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Editor

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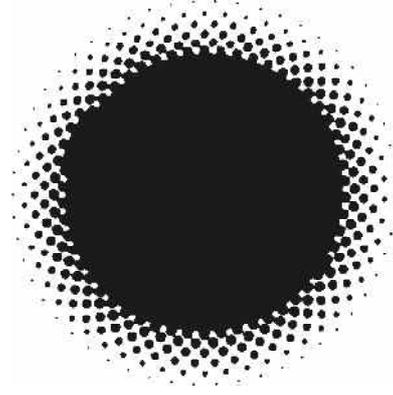
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ऋतम् • Ritam

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A Journal of Material and Spiritual Researches in Auroville
Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research

RITAM

A bi-annual journal of material and spiritual researches in Auroville

Our aim:

- | This is a journal under SAIIER connecting the various units under its umbrella with the focus on education and other related areas of research.
- | The purpose is to create a space where we express and share our work in Auroville and also invite others to share their perceptions with a view to look at where we stand with reference to the ideal.
- | It will publish articles, interviews etc. which are relevant to the Charter of Auroville, both from people in Auroville as well as those from elsewhere.
- | This journal is for both Aurovilians as well as others who are looking to Auroville for pioneering work in many fields.
- | The goal is to understand better the spirit of Auroville and in that context what we are doing and what further we can do.

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RITAM

Volume 3 Issue 1
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Prayers and Meditations

The Mother

Hail to Thee, O Lord, Master of the world. Give us the power to do the work without being attached to it and to develop the capacities of individual manifestation without living in the illusion of personality. Strengthen our vision of reality; make firm our perception of unity; deliver us from all ignorance, all darkness.

We do not ask for the perfection of the instrument, knowing that in the world of relativities all perfection is relative: this instrument, fashioned for action in this world, must, in order to be able to act, belong to this world; but the consciousness that animates it should be identified with Thine, it should be the universal and eternal consciousness animating the varied multitude of bodies.

O Lord, grant that we may rise above the ordinary forms of manifestation so that Thou mayst find the tools necessary for Thy new manifestation.

Do not let us lose sight of the goal; grant that we may always be united with Thy force, the force which the earth does not yet know and which Thou hast given us the mission to reveal to it.

In a deep meditation, all the states of manifestation consecrate themselves to Thy manifestation.

The Mother
June 26, 1914

The Spiritual Aim and Life

Sri Aurobindo

A society founded upon spirituality will differ in two essential points from the normal human society which begins from and ends with the lower nature. The normal human society starts from the gregarious instinct modified by a diversity and possible antagonism of interests, from an association and clash of egos, from a meeting, combination, conflict of ideas, tendencies and principles; it tries first to patch up an accommodation of converging interests and a treaty of peace between discords, founded on a series of implied contracts, natural or necessary adjustments which become customs of the aggregate life, and to these contracts as they develop it gives the name of social law. By establishing, as against the interests which lead to conflict, the interests which call for association and mutual assistance, it creates or stimulates sympathies and habits of helpfulness that give a psychological support and sanction to its mechanism of law, custom and contract. It justifies the mass of social institutions and habitual ways of being which it thus creates by the greater satisfaction and efficiency of the physical, the vital and the mental life of man, in a word, by the growth and advantages of civilisation. A good many losses have indeed to be written off as against these gains, but those are to be accepted as the price we must pay for civilisation.

The normal society treats man essentially as a physical, vital and mental being. For the life, the mind, the body are the three terms of existence with which it has some competence to deal. It develops a system of mental growth and efficiency, an intellectual, aesthetic and moral culture. It evolves the vital side of human life and creates an ever-growing system of economic efficiency and vital enjoyment, and this system becomes more and more rich, cumbrous and complex as civilisation develops. Depressing by its mental and vital

overgrowth the natural vigour of the physical and animal man, it tries to set the balance right by systems of physical culture, a cumbrous science of habits and remedies intended to cure the ills it has created and as much amelioration as it can manage of the artificial forms of living that are necessary to its social system. In the end, however, experience shows that society tends to die by its own development, a sure sign that there is some radical defect in its system, a certain proof that its idea of man and its method of development do not correspond to all the reality of the human being and to the aim of life which that reality imposes.

There is then a radical defect somewhere in the process of human civilisation; but where is its seat and by what issue shall we come out of the perpetual cycle of failure? Our civilised development of life ends in an exhaustion of vitality and a refusal of Nature to lend her support any further to a continued advance upon these lines; our civilised mentality, after disturbing the balance of the human system to its own greater profit, finally discovers that it has exhausted and destroyed that which fed it and loses its power of healthy action and productiveness. It is found that civilisation has created many more problems than it can solve, has multiplied excessive needs and desires the satisfaction of which it has not sufficient vital force to sustain, has developed a jungle of claims and artificial instincts in the midst of which life loses its way and has no longer any sight of its aim. The more advanced minds begin to declare civilisation a failure and society begins to feel that they are right. But the remedy proposed is either a halt or even a retrogression, which means in the end more confusion, stagnation and decay, or a reversion to "Nature" which is impossible or can only come about by a cataclysm and disintegration of society; or even a cure is aimed at by carrying artificial



remedies to their acme, by more and more Science, more and more mechanical devices, a more scientific organisation of life, which means that the engine shall replace life, the arbitrary logical reason substitute itself for complex Nature and man be saved by machinery. As well say that to carry a disease to its height is the best way to its cure.

It may be suggested on the contrary and with some chance of knocking at the right door that the radical defect of all our systems is their deficient development of just that which society has most neglected, the spiritual element, the soul in man which is his true being. Even to have a healthy body, a strong vitality and an active and clarified mind and a field for their action and enjoyment, carries man no more than a certain distance; afterwards he flags and tires for want of a real self-finding, a satisfying aim for his action and progress. These three things do not make the sum of a complete manhood; they are means to an ulterior end and cannot be made for ever an aim in themselves. Add a rich emotional life governed by a well-ordered ethical standard, and still there is the savour of something left out, some supreme good which these things mean, but do not in themselves arrive at, do not discover till they go beyond themselves. Add a religious system and a widespread spirit of belief and piety, and still you have not found the means of social salvation. All these things human society has developed, but none of them has saved it from disillusionment, weariness and decay. The ancient intellectual cultures of Europe ended in disruptive doubt and sceptical impotence, the pieties of Asia in stagnation and decline. Modern society has discovered a new principle of survival, progress, but the aim of that progress it has never discovered,—unless the aim is always more knowledge, more equipment, convenience and comfort, more enjoyment, a greater and still greater complexity of the social economy, a more and more cumbrously opulent life. But these things must lead in the end where the old led, for they are only the same thing on a larger scale; they lead in a circle, that is to say, nowhere: they do not escape from the cycle of birth, growth, decay and death, they do not really find the secret of self-prolongation by constant self-renewal which is the principle of

immortality, but only seem for a moment to find it by the illusion of a series of experiments each of which ends in disappointment. That so far has been the nature of modern progress. Only in its new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity now only beginning, is there a better hope; for by that turning it may discover that the real truth of man is to be found in his soul. It is not indeed certain that a subjective age will lead us there, but it gives us the possibility, can turn in that direction, if used rightly, the more inward movement.

It will be said that this is an old discovery and that it governed the old societies under the name of religion. But that was only an appearance. The discovery was there, but it was made for the life of the individual only, and even for him it looked beyond the earth for its fulfilment and at earth only as the place of his preparation for a solitary salvation or release from the burden of life. Human society itself never seized on the discovery of the soul as a means for the discovery of the law of its own being or on a knowledge of the soul's true nature and need and its fulfilment as the right way of terrestrial perfection. If we look at the old religions in their social as apart from their individual aspect, we see that the use society made of them was only of their most unspiritual or at any rate of their less spiritual parts. It made use of them to give an august, awful and would-be eternal sanction to its mass of customs and institutions; it made of them a veil of mystery against human questioning and a shield of darkness against the innovator. So far as it saw in religion a means of human salvation and perfection, it laid hands upon it at once to mechanise it, to catch the human soul and bind it on the wheels of a socio-religious machinery, to impose on it in the place of spiritual freedom an imperious yoke and an iron prison. It saddled upon the religious life of man a Church, a priesthood and a mass of ceremonies and set over it a pack of watchdogs under the name of creeds and dogmas, dogmas which one had to accept and obey under pain of condemnation to eternal hell by an eternal judge beyond, just as one had to accept and to obey the laws of society on pain of condemnation to temporal imprisonment or death by a mortal

judge below. This false socialisation of religion has been always the chief cause of its failure to regenerate mankind.

For nothing can be more fatal to religion than for its spiritual element to be crushed or formalised out of existence by its outward aids and forms and machinery. The falsehood of the old social use of religion is shown by its effects. History has exhibited more than once the coincidence of the greatest religious fervour and piety with darkest ignorance, with an obscure squalor and long vegetative stagnancy of the mass of human life, with the unquestioned reign of cruelty, injustice and oppression, or with an organisation of the most ordinary, un aspiring and unraised existence hardly relieved by some touches of intellectual or half-spiritual light on the surface,—the end of all this a widespread revolt that turned first of all against the established religion as the key-stone of a regnant falsehood, evil and ignorance. It is another sign when the too scrupulously exact observation of a socio-religious system and its rites and forms, which by the very fact of this misplaced importance begin to lose their sense and true religious value, becomes the law and most prominent aim of religion rather than any spiritual growth of the individual and the race. And a great sign too of this failure is when the individual is obliged to flee from society in order to find room for his spiritual growth; when, finding human life given over to the unregenerated mind, life and body and the place of spiritual freedom occupied by the bonds of form, by Church and Shastra, by some law of the Ignorance, he is obliged to break away from all these to seek for growth into the spirit in the monastery, on the mountain-top, in the cavern, in the desert and the forest. When there is that division between life and the spirit, sentence of condemnation is passed upon human life. Either it is left to circle in its routine or it is decried as worthless and unreal, a vanity of vanities, and loses that confidence in itself and inner faith in the value of its terrestrial aims, *sraddha*, without which it cannot come to anything. For the spirit of man must strain towards the heights; when it loses its tension of endeavour, the race must become immobile and stagnant or even sink towards darkness and the dust.

Even where life rejects the spirit or the spirit rejects life, there may be a self-affirmation of the inner being; there may even be a glorious crop of saints and hermits in a forcing-soil of spirituality, but unless the race, the society, the nation is moved towards the spiritualisation of life or moves forward led by the light of an ideal, the end must be littleness, weakness and stagnation. Or the race has to turn to the intellect for rescue, for some hope or new ideal, and arrive by a circle through an age of rationalism at a fresh effort towards the restatement of spiritual truth and a new attempt to spiritualise human life.

The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature. It will therefore regard the life, mind and body neither as ends in themselves, sufficient for their own satisfaction, nor as mortal members full of disease which have only to be dropped off for the rescued spirit to flee away into its own pure regions, but as first instruments of the soul, the yet imperfect instruments of an unseized diviner purpose. It will believe in their destiny and help them to believe in themselves, but for that very reason in their highest and not only in their lowest or lower possibilities. Their destiny will be, in its view, to spiritualise themselves so as to grow into visible members of the spirit, lucid means of its manifestation, themselves spiritual, illumined, more and more conscious and perfect. For, accepting the truth of man's soul as a thing entirely divine in its essence, it will accept also the possibility of his whole being becoming divine in spite of Nature's first patent contradictions of this possibility, her darkened denials of this ultimate certitude, and even with these as a necessary earthly starting-point. And as it will regard man the individual, it will regard too man the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment in its manifold relations and its multitudinous activities. Therefore it will hold sacred all the different parts of man's life which correspond to the parts of his being, all his physical, vital, dynamic, emotional, aesthetic, ethical,

intellectual, psychic evolution, and see in them instruments for a growth towards a diviner living. It will regard every human society, nation, people or other organic aggregate from the same standpoint, sub-souls, as it were, means of a complex manifestation and self-fulfilment of the Spirit, the divine Reality, the conscious Infinite in man upon earth. The possible godhead of man because he is inwardly of one being with God will be its one solitary creed and dogma.

But it will not seek to enforce even this one uplifting dogma by any external compulsion upon the lower members of man's natural being; for that is *nigraha*, a repressive contraction of the nature which may lead to an apparent suppression of the evil, but not to a real and healthy growth of the good; it will rather hold up this creed and ideal as a light and inspiration to all his members to grow into the godhead from within themselves, to become freely divine. Neither in the individual nor in the society will it seek to imprison, wall in, repress, impoverish, but to let in the widest air and the highest light. A large liberty will be the law of a spiritual society and the increase of freedom a sign of the growth of human society towards the possibility of true spiritualisation. To spiritualise in this sense a society of slaves, slaves of power, slaves of authority, slaves of custom, slaves of dogma, slaves of all sorts of imposed laws which they live under rather than live by them, slaves internally of their own weakness, ignorance and passions from whose worst effect they seek or need to be protected by another and external slavery, can never be a successful endeavour. They must shake off their fetters first in order to be fit for a higher freedom. Not that man has not to wear many a yoke in his progress upward; but only the yoke which he accepts because it represents, the more perfectly the better, the highest inner law of his nature and its aspiration, will be entirely helpful to him. The rest buy their good results at a heavy cost and may retard as much as or even more than they accelerate his progress.

The spiritual aim will recognise that man as he grows in his being must have as much free space

as possible for all its members to grow in their own strength, to find out themselves and their potentialities. In their freedom they will err, because experience comes through many errors, but each has in itself a divine principle and they will find it out, disengage its presence, significance and law as their experience of themselves deepens and increases. Thus true spirituality will not lay a yoke upon science and philosophy or compel them to square their conclusions with any statement of dogmatic religious or even of assured spiritual truth, as some of the old religions attempted, vainly, ignorantly, with an unspiritual obstinacy and arrogance. Each part of man's being has its own dharma which it must follow and will follow in the end, put on it what fetters you please. The dharma of science, thought and philosophy is to seek for truth by the intellect dispassionately, without prepossession and prejudice, with no other first propositions than the law of thought and observation itself imposes. Science and philosophy are not bound to square their observations and conclusions with any current ideas of religious dogma or ethical rule or aesthetic prejudice.

In the end, if left free in their action, they will find the unity of Truth with Good and Beauty and God and give these a greater meaning than any dogmatic religion or any formal ethics or any narrower aesthetic idea can give us. But meanwhile they must be left free even to deny God and good and beauty if they will, if their sincere observation of things so points them. For all these rejections must come round in the end of their circling and return to a larger truth of the things they refuse. Often we find atheism both in individual and society a necessary passage to deeper religious and spiritual truth: one has sometimes to deny God in order to find him; the finding is inevitable at the end of all earnest scepticism and denial. The same law holds good in Art; the aesthetic being of man rises similarly on its own curve towards its diviner possibilities. The highest aim of the aesthetic being is to find the Divine through beauty; the highest Art is that which by an inspired use of significant and interpretative form unseals the doors of the spirit.

But in order that it may come to do this greatest thing largely and sincerely, it must first endeavour to see and depict man and Nature and life for their own sake, in their own characteristic truth and beauty; for behind these first characters lies always the beauty of the Divine in life and man and Nature and it is through their just transformation that what was at first veiled by them has to be revealed. The dogma that Art must be religious or not be at all, is a false dogma, just as is the claim that it must be subservient to ethics or utility or scientific truth or philosophic ideas. Art may make use of these things as elements, but it has its own *svadharma*, essential law, and it will rise to the widest spirituality by following out its own natural lines with no other yoke than the intimate law of its own being.

Even with the lower nature of man, though here we are naturally led to suppose that compulsion is the only remedy, the spiritual aim will seek for a free self-rule and development from within rather than a repression of his dynamic and vital being from without. All experience shows that man must be given a certain freedom to stumble in action as well as to err in knowledge so long as he does not get from within himself his freedom from wrong movement and error; otherwise he cannot grow. Society for its own sake has to coerce the dynamic and vital man, but coercion only chains up the devil and alters at best his form of action into more mitigated and civilised movements; it does not and cannot eliminate him. The real virtue of the dynamic and vital being, the Life Purusha, can only come by his finding a higher law and spirit for his activity within himself; to give him that, to illuminate and transform and not to destroy his impulse is the true spiritual means of regeneration. Thus spirituality will respect the freedom of the lower members, but it will not leave them to themselves; it will present to them the truth of the spirit in themselves, translated into their own fields of action, presented in a light which illumines all their activities and shows them the highest law of their own freedom. It will not, for instance, escape from scientific materialism by a barren contempt for physical

life or a denial of Matter, but pursue rather the sceptical mind into its own affirmations and denials and show it there the Divine. If it cannot do that, it is proved that it is itself unenlightened or deficient, because one-sided, in its light. It will not try to slay the vitality in man by denying life, but will rather reveal to life the divine in itself as the principle of its own transformation. If it cannot do that, it is because it has itself not yet wholly fathomed the meaning of the creation and the secret of the Avatar.

The spiritual aim will seek to fulfil itself therefore in a fullness of life and man's being in the individual and the race which will be the base for the heights of the spirit,—the base becoming in the end of one substance with the peaks. It will not proceed by a scornful neglect of the body, nor by an ascetic starving of the vital being and an utmost bareness or even squalor as the rule of spiritual living, nor by a puritanic denial of art and beauty and the aesthetic joy of life, nor by a neglect of science and philosophy as poor, negligible or misleading intellectual pursuits,—though the temporary utility even of these exaggerations as against the opposite excesses need not be denied; it will be all things to all, but in all it will be at once their highest aim and meaning and the most all-embracing expression of themselves in which all they are and seek for will be fulfilled. It will aim at establishing in society the true inner theocracy, not the false theocracy of a dominant Church or priesthood, but that of the inner Priest, Prophet and King. It will reveal to man the divinity in himself as the Light, Strength, Beauty, Good, Delight, Immortality that dwells within and build up in his outer life also the kingdom of God which is first discovered within us. It will show man the way to seek for the Divine in every way of his being, *sarvabhavena*,¹ and so find it and live in it, that however—even in all kinds of ways—he lives and acts, he shall live and act in that,² in the Divine, in the Spirit, in the eternal Reality of his being.

Footnote:

¹ Gita.

² Gita. *Sarvatha vartamano 'pi sa yogi mayi vartate.*

Auroville – the School of Human Unity

Zahid Shahab Ahmed (Pakistan)

It was indeed a matter of pleasure and honour for me to be part of UNESCO's international conference 'Youth for Human Unity' held at Auroville, India from 21st to 28th February 2005.

The insatiable nature of human genus always demands for the curiosity, to know, to learn and to explore. I heard hundreds of questions from the youth during the conference, especially regarding religion and spirituality. Youth is asking questions and searching for the answers, because they do not want to take religion for granted. They want to move into the depths of realities.

I feel the need to motivate youth to explore the hidden realities in all of the religions on this planet - they would surely find out lots of similarities. The essence of religions would surely help us in our search for new avenues for human unity. A German psychiatrist says, "Often the purpose of religion is to protect people from directly experiencing the Divine."

I had many unshared questions in mind regarding religions, therefore I had a discussion with Dr. Ananda Reddy, one of the panelists. He said: "One must have special glasses to see the Divine. One can't do it without possessing knowledge and practicing it. For example, you can't come to know that water is made up of two elements i.e. hydrogen and oxygen, without studying chemistry. Similarly with the case of God - to see Him you must learn spirituality through meditation."

Spirituality is basically a journey for truth and usually we individually search for the truth. This journey should be collective by moving hand in hand. Our social life is a part of spirituality therefore we cannot separate any part of our life from spirituality.

Mr. Mukesh Vatsa said in his remarks during the conference that spirituality could not be expressed in the form of words, as what is not present in a seed is present in a flower.

There is no need to hate the present generation of any nation, because they have not initiated conflicts. I do not want the present generations to be blamed for anything which is now part of history. I do not want this; I do not want the upcoming generations to open their eyes in an environment of conflicts and hatreds.

Human attitude plays a very important role in life and to satisfy our own desires there is a need to have positive attitude towards life. I feel that the journey towards positivism starts with self-exploration. The root of many problems is hidden in the ego and desires. And at times our desires make human sufferings invisible to us, therefore we only think about our benefits. This has been found in the history of wars, where nations had fought for the sake of material benefits. At times it is really confusing why we are fighting for pieces of land and not for peace on land?

God is everywhere, talking to us and caring for us there is just a need to open our mind and ears to listen to God.

Being involved in the social sector as a researcher, I always have found that in our daily lives we only search for the differences between human beings e.g. caste, religion, class, gender, nationality etc. I feel that for human unity we must understand that we can peacefully live together, but for this our first step could be to eliminate the barriers of differences. Further, there is a need to realize that we can coexist in diversity and for this we should search for the similarities and neglect differences. Human unity to me is the state of mind where you do not consider

the barriers of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity, class and nationality before hugging each other.

While discussing the challenges to the human unity during the conference sessions the youth emphasized a lot on the lack of seriousness and interest to resolve the conflicts in the world and in our region. And it has been found in the case with most of the conflicts where the policy makers and people in power are not taking into consideration the benefits of peace.

Religious extremism was also highlighted by some of the youth leaders as a challenge to human unity. I have observed the severe impact of religious extremism on the youth in India and Pakistan, where our youth are puppets in the hands of religious extremists.

Whenever I interacted with my friends from India during the conference days most of the times I encountered the following questions:

1. Does every Pakistani have a weapon?
2. In Pakistan, are most of the people dying of hunger?

While replying to the questions I observed how badly the media has affected the mindsets of the people on both sides of the border. There is a permanent invisible wall between the two nations for the last 57 years, which is not even allowing people to glance into the lives of people on the other side.

We are presently living in a village and do not know anything about the situation outside the boundaries of our own village.

When I was about to leave for India to attend the conference in Auroville, some of my friends asked

me not to go to India, especially not to travel by train due to security reasons. But my practical experience helped me a lot to understand that we are all same and common people on both sides of the border are suffering due the decisions of powerful people.

While living in Auroville for a week I found that if we the youth from different countries could live together for a week with harmony and love then why not forever? Therefore, youth could be seeds of peace for better fruits in the future.

Auroville is really a place for learning and inspirations, and I have observed it during my short stay there. Here, I would like to share a moment when I observed an enormous amount of energy in the eyes of a 70 year old man. He was still having the energy to work for human unity, for positive livelihoods and love that never ends. I think it is the impact of the challenging lifestyle in Auroville. As the Auroville charter says:

Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages.

We the youth who have seen, observed and learned about human unity while living in Auroville for a week are now Auroville's seeds for human unity. Realistically speaking, with some of the intellectuals I come to the conclusion that a living example like Auroville is not possible in all parts of the world. Therefore, we must spread the message of human unity in our own countries. And our focus should also be on transforming the values so as to adopt the Auroville charter.

May peace prevail on earth!

The world is a unity - it has always been and it is always so, even now it is so; not that it has not got the unity and the unity has to be brought in from outside and imposed upon it.

Only the world is not conscious of its unity. It has to be made conscious.

We consider that now is the most propitious time for this endeavour. For a new Force or Consciousness or Light - whatever you call the new element - has manifested in the world and now the world has the capacity to become conscious of its own unity.

The Mother, 1960

Mohanam – a Call for Harmony

Aurelio

“It’s truly a hope – it’s founded on a hope – of doing something that can be the beginning of a harmony.”

“We set out already a little late into the remote valley on the slopes of the Nilgiris and were warned that after nightfall here was a possibility of encountering elephants on the way. Not really being used to ‘the feel’ of this primal wilderness the young people who came traveling here from the villages of the coastal region, were rather nervous but then relaxed as the local guide seemed really cheerful and began whistling and singing while leading the group over a narrow jungle track deeper into the valley. And there was the promise of sharing music and dance with the Irula tribals!

Having arrived at the first hut and the meeting ground it did not seem though as if there were any people around. Only after repeated signal calls and shouted messages through the dark valley that the visitors had arrived, more and more faces and figures appeared on the moonlit ground, wondering who and why and wherefrom these young men had come. In a swift shifting movement the crowd – by now the community ground which was a terrace overlooking the dense forest of the valley – was hushed and introduced to the young team from the Mohanam Cultural Center who came here to learn about and document this original culture. A small kerosene lamp was brought and the headman expressed a warm welcome and pleaded for support for the difficult material condition of his tribal community and the wish for a fruitful contact was emphasized.

Almost unnoticed the musicians formed a small standing circle in the middle, and from the first sound of the small shepherd’s oboe the whole atmosphere seemed to be transformed and charged with the expression of simple joy and celebration

of life. For more than three hours the music went on in an uninterrupted flow – due to the circular breathing method of the two oboe players and the polyrhythmic choric play of the drummers – and what unfolded was an authentic sharing of the spirit of community through an ever-changing dance of spiraling lines in which the elders, the women, the men, the youth and the children parallel and simultaneously regrouped into new strains of common movements spiraling around the center of the musician’s trance-like rhythm.

Only after midnight, with the visitors quite tired – whereas the tribal community seemed refreshed and enthused – could it be announced that a lap-top had been set up on the stone stairs of the main hut and that a video was to be shown from the temple festival in Sanjeevinagar, a village in Pondicherry, right in the neighborhood of the international project of Auroville.”

It had been in May 2001 that the ‘New Youth Group’ in collaboration with Aurelio, artist and social activist from Austria, had taken up the renovation of one of the oldest traditional houses in the village, inspired by a visit to the open air heritage museum of Dakshinachitra, north of Mahabalipuram, where original houses of the south are re-erected complete with interior displays and living crafts to give an impression of the traditional lifestyle and activities of South Indian Culture. Having worked as a trainer in communication skills for selected development workers of Auroville Village Action, Aurelio was interested in this group as it constituted itself through youth from several villages and castes and so created a bridge between the different Tamil communities. The initial motivation was to create a ‘meeting place’ for the youth to be able to follow their dream – imbibed by an exceptional teacher

in the government village school – of working in unity for a better future of the village and their own lives.

Now was not the call for unity also at the core of Auroville's dream? Wasn't from the very beginning one of the most important challenges that Auroville had to face its relationship with the local people, some 40,000 of whom live in the area? For human unity means nothing if it does not include one's neighbors. How successful, then, have Auroville and its individuals been in bridging the material, educational and cultural gap between the international community and the villagers?

Many newcomers – and even the pioneers once had been new arrivals in this land of the red soil and sun-baked population – often bring a colored perspective and either a romanticized idealistic or chauvinist realistic attitude towards the indigenous people, influenced often by their own upbringing and social background and conditioning, and in many cases are not prepared or even aware of the issue of the complex relationship with the local villagers.

As early as 1969 The Mother mentioned to the first inhabitants of Aspiration: *“A relationship that is not only cordial but friendly with the inhabitants of the neighboring villages is absolutely indispensable. For the realization of Auroville the first step is to establish a true human fraternity – any shortcoming in this regard is a grave mistake which can compromise the whole work.”*

The question appears of how this 'true human fraternity' can manifest and express itself when the most common relation of the Aurovillian to many of the villagers is one of inequality, of employer, supervisor, boss, director towards a worker, servant, laborer or assistant?! For many westerners it had not been even a consideration while deciding to come and settle in Auroville that there will be the challenge of the right relationship with the original population of the land, and that the project of the city to be, however visionary and spiritually inspired, cannot exist and be manifested in a social isolation from its surroundings. Again a very clear

hint: *“...while putting things in order, be very careful not to offend the people from the Tamil village. They are our brothers in spirit – this should never be forgotten.”*

If the cradle of the big world religions had been laid in the 'Middle East' and that region still remains one of the most unstable conflict areas on the globe, what significance could it have that *“the cradle of the superman”*, the possibility of a new spiritualized being, is planted in the soil of this ancient Tamil Land which carries one of the oldest living cultures of this planet? How much do we know about the constituents of this soil that helps to grow, protect and nourish the seedling of a *“living embodiment of an actual human unity”*? What are the gifts and qualities of this land and its people towards the realization of the Auroville Dream? What the contributions of the people in this co-evolutionary process, what their part in this *“attempt to bring peace and unity among men”*? If *“Auroville is the shelter built for all those who want to hasten towards a future of knowledge, peace and harmony”*, then who are these people offering their land and lives for this shelter to be established?

The many hands and enduring labor and perseverance, the inherent skills and learning capacity, the generosity, heart-centered life and smiles, the naiveté, kindness and readiness to give and share, the cheerful colors and good humor all contribute in a big way towards the building of Auroville. Poetess Meenakshi's often repeated appeal of *“Why don't we bring out and focus on all the aspects of beauty and achievement, rather than being preoccupied and resentful of all the difficulties of this ancient culture in decline and transition?”* had been a key note in the inspiration and formation not only of the Tamil Heritage Center in Auroville but also now of the Cultural Center in Sanjeevinagar. *“The disharmony exists everywhere but you must reject that and allow only the harmony to enter.”*

'Mohanam' is the classical Carnatic name for one of the most harmonious 'ragas' (similar to an elaborated scale, a selected musical melody

material which creates a certain atmosphere and state of mind) which can be found in many of the original cultures around the world. It evokes the power of enchantment and attraction, the fulfillment of our aspiration for beauty and harmony. (*"It's on the heights that harmony is created."*)

The emphasis of the center's work lies on the charm and gifts of the Tamil culture and how to bring the timeless values to the fore, preserve and invigorate them into a living contemporary expression. This naturally brought a focus on Tamil Heritage and its local facets, and while at its outset the only form of cultural expression the youth was aware of were modern cinema-pop songs and dances, a few steps have been won in the rediscovery of their own cultural forms and values. A survey was conducted on 'special people' in the local area and a few performers, artisans and special craft people were identified and invited to share their skills with the youth and children in classes and workshops. It had been found for example that before the conquering crusade of television into each village household every village had its own theatre group which played an important social function for the community renewal, as besides imbibing the character building values of the ancient epics and dramas of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata there always was a joker on stage referring to all the unspoken-of happenings in the village, bringing in a humorous way the shadow sides of life and politics into the light of the public stage and awareness. In weekend classes, seminars and summer-camps many subjects have been touched and the young generation finds exposure to clay and woodwork, folk and classical dancing, storytelling, folk-singing and theatre, herbal medicine and traditional martial arts.

"....the best way, you see, it is education. To educate them not by words and speeches but by example", the Mother answered to another question from the early settlers on how to deal with the local villagers. To think of all the different examples the new arrivals have planted and ingrained into this very

fragile ecosystem and simple mind can leave any observer bewildered or in deep acknowledgement and one can hope that the aspirations and high ideals of Auroville will be strong enough to successfully move through this chaotic transition between the breaking up of the old and budding of the new. But actually, *"What has ruined India is this idea that the higher consciousness deals with the higher things and that the lower things do not interest it at all. Well this error must be completely eradicated. It is the highest consciousness which sees most clearly what the needs of the most material things must be."*

Are there ways that the approaches to development work can be effected, improved and revolutionized by a spiritual discipline, and what differentiates Auroville's social and environmental outreach work in the bioregion from any of the countless activities and projects of volunteer and non-government organizations? Is there a common theme, inspiration, attitude or method of work weaving all the different Auroville activists in the field together – beyond their personal style, motivations and individually chosen projects? And how does the grassroots work reflect back on the inner path and the flowering of personal growth processes?

Bhavana, who has been working for more than twenty years for Auroville Village Action speaks about the 'consciousness approach' to development work and lives herself a shining example of the integration of deep concentrated meditative practice and an immense work output and tireless and cheerful engagement in the village related work.

"It's an interesting experience: how the same actions, the same work, the same observations, the same relationship with the people around, how they are take place in the mind, through intelligence, and how they take place in the consciousness, through experience." Facing the daily challenges and confrontations of the intermingling field and meeting place of the difference of culture, education, social and living

standard, material and technical achievement and environmental and global awareness one is left with an immense array of experiences which can be incomprehensible and overwhelming, exposing a constant edge or breaking point with the ensuing well known burnout syndrome of social workers, if the movements of clarifying reflection, assimilation and integration are not consciously practiced. And if *"Auroville is the place where this new way of living is being worked out"*, if *"it is a center of accelerated evolution where man must begin to change his world through the power of the inner spirit"* then the demanding work in relationship with the villagers is offering a marvelous and all comprehensive testing ground to prove that Auroville ideals are applicable and can model ways to solutions for many of the enormous challenges humanity is facing on the verge of doom, or the breaking of a new day, and through this fulfill its calling to really become *"The City the Earth needs."*

An important factor in the field work is the growing interest and engagement from the global community and the visit and input of many students and groups from abroad. The young and growing citizens of the world come with a fresh and critical perspective to Auroville, have a heartfelt and genuine aspiration to understand more about the pressing problems of human rights, equality, deep ecology, new economics, social injustice and cultural integration. Mohanam finds itself in a fruitful exchange with youth from many countries who visit, do studies, documentation, an internship or offer service for a social year. The learning process which unfolds between the local and global community is very stimulating and mutually enriching and opens new ways of conscious interaction towards the actualization of

"unity through harmony in complexity, with each thing in its place...."

Setting out very early morning, way before dawn, the group of young men was told to reach the entrance of the gardens before the first birds call. Crossing over the dam and the ponds, which since ages serve as rainwater catchments for the village, the atmosphere changes perceptibly while entering the protective canopy of the Auroville forest. Cycles quietly rolling over the sandy tracks and red roads towards the center of the township, the anticipation of the promised gathering builds up in the still dreamy minds, and it feels good to park the cycles under a tree and touch the solid cool ground with bare feet to walk into the sacred gardens. A row of lights and lanterns leads the path towards the peace area and everything moves in concentrated silence. Streaming in from all directions the large meeting ground, amphitheatre is filled as drawn by an unknown magnetic force and everyone settles in awaiting the fire to be lit.

And there She is, burning aspiration, commencing in a small flame, sparks of light through the night, rising stars, whirling, dancing, spreading the light through all the cells of this one body of earth. The music in the background sounds like waves of a big ocean but nobody stirs.

Only inside something is moving, rising, growing, burning, hearts opening, minds flying – together this cosmic tribe is awaiting the coming dawn, *"the advent of a more harmonious future."*

"To listen is good, but not sufficient – you must understand."

To understand is better, but still not sufficient – you must act."

... the people of India, even the "ignorant masses" have this distinction that they are by centuries of training nearer to the inner realities, are divided from a less thick veil of the universal ignorance and are more easily led back to a vital glimpse of God and spirit, self and eternity than the mass of men or even the cultured elite anywhere else...

Sri Aurobindo
The Human Cycle

Earth and Sky

Anu Majumdar

Artists begin from the ground beneath their feet. From where do we write, create or choreograph? What is our source, our native place? In Auroville the ground is made from all around the world and the sky is inside. Our anchor lies forward as we stand between the opposite poles of matter and spirit seeking to unite inside us and change us, because Auroville is a new creation willed by the Divine. What we search or create here are ways to receive and manifest this consciousness because the purpose of Auroville is unity.

Easier said than done, isn't it? But there is no choice. That is the really easy part.

As a child I loved watching kites fly. How its rough thread released like a wave in the sky and then held on to the wind. Everything in this universe is in movement, like our lives. The movement of a word in the mind can create a song in the heart. The movement of a song through the wind can cause a child to dance. The dance of an inspired vision can move thousands to break down a wall. All these things can happen at the same time and their many changing histories alter us all, from moment to minute moment. This movement is the consciousness at work. How to move with it?

When I came to Auroville I decided to stop writing and let life do the listening. I did not write for over five years. Then, one summer, on the bus coming back from Berijam camp, there were lines springing out of nowhere. When we got back we heard about Tiananmen Square. Those were the years you had to go hunting across town to find a newspaper and, of course, no internet. I started reading *The Human Cycle and the Ideal of Human Unity* by Sri Aurobindo. The world intruded through them: through issues of war, religion, change, humanity, unity, consciousness, and the poems kept growing. Eventually they formed a collection. Some of those poems led to a choreographic work called *Crossroads*. The text became music composed by Holger. And eventually, a phrase from *Crossroads* became the title of another book, *Refugees from Paradise*.

I always knew I would write, but I never imagined I would dance, let alone choreograph. I took training in Bharatanatyam after coming to Auroville, in between

work at Matrimandir and Pour Tous. I loved it. I loved the body centre, its lines and radials, its rhythm and fluidity and its joy. I loved cycling down for class, and so much more became alive: the music on the streets, the flowers in the ladies' hair. I began to notice how people moved their hands when they spoke, the sound of different languages in the Pour Tous store, the textures of argument or laughter, the rhythms of discord and harmony, of pebbles in the red earth, shafts of light through a crack, a tree holding centre in a raging storm. The heartbeat held all rhythms; the soul held the body and the breath aligned everything. Choreography came out of all that and it demanded exploration.

Often the work we do searches us out, and then, searches inside of us because that is how we have to develop and contribute our bit to life. To manifest this work, however, needs research and re-vision, restructuring and retrials to make the instrument supple, because life always needs new forms to manifest the advancing Consciousness. Without this continuous experimentation and curiosity, an alertness and application, inspiration can go wasted or be badly used. That is why one needs to make mistakes too, in order to learn from them. I think artists work hard because they really enjoy it. And for those breakthrough moments when the frontier is tested and pushed a bit further till something quite unexpected or absolutely perfect happens, and that really makes the day. The great creators, thinkers, inventors are often our best teachers, because they are people who never stop growing or learning from the world. Encountering their work in any field can accelerate learning and inspire. I have also had the advantage of having an artist for a partner and living in an environment that is in permanent throes of experiment, ideas and colour.

One way to explore movement for choreography was to put it through the test of a variety of music: ancient, classical, modern, contemporary, jazz, rock, whatever. And a variety of silence. We called it Dance Experiment. Then, as the Auroville Dance Lab grew, the exploration stretched because each dancer was so different. Each one had a special potential, a personal or unique way of expression and a weakness. To unify all that into something harmonious and living was a huge challenge. *Crossroads* gave us a lot of time to grow and develop

together because we worked and travelled with it for over two years. It combined dance, theatre, humour and free imagination to deal with the poem. One interesting thing was the sculpting of space with slides. It created a sense of crossing from one space to another to enter deeper in the uncertainty of the self, and further its search. *Mantra*, was an exploration on the Rig Veda. The idea for this began when I developed a way to read Sri Aurobindo's translations rhythmically. I began working that with passages of silence, passages of sound, with song and incantation. This gave rise to a different set of movements that required more concentration. It was stylized, repetitive and rhythmic to generate the dynamic point of stillness that is transformative. *Speaking in Tongues* was an experiment in merging styles until it became something by itself, the beauty of each other inside us.

Choreography was like writing a story in movement. These stories were abstract in their tone but vivid in their telling. Once I knew what that story was – it could be a poem or, a piece of music or, a theme – the movements would start to echo. Sometimes they came during rehearsals or, in the middle of the night. What to do? Get out of bed, try it out, go back to sleep. But the wonderful thing about choreography is that it does not stop with the body or its movements. It works with space and time, with light and shadow, with images, imagination, mistakes and bright moments, and with what the soul can give to that moment.

In the middle of all that along came a knee injury, the wisdom of an adverse fate perhaps? It pushed my focus back to writing gradually. It began with poetry once more; collaboration on an art project by Pierre called *Light Matter*. This was challenging because I had to come up with one poem a day, 108 in all, and inspiring because of the art work it had to relate to and reveal. Finally the poems unfolded through space to become an art installation indoors and outdoor.

Meanwhile, I edited *Transcript* and noticed my writing develop in different ways as I worked on newer short stories. They began to embrace movement as well as poetic thought, and a kind of visualisation peculiar to choreography along with the range and immediacy of narrative. It gave me a sense of structure as well as freedom to mutate with it. I have often heard structure disdained as something mental, but everything depends on DNA, even a blade of grass, and that is structure too.

After a gap of ten years I rediscovered the *Ideal of Human Unity*. Now it read more like a text book of the world and why something like Auroville was needed,

even as a small and apparently insignificant nucleus of change and experiment. The novel, *Refugees from Paradise*, began at this point without much obvious preparation. It is a story set around a small and unusual universe, a house of tenants called *Casa Mira*, where unexpected changes lead to remarkable investigations.

For writing, again: inspiration. One has to pray for it, beg for it, demand it, sing to it, Tai Chi for it, whatever. Sometimes, when I get stuck, I read *Savitri* aloud, for as long as it takes: a day, three days, a week, until the flow returns. Inspiration is a precious thing, a friend and a deeply fulfilling guide. One needs to stay with its breath and do whatever needs to be done to make that breath story. Sometimes you need to delete words until you get to the right one. Sometimes you have to delete a whole chapter or, a character, if it does not ring right. And sometimes you cannot stop until it lets you.

Reading *Savitri* can have its hazards too. One day I opened it at random and there was this line staring me in the eye: *His hunger for the eternal thou must nurse*. The book was closed and put away quickly. A few days, there it was again, the same line, out of a sea of lines, looking up. What was I to say to it? "Sorry, wrong number. Try the next one." Soon after, the publishers asked if I would consider doing a children's book. I said no, I do not write for kids. They tried again. I decided to say no again and went for a walk in the Matrimandir gardens. I was sitting under the banyan tree when I saw this big, beautiful owl, up in one of the hollows. It stared at me rather meaningfully. It had a kind but very commanding air. Suddenly it blinked its right eye, next the left one, then it swivelled its head right around. Clearly, darshan was over, my time was up. Back home I opened my computer to write the NO mail but there was a murmur swirling around the head. So I opened a new document instead and wrote a three page synopsis along with the title of the book. It is called *Island of Infinity*. It has an owl called Rishi and I have loved every minute of it.

Artists work alone or with others. As a dancer one can work alone if one wishes, as a choreographer one cannot, as a writer one must work alone. I am grateful for everything that has helped me grow and to do what I really want to do, despite the many uncertainties of an artist's path. Nothing is ever guaranteed. Artists rarely make products, they create experience, and for that, one depends on the Grace.

In Auroville the ground also stretches from heart to heaven and follows under our feet. I like to go walking from time to time.

The Tempest in Auroville

Jill D. Navarre

“If you want art to be the true and highest art, it must be the expression of a divine world brought down into this material world. All true artists have some feeling of this kind, some sense that they are the intermediaries between a higher world and this physical existence. If you consider it in this light, Art is not very different from yoga.”

The Mother on Art

The Tempest by Shakespeare which was staged in Auroville almost didn't get made. Everything about it was big – too big.

We needed 11 months to rehearse it. Not rehearse. We started on Shakespeare's birthday, which is April 26th. Just getting together and reading the script. There were about 8 people at that time. No Prospero. No Miranda. I had the crazy idea to import actors – sort of to wake up the rest of the cast and add an international touch. Our Prospero was going to come from France. Well, he was American but he was living in Paris for many years, and he'd been to Auroville before. Our Miranda was like a Swedish-Indian goddess type and she was actually one of the people who first plugged into the *Tempest* idea. So, sure, they were going to come and be the two main characters. How was that possible? Well, in theatre you sort of have the idea that anything is possible – up until the very last moment when it isn't. So, our overseas Prospero and Miranda eventually morphed into Jean and Anandamayi – who would almost get to play father and daughter onstage as well. (At the last moment, even this didn't happen, as Anandamayi got typhoid and Ketki, our indomitable stage manager from Pune, courageously jumped into the role).

I'd been wrestling with the idea of doing “*The Tempest*” for 7 years. I started thinking about it one day when I was in the Samuel French office in Paris (there's Paris again) looking over the play titles and came across a postcard of another production of “*The Tempest*”. There was an island and a magician and a

sweet young girl and a cast of wandering relatives and fairies and a storm. So naturally I thought of Auroville (you see the connection).

And then there was Shakespeare. I had worked at the Shakespeare Theatre at the Folger in Washington D.C. for several years and watched every production from the back of the house, sort of breathing in the atmosphere and helping 25 actors into their tights. So, there in Paris, I thought, let's do it! That done, I forgot about it, or maybe it's more accurate to say it lay like a shark, swimming lazily at the back of my brain, but always active, moving.

This year I took a deep breath and plunged in. Part of my motivation was that I wasn't getting any younger, and if I didn't direct a Shakespeare play soon I'd regret it and have nobody to blame but myself. The other thing was that as I began to actually work with the text (that's theatre talk for reading it about 5 thousand times) I saw how some of the themes might be relevant to our experience here in Auroville. And those themes were: reconciliation – (there was lots of talk around that time about the still lingering aftertaste of the “dark days” when people were doing weird things here, not speaking to each other, being rude and unkind, shaving their heads, burning books) and now there seemed to be some move to rectify the mistakes, some conciliatory words were spoken, people were hugging who hadn't spoken to each other in years, that sort of thing.

The other theme was: the island of the *Tempest*, isolated, touched by magic, a refuge for a man who had lived too long in his mind and his daughter who was coming of age – the magician was looking for a way back to the heart, even though he doesn't realise it at first, well, these sorts of insights take time to ripen – to reconnect with humanity – the positive and negative sides of isolation in Shakespeare were unfolding as a mirror image of this way of relating to the world in Auroville. And holding a mirror up to Nature is Shakespeare's specialty.

The secret of Shakespeare's genius, for actors anyway, is what you might call "the word is the action and the action is the word". Nowhere else had we experienced such a merging of the two as in William Shakespeare. I mean, when I read the texts I had always wondered why there were not too many stage directions. Was he too lazy? Too uncertain? Too trusting? Was it just a sign of the times? Was he foreshadowing writers like Beckett whose set design for "Waiting for Godot" consists of one tree, with actors entering and exiting and the rest you figure out? So we gathered those who were already "on board" and began to read the story out loud. What a thrill! Not only for the love of the language, and to realise, okay, here we go, but to finally understand what people were saying. You see, there is this magic that transforms the word from the page ("What are they saying?") to the word on the stage (Ahh, that's what they mean!).

Of course, we read Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare in "The Future Poetry". We devoured his words. For example, in Chapter VII: "the Course of English Poetry – 2":

"This interpretative vision and seeing idea have in the presentation to seem to arise out of the inner life of a few vital types of the human soul or individual representatives of its enigma and to work themselves out through an evolution of speech leading to an evolution of action. And of these two speech in the drama is the first and most important instrument, because through it the poet reveals the action of the soul, outward action and event are only the second, important, but less essential, reducible even to an indispensable minimum, because the outward movements serve only to make visible and concrete to us the result of the inner action and have not outer intrinsic purpose."

So here was Sri Aurobindo, himself a playwright, giving his own "advice to the players" about how the inner and outer life of the characters relate to each other and how the actor should reveal through the text the inner life he is playing. Fascinating.

As we met, night after night, week after week, the language became more familiar, not so daunting. We would eventually start speaking to each other in "Shakespearean English" even outside of rehearsal. Just for fun. Imagine, here we are a group of about 15 actors

– only one whose first language was English – jumping on Shakespeare and trying to make some sense out of

"Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?"

Jean Legrand, who had the unnerving job of playing the lead, Prospero, started immediately to memorise his text, and wrap his tongue around those sounds: a mind boggling job for a Frenchman who is used to dropping h's and speaking in another rhythm. But if "evolution of speech" was going to lead to "an evolution of action" the problem had to be faced.

It wasn't long before there was Shakespeare with a Russian accent, Shakespeare with a Dutch accent, Shakespeare with a Tamil accent – we wondered: could the audience tune their ear in 2½ hours to all these different versions of the bard's speech?

Did we say 2½ hours? There was another question staring us in the face – would we be able to sustain the story for 2½ hours? Could the audience remain fascinated enough to stay put? While we were trying to see where cuts could be made, (it's been common with other productions of "The Tempest" to cut out the elaborate "marriage puja") we seemed to be going in the other direction. The marriage scene was taking on a life of its own as the Auroville choir and musicians got more and more involved. You see, "The Tempest" contains 8 songs actually written in the text; such hits as "Where the Bee Sucks", "Full Fathom Five", "Awake, Awake" – if you're not familiar with these tunes, don't worry – they're almost 400 years old. I approached Nuria, the choir director, with the idea of the Choir joining us and adding another dimension to the show. Shakespeare's songs have been adopted for Choir quite successfully, and Nuria was intrigued. Of course, they didn't know what they were getting into!

It's one thing to sing some songs onstage, receive your applause, and then leave, it's quite another to be part of an evening of Shakespeare where you have to keep popping in and out of the story, enter, exit – and what role would 5 musicians and 35 choir members actually play – who were all these people? Finally, we figured out they must be Prospero's spirits who come to do his bidding. In the end, with sprightly

walk and sparkling faces, the musicians and Choir proved to be an indispensable, charming and delightful addition to the show.

Speaking of delightful, yet another layer of the work emerged with the inclusion of dance – you see, the production kept expanding, like a giant balloon – so here come the dancers, moments of sheer joy choreographed by Srimoyi, Grace and Joy. Moments which bring a lump to your throat. Of course, the audience only sees the final result, not the moments when actors don't know their lines, dancers don't show up for rehearsal, or a full choir stands in Kalabhumi, at twilight, while a light rain begins to fall. And they continue to sing, in their raincoats. But, of course, the show must go on, so bring on the fire jugglers! Bravo, Harmut!

How does it feel to direct such a work? Sometimes you are immersed in such a warm bath of love and gratitude. You feel the indescribable pleasure of seeing those lines come to life, your greatest expectations are fulfilled (and more). The costumes are so

beautiful, the comic characters are so hysterically funny . . . Other times, you are furious, frustrated and fantasize unspeakable things you could do to people who don't show up on time. The darkest moments are when you get angry at yourself – for stupid things you said at the wrong moment, for arriving late, for forgetting to thank someone, for being impatient, unkind or too tired to care.

The result of such a work, for everyone, is that in the end, you discover yourself in the tempest (and the tempest in yourself), the light as well as the darkness, and participate in the struggle as a group, the struggle to overcome the dark moments and keep yourself always turned to the light. No easy answers, just moments of truth revealed, when our reality and the reality of characters in a 400 year old play merge into one. And you wouldn't cut a word.

“Develop your inner being - find your soul, and at the same time you will find the true artistic expression.”

Mother on Art.

Dramatic poetry cannot live by the mere presentation of life and action and the passions, however truly they may be portrayed or however vigorously and abundantly pushed across the scene. Its object is something greater and its conditions of success much more onerous. It must have, to begin with, as the fount of its creation or in its heart an interpretative vision and in that vision an explicit or implicit seeing idea of life and the human being; and the vital presentation which is its outward instrument, must arise out of that deeper sight harmoniously, whether by a spontaneous creation, as in Shakespeare, or by the compulsion of an intuitive artistic will, as with the Greeks.

This interpretative vision and seeing idea have in the presentation to seem to arise out of the inner life of a few vital types of the human soul or individual representatives of its enigma and to work themselves out through an evolution of speech leading to an evolution of action. And of these two speech in the drama is the first and most important instrument, because through it the poet reveals the action of the soul, outward action and event are only the second, important, but less essential, reducible even to an indispensable minimum, because the outward movements serve only to make visible and concrete to us the result of the inner action and have not outer intrinsic purpose.

In all very great drama the true movement and result is psychological; and the outward action, even when it is considerable, and the consummating event, even though loud and violent, are either its symbol or else its condition of culmination. All has to be cast into a close dramatic form, a successful weaving of interdependent relations, relations of soul to soul, of speech to speech, of action to action, the more close and inevitable the better, because so the truth of the whole evolution comes home to us.

And if it is asked what in a word is the essential purpose of all this creation, I think we might possibly say that drama is the poet's vision of some part of the world-act in the life of the human soul, it is in a way his vision of Karma, in an extended and very flexible sense of the word; and at its highest point it becomes a poetic rendering or illustration of the Aeschylean drasanti pathein, "the doer shall feel the effect of his act", in an inner as well as an outer, a happy no less than an austere significance, whether that effect be represented as psychological or vital, whether it comes to its own through sorrow and calamity, ends in a judgment by laughter or finds an escape into beauty and joy, whether the presentation be tragic or comic or tragic-comic or idyllic.

Sri Aurobindo,
The Future Poetry

Biofuel research in Auroville

Production and use of plant oil as a substitute for fossil fuel

Manfred Lehnert

“One of the signs of the new age will be, when humanity learns to draw energy from above, from the inexhaustible source of the sun - instead of from below, by denuding the earth.”

The Mother

Regarding coal and oil, Mother said, both are fossil fuels and so, by their very nature, belong to a dead past. We should look for our energy requirements from things of the present leading into the future... We should concentrate our research on solar energy. The sun, Mother said, is the physical sign of the supramental, the goal towards which we are moving in Their Yoga. The sun pours down a tremendous amount of energy and only a very little fraction of it is being used, almost all of it goes to waste. (*Quoting the Mother from Sri Aurobindo's Action, June 1979, p.3*)

Plant oil is preserved solar energy and one way to shift to a sustainable energy production.

1. Introduction

Today we are witnessing an escalating energy demand. 95 % of the energy we use comes from non-renewable fossil energy resources like oil, gas and coal. It is being used for the production of secondary energy in power plants, in the transport sector and for household consumption. Two centuries of industrialisation, driven mainly by fossil fuels has caused a big disaster to the environment and to humanity. Burning fossil fuels emit pollutants into the air which harms our health and spews out a huge amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂). CO₂ is one of the main greenhouse gases which increase global temperature and cause more draughts, floods, terrible storms and many more hot days. The climate change impacts our eco-system and also affects the food growing ability.

We all consume energy directly through the usage of cars, motor-bikes and electricity, indirectly in all products we buy. We cannot deny the responsibility

for the problems we are facing. But we are culprits as well as victims of pollution.

For a sustainable city research on renewable energy sources is important. Bio-fuels are stored solar energy in a convenient liquid form for the use in engines for the transportation and generation of electricity. This research project intends to promote the production and use of renewable plant oil from the indigenous Pongamia Pinnata tree in order to replace the harmful non-renewable fossil diesel oil at a reasonable cost. This alternative reduces the level of pollutants and of CO₂ emission.

2. Why produce and use bio-fuels

All bio-fuels like biomass (e.g. fire-wood), bio-gas, bio-alcohol, bio-diesel (plant oil) are stored solar energy. Every plant growing through the photosynthesis process captures CO₂ from the air and builds biomass with the help of sun energy and water.

The biomass fire-wood is able to replace fossil coal and fossil oil in power plants. The biomass seeds of some trees contain plant oil which is able to replace fossil diesel oil in diesel engines. Some plants containing starch and sugar can be converted into bio-alcohol, which is able to replace fossil petrol in petrol driven engines. Any kind of biomass can be converted into biogas in order to replace fossil gas (CNG - compressed natural gas, or LPG - liquid petrol gas). Therefore the following advantages can be obtained:

- Whereas the resources of fossil energy are limited, raw materials used for bio-fuels can be grown in nearly every country (even in extremely dry zones) and are able to provide continuous harvests during the life span of the tree.
- CO₂ released by burning bio-fuels is absorbed by other plants which amongst other biomasses can produce plant oil. Thus the CO₂ remains in a closed cycle, resulting in a reduction of CO₂ emission.

- Bio-fuels are non-toxic, bio-degradable and form no threat to human health, soil and drinking water.
- Bio-fuels can lessen the dependency on fossil fuels and provide a higher security in oil supply.
- Bio-fuels contribute to a sustainable energy system.
- The use of bio-diesel or plant oil in conventional diesel engines results in substantial reduction (20-50%) of unburnt hydrocarbons (HC), carbon monoxide (CO) and solid particulate matters (SPM). Only nitrogen oxides are smoothly higher (10-20%).
- Investment in bio-fuel production contributes to stabilised energy prices.
- Plant oil usage counteracts the depletion of fossil oil.
- Plant oil is free of sulphur; its exhaust therefore does not contain sulfur dioxide, which is responsible for acid rain and the continuing damage of soils, natural water bodies and forests.
- Plant oil is completely free of risk (transport, leakages, etc) and requires no special precautions.
- Plant oil can be used as a concrete release agent in construction. It can replace the heavily polluting waste mineral oils normally use.
- The organic oil cake (the byproduct of the plant oil production) is excellent in replacing inorganic chemical nitrogen fertilizer.
- Last but not the least: production and distribution of the oil can generate employment for the rural population.

2. Plant oil under practical conditions

As compared to diesel oil, plant oil used in diesel engines produces the same energy output (power and consumption). In comparison to fossil diesel with its simple chain molecule ($C_{13}H_{28}$), plant oil has a more complicated molecule structure ($C_{57}H_{102}O_6$) which is the reason for its high viscosity (10 times more than diesel at room temperature); this property can cause insufficient injection spray resulting in ignition problems. Reduction

of viscosity is necessary. This requires either to modify the plant oil or the adaptation of the engine.

- Modification of the plant oil through the chemical process of esterification: This product is called **Bio-diesel**. This method requires investment and energy, resulting in a cost increase of about 20% as compared to the original plant oil.
- Reduction of viscosity through a blend (20-50%) of plant oil with diesel,
- With the present diesel engine technology, it is necessary to convert the engine in order to use 100% unmodified plant oil. Comprising of a pre-heater and a modification of the injection system, preheating can be achieved generally in three ways:
 - Through the heat of the exhaust gas by way of a heat exchanger. Starting can be difficult due to the time needed to raise the temperature. A second diesel tank can be installed to be used only for the starting process. After a few minutes when the plant oil is hot enough (70° Celsius) for a good injection spray the supply can be switched over to preheated plant oil.
 - Through the heat generated by a water cooling system (if available).
 - Through electrical energy from a battery (if available).
- In our field tests in Auroville we focused on preheating through exhaust gas. It must be mentioned that the diesel motor (World exhibition in Paris 1900) already ran on plant oil (derived from peanuts). During wartime in India several plant oils were being used as a substitute for mineral oil in diesel engines.

3. Field tests in Auroville

To start with, we purchased 5,000 litres of Pongam oil (Honge-, Karanji-oil), traditionally being used for medicinal purposes and oil lamps, to be used in field tests at different places in Auroville (Siddhartha-Farm, La Ferme, Annapurna, Aurobrindavan). The attempt to use pure plant oil in direct injection engines and pre-chamber engines resulted in the following observations:

- Increase of smoke
- Increasing starting problems leading to complete break-down.

Service revealed carbon deposits on injection nozzles and piston/piston rings. Too frequent maintenances would not lead to a feasible solution. And scientific tests in India and abroad confirm higher content of pollutants in the exhaust when using pure plant oil in unaltered diesel engines (as compared to the use of fossil diesel).

Non-adapted direct injection engines (tractors, motorcycles) do not show problems when run on 20% plant oil mixed with diesel oil.

Non-adapted pre-chamber engines (generators, water pumps) can even run on 50% plant oil blend.

Therefore 100% plant oil can only be used with adapted engines. A pre-heater for the plant oil (to reduce viscosity) and a modification of nozzle and injection pump (for increased injection pressure) is necessary. Stationary engines such as in use for water-pumps and generators have been used for most of our experiments. The results are encouraging enough to convince other diesel motor owners in Auroville to join the “plant oil club”.

In Germany, thousands of diesel cars, tractors, buses and lorries are already converted to plant oil, there are even reports of a racing car being converted. Other unaltered diesel cars can run on bio-diesel chemically processed plant oil; consumption in 2004 more than 1 million tons). In this way we have consumed in Auroville within the past 3 years 5,000 liters of plant oil and gained valuable practical experiences with its application, already avoiding approx. 17,000 kg of carbon dioxide (the major greenhouse gas and contributor to global warming).

4. Production and economy of plant oil

The next step of our research in Auroville would be the production of our own plant oil. Already we have been planting during the past three years 3,000 oil bearing trees (mainly Pongamia Pinnata - in Siddhartha Farm, Windarra Farm, Discipline Farm, Service Farm and Sadhana Forest).

Auroville’s climate requires watering of the trees in the initial year. We know from literature that the Pongamia Pinnata oil tree’s first yield can be expected in the 4th year; and after the 20th year 16 tons of seeds (= 4 tons of plant oil) per hectare can be expected.

At the time of writing (2005) Auroville’s fuel need for diesel engines (taxis, cars, buses, generators and pump-sets) is estimated as 200,000 liters of plant oil per year. This would require further plantations of oil-bearing trees on 50 hectares to ensure sustainable production. Land needs can decisively be reduced if such useful trees are being integrated into reforestation programs as well as landscape design (alley-ways, fence, etc.)

If, after extracting the oil, the remaining oilcake is sold as a valuable substitute for a chemical fertilizer, the production cost of one liter plant oil amounts to Rs. 20 (as per current fossil oil prices about Rs. 7 cheaper than diesel). The price of the conversion of the engine to run on plant oil is approx. Rs. 1,000-2,000 according of the engine type.

Producing bio-fuels from our own renewable resources helps to build a sustainable economy in Auroville and keep fuel expenses where they are produced. Plant oil extraction can be integrated in the local agriculture, creating a new local industry.

5. Quality of the plant oil

For an efficient and complete combustion in the engine, the plant oil must possess a certain quality. Further research must define criteria of standard in order to allow quality control.

6. Summary

The best conversion of solar energy for energy demand is possible via bio-fuels. Bio-fuels offer a reliable and cost effective alternative to fossil fuels with less pollution and no threat to either water, soil and the air. The problem of the high viscosity of the plant oil can be solved by modification of the plant oil (bio-diesel), by conversion of the engine or using a blend with diesel. The last two possibilities have been investigated in this research project. It is high time to invest time and money in sustainable bio-fuels.

Literature

The Mother

Mother reads *The Great Secret*: The Writer.

Sweet Mother, here it is written: "The word is sufficiently immaterial to be in contact with subtle things, forces and vibrations, principles and ideas".

My children, I have to tell you to begin with that this is "literature". So you should not ask me for explanations. It is a literary way of speaking, you must understand it in a literary way; it is a literary description of the word; it is very precise, but it is literary. So I cannot produce literature on this literature. One must have the taste for forms, for a beautiful way of saying things, a little exceptional, not too banal; but it is just one way, it's a way of saying things which is charming. Literature exists completely in the way of saying things. You catch what you can of what's behind. If you are indeed open to the literary meaning, it evokes things for you; but it cannot be explained. It is a means of evocation which corresponds also with music. Naturally, one can analyse literature and see how the sentence is constructed, but this is like your changing a human being into a skeleton. It is not pretty, a skeleton. It's the same thing. If in music you study counterpoint, and if this note must necessarily bring in this other, and this group of notes has necessarily to bring in that one, you spoil the music too, you make a skeleton of the music; it is not interesting. These things have to be felt with the corresponding senses, the charm of the phrase with the literary sense – catching the harmony of words and what it evokes.

In each of these persons it is the same thing: you are given a description of people who have reached the highest human possibility. It is obvious that this Writer is a very great one, the best that can be conceived. Well, he has come to this. And then at last he has realised that it was all hollow, that he lacked the essential thing. And for all it will be the same experience.

Last time we said that it was an exceptional Statesman. Well, we can say this time that it is an exceptional Writer

who has reached the psychological point where he can awaken to another consciousness, a higher consciousness. And yet the description he gives is truly that of the highest human possibilities. He did not see things as they are, lifeless, he saw the spirit which was behind, he communicated with it, he tried to express it and he made... he went as far as a human consciousness can go. And then he found himself before a precipice. How to cross over to the other side? Everything is like that, you see. We shall have to repeat the same thing each time.

There then.

No questions?

Sweet Mother, how can literature help us to progress?

It can help you to become more intelligent, to understand things better, to have a sense of literary forms, to cultivate your taste, to know how to choose between a good and a bad way of saying things, to enrich your spirit. It can help you in a hundred different ways.

There are many different kinds of progress. And if one wants to progress integrally, one must progress in all these different directions. Well, this one is an intellectual and artistic progress at the same time, in which both combine. One plays with ideas, is capable of understanding them, classifying them, organising them, and at the same time one plays with the form of these ideas, the way of expressing them, the way of saying, the way of presenting them and making them intelligible.

Sweet Mother, all that we read in literature – stories, novels, etc. – very often contains stuff which lowers our consciousness. It is not altogether possible to leave out the matter and read only from the point of view of the literary value.

You see, there is no excuse for reading any odd novels except when they are remarkably written and you want to learn the language – if they are written either in your

own language or in another one and you want to study this language, then you may read anything at all provided that it is well written. It's not what is said that's interesting; it's the way of saying it. And so the way to read it is exactly to be concerned only with the way it has been said, and not with what is said, which is uninteresting. Only, for instance, in a book, there are always descriptions; well, you see how these descriptions are made and how the author has chosen the words to express things. And for ideas it is the same thing: how he has made his characters speak; you take no interest in what they say but in how they say it. If you take certain books like study books, to learn just how to write sentences well and express things as you should, because these books are very well written, what the story is has not much importance. But if you start reading books for what they narrate, then in that case you must be much stricter and not take things which darken your consciousness, because that's a waste of time; it's worse than a waste of time. So, things like vulgar stories which are written in a vulgar way, about these, you see, there's no longer any question. These things you should never touch. And yet this is the currency which circulates everywhere, above all in our times, it seems, because men have invented methods for cheap printing, for making cheap illustrations. So they flood the country and all other countries with worthless literature, which is badly written, ill-conceived, and which express vulgar things and coarsen you with vulgar ideas and completely spoils your taste through vulgar pictures. All this happens because from the point of view of production they succeed in making things very cheap, what are called popular editions "accessible to all". But as the aim of these people is not at all either to educate or to help men to progress, far from that – they hope on the contrary that people don't progress, because if they did they would no longer buy their wares – so their intention is to make money at the expense of those who read their literature, and so the more it sells, the better it is. It may be frightful, but it's very good if it sells well. It's the same thing with art, the same thing with the drama.

The latest scientific discoveries, applied to life, have put within the reach of everyone all kinds of things which formerly were reserved only for the intellectual and artistic elite; and to justify their effort and profit by their work, they have made things which can sell most, that is, the lowest, most ordinary, most vulgar things, the easiest to understand because they require no effort and no education. And the whole world is drowned under these things, to such an extent that when there's someone

who has written a good book or a fine play, there is no longer any place for him anywhere, because the whole place has been taken up by these things.

Naturally there are sensible people who try to react; but it is very difficult. First of all the commercial mentality should be driven out from the world. This will take some time. There are a few signs, that it is perhaps less respected than before. There was a time when, you see, one was considered a criminal if he didn't know how to do business, and he who had the audacity to spend his capital, even for very good things, was fit to be sent to a madhouse. It is a little better now, but still we are quite far from the real situation; there is yet the golden calf, there, reigning over the world; before it is pulled down some time will yet go by, I am afraid. This has so perverted men's mind, that it is for them the criterion. You see, in America when someone is spoken about, it is said: "He, oh, he is worth a million dollars!" This indeed is the greatest compliment one can pay. And it is this: someone asks, "Do you know this person? What is he worth?" – "He is worth a hundred thousand dollars", "he is worth five hundred dollars". So this means that he has a position which brings him this. Is he intelligent, is he stupid? Is he ... this is not at all important. Is he a good man or a bad one? That makes no difference at all! Is he a rich man or a poor one? "If he is rich, ah, ah! I would like to know him very much! If he is poor, I have nothing to do with him". There! Naturally America is a young country, so its ways are those of a child, but of a fairly ill-bred child. But the older countries have become too old and can no longer react, they shake their heads and wonder if after all this youth is not right. Everything is like that. The world is very ill.

That's all.

Sweet Mother; how should one choose one's books?

It would be better to ask someone who knows. If you ask someone who, at least, has taste and some knowledge of literature, he won't make you read badly written books. Now, if you want to read something which helps you from the spiritual point of view, that's another matter, you must ask someone who has a spiritual realisation to help you.

You see, there are two very different lines; they can converge because everything can be made to converge; but as I said, there are two lines really very different. One is a perpetual choice, not only of what one reads but of what one does, of what one thinks, of all one's

activities, of strictly doing only what can help you on the spiritual path; it does not necessarily have to be very narrow and limited, but it must be on a little higher plane than the ordinary life, and with a concentration of will and aspiration which does not allow any wandering on the path, going here and there uselessly. This is austere; it is difficult to take up this when one is very young, because one feels that the instrument that he is has not been sufficiently formed or is not rich enough to be allowed to remain what it is, without growing and progressing. So, generally speaking, except for a very small number, it comes later, after a certain development and some experience of life. The other path is that of as complete, as integral a development as possible of all human faculties, of all that one carries in himself, all one's possibilities, then, spreading out as widely as possible in all directions, in order to fill one's consciousness with all human possibilities, to know the world and life and men and their work as it now is, to create a vast and rich base for the future ascent.

Usually this is what we expect of children; except as I said, in absolutely rare, exceptional cases of children who have in them a psychic being which has already had all the experiences before incarnating this time, and no longer needs any more experiences, which only wants to realise the Divine and live Him. But these, you see, are one-in-a-million cases. Otherwise, till a certain age, so long as one is very young, it is good to develop oneself, to spread out as much as possible in all directions, to draw out all the potentialities one holds, and turn them into expressed, conscious, active things, so as to have a fairly solid foundation for the ascent. Otherwise it is a bit poor.

That is why you must learn, love to learn, always learn, not waste your time in... well, in filling yourself with useless things or doing useless things. You must do everything with this aim, to enrich your possibilities, develop those you have, acquire new ones, and become as complete, as perfect a human being as you can. That is, even on this line you must take things seriously, not simply pass your time because you are here, and waste it as much as possible because you have to pass it somehow.

That is the attitude of men in general: they come into life, they don't know why; they know that they will live a certain number of years, they don't know why; they think that they will have to pass away because everybody passes away, and they again don't know why; and then, most of the time they are bored because they have nothing in themselves, they are empty beings and there

is nothing more boring than emptiness; and so they try to fill this by distraction, they become absolutely useless, and when they reach the end they have wasted their whole existence, all their possibilities – and everything is lost. This you will see: take a thousand men, out of them at least nine hundred and ninety are in this condition. It happens that they are born in certain circumstances or certain others, and they try, you see, to pass their time as well as they can, to be bored as little as possible, to suffer as little as possible, to have as good a time as possible; and everything is dull, lifeless, useless, stupid, and absolutely without any result. There, then. This is the majority of human beings, and they don't even think... they don't even ask themselves, "But indeed, why am I here? Why is there an earth? Why are there men? Why do I live?" No, all these things are absolutely uninteresting. The only interesting thing is to try to eat well, to have good fun, be nicely distracted, well married, have children, earn money and have all the advantages one can get from the point of view of desires, and above all, above all not think, not reflect, not ask any questions, and avoid all trouble. Yes, and then get out of it like that, without too many catastrophes. This is the general condition; this is what men call being reasonable. And in this way the world can turn round indefinitely for eternity, it will never progress. And this is why all these are like ants; they come, crawl, die, go away, come back, crawl again, die again, and so on. And it can last for eternities like this. Fortunately there are some who do the work of all the others, but it's only these who will make everything change one day.

So the first problem is to know on which side one wants to be: on the side of those who are doing something or the side of those who do nothing; on the side of those who, perhaps, will be able to understand what life is, and do what is necessary for this life to culminate in something, or else of those who hardly care to understand anything at all and try to pass their time in having as few botherations as possible. Above all, no botherations!

There we are. This is the first choice. After this there are many others.

So there, my children.

Now, if you wish to have a meditation, say so. Yes or no? Yes? Good! Try to eliminate from your consciousness all that is darkly attached to living uselessly.

Questions and Answers, 1955