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Editors

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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.
CONTENTS

2 Some Statements on the Supermind ..................................................... The Mother
11 The Twelve Petals of the Matrimandir ............................................. Chantal Gowa
19 After the Silence ........................................................................... Paola De Paolis
23 Philosophy of Evolution: Darwin and Haeckel ......................... Rod Hemsell
28 Spirituality and Urban Development ........................................... Ranjeet Mukherjee
Some Statements on the Supermind*

by The Mother

There are, in the history of the earth, moments of transition when things that have been for thousands of years must give place to things that are about to manifest. A special concentration of the world consciousness, one might almost say, an intensification of its effort, happens at such times, varying according to the kind of progress to be made, the quality of the transformation to the realized. We are precisely at such a turning of the world’s history. As Nature has already created upon earth a mental being, even so there is now a concentrated activity to bring forth in this mentality a Supramental consciousness and individuality.

Sri Aurobindo’s work is a unique earth-transformation. Above the mind there are several levels of conscious being, among which the really divine world is what Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermind, the world of the Truth. … It is the direct descent of the Supramental Consciousness and Power that alone can utterly re-create life in terms of the Spirit.

There is not a shadow of doubt as to the issue of the work we have in hand. It is no mere experiment but an inevitable manifestation of the Supramental…

By slow degrees the Supramental is exerting its influence; now one part of the being and now another feels the embrace or the touch of its divinity; but when it comes in all its self-existent power, a supreme radical change will seize the whole nature.

We are moving nearer and nearer the hour of its complete triumph…

The consciousness is like a ladder: at each great epoch there has been one great being capable of adding one more step to the ladder and reaching a place where the ordinary consciousness had never been. It is possible to attain a high-level and get completely out of the material consciousness; but then one does not retain the ladder, whereas the great achievement of the great epochs of the universe has been the capacity to add one more step to the ladder without losing contact with the material, the capacity to reach the Highest and at the same time connect the top with the bottom instead of letting a kind of emptiness cut off all connection between the different planes. To go up and down and join the top to the bottom is the whole secret of realization, and that is the work of the Avatar. Each time he adds one more step the ladder there is a new creation upon earth…

The step which is being added now Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermental; as a result of it, the consciousness will be able to enter the Supramental world and yet retain its personal form, its individualisation and then come down to establish here a new creation. Certainly this is not the last, for there are farther ranges of being; but now we are at work to bring down

* These statements by The Mother have been taken from the brochure brought out by the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Studies: ‘India and the World’, Bharat Nivas, International Zone, Auroville, on the occasion of the “bhumi puja” for the new building on January 4, 2010.
the Supra-mental; to effect a reorganization of the world, to bring the world back to the true divine order. It is essentially a creation of order, a putting of everything in its true place and the chief spirit or force, the Shakti active at present is Mahasaraswati, the Goddess of perfect organization...

The Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognized, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward field in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.

As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he had called the Mind of Light got realized here….

The Supermind had descended long ago – very long ago – in the mind and even in the vital; it was working in the physical also but indirectly through these intermediaries. The question now was about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the Supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light.

The transformation of the material body has not been done nor even attempted perhaps in the past. It can be done only if life is sufficiently prolonged; you do not leave the body unless you will it so and thus have the necessary time at your disposal to bring about the change. Sri Aurobindo once said and he said it without the least hesitation ---- that it will take about three hundred years to do it, I can add, from the time when the last stage of union with the Divine is achieved…

There is another difficulty one has to face in the work of transformation. A particular body cannot change unless there is some sort of a corresponding change in the surrounding bodies and in the surrounding generally also; for one lives and moves through mutual interchange in the midst of others. A collective change takes more time than individual change. So it is no longer an individual consciousness, but the collective consciousness that has to do the work.

1953

The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

The effect of the Supramental action will be multiple, infinitely varied, not forced to follow one precise line and the same line for all. This is impossible, because it is contrary to the very nature of the Supramental consciousness.

Before the effects of the Supramental manifestation become visible and tangible, perceptible to the whole world, thousands of years have perhaps to pass … For a developed consciousness, the Supermind is already realized somewhere in the domain of the subtle physical, it is already existent and visible and concrete, already expressing itself in forms and in activities. When one gets into rapport with that consciousness and lives in its vision, one has a very strong impression that it would suffice for condensing, so to speak, this world and make it visible to all….. It could be that those who are conscious in their dreams would have dreams of a new kind which would connect them with the new world, for it is within reach of the subtle physical of all who have the corresponding organs in themselves. And inevitably there is a subtle influence of that
physicality on external matter if one is ready to receive the impressions and admit them into one’s consciousness.

1956

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I have been asked what difference the presence of the Supermind will make, in what way it will change the trend of events and how, since the Supramental manifestation, life has to be reviewed…

It is evident that the modern scientific perception is much nearer to something that corresponds to the universal Reality than the perceptions, say, of the Stone Age; there is no shadow of a doubt about that. But even this will be completely transcended, surpassed and probably upset by the intrusion of something which was not in the universe and has not been studied so far.

This change, this sudden mutation in the universal elements will very certainly bring a kind of chaos in our perceptions, but out of it a new knowledge will arise. That, in a most general way, will be the result of the New Manifestation….

Indeed it is quite possible that things are happening now which people are not accustomed to meet with. But this is a question of interpretation. The only fact I am sure of is …that the quality, the quantity and the nature of the possible universal combinations are about to change to such an extent that it will stagger all those who deal with life. Let us wait and see…

1956

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According to modern scientific discoveries, the mental manifestation has taken about a million years to evolve from a simian brain to the first human brain. And I told you, therefore, that one must not expect the Supramental manifestation to be achieved within a few months or a few years; that will evidently take a little more time.

Now some people seem to have concluded from that that I had announced that there would be no superman in a million years. I want to correct this impression.

Sri Aurobindo says that as growth proceeds on a higher and higher scale of consciousness, the movement becomes quicker and when the Supramental or the Spirit mixes up with it, the thing may go very much quicker. So we can hope that in a few centuries the first Supramental race will appear.

Now that the Supramental has manifested in a general cosmic way, the certitude of the possibility of the transformation is naturally much greater.

1956

It is because Evil was opposed till now by a spiritual force having no power for transformation in the material world that the mighty effort of good will made by mankind through thousands of years has ended only in a lamentable defeat and left the world in the same state of misery and corruption and falsehood. One must — and this is the true, the only remedy — on the very plane where the adverse forces are supreme, on the material plane, secure a power greater than theirs, capable of conquering them totally in that domain itself, in other words, a spiritual force that is capable of transforming the consciousness and the material world. This force is the Supramental Force. What is needed is to be receptive to its action on the physical plane and not run away into a far-off Nirvana leaving to the enemy uncontested empire over that which one abandons.

Neither the sacrifice of the physical life nor the giving up of material power can win the victory. That only Joy can do, the Joy which the
Supramental Consciousness brings, the Joy which is Force and Endurance and Supreme Courage. Surely it requires much greater heroism to do that than to abandon all and escape, but that is the only way to conquer.

1957

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It is now nearly one year that we had one Wednesday the Manifestation of the Supramental Force. Since that moment the Power is working very actively, even if very few people are able to perceive it; and I think that the time has come now to help it as much as we can by making an effort towards collective receptivity.

The greatest thing that can ever be, the most marvelous thing since the beginning of creation, the miracle has happened. And that is the only thing that concerns us most intimately and the only thing we should be concerned with. A new world, yes, a completely new world, is born and is here. Nothing can be more momentous.

1957

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Last year when I announced to you the manifestation of the Supramental Consciousness and Light and Force, I should have added that it was an event forerunner of the birth of a new world. But at that time the new world was so much engulfed in the ancient that even now there are very few people who are aware of its birth and of the difference it brings into the world. Yet the action of the new forces has continued in a very regular, very persistent, very obstinate and, to a certain extent, very effective way. The result of all that has been noted at every step in almost day-to-day experiences. It may be expressed in a concise, so to say, linear way. First of all, it is not merely a new conception of the spiritual life and the divine Reality. Sri Aurobindo has expressed this conception in the most clear and complete manner. Briefly it may be formulated somewhat like this:

The old spirituality was an escape from life towards the divine Reality, leaving the world where it was, as it was. Our new version, on the contrary, is the divinisation of life, the transformation of the material into a divine world. This has been said, repeated, more or less understood; this indeed is the basic idea of what we want to do. But this work could have been a simple continuation, an amelioration, an enlargement of the old world as it was. And the whole conception, however true, however new, so long as it remains in the higher regions, in the domain of pure idea, can be only potentially a new creation. But what has happened is truly a new thing, a new world has been born. It is not the old that is being transformed, it is quite a new world that has been really concretely born.

At the present hour we are in the very heart of a period of transition, where the two are intertwined; the old persists, still all powerful, continues to dominate the ordinary consciousness, while the new glides in, still very modest, unnoticed to the extent that for the moment it disturbs nothing much externally, and even in the consciousness of most people it is quite imperceptible. And yet it works, it grows till the moment when it will be strong enough to impose itself visibly.

1957

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When the physical substance will be Supramentalised, to be born on earth in a body will not be a cause of inferiority, rather the contrary, there will be gained a plenitude which could not be obtained otherwise.

But all that is of the future, a future that has begun but will take some time before realising itself integrally. In the meanwhile, we are in a very special situation, extremely special which has had no precedent. We are attending on the birth of a new world, altogether young,
altogether weak — weak not in its essence, but in its external manifestation — not yet recognized, not yet felt, denied by most: but it is there, it is there endeavouring to grow and quite sure of the result. Yet the road to reach there is a new road that has never before been traced; none went by that way, none did that. It is a beginning, a universal beginning. Therefore it is an adventure absolutely unexpected and unforeseeable.

There are people, who love adventure, and to whom then I give a call and I tell them:

I invite you to the great adventure, and in this adventure you are not to repeat spiritually what others have done before us, because our adventure begins from beyond that stage. We are for a new creation, entirely new, carrying in it all the unforeseen, all risks, all hazards, -- a true adventure of which the goal is sure victory, but of which the way is unknown and has to be traced out step by step in the unexplored. It is something that has never been in the present universe and will never be in the same manner. If that interests you, well, embark. What will happen tomorrow, I do not know.

You must leave behind whatever has been foreseen, whatever has been designed, whatever has been built up, and then on the march into the unknown. Come what may!

I 1957

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In the Supramental vision there is a direct, full and immediate knowledge of things, in the sense that you see all things at the same time totally, integrally; you see the truth of a thing in all its aspects simultaneously.

But as soon as you want to explain or describe it, you are obliged to come down to a lower level. Sri Aurobindo calls it the Mind of Light. Here things have to be said or even thought or expressed and realized in action one after another in a certain order, in a certain relation to each other. Therefore the simultaneity disappears; for, in the present condition of our way of expression it is impossible to say everything at once outright. We are obliged to veil a portion of what we see and know in order to bring it out little by little. Sri Aurobindo therefore calls it a transparent veil; for you see all, you know all at the same time, you have the entire or total knowledge of a thing, but you cannot express it whole and entire at one stroke.

There are no words, no possible modes of expression for the Supramental vision, so long as we are what we are… To live totally in the Supramental knowledge, one must have other means of expression than those available at present. New modes of expression have to be developed for expressing Supramental things in a Supramental way. At present we have to raise our mental faculty to its maximum, to a sort of frontier that is hardly visible and yet which exists; for our means of expression still belong to this mental world and they do not possess Supramental power. We have not got the necessary organs. We must become beings of the Supramental world, with a Supramental substance, a Supramental inner organization, to express the Supramental knowledge in a Supramental way. Till now, we could, in some part of our consciousness, come out wholly into the Supramental vision and knowledge, but could not express it from there. We had to come, as I say, one plane lower down to be able to express ourselves.

1957

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What is your idea of the Supramental life? A paradise where everybody will do the same thing, in the same way… the old idea of heaven where everybody is an angel playing on the harp? It is not exactly like that. All the differences will be there, the differentiations and the different activities, but instead of acting with ordinary human ignorance one will act with knowledge;
that will make the difference.

….If, as Sri Aurobindo promises to us, the Supramental Force, Light and Consciousness transform the world and create a new race, then man would not be able to deny the existence of these new beings –on condition that they are sufficiently different from the human race, so that the difference is perceptible even to the deceptive human organs,-- any more than apes and animals, if they spoke, could deny the existence of man.

Following these deductions, it would seem that the most conclusive, the most obvious aspect, and one which probably will be the first to appear, and will be the aspect of power, more than the aspect of delight and that of truth. In order that the new race may be established and may survive, it would be necessary for it to be protected from other terrestrial elements, and power is protection, not an artificial, external, false power, but the true force, the victorious will. It is not then impossible to think that the Supramental action, even before being an action of harmonization, illumination, delight, beauty, will be an action of power to serve as protection. Naturally, if this action is to be truly effective, it must be based on knowledge and truth, on love and harmony, but these things might show themselves visibly little by little, when the ground will be prepared, so to say, by the action of a sovereign will and power.

But to make the least of these things possible, a basis of perfect equipoise is needed, the poise given by egolessness, perfect surrender to the Supreme, true purity, that of identification with the Supreme. Without this basis of perfect equality, the supramental power will be dangerous and at no cost must one seek it or want to pull it, for even in an infinitesimal quantity it is so powerful and formidable that it can upset the whole system.

I identified myself with Nature, totally, entered into her play. And this movement of identification called forth a response, a new kind of intimacy between Nature and myself, a long movement of drawing ever nearer until it found its culmination in an experience that came on the 8th November.

All on a sudden Nature understood. She understood that this new consciousness that has taken birth does not intend to reject her, but wishes to embrace her totally. She understood that the new spirituality did not shirk life, did not recoil before the formidable amplitude of her movement, but, on the contrary, wanted to integrate all her aspects. She understood that the Supramental consciousness was there not to diminish but to complete her.

Yet you must not make a mistake on the meaning of this experience and imagine that henceforth everything will happen without any difficulty and always in a way favourable to our personal desires… It is something deeper. Nature has admitted into the play of her forces the new force that has manifested, she has included it within her movements. And, as always, things of Nature, movements of Nature are on a scale that surpasses infinitely the human, that is not visible to the ordinary human consciousness. It is an inner, psychological possibility that has been born on earth rather than a spectacular change in earthly events.

1958

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One of the very first results of the Supramental manifestation has been to give to the body a freedom and an autonomy which it had never known. And when I speak of freedom, it is not a matter of a psychological perception or a state of inner consciousness, it is another thing and it is much better — it is a new phenomenon in the body, in the cells of the body. The cells themselves have felt for the first time that they are free, that they
have a power of decision. When the new vibrations came and were mixed up with the old, that is what I felt immediately and that showed truly to me that a new world was being born.

Normally as it is, the body lives always with the impression that it is not master in its house: illnesses enter into it without its being really able to oppose them and a thousand factors are there that are forced upon it, press upon it. The only power it has to defend itself, to react...Now, with the Supramental manifestation, something new has happened in the body: it feels it is master of the house, autonomous, both the feet planted upon earth, if I may say so. The impression it gives physically is that the whole being is erect, it has lifted its head — one is master.

We have been living ever with a burden, as it were upon our shoulders, something that bends our head, and we feel dragged, led by all kinds of external forces, one does not know by whom or what, towards one does not know where — it is what men call Fate, Destiny. When you do Yoga one of the first experiences you have — the experiences of the Kundalini, as it is called here in India — is precisely this, the consciousness rises, it breaks through the hard shell, there, to the crown of the head and you emerge at last into the Light. Then one sees, one knows, one decides and realises — there are difficulties still but you really stand above. Now, with the Supramental manifestation, that experience has come in the body. The body has raised its head up and felt its freedom and Independence...

And this new vibration in the body has made me understand the mechanism of the transformation. It is not a thing that comes with a Higher Will, a higher consciousness imposed upon the body, it is the body itself that wakes up in its cells, it is a freedom of the cells themselves, altogether a new vibration, and the disorders are mended, disorders even antecedent to the Supramental manifestation.

Naturally, all this is progressive, but I have good hope that little by little this new consciousness will grow, gain ground and resist victoriously the old forces of destruction and annihilation, the Fate that was believed to be inexorable.

1958
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Last night I had a vision of what the Supramental world would be like if the people were not sufficiently prepared. The confusion that now exists on earth is nothing in comparison with what may happen. Just imagine any strong will possessing the power to transform matter according to its liking! If the sense of collective unity did not grow in proportion to the growth of the power, the resulting conflict would be yet more acute and chaotic than all our material conflicts.

1958
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It can be affirmed with certainty that between the mental and the supra-mental being there will be an intermediate specimen, a kind of superman who will have still the qualities and partially the nature of man, that is to say, will still belong, in his most external form, to the human being with an animal origin, but will have sufficiently transformed his consciousness so as to belong, in his realisation and activity, to the new race, the race of supermen.

This species may be considered as a species of transition, because it will discover, as it is to be foreseen, the means of creating new beings without passing through the old animal method, and it is these beings, having truly a spiritual birth, that will form the elements of the new race, the Supramental race.

One might thus name supermen those who still belong by their origin to the older method of generation, but who, by their achievement, are
in conscious and active relation with the new world of supramental realisation. It appears, it is even certain that the very substance that will constitute this intermediate world which is being already developed in a substance richer, more powerful, more luminous, more resisting, with certain new qualities, more subtle and pervasive and a kind of innate capacity for universality, as if the degree of subtlety and refinement it has reached allows vibrations to be felt in a manner much more wide, if not altogether total and it takes away the sensation of division which one has with the older substance, the ordinary mental substance. There is a subtlety of vibration which makes the universal global vibration a natural and spontaneous thing. The sense of division of separation disappears altogether naturally and spontaneously with that substance; and that substance is now almost everywhere spread in earth’s atmosphere.

That can be felt in the waking state, simply by a little concentration and a kind of self-absorption of consciousness, if one retraces, retires from the usual exteriorisation that appears more and more artificial and false.….

This new perception is affirming itself more and more, it is becoming more and more natural, and sometimes the old manner of being is difficult to seize again, as if it was disappearing into a misty past - something that is on the point of ceasing to exist.

One can conclude from this that since a body formed obviously according to the older animal method is capable of living this consciousness naturally, spontaneously, effortlessly, without coming out of itself, it proves that it is not an exceptional, a unique case, but simply it is the sign, forerunner of a realization which even if it is not absolutely general, can in any case be shared by a number of individuals and these more over as soon as they share the experience will lose the feeling that they are separate individuals and will become a living collectivity.

This new realization is following its course with a thundering rapidity, so to say, for, if we consider time in the ordinary way, only two years have passed, a little more than two years, between the time when the Supramental substance penetrated the earthly atmosphere and the time when this change has been brought about in earth’s atmosphere.

1958

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As the beginnings of the Supramental life which is next to be realized in the volition of the universe, are developing, not perhaps in an apparent but a most sure manner, it appears more and more evident that the most difficult means of approach to this Supramental life is intellectual activity.

One might say that it is much more difficult to pass from the mental to the Supramental life than to pass from a certain psychic emotion in life - something which is like a reflection, a luminous emanation of the divine Presence in matter - to the Supramental consciousness. From there one can pass much more easily to the Supramental consciousness than from the highest intellectual speculation to any Supramental vibration. Perhaps it is the world that misleads us. Perhaps it is because we call it Supramental that we hope to reach it through a higher mental activity, but the fact is very different. Through this very high, pure, noble intellectual activity you seem to enter into a kind of abstraction cold and powerless, a frozen light which is surely very far from life and farther yet from the experience of the Supramental reality.

There is in this new substance that is spreading and acting in the world, a warmth, a power, and a joy so intense that all intellectual activity appears by its side cold and dry. And that is why the less one speaks of these things the better. One single instant, one single surge of deep and true love, one single minute of deep communion in the divine Grace, takes you much nearer to
the goal than all possible explanations.

One can say even that a kind of sensation that is refined, subtle, clear, luminous, sharp, deeply penetrating opens the door much more to you than the subtest explanations. And if we push the experience a little further, it seems when you arrive at the work of transformation of the body, when some cells of the body more ready than others, more refined and subtle and plastic, begin to feel concretely the presence of the divine Grace, the divine Will, the divine Power, the Knowledge which is not intellectual but knowledge by identity, when you feel this even in the cells of your body, then the experience is so total, so imperative, so living, concrete, tangible, real that all the rest appears as a vain dream.

Thus one can say that it is only when the circle will be completed, when the two extremities will touch, when the highest will manifest in the most material that the experience will be truly decisive.

It would seem that one never truly understands until one understands with one’s body.

I saw once again that the values prevailing in the Supramental world have nothing to do with our values here below, even our values of highest wisdom, even those that we consider most divine when living constantly in the divine Presence; it is altogether different…. 

The quality or the kind of relation I had with the Supreme at that moment was quite different from that which we have here, and even the identification had a different quality. With regard to the lower movements one understands very well that they must be different. But that which is the summit of our experience here, that identification because of which the Supreme rules and lives - well, he rules and lives quite differently as we are in this lower hemisphere or in the Supramental life.

There is in the other hemisphere an intensity and a fullness which is translated into quite a different power of him here… It is not something just higher than the peak to which we can rise here, it is not one more step: here we are at the end, at the summit…. It is the quality that is different, the quality, in the sense that there is a plenitude, a richness, a power---that is a translation in our way---but there is something that escapes us….it is truly a new reversal of consciousness.

When we begin to live the spiritual life, a reversal of consciousness happens which is for us the proof that we have entered the spiritual life: well, another reversal of consciousness happens when one enters the Supramental world….

1959

Now it is the Supermind that directly guides and governs.

1958

Reference

Note: The above statements form part of the following:
With immense gratitude to Roger Anger, who offered me the opportunity to work at the Matrimandir and gave me his full trust and all the freedom needed to be creative, and with equal gratitude to his partner Jacqueline who was able to get me moving again and insisted that I continue the work on many occasions when I lost the thread of inspiration.

I thank the Mother for her subtle replies when my questions got entangled with each other ....

Chantal: Thank you for meeting me and accepting this interview. As I told you the other day on the telephone, I go regularly to the Matrimandir, to the inner chamber; and then I take the chance to meditate in the petals when they are open. The great beauty of these small rooms has touched me, and I wanted to know more ...

Shanta: Welcome to my home. Ask me your questions, and I shall try to answer you as truthfully as possible.

Chantal: Before going to the heart of the matter, please tell me a little about yourself and your coming to Auroville.

Shanta: I arrived in Auroville on February 17, 1991, with my son Coriolan, who was 8 years old. It was a turning-point in my life. I had three months ahead of me, and wanted to see something new. I had a small suitcase, a sketchbook, and a very beautiful album of photographs of my paintings and sculptures.

Chantal: What was your first impression of Auroville? Shanta: A sense of mystery. That first evening, as my son and I were coming up the hill to Auroville in a rickshaw I heard a voice telling me ‘You are coming home’. All around was twilight and silence ....

Chantal: Do you often hear voices giving you messages?

Shanta: No – that was only the second time in my life.

Chantal: And during those three months, you were able to meet Roger Anger, the chief architect of Auroville?

Shanta: Yes, it was as if my journey was being guided from afar. In fact, I didn’t know anything about Roger Anger. But on February 21, the Mother’s birthday, I met an Aurovilian woman who had been here a long time. After seeing the photos of my paintings she literally rushed to the nearest telephone and arranged a meeting with Roger.

On February 24, between two doors at Aurofuture I met this man. He was in a hurry, he could only spare me ten minutes. He took the album I held out to him and gazed at it. When I say ‘gazed’ I am not exaggerating. I could feel his ability to plunge deeply into my work and pierce to the root of the forms and colours. From time to time he lifted his head to look at me, and then plunged back into the catalogue. At the end of 20 minutes, he said, ‘I’m in the middle of preparing an exhibition on education in Auroville for February 28th. Do you have time to help me?’ I had an hour free. ‘An hour is an hour’ he replied. That is how I came to be part of the Aurofuture team.

* Translated from the original French by Shraddhavan.
Chantal: And what did you do in that team?

Shanta: Everything connected with decoration, graphics, painting.

On March 17 1991, a month after her arrival in Auroville, Shanta had a dream of the Mother for the first time.

I was sitting at her feet, on the step of a magnificent sculptured chair. Mother laid her hand on the top of my head and said, ‘Oh, my child, you will have a lot of work here in Auroville. Sounds and colours ....’

Chantal: ‘Sounds and colours’ – did ‘sounds’ turn out to be true as well?

Shanta: I share my life with Heinrich, a retired doctor who dedicates his time to the piano and to music in all its dimensions. In February 2006, Ritam published an article by Heinrich on Scriabin and the relation between sounds and colours in his piece ‘Mystère’. And in our house in Auromodel we have opened ‘La Salle Auropax’, where musicians perform concerts.

Chantal: All this is very surprising, isn’t it? When did Roger speak to you about working for the Matrimandir petals?

Shanta: In 1992 Roger was working on the architectural design of the petals. I saw sketches of oval forms appearing around me one by one. Two Aurovilians had joined him to prepare models as the architectural designs developed. At that time Roger came and asked me whether I would be interested to do some research into the colours for twelve meditation rooms surrounding the Matrimandir, and to create twelve ‘man-dalas’ symbolising the qualities represented by the petals.

Chantal: What did you do then?

Shanta: I agreed and set to work. Roger’s partner Jacqueline gave me a plan of the Matrimandir seen from above, with the twelve qualities and the four entrances shown on it. And I received a printed sheet from 1976, with the names of the qualities and the colours given to them by the Mother.

For months I painted samples of colours: hundreds and hundreds of small rectangles, classified in order from the palest tones to the purest hues. Mix a minute drop of colour with another drop of a different tone, and a new colour would appear ... to identify with the colour, enter into the colour itself, to feel wonder and delight; a complicity with matter that was like a nameless smile. Lola, an Aurovillian who loves painting, came to join me and we shared that approach and that silence.

Chantal: How did you begin creating the ‘mandalas’?

Shanta: I tried to soak myself in the qualities. What do the words ‘Sincerity’ ‘Humility’ ‘Gratitude’ ‘Perseverance’ ‘Aspiration’ ‘Receptivity’ ‘Progress’ ‘Courage’ ‘Goodness’ ‘Generosity’ ‘Equality’ ‘Peace’ mean according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? This study drove me to the Ashram archives in search of every document related to these qualities. I read a lot, took notes, and discovered in the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo more and more subtle levels of each quality. A first veil was opening ....

The Aurofuture team had a small studio built inside the architecture office for me to work in. I had good light there, it felt good.

Then I started drawing a circle for each of the qualities, and sketching forms: no preconceived idea: a totally empty space; and in that space I searched, drew, erased, worked, concentrated and in silence. I set off as an explorer, an adventurer, but into a space where peace rules, accompanied only by some definitions of the twelve qualities. First hints of sculptures emerge. I am surprised to find myself working on all the qualities together, despite their apparently different meanings.
Creation touches something beyond time.

Chantal: Why do you say, ‘their apparently different meanings’? Why do you use the word ‘Apparently’?

Shanta: If you take the names of the qualities, they are twelve completely different qualities. I shall give you an example: ‘Simple sincerity is the beginning of all progress.’ You realise that progress is involved within sincerity. ‘Peace in the cells, the indispensable condition for the body to progress.’
I go on, ‘To become perfectly sincere, one must not have any preference, any desire, any attraction, any revulsion, any sympathy, any antipathy, any attachment, any repulsion.’ Take the time to soak yourself for a few moments in this quotation from the Mother.
This quotation overwhelmed me, and still does as I speak it now. Through this high level of consciousness you touch peace, courage, humility, all the other qualities. We enter into a vast canvas where each of the qualities will meet each of the others.

Chantal: You are making me feel giddy ... I’m beginning to get an idea of your way of working and moving ahead.
I have read that these meditation chambers were opened for the first time in February 2007 – so you must have worked for fifteen years to complete this task. Is that right?

Shanta: The work took fifteen years, but I did not work visually for fifteen years.

Chantal: Can you make that clearer to me?

Shanta: A fortnight after my first meeting with Roger Anger in 1991 he called me into his office and told me, ‘I’ve seen you at work Shanta. It has been seventeen years since I came to Auroville. I’ve always wanted to open an ‘Art Training Centre’ for young people. I am not here all the time. Would you like to do that in my place?’

Chantal: What a responsibility! I don’t know anything about you. What did you do? What was your reaction?

Shanta: First of all I was extremely surprised. Then I felt above my head a luminous spiral turning around and around. Not knowing what to reply, I asked Roger to give me three days to think.

Chantal: You are becoming more and more mysterious – a luminous spiral?

Shanta: Yes. I knew that this spiral was showing me that I had come to a key moment in my life. I listened to the voice of my heart ... then I saw the chief architect of Auroville again. ‘Roger, it is YES for the Art Training Centre. I will do it. First I must go home, change my visa and sell my things.’

In 1993, Shanta left Aurofuture and followed the Call of the Pyramids, the place where she was to concentrate her energy to open this school of Art and give it a soul. The years passed ... The ‘Art Training Centre’ took off, new artists entered on the scene .... The research into colours for the petals, and the first gropings for forms for the mandalas had fallen into total oblivion.

Chantal: But how is it possible to forget such a big project so totally?

Shanta: The twelve meditation chambers in the petals were not considered a priority at the Matrimandir. The construction of them had not started yet. Those conditions encouraged the forgetfulness – a complete blank. This ‘forgetfulness’ allowed me a deeper concentration for the realisation of each of the projects.

In 1997, Jacqueline telephones Shanta and tells her that the petals are being built, that some of them will soon be ready, and that it is high time for her creation – even urgent. Jacqueline was persistent and confident, calling her several
times, and reawoke in her what had fallen asleep in the heart of another realisation.

Shanta: At last I woke up, visited the petals, entered into this inner realm. Then I took up my portfolio again, rediscovered my earlier research, and plunged back into the texts on the twelve qualities.

Chantal: Did you again start working on all the twelve mandalas at the same time?

Shanta: No, not really.

Chantal: What constraints did the architect set for you?

Shanta: I received from Roger the mandala form, which is an ellipse, calculated in proportion to that of Matrimandir itself. On a visit to the incomplete construction of these future small meditation rooms, Roger showed me that the ellipse was to be placed in front of a long thin source of natural light – the only visible source of light in the room. The lighting was to be artificial and invisible.

Chantal: Did these constraints focus your work in a particular direction?

Shanta: Very definitely. I excluded all pictorial ideas for the mandalas and turned towards sculpture, towards the notions of transparenacy and then of translucence.

Chantal: How did your first model come into existence?

Shanta: It came thanks to the words of Mother and Sri Aurobindo about the twelve qualities, which I kept always close to me. Once again I set off on an ‘unplanned journey’. I kept alert for sounds, chance happenings, signs. I began to discover a path by cutting and folding sheets of paper, following the ellipse. The idea of a central point became imperative: a small ellipse at the heart of the mandala: the psychic being awakening?

‘Gives and gives itself without bargaining’ writes Mother about Generosity. Some openings of different sizes in proportion to the Matrimandir created a play of light and shadows. Gradually a first model emerged for the mandala of Generosity, which I enlarged on paper to the original dimension.

Chantal: What material did you want to use for implementing that first model?

Shanta: I didn’t want anything. I make suggestions, and the materials respond. According to the conditions mentioned before, I first thought of glass. I consulted Michael Bonke who is a specialist in this material. He came to see the model in the petal itself, and after some reflection advised me against using glass, because of the final weight and the complexity of the design.

Chantal: I’m not following you – Matter replies to you?

Shanta: Yes, it is a different way of working. I search, I listen, and I make suggestions.

Chantal: That’s beyond me for the moment. So, what happened?

Shanta: Bhagawandas, an Aurovilian from the early days, offered to prepare for me a fibreglass shell, based on a mould. This ellipse becomes convex and harmonises better with the architectural ensemble. First I fixed the first model of ‘Generosity’ onto this fibreglass shell, and very soon noticed that the effect was much more interesting if I fixed the model behind the shell. The material is there, you just have to listen to it. And in order to listen to it, I have to be free from preconceived ideas. We set up the whole thing in the Generosity petal. Roger was very enthusiastic.
Chantal: Yes, I think I’m beginning to get the thread of what you are trying to make me understand.

Shanta: A Spanish visitor, a painter of frescos in natural shades, suggested trying out the colour violet in the Generosity petal. A few Aurovilians gathered round him and learned the technique of making frescos. Red and blue, superimposed on each other, gave a shimmering vivid effect.

Chittou left me some documents on this technique and on the available colours. This petal No. 10 became our test meditation room.

Chantal: What was your next model?

Shanta: You are going too quickly. Before moving on to the next model, more years were to pass. Internal disagreements arose at Matrimandir and delayed the work. There were no more workers in the petals. Carlos, an Aurovilian painter for constructions, took charge of this part of the site. He discovered unimaginable mistakes in the proportions of these rooms. It took many years to remove, reconstruct and build afresh.

Chantal: How did you experience these constant interruptions in the work at Matrimandir?

Shanta: I very quickly realised the advantage of these interruptions. A kind of time-magic was happening. In 1991, pastel colours were much appreciated in Auroville. Teachers often mixed colours for children to use, deliberately avoiding all pure colours: red, for example was thought to be too ‘vital’, black had disappeared from the colour circle.

Shanta was dividing her time between the students at the Pyramids and her own work as a painter. In 1998 she withdrew from the Art School to respond again to the call of Roger and Jacqueline.

Shanta: Roger and Jacqueline phoned me – the rebuilding of the petals was going well. We went to take a look together on the site. On this visit I discovered that the colour of Generosity had aged and become greyish – no luminosity left, only sadness. The masonry of the Peace petal was fully finished. I asked Roger to allow me to paint this petal according to my feeling. ‘Carte blanche’ he replied.

Chantal: Roger must have had very great trust in you to reply like that?

Shanta: Yes, I think so – and trust allows you to bring out the best of yourself.

So, encouraged by this reply of Roger, I ordered from Germany the most beautiful blue pigment that I know. Carlos and I mixed this pigment by hand with a medium and dynamised water charged with the Mother’s Mantra. A team of seven Aurovilians, all lovers of colour, would hand paint this petal, in a deep Peace, Joy and Silence.

Chantal: What was the reaction from Roger, Jacqueline and others who came to see the result?

Shanta: Everyone was dazzled by this colour – Roger was convinced.

So petal No. 12 was to determine the tonality value of each of the other eleven rooms.

Chantal: I am not an expert in colour – could you explain more?

Shanta: The twelve chambers are inseparable. If you use a pure colour in one petal, all the other chambers must agree with the intensity of this tone. Imagine that the structure of the twelve petals is transparent, and you move from one chamber to the next – you will be in contact with the whole range of colours – so there must be harmony in tone values.

At Matrimandir Shanta shared part of the workshop where people were working on the
golden disks. Again she takes up her portfolio and her earlier models of mandalas, and plunges back into her research. The important thing is to work – little by little something descends. The work itself shows the direction.

Chantal: Could you explain this ‘something that descends’?

Shanta: I became aware that these twelve qualities all converge towards the Divine at the most subtle level of their development. This sudden awareness helped me immediately. I started from twelve rays for Peace, rays which join a central ellipse. The geometry became obvious. Each small ellipse, formed in proportion to the Matrimandir itself, will be part of a larger ellipse on different levels: the number twelve will appear at each level.

I felt certain that this Mandala contained within it all the eleven others ... I started searching.

I took the Peace mandala, removed ten rays and left the central vertical line visible. No concessions: a line from above, a central nucleus: the number 1 meets the number 12 – and the “symbol” of Sincerity emerges.

Chantal: Do you think that any of the qualities is more important than the others?

Shanta: Yes, Sincerity. Mother said that the yoga of Sri Aurobindo begins with Sincerity. Without sincerity, no yoga is possible. That is why the symbol of Sincerity would be there in all the other eleven mandalas, more or less visibly.

Chantal: I hadn’t noticed that. Very interesting. Did I understand you to say that the Peace mandala contains the eleven others?

Shanta: Yes, that’s right. I was very sincere in this conviction. I managed to discover five more of them (Sincerity, Humility Receptivity, Goodness, Equality). Then I began to feel, really in my body, a taste of boredom. In creative work, boredom is fatal. I’m very alert to this sign, which

is trying to tell me: ‘Renew yourself. You have entered on the path of facility. You have found a ‘trick’ and you are playing with it. Find another creative clue.’ I paid attention, and the joy of the research gradually came back.

Chantal: With this taste of renewal, which petals came next?

Shanta: Generosity.

Chantal: But hadn’t you already completed that?

Shanta: Yes, but I was not satisfied. I couldn’t feel any generosity in that first proposal. It was as I walked around in Auroville that I rediscovered the illimitable generosity of nature: the long seed-pods of that magnificent tree the flamboyant, for example. If you open one you will be amazed by the internal arrangement, so velvety, so magically organised. Hundreds of seeds are sleeping there in this perfect cradle. It was from the core of that beauty that I drew the inspiration for the tenth petal.

Then Perseverance ... ‘Face all difficulties with a smile ...’ ‘We continue the work that has been begun for as long as necessary ...’ The central ellipse, the vertical line of Sincerity, and many small cells, very regularly cut out horizontally.

Chantal: So far you have always been using the word ‘model’. How did you implement these symbols?

Shanta: I met Joël at Matrimandir, and through him I met Zamir, who has a fibreglass workshop at Bangalore. This workshop is only a few metres away from Joël’s aircraft factory. Zamir and his workers had never done the kind of work I brought him, but he was ready to try.

As soon as I had completed the models, I went to Bangalore with Joël and his partner Sneha, stayed with them, and went to the factory every morning. In this way I followed the making of the twelve Mandalas.
Chantal: Was it absolutely necessary for you to follow the work so closely?

Shanta: I would say it was indispensable. Zamir would supply me with a convex shell on which I would very carefully draw the relevant model. Then I worked with the employees, cutting, sanding, glueing. We made a very good team – the eye of the perfectionist was at work.

Chantal: And what were the last mandalas to be carried out in Bangalore?

Shanta: Aspiration, Courage and Gratitude. These last three were technically difficult to make, especially Gratitude. For this one, I had to make two fresh starts. It was as if Gratitude was not managing to come down. After a lot of reflection and a good night’s sleep I started work the next day in a different way. We completed the manufacture in Joël’s factory with one of his specialists.

Chantal: How did you experience these times of working in the factory or workshop?

Shanta: Physically it was quite challenging, the almost constant noise, the sometimes nauseating smells – but I knew that I had to follow these unique creations through to the end. In another way, these long days with the workers were very enriching. I was a worker of the divine through matter, and always connected with Auroville. Joël and Sneha were wonderful in their way of looking after me. We wove golden threads of friendship.

Chantal: I don’t want to take up too much of your time, but would you mind sharing more of your most significant experiences in connection with the colours? How could you tell that a particular colour corresponded exactly with a petal quality?

Shanta: I tried to put myself in harmony with the sound and the colour – the sound of the petal quality, its vibration, and the same for the colour. It is a new world to be perceived, a sensitivity to be rediscovered. The choice becomes clear, beyond our personal taste. But how often I had to call the Mother to help me!

After painting the Peace petal, I again started preparing colour samples, but this time based on high quality pigments that cannot be found in India.

In the course of this work, I learned that the cadmium colours (yellow and red pigments) become harmful on large surfaces. So my aim was to find non-toxic colours. I consulted many Indian paint suppliers, but each time the colour trials gave an effect of plastic which seemed to have no radiance.

I remember exactly the day when I was sitting on the ground in my own studio at Auromodel and saying to the the Mother, ‘Listen Mother, I am working for you; you are not in your body and I can’t simply go and ask your advice. I don’t know what you are visualising for the petals, I’m willing to go on being an instrument of yours for the work, but then give me a sign, show me what I should do, what I must use, I have no idea any more.’

That very day, in the late afternoon, my eyes were drawn to one of the shelves where I had kept Indian powder colours used in 1991! I rushed there and brought out this decaying treasure. In my whole body I felt a complicit delight – Mother was replying to me.

In the end, we unanimously chose this quality of colours whose mat velvetiness now shines from the walls.

Chantal: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Shanta: I would have a lot more things to add, but it feels as if part of the essential has been said. I am happy that Roger Anger was able to see the Matrimandir completed, he who was called to build the City of Auroville, the Galaxy. I had the joy of showing him all the finished petals. A few days after that visit, I passed by his studio and he
told me ‘I surprised myself by letting you work freely as I did ... You should take the time to prepare a publication about these twelve meditation chambers.’ Work once completed belongs to no one in particular. If Nature generously bestows some gifts on us, let us develop them to progress further and spread them anew. To close, would you agree, Chantal, to share a moment of Silence?

CHANTAL GOWA (SHANTA)

1944 Born in Nice, France.
Since 1970 She has had many international exhibitions in Europe and Asia.
1980 Moves to Germany.
1991 Moves to Auroville, India.
Since 1997 Lead designer and artist painter of the windows mandalas and walls of Matrimandir12 meditation rooms “The Petals” in Auroville.
We, humankind as a whole, seem to have arrived at a point of no return. It is as if our souls know that this time, after so many incarnations, we are playing a very special game. If we look back, our story appears a tragedy of tears and blood: how long it took to arrive to understand the only thing which exists? A slow, very slow awakening, cadenced by pain.

Pain is the hammer of the gods to break A dead resistance in the mortal’s heart,

(Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 443)

If Science – with quantum Physics – and spiritual experience are going now hand-in-hand to face the step which will make us enter into a new dimension, it’s because they are sharing the same vision: both of them, each one in its way, are telling us that we live in an apparent world which is unreal; everything is traceable to vibration and everything is interconnected. We are one, and we come from Oneness. Only our mind’s thoughts made this unreality where we are moving like sleep-walkers believing to be awake – and feeling now to be drawn in it.

Because mind’s ordinary thought has never created from Silence, i.e. in union with God’s Mind and its luminous plan, that “illimitable plan / the One keeps in his heart and knows alone” (*Savitri*, p. 52), but was always going on making a world from a separate ‘I’.

… from the furrows laboured by our will We reap the fruit of our forgotten deeds.

(Savitri, p. 378)

But now our sleep has no more excuses. Since the mind, with the first human being, began to weave the cloth of its illusions in reaction to its own fear (the fear deriving from its presumed separation from the Source, that is God’s Mind or Transcendence), a world fully made of small or big groups separated from each other and in conflict among themselves, a world of division and violence inevitably developed, more and more out of our control – only in order that we may well understand all the evil coming from our oblivion.

A shapeless memory lingers in us still

(Savitri, p. 47)

Now that we have understood the law of attraction as the fundamental law of the Universe and we cannot any more pose as victims or complain like we were thinking it was our right in the so-called “old paradigm”, now that we know that we alone are the builders of all our personal and planetary circumstances, what is left to do? To remember. Just to remember the only thing which exists. Because if we don’t know where we came from, we cannot either recognize where we are heading for. And without an evolutionary vision of the process we are plunged in, earthly life doesn’t make sense, reducing itself to “a vale of tears” from which Death still provides us deliverance or, in the best case, a spiritual realization which, as Sri Aurobindo says, leaves the earth ‘unredeemed’.

*This article first appeared in Italian in *Lus Terrae*: (March-April 2011), a bimonthly magazine.
How many realised beings were in contact with Transcendence, tasted Bliss, liberated their soul during their life? A lot, and our tradition is full of them, both in the East and in the West. They admirably inspired our aspiration, but nothing changed for our Earth: pain is still there, Death reigns. And until Death is there, there is still a work not yet done.

O soul, it is too early to rejoice! Thou hast reached the boundless silence of the Self, ... But where hast thou thrown self’s mission and self’s power?

... only half God’s cosmic work is done.

(Savitri, p. 310)

The Vedic Rishis, the legendary Indian seer-poets of more than 7000 years ago, had the vision (kavi, in Sanskrit, means ‘poet’ and ‘seer’ at the same time) and were singing about “two worlds, eternal and in the same nest”: Spirit and Matter as One. Sri Aurobindo, our modern kavi and pioneer of the new experience, saw the secret of this visible and apparent world: the involution of a superconscient Spirit in inconscient Matter. And he found the ‘keyword’ of the earth’s riddle: the evolution of this Superconscient out of the inconscient Matter to change this ‘blind prison’ of Earth-life into his “splendid mansion and high heaven-reaching temple”. An evolution taking eons of time.

A huge inertness is the world’s defence

(Savitri, p. 247)

“A conscious being is the centre of the self”, reads the Katha Upanishad (II, 1, 12). A being which has the attributes of Transcendence (Sat-Cit-Ananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) and is “like a fire without smoke”. This is “he that is awake in those who sleep” (Ibid., II, 2, 8) and what “one must disengage with patience from one’s own body”, (Ibid., II, 3, 17). It’s the same superconscient Spirit which involved itself in Matter in order to make possible the coming back to Transcendence through somebody who could be aware of it. In short, He, who was the not-manifest One, wants to become One. And, in the manifestation, somebody was needed to experience that. But integrally. In the Matter. In the body. Without leaving Earth for Heavens: “The Enigma’s knot is tied in human kind.”

A self-fulfilling transcendence treads man’s road

(Savitri, p. 339).

That “conscient Being” has never been ‘liberated’ into his full expression which inevitably will be, in time, the manifestation of the Divine Nature on Earth, a manifestation that the prophecies of all the Holy Scriptures point to.

… shall the secret Truth in things prevail. For in the march of all-fulfilling Time The hour must come of the Transcendent’s will

(Savitri, p. 708)

If in our traditional spirituality the Spirit has always broken off, in one way or another, with Matter, this time we have to face an absolutely new task. With the maturation of times, we know that the electromagnetic vibration of our planet is changing, it is more and more accelerating, taking us to the imperative need to free ourselves from ‘densities’ preventing us from surviving and becoming adequate to the new vibrational environment. All the unconsciousness-densities recorded, one by one, at a cellular level during so many lives we lived with the mind (principle of separation) as a guide of our being, must be deleted, again one by one, but with a process which will take much less

4. In this regard, The Life Divine by Sri Aurobindo and A New Earth by Eckhart Tolle may be the best writings till now.
time, because this time it’s a conscious process. And we can face this work only in our body, inhabiting it fully, if we are willing to do that. Because there is always the possibility of escaping, or of putting off all that to the next time.

Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls; Earth is the heroic spirit’s battlefield

(Savitri, p. 686)

Now, to inhabit our body is impossible if we are in our mind. To identify ourselves with our mind means in fact to be always somewhere else. To fully inhabit our body we need to be centered in our heart, i.e. our psychic centre (which is subtly located there).

This psychic centre is higher than the physical (the hara, the vital centre) stressed by so many body-disciplines in fashion today. It’s true that every physical sporting performance requires one to be centered there to keep his body-balance, but a human being is more than his own body. (That is to say that also if our life is a perfect example of a chronic state of separation, we could perform a perfect slalom, as in a skiing competition, without falling.)

So, what is this new experience which is waiting for us? It’s the experience of Oneness, the experience of Oneness in the Many. An experience we can have only through our body. Because it is a vibrational experience – not a mental one, not even belonging to the highest mind levels, which inspired all the previous spiritual realizations – stars which lightened the deep sleep of the era we are leaving behind. Only by facing the unconsciousness recorded in our cellular memory can we ‘gear’ the transmutational work which will make us enter the new adventure, or dimension.

As if reversing a deformation’s spell …

(Savitri, p. 171)

Then, what we were thinking of as an obstacle becomes the lever. It’s our own body, our faithful ally, to point infallibly at those unconsciousness-densities: simply through our emotions in our daily situations. We’ll end by acquiring antennae more and more sensitive to what our body is telling us. Because the body, we all know, never lies. With our mind, on the contrary, we have told ourselves so many stories and lost the main thing, i.e. ourselves, our true Self.

What to do with all these unconsciousness-densities? This is a mental question. And the answer is: nothing. Simply to watch them when they show themselves. To feel their vibration, to accept it, without identifying ourselves with it.1 One needs the utmost courage to do that, a Presence that only his heart, or psychic being, can have; because, every time, it’s like an experience of death to realize, at the same time, that death is being undone from inside. With our mind, on the contrary, we can only re-act, judging the situation of the moment, and so we perpetuate it, tightening still more the knots of the net which suffocate us. But to stay like that, like witnesses, every time an uneasyness points out an unconsciousness, means to deepen Silence in the ‘secret cave’ of our heart. And in the deepest Silence is the Transcendent’s Power: the Divine spark in us, the feminine aspect, dynamic, of the not-manifest Transcendent – The Divine Mother.

In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power. Awaking, it can wake the trance-bound soul, It can make the world a vessel of Spirit’s force

(Savitri, p. 311-312)

Therefore, in the perfect following of the made-to-measure difficulties which, one after another, our unconscient-stuff draws to us, we can finally leave room to the Divine Force-Consciousness:

1. In The Power of Now E. Tolle describes clearly and simply this process.
the only thing which can do the work.

Alone her hands can change Time’s dragon base.

(Savitri, p. 314)

And we become responsible beings, that is “able to respond”, and we stop living in constant reaction. Like that, we can build our real destiny, coming out of the meanders of Unconsciousness. Like that, we can remember our Origin: by putting the Divine vibration in touch with Matter: this, as the Mother said, “it’s the only thing which is REAL”.

Then we can witness a series of miracles, maybe infinitesimal ones, but very important for our experience, miracles more and more loosening the meshes of that net, letting more light in. The mechanic Necessity, sticking us in circumstances always repeating themselves, becomes slowly fuller and fuller of light. The circumstances around us change, because we change. The unreal world little by little dissolves leaving room to the true Reality which discloses the Divine plan. And we become strong of “a vast surrender”.¹

¹“A vast surrender was his only strength”: Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, p. 315.
Darwin’s theory of natural selection
We want to engage ourselves in the philosophical process, and to create a philosophy of evolution, if we can. That is primarily a process of assembling, gathering, and understanding. If you are not a naturalist and therefore, by nature, immersed in the processes of nature, then it is important to put oneself in touch with that consciousness first, in order to understand something about evolution.

Are there any people here who are naturalists? If you are familiar with the theory of multiple-intelligence you will know that this school of cognitive psychology has identified eight approaches to knowledge commonly developed by individuals throughout the human species. Just as there are subspecies or varieties of butterflies, there are also varieties of human beings, according to the psychology of multiple-intelligence. And one of those, which is prominent and easily recognized, is the naturalist, the naturalist intelligence. This is the one who spontaneously, effortlessly, notices incremental differences among plants, animals, behaviors in nature. It is a cognitive faculty which makes it easy to categorize and understand lineages, and not to be satisfied without knowing and categorizing all that which you see and which you appreciate and love and are overwhelmed by. You have to put some order into all of that, and then you begin to really understand nature. If you happen to be with a person like that, walking about in nature, they will observe a hundred things in the time it takes you to ask about one thing.

Charles Darwin was one of those people. When you read his writing, you have to be amazed at the extraordinary breadth and depth of the observations he makes, and because of that he was able to write the Origin of Species. There were a few other people around in those days who were making similar observations and there is a historical chapter in the beginning of the book in which he mentions a group of people who were making observations similar to his, including Wallace who was partly credited with the theory of the origin of species. In this history he remarks that “In June of 1859, Professor Huxley gave a lecture before the Royal Institution on the ‘persistent types of animal life’. Referring to such cases, he remarks, ‘It is difficult to comprehend the meaning of such facts as these, if we suppose that each species of animal and plant, or each great type of organization, was formed and placed upon the surface of the globe at long intervals by a distinct act of creative power.” Difficult, indeed, to understand how individual acts of creation, which at that time were commonly thought to be the origin of species, – “individual acts of creative power” – could have placed all these species of life on the earth.

Throughout the Origin, Darwin frequently concludes a passage by saying that it would be very difficult to explain this series of complex interrelations by the theory of individual acts of creation. And his arguments are very convincing. We will come across some of them. I want us to look at some of Darwin’s passages that make very clear the theory of evolutionary descent by variation and natural selection.

That, of course, is Darwin’s theory. It was

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*Adapted from the course-book The Philosophy of Evolution: Darwin and Sri Aurobindo by Rod Hemsell, a monograph of the University of Human Unity in Auroville.
obviously a very compelling idea among philosophers and scientists in the mid 19th century, that what we observe in nature, in terms of lasting groups, species, and genera, was apparently the result of a natural process, a phenomenon of nature. It was a very compelling need that they had at the time to distinguish that idea from the idea that species were a product of individual creation by a power other than nature, a divine power. They were obsessed with two things: making very clear the processes of nature, on the one hand, and on the other defending themselves and arguing persuasively against, for the sake of culture and education and values, the religious idea that species were created by a power outside of nature. They were obsessed with this idea.

In an early chapter called ‘Natural Selection’, (Chapter 4) of the Origin, Darwin says, “Let it be borne in mind how infinitely complex and close fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life, and consequently, what infinitely varied diversities of structure might be of use to each being under changing conditions of life. Can it then be thought improbable, seeing that variations useful to man have undoubtedly occurred, that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have a better chance of surviving and procreating their kind?”

Can it be thought improbable that useful variations have occurred in species through many successive generations, he asks, because we know that man has, by breeding, created useful variations. “If such do occur, can we doubt, remembering that many more individuals are born than can possibly survive, then doesn’t it stand to reason that those who have an advantage will be the ones that survive, under the changing conditions of life?

“On the other hand, we may feel sure that any variation in the least degree injurious, would be rigidly destroyed.” Any plant or animal born with a serious defect, along with another next to it with no defects, is probably going to be eliminated in the struggle for survival. We should have no doubt about that. “This preservation of favourable individual difference and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious, I have called Natural Selection.”

That’s the theory of natural selection. And then he says, “Several writers have misapprehended or objected to the term ‘natural selection’. Some have even imagined that natural selection induces variability, whereas it implies only the preservation of such variations as arise and are beneficial to the being under the conditions of life. No one objects to agriculturists speaking of the potent effects of man’s selection. In this case, the individual differences given by nature, which man for some reason selects, must of necessity first occur. Others have objected that the term selection implies conscious choice in the animals which become modified. It has even been urged that as plants have no volition, natural selection is not applicable to them.”

Volition means will. And so, some have thought, he says, that natural selection means that plants and animals choose the variations, that there was an element of choice in the theory. Darwin wants to insist that this is definitely not the case. “It has been said that I speak of natural selection as an active power or deity, but who objects to an author speaking of the attraction of gravity as ruling the movements of the planets? Everyone knows what is meant and is implied by such metaphorical expressions which are almost necessary for brevity. It is difficult to avoid personifying the word “nature”, but I mean by nature
only the aggregate action and product of many natural laws. And by laws, I mean the sequence of events as ascertained by us."

It is difficult to avoid personifying nature. Metaphor is necessary for communication, for us to communicate about nature. Not everyone can perceive relationships of cause and effect in nature, like naturalists do. (Here we can get a pretty strong sense of Hume’s influence on the thought of the day, which was committed to empiricism, the belief that we can only know what we observe, and we can only deduce and infer cause and effect relations. We can no more observe choice on the part of nature than we can observe choice on the part of God. We can only know what occurs in perception and abstraction. Such distinctions were of utmost importance to the men of science of Darwin’s day.)

“Nature, if I may be allowed to personify the natural preservation or survival of the fittest, cares nothing for appearances, except in so far as they are useful to any thing. She can act on every internal organ, on every shade of constitutional difference, on the whole machinery of life. Man selects only for his own good; nature only for that of the being which she tends.”

“It may metaphorically be said, that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing throughout the world, the slightest variations, rejecting those that are bad, preserving and adding up all that are good, silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life. We see nothing of these slow changes in progress, until the hand of time has marked the lapse of ages. And then, so imperfect is our view into long past geological ages that we see only that the forms of life are now different from what they formerly were.”

One of the subjects Darwin deals with at length is the causes of variation. First he says the causes of variation are infinitely complex and largely unknown to us. But at the same time he defines many likely causes of variation. One of his discussions is about the idea of the increase of species under natural conditions, in which he quotes from Linnaeus about the geometrical increase of species and the idea that it is impossible that all the products of life, all the progeny of all animals and insects, could survive. And then he has a chapter on the natural checks to increase. Some of the checks that he notices are that, among egg laying species many eggs are eaten before they hatch. Among seeding plant species many seeds are eaten before they sprout, and many are transported to other locations. At the same time there is the process of spreading which adds to diversity, and devouring which limits the number that survive. He mentions seedlings being stifled by weeds, insects and grazing. He describes the examples beautifully. It isn’t at all boring to read his descriptions which flow mellifluously. He mentions limitations of food supply which occur because of weather changes, and deforestation, which of course we are aware of at this time. Global warming is following human habitat destruction, and 25 % of vertebrate species have become extinct in the last thirty years. In addition to climate change he mentions epidemics, being preyed upon, and the combination of climate change and competition for food as being important factors in selection, because variations can occur that allow adaptation to both climate change and competition. These are complexes that can be observed in nature.

Now I would like to point to a philosophical aspect of this discussion. There was a tendency prevalent at that time, and still prevalent today, to think that species are unchanging, that they are fixed and were created once and for all. This is our normal experience, and Teilhard de Chardin, in fact, starts one of his books with this problem. In a period of three hundred or five hundred years, if we look at paintings and drawings and observe nature around us, we actually see pretty much the same species there all the time.
In history, especially if we go back to the origins of science in the Greek period, it was universally accepted that species are eternal. The idea that species are created once and for all, not that they have evolved, is largely a product of “sequences ascertained by us”, but now that we have scientific instruments and techniques, those sequences ascertained by us include the genome and the whole fossil record which was not available to Darwin. He has raised the issue in several sections, that his theory can be questioned based on the gaps in the fossil record known at that time. There are far fewer lapses today than there were at that time. Lyle, who was a cousin of Darwin, was just discovering earth changes and geological time and it was just beginning to be understood that geological time was basically beyond conception. The same excavations that were enabling the discovery of geological time were turning up enough fossil evidence so that the naturalists could see the recurrence of body plans, over long periods of time, and they could see that horses and pigs and birds had evolved.

One of the things that we will notice in the writings of Haeckel and Darwin is that they use the term “strong inheritance”. They knew that generations inherit variations, but they didn’t know how it worked. They refer to inheritance as a strong factor in the process of natural selection, but Mendelian genetics hadn’t been studied yet. They were basing everything on naturalistic observation; they were travelling around observing different species on different islands, varying under different conditions, and they were inferring the process of the connectedness of species through time, and under different conditions. Darwin and Haeckle attributed the connectedness to inheritance, just as they were attributing the selection process to natural conditions, but they didn’t know anything about genetics. The whole theory, which was in fact substantiated by genetics in the 1940s, was being based solely on naturalistic observation and deduction.

Similarly, in Aristotle’s time, – Aristotle was an extraordinary naturalist who wrote a taxonomy of species, who also based his philosophy of nature entirely on naturalistic observation. We will discuss his theory of evolution, which was entirely determined by the perception that species are eternal. And he produced the philosophy of forms. Whether we read Whitehead, Heidegger, Dennett, Sheldrake, or whoever, we will come across a reference to Aristotle’s philosophy of form. He came up with four causes of any phenomenon. There is the material cause, the efficient cause, the formal cause, and the final cause.

Aristotle says the material makeup of something, its matter, determines a lot of what happens to it. The matter of the human is different from the matter of the snail or the geranium or the volcano. There are material causes. The efficient cause comes from outside and moves something from place to place; it’s what we do to the plant to nourish and preserve it or to the children to teach them and encourage their growth. These are external forces. Then there are the formal causes, the species, which limit what something can do or become. You will not become an elephant. An elephant will not grow until it touches the moon. Each thing is limited by its type, its form. So a bird will build a nest, lay eggs, bring food to the young until they can fly; the bird knows how to do these things because of its form, which is eternal. Aristotle learned this from Plato. The final cause is – guess what? – Survival, Reproduction, Knowledge, Skill, the Good (for each thing). The ultimate, final cause is called, in our language of evolution, the good, infinite, true, beautiful, powerful – the Supermind. In Sri Aurobindo’s writing there are many allusions to Plato’s conception of the Good in relation to his conception of Supermind.

The question can be asked whether everything that happens – the material, efficient and formal causes of things – serves the good or final cause, and this is an important philosophical question. Darwin speaks about extinctions and destruction being as much a part of evolution as variation
and selection, and Sri Aurobindo speaks about “nature’s harsh economy”. We all know that in ignorance the spur to progress is pain. In my paper called “Physics and the Philosophy of Evolution”, I propose the concept of complementarity to deal with these dualities. But now we are just collecting material in the form of great ideas, systematic thinking, reflection on the principles of nature as it is observed, and on the mind observing it. For philosophy these are two important questions: What is the nature of the world we observe, and what is the nature of the consciousness that is observing it? How does consciousness know that what it perceives is the reality? There are answers to these questions, solutions to the problems, that are finite and important, and I hope we come to them as a process of exploration. The important thing is to recognize the aporias, the questions, the enigmas.

Whenever a question arises in your mind, that’s your hook, follow it.

Notes

2. Ibid., p. 23
3. Ibid., p. 121
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 122
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 124
8. Ibid., p. 125
9. Ibid., p. 126

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Spirit is in process of unfolding through matter, by its involved complexity. This process has been active since the beginning, if there were any such conceivable thing. Ours may not even necessarily be the ‘only’ manifest of Divine joy, for it is believed that there have been many cycles of creation, and will be many more. Moreover, should our linear conceptions of temporal and spatial evolution be cast aside, we may notice that, every possible reality could be occurring simultaneously, for history itself would be but a flicker, when measured up against an Infinite and Eternal canvas of creativity.

Paradoxically we occupy a realm where, to the best of our analytical capacities, it is found that regardless of how finely we divide space or take matter apart, there seems to be no end in sight. The deeper we go; the further any ‘fundamental’ unit seems to get, as complexity and depth within every quantum of space, is apparently infinite. Similarly we appear in a universe infinitely large, now seen to be composed of building blocks, that are in turn, infinitely small… and humanity stands on the knife edge, as some scalar median. The same goes for time ironically, as we can dissect micro, milli, nano seconds and so on, but there is no quantifiable or identifiable zero time, which also effectively implies, that every moment is thus actually eternal. All these moments thread together through history, so incredibly short, yet composed of a stream of eternal moments, and thus an eternity in itself. We are infinite and eternal, yet also fleeting and miniscule. Ours is truly the perfect trap, a riddle unimaginable.

So if we step back and look at what we are dealing with, it can be seen that, human conceptions of Divine Reality, are starting to resemble the nature of our own reality which leads to the conclusion that this plane could evidently be, a divine field of action. Every point of time and space, now shown through entanglement to be fundamentally connected; separate only to deluded, defined, restrained and narrow perception. Every aspect of the action being perfect; a fact denied only by ego, which strays through fantasy, of being the driver… separate from the whole. Ego of human nature, though systemically ingrained throughout the structure of our experience, starts off perhaps, as a harmless misunderstanding on inception, but when compounded upon itself over centuries and millennia of the conflict, that this element breeds, a net result could be precarious; even though this place, is comfortably part of divine script, as there is no ‘alternative’ to the plan.

This Zeitgeist can best be compared to a birthing process. Chaos, pain, tearing, bleeding, crying and a distinct sense of emergency, though all endured in the light of bringing forth, an entirely new force. We are caught in this situation metaphorically, at a planetary or galactic scale, perhaps something even more profound. All this momentum revealed vividly to those tuned in, through awakened awareness, where understandings are enlarged to the extent of being able to zoom out effortlessly, and perceive Transformation. Unfortunately the vast majority of our brothers and sisters remain trapped, by institutions and systems which emerge from the wake of an ever enlarging Ego-centric religious and scientific agenda that carves the landscape of contemporary global culture.
Both religious and scientific institutions originate from the same source, a sense of duality and separate domain; the original sin, our first disconnect with humanity and turn from unity. Characterized by defined ideologies and exclusive aesthetic identities, these forces are fundamentally intertwined, intricate and powerful. This is that area of enterprise, which has somehow managed to cloud Truth and Reason over the ages, to the extent of becoming hostile agents at play. Within the last century or so, we witness an ultimate merger of their agendas: a military, media, corporate, legal and political network, of dubious allegiances to divergent interests, all at constant siege with each other.

Such agencies pose many serious dangers to collective welfare, for they are not human and therefore rarely display any semblance of humanity, though often protected legally as virtual beings, by common cultural sanction or political mandate; their interests worked into the system, to allow for ambiguous abstract entities and conglomerates, to take control of most activity that defines the collective human endeavor. Propaganda permeates every realm of ‘development’, making our way of life consumption driven, deceptive, reckless, destructive and remorseless. This model upon which our global culture has been conformed to, cannot be considered healthy from any reasonable and responsible perspective. It seems the primary mantra, of the varied authoritarian regulatory mechanisms, that channel human potential, is to ‘take what we can, while we can… and leave’. Almost as if the collective consciousness of popular culture had been hijacked by some locust over-mind, which drives us to willfully annihilate our habitat, while simultaneously through varied gestures, urging us persistently to look to the stars, and locate the next habitable target to colonize and eventually consume entirely.

On the other side of the fence huddle those awkward awakened few who refuse to be participants in this nightmarish planetary scale psychopathic genocide, and chant the exact opposite; ‘give everything and yourself unconditionally… to stay’. This is the spiritually inspired development paradigm, which is nothing more complex, than an answer to the call that we all hear. There is almost no ambiguity, as to what the highest expectations from us are. Should any doubts remain, this sense of connection, love, obligation and responsibility for context, can be explained… as a natural extension, of the same intuitive care for one’s own mind, body and being. To be aligned with the unfolding of spirit differs in essence from humanity’s mutant step siblings (the scientific religious establishments and their countless demon offspring)… but is never ‘apart’. The spiritual realm is all encompassing, inclusive and regards not the blunders of other manifestations as errors but as reason or inspiration, to strive and aspire to greater heights of creative harmony. Spirituality is an understanding and eventual becoming, of who we really are and what is really going on.

Tracing back the origins of organizations, agendas and cultures, we are enabled by and are enabling, on a daily basis, at multiple synchronized levels, through ‘business as usual’; it may be revealed that we are in some way or another, often integrally part of this vicious machinery, in some cases even, active perpetrators of Ego sponsored crimes, against ourselves. We are discovered as unconscious agents towards a homogenized, standardized, global operating protocol. Even academia, the identified institutions whose primary program should have ideally been boundary dissolution, often peddles the same product and is funded, therefore at some level controlled by Ego agenda. Their moulded, educated, certified registered specialized and qualified drones filter into the hierarchical stratified corporate labyrinth, and serve as tools to render landscapes indistinguishable, by ironing out individuality, cultural plurality, and aesthetic or operational variety.

Even the best intentioned explorations into
alternative approaches, are riddled with logistical, technological and feasibility issues, which are presented to the public as hurdles that cannot be overcome; but more often than one would be willing to believe, failures are the result of designed ‘built-in’ obsolescence and redundancy cycles. Compounded by a Pandora’s box of embodied energy cycles, in the form of mining, processing, manufacture, transportation, specialized locations, centralized processes, toxic waste, biodegradation term, costing, distribution, accessibility… all another medium for corporate profit making, reinforcement of inequality and suppression of those less privileged. If a genuine radical recalibration of culture occurred, innovations would be inconspicuous, refined, optimized and harmoniously integrated accessories, to our myriad processes.

Tools to achieve convergence are already at our disposal, for we are literally ‘growing’ the macro-biological tissue of the greater resultant organism, that our species is weaving itself into. Without necessarily being conscious of implications involved by their subtle nature, proliferation of information technologies and resultant instant network connectivity is plausibly biomimetic; planet girdling live feedback mechanisms to gauge collective, appropriate response coordination and interventions, behaving effectively like an integrated sentient being. The operating system might be to model reality, serving as platforms for collective consciousness to address evolving models, with a transcendence of language and progression; from communicating, to showing, to understanding, to becoming what we ‘Mean’ to ourselves. This is the signature of Spirit’s efflorescence by matter in fractal ways, parts coming together to form a whole, that is approximately reminiscent of the part, and vice versa.

Looking closer… it may be possible to develop the ability to discern where, when and how to deliver the slightest, most delicate intervention, surgical in precision to generate ripples, transformative unto eventual game changing proportion. This will depend on species scale understanding, where both macro and micro sensitivities; intuitively, simultaneously and spontaneously have to be harmonized, effortlessly to generate that all encompassing gesture. It is true that divinity has but just begun to introduce the delights of being co-creators and stewards of this gifted context though our fullest potential, in terms of eventual contribution towards union of spirit and matter is still imperceptible. This is why there are so few examples of sensitive explorations, towards a truly symbiotic relationship with our terrestrial plane.

Though if viewed abstractly, any and every manifestation (conscious or otherwise), has been generated by Spirit as ultimate origin and destination. Therefore in effect, everything that has been and is in becoming, is already a result of Spirituality as the fundamental development protocol; though with varied degrees of revelation, that generates those distinctions, which we discern and compartmentalize into styles and typologies, with rigorous boundary defining scientific approaches. Aspiration and bestowed Grace are not necessarily proportional, so such variety in Revelation cannot depend solely upon levels of tangible or quantifiable advancement. As conduits of Divine expression, there are unpredictably scattered examples, of highly evolved complex creations, like traditional vernacular Ba-ila settlement patterns in southern Zambia. Developed over generations with no imposed organizational framework, yet organically evolving with self articulated fractal order, these places intuitively display how Content and Meaning can be significantly crystallized unto Form and Space.

From mathematics, to cosmology, to physics, to geology, to chemistry, to biology, to technology, to information and eventually distilled unto Knowledge; Spirit is making a steady march, leaping seamlessly through a multitude of media, material, energies and tendencies, simultaneously
with Reason unfathomable. Every jump from one level of play, to another occurs with accelerated urgency, therein requiring shorter time spans between creative displays, of more and more complex novelty. If projected exponentially, inevitably this evolutionary momentum attains to terminal velocity (abstractly), with an eventual free flow, of unimaginable unbridled potential, and we then tread upon a whole new set of parameters to define that new found ‘state’, if analysis and the intellectual process, still have any meaning beyond an inescapable dissolution of duality.

As a pre-requisite, the stage must be set for this metamorphosis of global culture, by exposing that neither is the universe a chaotic mess of random occurrences which accidentally, mysteriously forms this magnificent realm; nor is this some murky world between heaven and hell that was set up, to expose blasphemy in infidels and serve as a field for the persecution of heresy. These caricatures of Reality are unfortunately currently the major pillars of standardized popular human belief systems, and such mass psychosis must be cured urgently. Both views give license to apathy towards the felt presence of direct experience. The world and its workings should not be confronted as some awful test or trap, which we ‘endure’ to be ultimately relieved or pardoned from. The end goals of both scientific and religious rhetoric, are always cul-de-sacs, either a negation of purpose with anticipated probable chaotic Armageddon, or an induced aspiration to dissolution through promise of empty salvation, separate from this reality, as an only ‘solution’ to our situation; both negative and Self defeating.

Human settlement patterns are a direct reflection of these progressive states of being, from pre-pagan arrangements of stone by shamanic inspiration millennia past, to envisioned ominous ‘new world orders’ looming on the horizon. Though urban history has been a short chapter (as urbanity in itself is a relatively new phenomenon), now more human beings operate with urban parameters, than those tending to the rest of Earth, an accelerating trend that shows no signs of waning. By implication, the role of planning and development strategy becomes critical, especially when practitioners in these fields are increasingly active at the core of the latest debate in town… global climate change. The compounding symptoms of which are very real and increasingly perceivable, but when concern mutates, into another hysterical agenda enabling ‘slogan’, to justify a whole new range of bizarre Ego charged semantics, indexes, quotients, values, shares, stocks, credits, exchanges, trades, markets, curbs, caps, cuts… we see again, that the Business, is no longer about actually being sensitive to context, but more another domain to revel in mind games, politics, hierarchy, ideology, protocol and similar babble. The effort to heal becomes rendered impotent, as ‘reasons’ become flawed, driven by virtual interests. To continue, we must first achieve the power of being Good to our home and host, simply because it is good to be Good, and not as some clumsy urgent reaction to scientific conjecture and religious guilt.

Contextual, environmental and ecological sensitivity is a sort of default setting, or precondition to composed and consistent spiritually guided praxis. Attaining to the stage where Work becomes Meditation cannot stem from some new theory, manifesto, referable best practice, guideline or movement. To appraise, inspect, quantify, qualify, discuss, judge and criticize potentialities, would necessarily require implementation of scientific duality, to create the Ego-distinction between, observer and observed. Spiritual content can have no adequate quotient in ‘rational’ terms. Only by personal, individual sustained awakening and profound Self actualization, can we aspire for the opportunity to continually serve, with perseverance, surrender, acceptance of limitations… and faith. With critical mass and momentum in this direction, what must be done will be collectively understood, and our Vocation revealed.
Pointed attempts to simulate this envisioned ideal condition, have already been underway over time, in manifold forms, at multiple locations, at diverse scales. Auroville in south India is one such example, which has the distinction of being internationally recognized, as an evolving experiment, aimed at achieving human unity. The ‘universal township’ is inspired by the visionary work of Sri Aurobindo, and was set in motion by his collaborator, The Mother, in 1968. This place is to belong to humanity as a whole and no one in particular. In order to live here the only condition, is to be a willing servant of Divine Consciousness. Aurovilians being pilgrims of sorts, as they traveled far and long, to bring the Dream forth, inevitably (like all immigrant societies) brought with them, all the artificial, mental, vital, ego fuelled institutional perspectives, afforded by their former contexts, and those ‘features’ of community process turn out to be the only genuine blockages, to the potential for actual unity. Culture has an awful way of entrenching itself persistently in personality, and serves more often as a dividing, defining, isolating and excluding force, than anything else. Rare is the occasion for joyful exchange of differences, for the novelty of that excitement wears off soon enough, and then the daily grind starts to reveal inevitable mundane frictions between identities, ideologies, personalities and perspectives.

Getting something done is easy enough when the object of an exercise is product, versus process. Achieving an ideal design, layout, plan, strategy or operating system is tough, even when all energies are converged upon the task at hand. But suddenly in a situation where collaboration, participation, emotion, intuition, Yoga, and integration are the real parameters of the game, boiling down to something tangible, that all parties agree upon, in the absence of governance or law, (that is also appropriate and sensitive) becomes a daunting task. For not only do fact and figures, reason and logic apply; the community must function simultaneously with a whole other set of defining concerns, that are usually intangible, subjective, personal and often bizarre to the bystander. This visionary place is vividly involved in a development program, whose object is solely to reconcile paradox at epic proportion. So when set to achieve the almost unachievable, these people will naturally be in a consistent state of ‘failure’. Because simply put, if Auroville does ‘succeed’ humanity is instantaneously and irrevocably transformed. So when being critical of this specific example, much caution is advised in the best interests of one’s own humility.

The true genius of this community was how they managed to radically transform the given landscape. When the pioneers first arrived at the designated location some distance from Pondicherry, they were confronted by a barren, scarred, scorched, cracked desolate red burnt soil wilderness, with no significant foliage to speak of. Contextually speaking, the initial conditions of the experiment were considerably hostile and fragile. These young enchanted souls, coming together from all corners of the planet, leaving everything behind to become a part of creating something, they believed to be the Future. With near nothing at their disposal, dismal funding, primitive technologies, spartan living conditions, harsh climate and scarce resources, they endured. Self organization into groups and collaborations took place, each simultaneously engaged with a different aspect of manifesting the ‘City of Dawn’, an urban master plan designed by Roger Anger, a French architect and son-in-law to The Mother at the time. Judging from results nearly half a century later, it is self evident that though perspectives on history may differ, Auroville has actually managed to display a Herculean feat of unified action. The bioregion has flourished with life and activity, complimented by indigenous rural socio-economic development. Rich and diverse recently introduced forests, gardens, farms and wildlife abound with industries cropping up for tourists, guests, volunteers, practitioners and students. There is a lot going on there visibly, and layered quite discreetly, sometimes even invisible (forces) or secluded in greenery.
In fact the physical and material transformation of the region has been so triumphant, from a reluctantly analytical perspective, that senior members of the community now live to watch a whole swarm of self-serving opportunist agendas get drawn in and try to take things apart for all they are worth. Politicians, lobbyists, realtors, land sharks, mafia gangs, administrators, bureaucrats, academics and businessmen actively seek influence, leverage and control, over the now inflated resources involved with this project. The fundamental problem Auroville faces is a gap between its vision, and actually achieving a true spiritual-urban situation caused by reliance on methodologies, which resemble scientific and religious institutional prototypes, too closely for comfort. By employing the cliché stereotypical model, of building a shrine as first priority, to establish sacred territory and serve as a physical symbol of faith, the first contradictions surface. Semantic tricks often found posing as radical new forms, but in reality most found patterns, often no different from those that were to be abandoned.

Currently many contradictions abound in the Auroville experience, and therefore this case cannot be considered a definitive model or template for a ‘realized’ Spiritual Urbanity. Auroville is simply what it presents itself to be… a magnificent and inspired work in progress expressing aspiration for Divinity. However just the same as it works for everything else, Transformation is hinged on Grace, and over that we have no appropriate response, but complete surrender and total receptivity.

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