It was started and is managed by Dilip, the son of an Ashramite, who in 1984 became an Aurovillian. The unit is not related to Auroville, though it has donated to Auroville units in the past and now contributes to Auroville's Central Fund.

We spoke to Dilip about his experience of managing a non-Auroville business, about corruption and business ethics, and about his dreams of Auroville-to-be.

**Dilip:** "As time goes on, I find I am getting further and further away from Auroville. My life has split into two, the work part, which is not connected to Auroville, and the other part that is: my leisure time, my kids, friends, and so on. This split has increased over the years, and I really do not know how to bridge it again.

I feel I am being pushed out, that some sections in Auroville do not accept me. It seems that being involved with a business outside Auroville is considered to be something which is not sufficient to explain your presence in Auroville, even though we have in the past given large donations to Auroville units, and have recently started to contribute to Auroville's newly set up Central Fund. There are people who have asked me to transfer my factory to Auroville. But I wonder if it would be ac-

ceptable, even if I wanted to do it. It would mean an additional 500 people walking in and out of Auroville every day. And then there is the administrative hurdle, which seems to be insurmountable right now.

I do not know the details of the Auroville Foundation Act, but one thing is very clear: if a manager cannot have administrative control over business decisions—it will not work. The number-one guarantee each business should have is the freedom to make its own decisions. Any businessman in India will tell you that he is terrified of any control from the government. And there should be no control by the administrative machinery within Auroville either, unless it is clearly laid down what role it would have.

The true role of business is to create the wealth and the assets to enable the community to run itself. The only way the relation between the administration and business will work is when the administration abstains fully from any business control, and the business donates parts of its profits to the administration, it being up to the administration to use that part of the profits in whatever way it thinks fit. The business should guarantee that it will donate a minimum percentage—I think at least 20%—and beyond that it can add whatever it wants. I see here a possibility of a very fruitful dialogue between each individual business and the administration, as it has started to happen in Auroville very recently between the Central Fund and the businesses. That requires a certain kind of professionalism on both sides, which means that the Auroville administration has to become much more professional. A certain background in economics and

management has to be there, and in this context the new economics group has brought a refreshing change.

In spite of my own experience, I think that the mistrust against business and the business holders, which was prevalent at the beginning in Auroville, may be diminishing. But it is certainly still there, and is stronger among the older people. What is really refreshing is that the young kids do not have it at all. They seem to respect business.

The prevalence of small and large scale corruption in India is something I do not think we will be able to solve by ourselves. Everyone in business has faced the problems of corruption. We all hated it, we all resisted it, and we all found out that it is impossible to do business if you do not at least do a minimum. You close your eyes, and there is someone else in the business who takes care of it. It is just another expense that one has. I do not think that a kind of stubborn attitude against it will be helpful in the end. It does not work, since we cannot change the whole world around us overnight. If you do not do it, your auditor or your lawyer may be forced to do it for you. And there comes a time, after you have lived with Indian business for a while, that it becomes difficult to view it as a criminal act. At the level of the person taking the bribe, it is considered to be part of one's salary. The people who are taking it are not criminals. They are normal people, who have to live and send their children to school, and bribes are still considered to be amongst the normal extras of the job.

The future? Well, first of all I wish to see the return of a strong drive towards the uncompromising realisation of Auroville's ideals; something represented by a certain group of Aurovilians, many of whom have now left. They were balancing the perhaps too pragmatic position of people like me. Secondly, what I miss more than anything else is the drive for new activity, the urgency to create new things.

The ideal in terms of my private life would be that the split between the businessman and the Aurovillian would go, that the unity would come back that is lacking now. It is difficult to live with a split personality. It would make more sense if there could be more input from Hi-design into Auroville, and from Auroville into Hi-design. I would welcome more Aurovilians to work in Hi-design, and I would be happy when it could serve as a training ground for young Aurovilians."

*In conversation with Carel*

## BRIEF NEWS

- After years of coping with holes in the roof, marauding rats and primitive ovens, the Auroville baking crew have moved from Kottakarai into a spacious new bakery at 'Douceur'. While they were still recovering from the shock of clean floors and adequate storage, a Dutch master baker turned up and began kneading the team into a firmer mix. As a result of his advice, the new, born-again bread is reviving jaded palates and putting the bounce back into breakfasts.
- That rare event—the Auroville General Meeting—occurred recently. A well-attended meeting clarified community policy on visa recommendations and backed the Council's recommendation that we should assist 'Aurelec' to be outside the Foundation while ensuring that the Foundation was not in any way weakened. A small group has been set up to work on this process with the Government.
- The first World Congress on Renewable Energy took place in September at the University of Reading (U.K.). Joel Goodman, who lived for many years in Auroville, presented a paper on solar bowl architecture. Later, he spoke to *Auroville Today* about Auroville's possible contribution in the area of clean renewable energy technology: "More research and projects should be supported—like, for example, wind electric units at the Auroville beaches, as proposed by Tom Read (see *Auroville Today* no.15). Photovoltaic systems should be designed and developed for large-scale application as soon as possible."
- On the 12th of November, the French Ambassador in Delhi, the Consul-General of France in Pondicherry and a group of four people from the Regional Council of Franche-Comté visited Pondicherry and Auroville to look into the possibilities of investing money for industry and development.
- The video on Matrimandir, made by *Auroville Video*, is now available not only in English, but also in Dutch, Spanish, French and German. It shows the work in progress at the Matrimandir and its duration is about 15 minutes. Contact Alain Antoine or Patricia in Auroville or the Auroville International centre in your country. □

## She Smiles

And there she goes, my little amma, with her seventy-two rupees, her week's wages, to feed her five children and her man.

She smiles a lot.

She smiles at my attempts to understand her, she smiles when I ask her to prepare me a coffee, she smiles when I try to explain my views on a clean bathroom and giggles irresistibly when I try to tell it in Tamil.

A smile and two sparkling eyes—her way to bridge cultures and mentalities that are miles apart. Two eyes taking me in, silently observing me in the many details of my way of being, finding each time again new things to wonder at.

Seventy-two rupees. It nags me, I notice, every week again when I pay. Barely sufficient for a meal for two in Pondicherry, and she manages with all that offspring and a husband? A picture crosses my mind—that of her legs, bony and stick-like, once seen in a flash when she was doing the laundry. Those legs had known hunger. Do they still know malnutrition?

Seventy-two rupees. A lot, says the official norm in and around Auroville. Still I

wonder, and in my mind echoes an old refrain: you pay sufficient so that they do not die, but what about their rights to live? But my amma smiles—and makes me wonder about that Grace that made Auroville come into existence in this remote place on the earth, where even white-skinned idealists are accepted and tolerated in their many strange and culture changing attitudes.

She smiles—a true one, somewhere from deep within. Didn't Mother say somewhere that the average farmer in India is in his heart closer to the Divine than all the intellectuals of Europe?

"You have to communicate with them on another level", a friend once told me, stressing that I am "far too mental".

But how to answer to a smile?

You smile back?

From that same level?

But...

Try.

—Carel



## LETTER

### From Russia

My dear friends!

My country goes through a very difficult time now. The majority of people live in circumstances of permanent deficit of everything required. But it is not terrible in comparison with the deficiency of kindness and love which encircles everybody. The life of our society is more open and free now, but unfortunately more gloomy and unjoyful.

Auroville became my dream, my joy, my rescue from griefs and pain of everyday life. I would be happy to become a little part of your unity but I cannot leave Russia while my motherland endures hard times. I am not a politician. I wish only all people on

the Earth to be happy. I am doing all my best not to harm anybody. But it is not enough, I think that one has to give people joy. You can do it. You can give joy to my fellow citizens. Auroville became an embodiment of Love and Kindness to us. Share your happiness with us.

I know about financial difficulties but I beg you to come to my country if only for some days.

I believe you are able to drop a spark into souls of tired people who lost faith in a better life. We need you.

You can help us!

I wish you all the best! Que tous vos rêves se réalisent.

With love, —Tatiana Baranovskaya.

# AUROVILLE TODAY

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This month: Business

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Photo Sven

Dining out in Pondy...

## "From time to time I managed to be a dentist!"

*Our interview took place at his house, at Akashva. It was getting dark. The Japanese-style house was inducing a calm and meditative mood.*

*When Jacques discovered, in a brochure, the Galaxy-plan and the Auroville Charter written by Mother, he knew immediately that he wanted to live there. It would take him twelve years to realize his dream...*

"Dentistry was for me the best way to express myself in Auroville... The first ten years have been very hard. I swung between discouragement and exaltation. I had been working in Europe for twenty years with the most sophisticated equipment, and here I was suddenly confronted with a mass of people needing my care, and with materials which were outdated by at least 30 years, and I had to improvise. I felt very much alone, facing a huge job.

As a consequence of the lack of dental care which certain Aurovilians had endured for as long as 10 years, the dental health situation in Auroville in 1980 was really bad. Fortunately Aurovilians are easy patients. As a dentist you definitely need technical know-how, but what counts all the more is the human relationship which can be very subtle, a real exchange of energy. When there is a mutual confidence it happens most often in silence, but most of the time you must create this confidence, and that is first of all a way of being. During those moments every word has a certain resonance. It asks you to be tuned to the other.

I started at the Health Centre with the villagers, but at the same time I wanted to start a clinic. I decided to find a quiet place and... oh wonder! - two days later an Aurovilian offered me a building which was originally meant for manufacturing desks. I immediately imported equipment from Europe and completed it with Indian materials. That was an incredible experience, truly an ordeal, for the imported equipment was rather sophisticated and needed an appropriate infrastructure. For example, we had to buy a generator because of the incessant powercuts. I had to go to Pondy myself to buy cans of kerosene, and filter it because it was dirty... and so on. Let's say that between every two extractions I was a plumber, an electrician, and from time to time I managed to be a dentist. The conditions were such that it became comical. One morning, during the monsoon, I was working on somebody's teeth. Suddenly there was a power cut and, immediately after, the water pipe exploded! The wash basin was cracked, the water ran over the floor and flooded the room. In the midst of the panic somebody went out to find someone who could stop the flood - and it was finally a carpenter who came to fix the pipe! Luckily an electrician followed him and made the current come back and then a cleaning woman mopped up the floor. Then I suddenly cracked up with laughter, an unbelievable, crazy laughter that made tears come out of my eyes. My assistant, a young Tamil girl I trained, looked at me dumbfounded, believing I was on the brink of madness.

Now an engineer has come to work with me, Jean Claude, and we work very well together. Thanks to him we have reached an almost European standard and succeeded in putting together a dental clinic which is, in terms of an efficient use of

space and energy, very advanced. The clinic has developed in the rhythm of Auroville. We could have done it faster, but we wanted dental care to be considered as a free service for all and to be run by the community as a whole. Realizing this aim has taken a lot of energy. But this year it started to work: we are integrated into the present economic system. My mind is now more free and I can work better. It took ten years to establish the basis. From now on, everything is possible and everything begins. And everything is still to be done! But I have more energy and enthusiasm than ever.

We have already had concrete results. The dispensary project for instance, which was launched in 1983, came through in '88 thanks to help from France and Germany. The 'Caritas' group finances a large-scale programme which includes supporting the dental clinic for three years. Next, we will have to get the villagers to practise active prevention and to make them participate in the costs - the only way to lasting progress. In this area, Auroville has a very important role to play. In the coming months a dental engineering laboratory will be started up. We need to receive second-hand equipment, and then we will have a European dental engineer come who will train young Indians on the spot."

**Q: You have been working alone as a dentist for ten years. How do you see the future?**

**A:** Not alone any more - there are too many fascinating things to explore. I would need qualified colleagues.

There is the preventive education in the schools. I started three years ago with showing videos, distributing brushes and toothpaste, and doing check-ups for children. Sometimes I get the impression there was not much effect, but I hope at least that my intervention will leave some traces with the hygiene-habits of the children. I would also like to make the whole community rediscover 'jaggery', which is natural sugar full of vitamins and trace-elements, and which, besides tasting delicious, doesn't cause caries... but cures it. Why not grow biological sugar cane in Auroville?

**Could one say that you are approaching your dream?**

A bit more every day, yes. But I know that in my daily life of tomorrow I will have one foot in the 21st century, with lasers and computers, and I will still... have to go to Pondy to get kerosene. I love paradoxes, and Auroville is one of them!

**We have talked a lot about difficulties. Yet there must have been moments of joy.**

It was at the Health Centre. I was working under a tree, under terrible conditions. I was plagued by flies. As I did not speak Tamil, the patients could only show me with gestures where it hurt. When I had relieved them of their pain, there sometimes was this gesture of incredible dignity: the Indian greeting. It took my breath away. It was all of India thanking me for my efforts. These are moments that you never forget, for there is no more technique or money - there are only two human beings facing each other.

Yanne