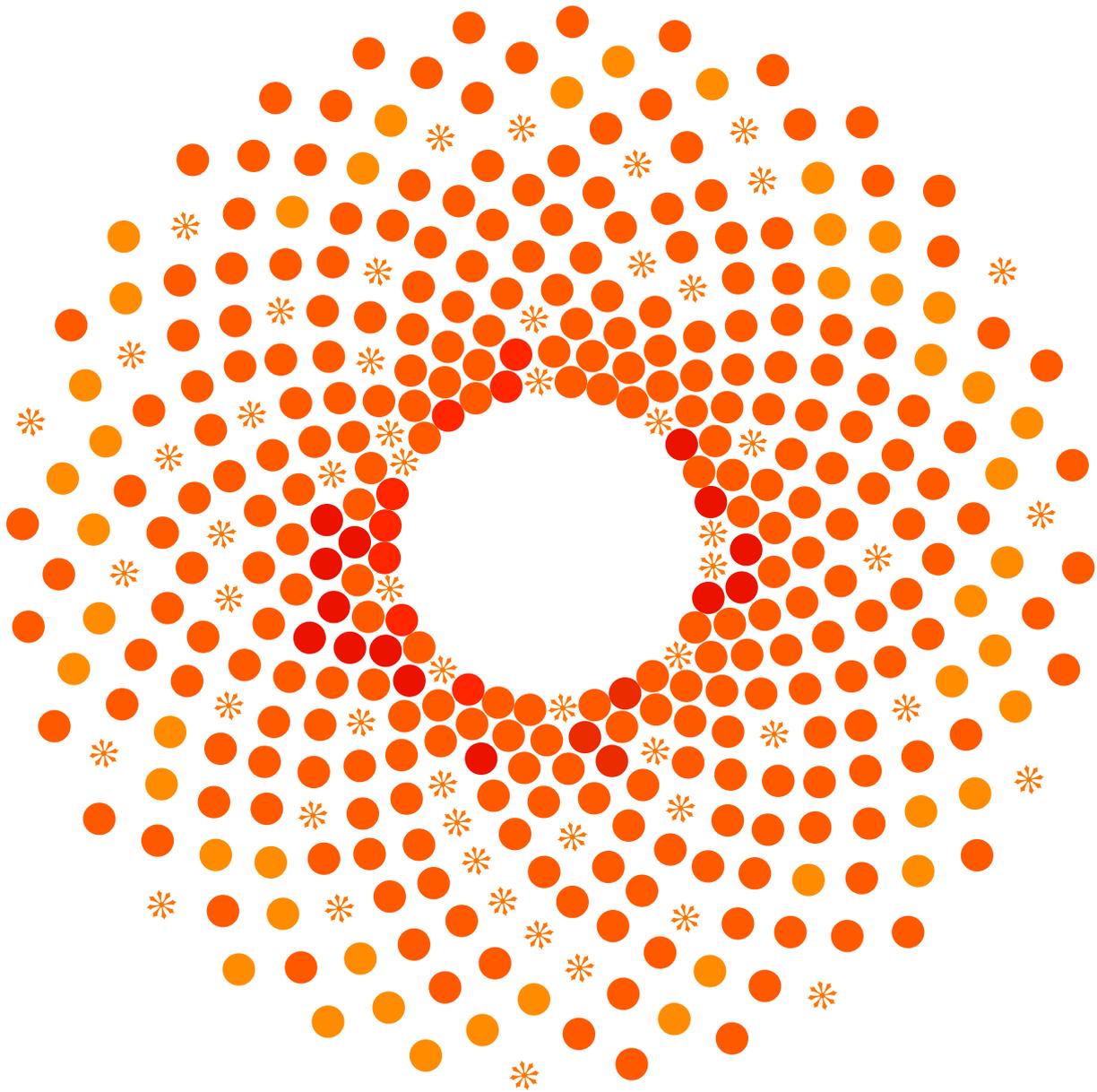


ऋतम् • Ritam

Volume 4 • Issue 2 • February 2007



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

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Editor

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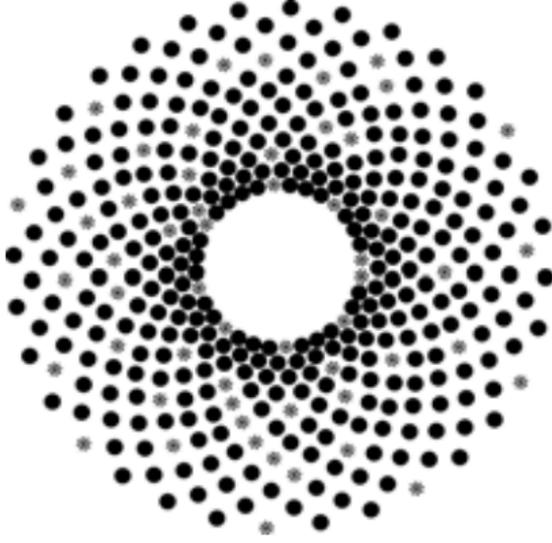
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A Journal of Material and Spiritual Researches in Auroville
Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research

RITAM

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

Our aim:

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

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RITAM

Volume 4 Issue 2

FEBRUARY 2007

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The Divine Worker

Sri Aurobindo

I face earth's happenings with an equal soul;
In all are heard Thy steps: Thy unseen feet
Tread Destiny's pathways in my front. Life's whole
Tremendous theorem is Thou complete.

No danger can perturb my spirit's calm:
My acts are Thine; I do Thy works and pass;
Failure is cradled on Thy deathless arm,
Victory is Thy passage mirrored in fortune's glass.

In this rude combat with the fate of man
Thy smile within my heart makes all my strength;
Thy force in me labours at its grandiose plan,
Indifferent to the Time-snake's crawling length.

No power can slay my soul; it lives in Thee.
Thy presence is my immortality.

20-9-1939
Collected Poems

The Mind and Spiritual Experience

Sri Aurobindo

I have started writing about doubt, but even in doing so I am afflicted by the "doubt" whether any amount of writing or of anything else can ever persuade the eternal doubt in man which is the penalty of his native ignorance. In the first place, to write adequately would mean anything from 60 to 600 pages, but not even 6000 convincing pages would convince doubt. For doubt exists for its own sake; its very function is to doubt always and, even when convinced, to go on doubting still; it is only to persuade its entertainer to give it board and lodging that it pretends to be an honest truth-seeker. This is a lesson I have learnt from the experience both of my own mind and of the minds of others; the only way to get rid of doubt is to take discrimination as one's detector of truth and falsehood and under its guard to open the door freely and courageously to experience.

All the same I have started writing, but I will begin not with doubt but with the demand for the Divine as a concrete certitude, quite as concrete as any physical phenomenon caught by the senses. Now, certainly, the Divine must be such a certitude not only as concrete but more concrete than anything sensed by ear or eye or touch in the world of Matter; but it is a certitude not of mental thought but of essential experience. When the Peace of God descends on you, when the Divine Presence is there within you, when the Ananda rushes on you like a sea, when you are driven like a leaf before the wind by the breath of the Divine Force, when Love flowers out from you on all creation, when Divine Knowledge floods you with a Light which illumines and transforms in a moment all that was before dark, sorrowful and obscure, when all that is becomes part of the One Reality, when the Reality is all around you, you feel at once by the spiritual contact, by the inner vision, by the illumined and seeing thought, by the vital sensation and even by the very physical sense, everywhere you see, hear, touch only the Divine. Then you can much less doubt it or deny it than you can deny or doubt daylight or air or the sun in heaven – for of these physical things you cannot be sure but they are what your senses represent them to be; but in the concrete experiences of the Divine, doubt is impossible.

As to permanence, you cannot expect permanence of the initial spiritual experiences from the beginning –

only a few have that and even for them the high intensity is not always there; for most, the experience comes and then draws back behind the veil waiting for the human part to be prepared and made ready to bear and hold fast its increase and then its permanence. But to doubt it on that account would be irrational in the extreme. One does not doubt the existence of air because a strong wind is not always blowing or of sunlight because night intervenes between dawn and dusk. The difficulty lies in the normal human consciousness to which spiritual experience comes as something abnormal and is in fact supernormal. This weak limited normality finds it difficult at first even to get any touch of that greater and intenser supernormal experience; or it gets it diluted into its own duller stuff of mental or vital experience, and when the spiritual does come in its own overwhelming power, very often it cannot bear or, if it bears, cannot hold and keep it. Still, once a decisive breach has been made in the walls built by the mind against the Infinite, the breach widens, sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly, until there is no wall any longer, and there is the permanence.

But the decisive experiences cannot be brought, the permanence of a new state of consciousness in which they will be normal cannot be secured if the mind is always interposing its own reservations, prejudgments, ignorant formulas or if it insists on arriving at the divine certitude as it would at the quite relative truth of a mental conclusion, by reasoning, doubt, enquiry and all the other paraphernalia of Ignorance feeling and fumbling around after Knowledge; these greater things can only be brought by the progressive opening of a consciousness quieted and turned steadily towards spiritual experience. If you ask why the Divine has so disposed it on these highly inconvenient bases, it is a futile question, -for this is nothing else than a psychological necessity imposed by the very nature of things. It is so because these experiences of the Divine are not mental constructions, not vital movements; they are essential things, not things merely thought but realities, not mentally felt but felt in our very underlying substance and essence. No doubt, the mind is always there and can intervene; it can and does have its own type of mentalising about the Divine, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, mental reflections of spiritual Truth, even a kind of mental realisation which repeats as well as it

can some kind of figure of the higher Truth, and all this is not without value but it is not concrete, intimate and indubitable. Mind by itself is incapable of ultimate certitude; whatever it believes, it can doubt; whatever it can affirm, it can deny; whatever it gets hold of, it can and does let go. That, if you like, is its freedom, noble right, privilege; it may be all you can say in its praise, but by these methods of mind you cannot hope (outside the reach of physical phenomena and hardly even there) to arrive at anything you can call an ultimate certitude. It is for this compelling reason that mentalising or enquiring about the Divine cannot by its own right bring the Divine. If the consciousness is always busy with small mental movements, – especially accompanied, as they usually are, by a host of vital movements, desires, prepossessions and all else that vitiates human thinking, – even apart from the native insufficiency of reason, what room can there be for a new order of knowledge, for fundamental experiences or for those deep and tremendous upsurgings or descents of the Spirit? It is indeed possible for the mind in the midst of its activities to be suddenly taken by surprise, overwhelmed, swept aside, while all is flooded with a sudden inrush of spiritual experience. But if afterwards it begins questioning, doubting, theorising, surmising what these might be and whether it is true or not, what else can the spiritual power do but retire and wait for the bubbles of the mind to cease?

I would ask one simple question of those who would make the intellectual mind the standard and judge of spiritual experience. Is the Divine something less than mind or is it something greater? Is mental consciousness with its groping enquiry, endless argument, unquenchable doubt, stiff and unplastic logic something superior or even equal to the Divine Consciousness or is it something inferior in its action and status? If it is greater, then there is no reason to seek after the Divine. If it is equal, then spiritual experience is quite superfluous. But if it is inferior, how can it challenge, judge, make the Divine stand as an accused or a witness before its tribunal, summon it to appear as a candidate for admission before a Board of Examiners or pin it like an insect under its examining microscope? Can the vital animal hold up as infallible the standard of its vital instincts, associations and impulses, and judge, interpret and fathom by it the mind of man? It cannot, because man's mind is a greater power working in a wider, more complex way which the animal vital consciousness cannot follow. Is it so difficult to see, similarly, that the Divine Consciousness must be something infinitely wider, more complex than the human mind, filled with greater powers and lights, moving in a way which mere mind cannot judge, interpret or fathom by the standard of its fallible reason and limited half-knowledge? The simple fact is there that Spirit and Mind are not the

same thing and that it is the spiritual consciousness into which the yogin has to enter (in all this I am not in the least speaking of the supermind), if he wants to be in permanent contact or union with the Divine. It is not then a freak of the Divine or a tyranny to insist on the mind recognising its limitations, quieting itself, giving up its demands, and opening and surrendering to a greater Light than it can find on its own obscurer level. This doesn't mean that mind has no place at all in the spiritual life; but it means that it cannot be even the main instrument, much less the authority, to whose judgment all must submit itself, including the Divine. Mind must learn from the greater consciousness it is approaching and not impose its own standards on it; it has to receive illumination, open to a higher Truth, admit a greater power that doesn't work according to mental canons, surrender itself and allow its half-light half-darkness to be flooded from above till where it was blind it can see, where it was deaf it can hear, where it was insensible it can feel, and where it was baffled, uncertain, questioning, disappointed it can have joy, fulfilment, certitude and peace. This is the position on which yoga stands, a position based upon constant experience since men began to seek after the Divine. If it is not true, then there is no truth in yoga and no necessity for yoga. If it is true, then it is on that basis, from the standpoint of the necessity of this greater consciousness that we can see whether doubt is of any utility for the spiritual life. To believe anything and everything is certainly not demanded of the spiritual seeker; such a promiscuous and imbecile credulity would be not only unintellectual, but in the last degree unspiritual. At every moment of the spiritual life until one has got fully into the higher light, one has to be on one's guard and be able to distinguish spiritual truth from pseudo-spiritual imitations of it or substitutes for it set up by the mind and the vital desire. The power to distinguish between truths of the Divine and the lies of the Asura is a cardinal necessity for yoga.

The question is whether that can best be done by the negative and destructive method of doubt, which often kills falsehood but rejects truth too with the same impartial blow, or a more positive, helpful and luminously searching power can be found, which is not compelled by its inherent ignorance to meet truth and falsehood alike with the stiletto of doubt and the bludgeon of denial. An indiscriminateness of mental belief is not the teaching of spirituality or of yoga; the faith of which it speaks is not a crude mental belief but the fidelity of the soul to the guiding light within it, a fidelity which has to remain till the light leads it into knowledge.

On the Subject of Work in Auroville

Harini Sampathkumar, Tejas Joseph

Introduction

Auroville can be viewed from many different perspectives in relation to what it is aspiring to do – embodying human unity in diversity, creating an alternative way of life, building a city for an ideal society, living in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds/politics/nationalities, and so on. But all these perspectives manifest in the life of a group of people who have consciously chosen to live in this physical, geographical place called Auroville, in rural Tamil Nadu, India, by doing some work. The residents of Auroville today are fewer than 2,000. But Auroville, a city in the making for an intended 50,000 residents, employs people everyday from the surrounding villages. These employees numbered 3,709 in March 2000, and today may be as many as 5,000. The work of 2,000 people living in Auroville catering to the numerous perspectives of Auroville’s aspirations sustains not only their own lives, but those of an additional 5,000 families and their villages – this model by itself is not unique as can be seen in most industrial townships. But there are other differences, some of which are highlighted below.

While the subject of work is one of the most central issues to life in Auroville, as described by the Mother, it defines in great measure what it means to be a resident of Auroville. Work, in simple terms in any place, can be broadly termed as physical or mental effort or activity directed towards the production or accomplishment of something; a job, a trade, a profession, occupation or a means of livelihood. In Auroville this work is also (and primarily) seen as an offering or consecration of oneself to the Divine; but what does this mean at an everyday level that makes it different? Any work in the world can also be looked at as an offering to the Divine, without having to call it thus, but in Auroville when this takes the primary focus, and its interpretation is given by the Mother in *The Dream*, “*Work would not be there as the means of gaining one’s livelihood, it would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one’s capacities and possibilities, while*

doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side would provide for each one’s subsistence and for the field of his work,” there is a shift in focus from livelihood to capabilities and aspirations. It then becomes an area of expression of one’s own potential that allows the individual to grow and is a progressive movement. It is this definition of work that attracts many people to Auroville; for work here breaks the confining and limiting barriers of formal contractual, routine and choice-less tasks in market situations and social institutions. Yet this very freedom offered by this new definition of work in Auroville has its own challenges because it assumes that it is accompanied by its complementing counterpart – responsibility. If changes in personal lives are deemed necessary for growth, then how would this translate when we experiment with frequent changes in vocations and types of work as part of such personal changes? How can we create a dependable work force within the community that can be relied upon to run our essential services, from education, infrastructure, economy, etc? Is there a lack of responsibility (or self-discipline) or dislike of routine/repetitive tasks or need to provide livelihoods for the villages, that makes us dependent on an external workforce for building up the economy of Auroville through commercial or non-commercial activities? For this reason of dependability, there is obviously a preference, particularly in the commercial sector for employees as opposed to voluntary and selective inputs based on personal choice and ability. How then do we plan future developmental needs with people whose personal objectives and needs may not match with that of a larger collective vision of Auroville? This is one of our present dilemmas.

Working for the collective welfare while sustaining themselves with difficulty

When work is not connected to gaining livelihood, and should be the case of at least all those Aurovilians who are on a centrally funded maintenance doing work for the collective economy through production

and services of essentials (as contrasted to those producing non-essentials that once again go to subsidize the life of people producing essentials), and when these sustenance levels provided are below the needs because of rising market prices and expansion of the minimum needs basket itself that is accompanied by the development of any society, some of these people are forced into taking up economic activities and responsibilities outside the community (if not possible within the community) only in order to sustain themselves. The problem here is not so much taking up the economic activity as much as it is pursuing an interest dictated by money that was precisely what the role of work was not meant to be in Auroville.

Sustenance covered from elsewhere

On the other end of the spectrum we have people who prefer to be financially independent (through personal incomes) to be able to have the freedom to pursue any activity of their choice, whether it is directly for the welfare of the collective or preferring a life of discovery through arts, philosophy, etc. These people usually have to go out from time to time to Europe or to other developed economies to work for a while in a variety of occupations there. The money so earned helps to buy freedom from financial dependence on minimum levels of the central economy through tasks that may not be interesting. But this does not directly promote the growth of Auroville as an organism by itself, although it does economically, up to the point that it weans away a large number of people from the central economic responsibility of Auroville and also allows them the freedom to work in any place of their choice. But this going out of Auroville to earn and bring back money to live in Auroville, is not an easy process and has its own limitations, both at the individual and collective level.

Sustaining themselves and the rest without adequate appreciation by the collective

The commercial sector is another small group of Aurovilians who produce goods that bring in money that feeds the economy. On this small group of people rests a big responsibility that involves generating money that will feed not only almost 50% of the village workforce (in the year 2000), and all the social implications of that, besides being responsible for more than 50% of the expenses of the community (livelihood of people, services, infrastructure) according to the Central Fund Budget Report 2004-2005.

Paradoxically, these people with high societal responsibility are not deemed the 'favoured' citizens of this township, because although there is a joy in being able to direct/utilize/organise in such a way that there is a minimization of outlays and a maximization of results, it also could be seen as a power-dynamic.

Between the above-mentioned three large groups of people, are many others who are not in an either-or position of belonging entirely here or there, some doing more than one person's work at a time, some others falling under one group for a period of time and moving into another group later depending on personal circumstances, and so on.

All this speaks not only about the richness of the diversity, but also about the high level of intra-inequities as well as the difficulty in devising uniform rules or regulations that can be applicable to all.

- This schism between individual and collective needs is the start of many of our problems and difficulties, translating into work needs of the individual and collective. Our current definitions and approaches to the concept of work and the gap between individual and collective perceptions and requirements of 'work' varies widely.
- The carrying capacity of Auroville for providing support to the surrounding region directly through employment (and the rest) is another question for the sustainability of Auroville (not only economic, but at other levels). This can also be looked at from the point of how much wealth generation through work is fed back into Auroville and how much goes outside. What will be the trends in this area for the next years?
- Being a project in India and employing people from India, makes it accountable to the labour laws and rules of the country: how much freedom does this allow for doing work that enhances the potential of the individual and the collective?
- An Aurovilian's work commitment, based on a collective understanding of Mother's guidelines or individual interpretations of it or both in relation to work as a "*means to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities, doing at the same time service to the whole group,*" is sufficient to override the commonly understood predefined norms and guidelines that are bound by laws or rules. But on a day-to-day level, who decides whether there is any breach of responsibility and

what are the penalties thereof? And simultaneously, the work of most employees of Auroville is based on formal contractual agreements of labour, legalized through wages, salaries, and benefits from an employer towards an employee. These parallel realities that exist – do they create a conflict of interests for both the resident Aurovilian and the non-resident employee?

- And if in Auroville a new way of work is being attempted so that eventually it becomes a model for other places, then should these new ways of work also be tried when we work with employees from the villages?

A survey can be done on the work of every Aurovilian to create a database of human resources of Auroville, which is of a demographic nature: person, nationality, age, sex, educational and occupational background, current nature of work, early history of work before and after coming to Auroville, and job mobility. Such a human resource database can serve as a resource pool providing us with profiles of a potential work force, and also try to see how much work is actually based on individual or collective work need, as well as how much work is based on non-gaining of livelihoods. We can use it to match skill sets with job requirements for future recruitment needs.

Such a survey done on ‘work’ ought to bring out the various gaps of needs and wants related to work as it exists today in Auroville, and we could attempt to find out from people their own personal definitions and perceptions of work and try to match this and observe why it is at variance with the larger definition of work

in Auroville as given by the Mother. This would be more sociological in nature with personal interviews covering a stratified sample of the residents in order to address the five areas listed above to probe deeper and try to take stock of individual perceptions and interpretations of what work means – whether it is seen as collective action, integral yoga, inner quests, creative self-expression, personal growth, escape from inner conflicts, pursuit of livelihood or in other ways.

Such knowledge can assist us in framing more open-ended and innovative definitions and guidelines for work, which could also help in considering how future work forms and ethics are very likely to be influenced by improved technology and other global trends that will affect the economy of Auroville and its carrying capacity. Auroville could use this opportunity to move from its made-to-order economy into other areas that are more knowledge-based, in which it is equipped to be part of these emerging trends. This not only means up-gradation of the educational/skills training of its young residents, but also that of the surrounding village youth. This is likely to be Auroville’s challenge for the future – having the insights to identify our core values and the creativity to redesign them in new ways that matter.

Harini Sampathkumar, Indian, living in Auroville since 1994, and working at Life Education Centre – an outreach school of Auroville; and the Social Research Centre – a centre for socio-economic research studies on Auroville. Tejas Joseph, Indian, living in Auroville since 1995, with special interest and experience in sociology, and consultant to the Social Research Centre.

The first step on this long path is to consecrate all our works as a sacrifice to the Divine in us and in the world; this is an attitude of the mind and heart, not too difficult to initiate, but very difficult to make absolutely sincere and all-pervasive. The second step is to renounce attachment to the fruit of our works; for the only true, inevitable and utterly desirable fruit of sacrifice – the one thing needful – is the Divine Presence and the Divine Consciousness and Power in us, and if that is gained, all else will be added. This is a transformation of the egoistic will in our vital being, our desire-soul and desire-nature, and it is far more difficult than the other. The third step is to get rid of the central egoism and even the ego-sense of the worker. That is the most difficult transformation of all and it cannot be perfectly done if the first two steps have not been taken; but these first steps too cannot be completed unless the third comes in to crown the movement and, by the extinction of egoism, eradicates the very origin of desire. Only when the small ego-sense is rooted out from the nature can the seeker know his true person that stands above as a portion and power of the Divine and renounce all motive-force other than the will of the Divine Shakti.

Sri Aurobindo
The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 235

Eco-friendly Hygiene with EM Technology

Another Perspective on Hygiene

Dr. Lucas Dengel

When we think of hygiene, we think of getting rid of microbes. It is generally understood that hygiene equals the absence of microbes, or “germs”. This is further reinforced by advertisements for cleaning agents and pest control inputs, in journals, films, television and on hoardings. However, except for a very limited field of applications, this mind-set benefits no one except the manufacturers of the products, and these practices in hygiene are ecologically non-sustainable and add to environmental pollution. There is a historical background and logic to the prevailing attitude. And, there is a way out of the conventional approach.

Historical background of hygiene

In the mid-nineteenth century, a conscientious physician in Europe was obliged to warn his patients against all forms of surgery: More patients died from surgery due to iatrogenic – i.e. caused by the doctor – infections, than from the various diseases for which they were made to undergo surgery. The development of modern surgery could only take off when disinfectants were discovered by Semmelweis and by Lister, and phenol (carbolic acid) was introduced into mainstream medicine, by Lister. When a surgeon could kill all micro-organisms on the particular patch of skin through which his knife was to enter the patient’s body, surgery was rendered hygienically safe. Only in the late 1870’s did modern surgery start its rapid glorious course from operations on the appendix, hernia, gall-bladder, and stomach, later advancing to open heart surgery, organ transplantations, limb re-implantations, and endoscopic minimally invasive surgery. The discovery of microbe-killing substances – i.e. biocides – was indeed a breakthrough for surgery and medicine.

However, it is unwise and unhealthy to regard the annihilation of all microbes on the body surface as a step towards physical health and hygiene. It is harmful to make annihilation of all microbial life the base for hygiene in a household, and it is ecologically even more disastrous to pursue it in all human environments or

on the environment in general. The disaster has already set in. In the same way as agriculture has become a major polluter of our environment, “hygiene” too contributes heavily to the burden on the environment. Not only do we discharge excessive amounts of untreated liquid and solid wastes into the soil and water bodies, not only do we make rivers and lakes into open sewers unfit for fishing, household use, agricultural use and recreational use, we also undermine nature’s mechanisms for self-purification and revival by killing the very organisms that are responsible for the recycling of elements – though it should be noted that the scientific dispute regarding the ecological impact and usefulness of disinfectants is not conclusive.

Microbes are present everywhere on this planet, even up to depths of several kilometers within the earth, in rocks and volcanoes, and in thermal vents in the deep sea. Microbes, or unicellular organisms, were the first forms of life, appearing some 3.8 billion years ago, preparing the development of higher organisms and involved in the development of the globe’s atmosphere making it fit for higher life forms. Homo sapiens have evolved in the presence of and with the help of microbes. Microbes protect our skin, our orifices, our digestion; they are responsible for the development of our immune system, for manufacturing vitamins, and for the uptake of nutrients and calories from food. While our bodies contain a few trillions cells, it has been estimated that there are hundreds of trillions of microbes in our intestines. By number of cells, we are definitely much more microbial than human. While Louis Pasteur discovered the organisms of yeast responsible for the fermentation of alcoholic drinks, microbiology has originally progressed through discovery of disease-causing germs. Modern microbiology knows that in comparison to the number of both identified and unidentified microbial species, the number of pathogens is indeed negligible. Hence, it is scientifically appropriate to state that homo sapiens have to live along with and amongst microbes, and that efforts to eliminate microbes are based on

misconceptions of biology and health. It should come as a relief to realize that there is, besides biocidal warfare, another approach to hygiene and that alternative techniques and inputs are available. One of these technologies is EM technology, the use of “Effective Micro-organisms”.

EM technology

EM stands for “Effective Micro-organisms” and is a liquid culture with basically three genera of micro-organisms, i.e. lactobacilli (as in curd and Sauerkraut), yeast (as in idlis, bread, beer and wine), and photosynthetic or phototrophic bacteria (as in some pickles and cheeses, and in the roots of water hyacinths). These organisms are not modified by genetic engineering, they are safe and easy to handle and cause no harm even if accidentally ingested. EM has been produced in India since 2000 and, is being made available at affordable rates.

EM was developed by Professor Teruo Higa, an agriculturist from Okinawa, Japan. He had made the accidental and fortunate discovery that some symbiotic aerobic and anaerobic organisms jointly exhibit stronger and more interesting properties than the individual organisms on their own. In 1982 he went public with his product in Japan, and in 1989 in the international domain. At present, EM is manufactured in 50 countries and used in about 150.

EM was developed for the agricultural sector and has improved the quantity as well as the quality of various crops: taste, scent, colour intensity, and shelf-life. Surprisingly, the first users also gave reports on its power to counteract “rot, stink and rust”. If EM can control the fouling of organic debris, it will also control associated pest nuisance – flies, cockroaches – and spread of pathogens. It became obvious that EM can be made use of in composting and solid waste management, and in sewage and effluent treatment. And if EM is anti-oxidant or anticorrosive, it will find use in medical and technical contexts.

Thus EM is successfully being used in agriculture and horticulture, in animal husbandry and aquaculture (e.g. fish, shrimp), in composting and solid waste management, in sewage and effluent treatment, in environmental rehabilitation of wastelands and of eutrophied water bodies – and in the management of hygiene.

Practical steps for preparation and use

EM is made available as EM1 (in India as “Maple EM.1”) or so-called EM stock solution. This contains the microbes in a semi-dormant state (as spores) and has a shelf life of six months. EM1 needs to be activated or extended by mixing one volume part EM1 with one volume part of jaggery or molasses and with twenty volume parts of water. This mixture needs to be placed in an airtight container of food-grade plastic and kept undisturbed in a shaded place of stable temperature to ferment for 5-10 days. Because of gas development during fermentation, metal or glass containers cannot be used, and the pressure build-up in the container needs to be released once a day. After about one week, i.e. when the pH has dropped to below 4, activated EM solution (AEM) is ready for use. When it reaches this stage it should be used within one month. For agricultural use, AEM is diluted in the range of 1:500 to 1:1000, in wastewater treatment from 1:500 to 1: several thousands. Wherever its use has benefits, EM proves to be a cost-efficient input.

EM use in sanitation and hygiene

The hygienic need of our bodies and surrounding is not sterility, but cleanliness, freedom from unpleasant odors, and freedom from aggressively virulent microbes. It makes no sense to ever try to establish aseptic conditions on a floor – including a hospital floor – as every foot or shoe that walks over on the surface brings along millions of organisms. It is indeed an effect of aggressive hospital hygiene that the most virulent microbes have developed resistance against all antibiotics and disinfectants and now threaten the life of in-patients more than any microbe outside hospital surroundings.

If we are ready to accept an eco-friendly approach to hygiene, EM may be used to replace most cleaning agents. Instead of killing all life forms, the beneficial microbes of EM establish themselves against pathogens and create an environment in which pathogens are not fostered.

EM can be applied to toilets and in bathrooms to dispel unpleasant odors within seconds, as well as on floors and wall surfaces, on shelves and in cupboards. It controls the development of fungus and mouldy odors, and eliminates fly nuisance and cockroaches, i.e. major vectors of pathogens. In practice, AEM solution is diluted in the range 1:50 to 1:200 (for floor surfaces), and in toilet bowls and urinals it may be sprayed

undiluted. After about two weeks of regular use, even the desired shine on tiled surfaces will appear.

One precaution should be noted: surfaces (e.g. Cudappa stone) that suffer from acids such as lime juice or vinegar will also suffer from undiluted (very acid) AEM.

The following steps need to be taken to implement hygiene management with EM:

- Dispense with (lock away) all biocidal hygiene agents (disinfectants, chlorine) – do not mix the use of biocides with the use of a microbial agent. Hygiene personnel are conditioned to “smell” cleanliness – initially they will miss the scents generally added to conventional hygiene agents.
- Issue AEM in small amounts, i.e. enough for one day or for a few days.
- Purchase a household sprayer to apply AEM full strength in toilets and urinals, preferably late at night, and leave it on without flushing overnight.
- Wash all surfaces (toilet bowls, urinals, sinks, floors, walls) with AEM diluted in water 1:200 (e.g. 50 ml in 10 litres of water), as frequently as it was being done with other cleaning agents.
- For quick removal of stains use detergents or soaps.
- Use AEM in the last floor wash to allow the (EM) microbes to establish themselves.

It should be noted that all long-term and downstream effects will be beneficial, too: wastewater becomes inoculated with EM, leading to improved wastewater treatment and thereby reducing the burden on any treatment plant and on the environment, thus facilitating the re-use of wastewater after treatment.

EM in action

From 2001 to 2004 anecdotal evidence was collected on the benefits of EM use in household hygiene. For example, a sewer manhole – a typical site of infestation with cockroaches and other crawling creatures – had become absolutely pest-free within two weeks of pouring a capful of AEM down the drain of the household kitchen sink the last thing every night. Another household could dispense with the application of toxic pesticides by introducing EM as the only cleaning agent. While neighbouring households continue to use pesticides regularly and yet continue

to sweep out large numbers of dead cockroaches after each measure of “pest control”, the EM-using household encounters cockroaches rarely and lives without biocides.

Three days after the tsunami of December 2004, EM technology was introduced to health officials in the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu, and subsequently was used to control foul odors and flies and spread of diseases. It was found to be as effective as the conventional agent, chlorine.

Early in 2006 EM was introduced into the public toilets of the out-patient department of a large Pondicherry hospital. Its effects are being monitored with microbiological tests, and it is hoped that test results will be available later in the year.

Conclusion

It has become obvious that with the use of EM technology hygiene, composting, gardening, and wastewater treatment become eco-friendly practices. EM input makes it possible to dispense with environmentally burdening household agents, and helps to close the natural ecological loops, transforming liquid and solid wastes into resources and facilitating quick and easy on-site re-use of treated and processed waste materials.

More information

More information is available from: AuroAnnam, AuroAnnam Farm, Auroville - 605 101, Tamilnadu, tel.: 0413-2623391 and 262204, e-mail: auroannam@auroville.org.in, website: www.auroville.com/auroannam. AuroAnnam, with funding support from UNICEF, has produced a film about the use and benefits of EM in hygiene, sanitation and solid waste management in Tamil and English. It is available as VCD and DVD. A booklet on the same subject is going to be available soon.

Lucas visited Auroville for the first time in 1973, subsequently came for several visits and stayed for five years. After having received education as a general physician, he settled in Auroville in 1988 and worked for ten years at the Auroville Health Centre. Challenged by issues of public hygiene, management of solid waste and wastewater, and of farming, he took up environmental work in the late nineties. In 2000 he founded the company AuroAnnam, which runs a farm, trades in organic food items, and promotes EM technology. Lucas is also engaged in the promotion of ecological sanitation and decentralized wastewater treatment.

Sri Aurobindo and the Crisis of Contemporary Culture

Sachidananda Mohanty

Sri Aurobindo's place in the intellectual history of modern India is yet to be determined. The relevance of his cultural and political vision remains unassessed. His critics oppose him by not reading his vast body of writings; and his followers have made a cult out of him. The sage of Pondicherry is more than a poet and a mystic philosopher. In this essay, I shall try and show the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's political vision to the crisis of contemporary culture.

There are six major areas where we see the crisis of contemporary culture:

1. The tyranny of the State Idea.
2. The crisis of the Nation State.
3. The conflict over language and ethnicity.
4. The challenges of the emerging internationalism.
5. The problem of identity politics in a multicultural society
6. The question of self-determination.

Each of these is related to the other, and yet separately, each poses a challenge to our thinking. What insights does Sri Aurobindo offer for the resolution of these crises? The threat of a looming disaster is what seems to define the human condition today. Sri Aurobindo captures aptly this crisis in *The Life Divine*:

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way... Man has created a system of civilization, which has become too big for his limited mental capacity... a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites.¹

What, then are the manifestations of this evolutionary crisis in the contemporary world? If we define culture

as the entire gamut of our life, and not just a creative expression of a select elite, then we will notice the crisis of contemporary culture in the six areas outlined.

II

If we look at the past century, we are bound to notice that amidst all the upheavals that mankind has experienced so far, such as the horror of the two World Wars, the Cold War and beyond, there has been a continued tyranny of the State in various forms and political guises: democratic or totalitarian. What accounts for the persistence of this State idea? What is this entity called the State that a chosen few can manipulate, and mete out incredible cruelties to entire populations that shock our collective conscience? What is the alternative to this rapacious State? Consider Sri Aurobindo's analysis in his work entitled *The Ideal of Human Unity*:

What, after all, is this State idea, this idea of the organized community to which the individual has to be immolated? Theoretically, it is the subordination of the individual to the good of all that is demanded; practically, it is his subordination to a collective egoism, political, military, economic, which seeks to satisfy certain collective aims and ambitions shaped and imposed on the great mass of the individuals by a smaller or larger number of ruling persons who are supposed in some way to represent the community. It is immaterial whether these belong to a governing class or emerge in modern States from the mass partly by force of character, but much more by force of circumstances; nor does it make any essential difference that their aims and ideals are nowadays imposed more by the hypnotism of verbal persuasion than by overt and actual force. In either case, there is no guarantee that this ruling class or ruling body represents the best mind of the nation or its noblest aims or its highest instinctsⁱⁱ.

Given the unfolding of cataclysmic events following the rise of fascism and totalitarianism soon after Sri Aurobindo wrote *The Ideal of Human Unity* in 1918, his views turned out to be prophetic. He added the postscript chapter in 1949 before he left his body in December 1950. Nor did his diagnosis become obsolete in the context of the experiments that have taken place in the socialistic or liberal democracies, in Stalin's Russia or the America of George W. Bush, as Noam Chomsky rightly points out. The embroilment of the State in all aspects of the citizen's life is a ubiquitous feature of late capitalism. As Sri Aurobindo argues, such aberrations occur because our understanding of the relationship between the individual self and collective entities is deeply flawed. It is based on shallow principles, founded on exigencies and expediencies rather than resting on deeper psychological factors. This is noticed in other areas of contemporary crisis as well. We must therefore take a look at some of these domains, before attempting any answers in the light of Sri Aurobindo's ideas.

III

To a critical observer of present culture, nothing is more troubling than the ongoing problem of self-determination, the seemingly inevitable conflict and antagonism ensuing from such drives in the human being. As historian Einslee Embree points out, there is a ceaseless conflict today between the nation and groups of people. From Kashmir to Jaffna, Chechnya to Sudan we witness a clash among groups of citizenry, their opposition to the sovereign states they reside in. What then is self-determination, the desire for individuals and groups to decide their destiny? Sri Aurobindo wrote a chapter called "Self Determination" in his book named *War and Self Determination* containing a series of essays that first appeared in the philosophical quarterly called *Arya* between 1916 and 1920. The chapter concerned is to be seen along with another called "Diversity in Oneness," as part of another series that appeared between September 1915 and July 1918, resulting in a book published in 1919 named *The Ideal of Human Unity*. Here we can clearly see Sri Aurobindo's theorization of the concept of self-determination.

Clearly, from Woodrow Wilson to the Vietnamese nationalist Ho Chi Minh to the present era, we seem to have come a long way. But how does the individual exercise his/her freedom in order to decide his/her destiny? As Sri Aurobindo says:

The principle of self-determination really means that within every living human creature, man, woman and child, and equally within every distinct human collectivity, grown, half developed and adult, there is a self, a being, which has the right to grow in its own way, to find itself, to make its life a full and a satisfied instrument and image of its being. This is the first principle which must contain and are top all others, the rest is a question of conditions, means, expedients, accommodations, opportunities, capacities, limitations, none of which must be allowed to abrogate the sovereignty of the first essential principleⁱⁱⁱ.

Similarly, we see that the idea of liberty is often pitted against the idea of law. Such concepts of law may impose desired patterns of social and professional behavior among recalcitrant members of various caste or gender groups among the proletariats or other subordinate sections of society by dominant sections. As Sri Aurobindo notes in a comical vein:

We see a similar confusion of ideas in the claim of European statesmen to train Asiatic or African peoples to liberty, which means in fact to teach them in the beginning liberty in the school of subjugation and afterwards to compel them to each stage in the progress of a mechanical self government to satisfy the tests and notions imposed on them by a being and consciousness instead of developing freely a type and law of their owniⁱⁱ.

Sri Aurobindo concludes that the right approach would be to start the "self-determination of the free individual within the free collectivity in which he lives", "because so only can we be sure of a healthy growth of freedom and because too the unity to be arrived at is that of individuals growing freely towards perfection and not of human machines working in regulated unison or of souls suppressed, mutilated and cut into one or more fixed geometrical patterns."

The problem of self-determination in the contemporary world is also seen in the form of what is known as identity politics. Democratic societies in the contemporary world wedded to pluralistic or multicultural ideals promote various identity formations, based on gender, caste, class and race.

In the U.S. there is an attempt to move from the ideals of the melting pot to those of the salad bowl or the mosaic in the form of hyphenated identities such as the Hispanic, Native American, Korean, South Asian or Japanese American. Similarly, in recent times Indian polity has witnessed caste based mobilization and identity formation based on different language-groups and ethnic communities. While all these may fulfill legitimate democratic aspirations, they also lead frequently to mutual conflicts, fractured polity and civic strife.

Opposition based on linguistic and ethnic factors equally manifests in the cultural domain in academia in the form of what is known today as “culture wars.” In higher education in the West or the East, there is an increasing and legitimate demand today by marginalized groups for greater literary-cultural space in terms of the texts to be read in the classroom. New anthologies such as the “Heath” and “Norton” based on new scholarship by cultural critics, and feminists have revealed many of our blind spots. Here again, we are still groping as to how the various groups and approaches are to negotiate with each other on equal footing in terms of shared literary-cultural space.

Identity politics in the domain of caste also engages the attention of Sri Aurobindo in his earlier writings. In his essay entitled “*The Unhindu Spirit of Caste Rigidity*,” written on 20 September 1907. This is what he had to say:

The caste system was once productive of good, and as a fact has been a necessary phase of human progress through which all the civilizations of the world have had to pass. The autocratic form of Government has similarly had its use in the development of the world’s polity, for there was certainly a time when it was the only kind of political organization that made the preservation of society possible. The Nationalist does not quarrel with the past, but individual or class autocracy into the autocracy, self-rule or Swaraj, of

the nation of the fixed, hereditary, anti-democratic caste-organization into the public self-adapting, democratic distribution of function at which socialism aims. In the present absolutism in politics and the present narrow caste-organization in society he finds a negation of that equality which his religion enjoins. Both must be transformed. The historic problem that the present attitude of Indian Nationalism at once brings to the mind, as to how a caste-governed society could co-exist with a democratic religion and philosophy, we do not propose to consider here today. We only point out that Indian Nationalism must by its inherent tendencies move towards the removal of unreasoning and arbitrary distinctions and inequalities. Ah! He will say, this is exactly what we Englishmen have been telling you all these years. You must get rid of your caste before you can have democracy. There is just a little flaw in this advice of the Anglo-Indian monitors, it puts the cart before the horse, and that is the reason why we have always refused to act upon it.^v

The problem of multiculturalism also extends to the domain of the emerging international order. We see facets of this order in the form of what has come to be known as globalization thanks to the rise of the unipolar world. We witness the leveling of all differences, in the form of economic and cultural homogenization. National sovereignty resting on the claims of groups of nations to decide their own destinies unfortunately is giving away to unilateralism by international political forces and agencies. In this way internationalism militates against national and regional aspirations and becomes anti-democratic.

Assuredly, there is recognition of the problem in all these areas by leading cultural critics and political theorists today. Yet our efforts seem to move inexorably in a pendulum like manner, from optimism to despair. It is here that, we may consider the answer Sri Aurobindo provides. As he writes insightfully:

The right idea of self-determination makes a clear sweep of these confusions. It makes it clear that liberty should proceed by the development of the law of ones own being determined from within, evolving out of oneself and not determined from outside by the idea and will of another. These remain the problem of relations, of the individual and

collective self-determination and of the interactions of the self-determination of one on the self-determination of another. That cannot be finally settled by any mechanical solution, but only by the discovery of some meeting place of the law of our self-determination with the common law of mutuality, where they began to become one. It signifies in fact the discovery of an inner and larger self other than the mere ego, in which our individual self-fulfillment no longer separates us from others but at each stage of our growth calls for an increasing unity^v.

IV

To sum up: I have attempted to recognize some of the outstanding problems of contemporary society and culture. In the areas delineated such as identity politics, the tyranny of the State Idea, the crisis of the Nation State, the emergent international order, and the question

of self-determination, we find legitimate human aspirations for greater diversity but we seem to lack a principle for greater cohesion. Sri Aurobindo suggests that such a principle could in fact rest on deeper psychological and spiritual factors that transcend the human ego. That is where true mutuality would be possible. His philosophy of creative evolution gives us assurance of such a vision. We can retrieve from this vision, insights for the right governance of our individual and collective life. Ultimately, that remains both a hope and a challenge to our current thinking.

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References:

² Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1939; rpt 2004 p. 1092.

ⁱⁱ *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1919; rpt, 1998, p. 26

ⁱⁱⁱ *War and Self-Determination*, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1920: rpt, 1962, pp. 838-39

^{iv} *Ibid*, p.843.

^v *On Nationalism*, Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1965: rpt 1996 ,p. 229.

^{vi} *War and Self-Determination*, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1920: rpt, 1962, p. 843.

Today the ideal of human unity is more or less vaguely making its way to the front of our consciousness. The emergence of an ideal in human thought is always the sign of an intention in Nature, but not always of an intention to accomplish; sometimes it indicates only an attempt which is predestined to temporary failure.... Still the ideal, having once made its way to the front of thought, must certainly be attempted, and this ideal of human unity is likely to figure largely among the determining forces of the future; for the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it, especially the scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem now no more than the provinces of a single country.

But this very commodity of the material circumstances may bring about the failure of the ideal; for when material circumstances favour a great change, but the heart and mind of the race are not really ready—especially the heart—failure may be predicted, unless indeed men are wise in time and accept the inner change along with the external readjustment. But at present the human intellect has been so much mechanised by physical Science that it is likely to attempt the revolution it is beginning to envisage principally or solely through mechanical means, through social and political adjustments. Now it is not by social and political devices, or at any rate not by these chiefly or only, that the unity of the human race can be enduringly or fruitfully accomplished.

It must be remembered that a greater social or political unity is not necessarily a boon in itself; it is only worth pursuing in so far as it provides a means and a framework for a better, richer, more happy and puissant individual and collective life. But hitherto the experience of mankind has not favoured the view that huge aggregations, closely united and strictly organised, are favourable to a rich and puissant human life. It would seem rather that collective life is more at ease with itself, more genial, varied, fruitful when it can concentrate itself in small spaces and simpler organisms.

Sri Aurobindo
The Human Cycle, pp. 262-263

The Problem of Woman

The Mother

I wish to speak to you about the problem of woman, a problem as old as mankind in appearance, but infinitely older in origin. For if we want to find the law that governs and solves it, we must go back to the origin of the universe, even beyond the creation.

Some of the most ancient traditions, perhaps even the most ancient, ascribed the cause of the creation of the universe to the will of a Supreme Absolute to manifest by his own self-objectification; and the first act of this objectification was said to be the emanation of the creative Consciousness. Now, these ancient traditions usually speak of the Absolute in the masculine gender and of the Consciousness in the feminine, thus making this primordial gesture the origin of the differentiation between man and woman and at the same time giving a kind of priority to the masculine over the feminine. In fact, although they are one, identical and coexistent before the manifestation, the masculine took the original decision and emanated the feminine to carry it out, which amounts to saying that while there is no creation without the feminine, neither is there any feminine manifestation without the previous decision of the masculine.

We could certainly ask whether this explanation is not a little too human. But, to tell the truth, all the explanations that men can give must always necessarily be human, at least in their formulation. For, in their spiritual ascent towards the Unknowable and Unthinkable, certain exceptional individuals have been able to transcend human nature and identify themselves with the object of their seeking in a sublime and, in a way, unformulable experience. But as soon as they sought to share the benefit of their discovery with others, they had to formulate it, and in order to be comprehensible their formula had, of necessity, to be human and symbolic.

We could also ask whether these experiences and their disclosure are responsible for the sense of superiority which man nearly always feels towards woman, or whether, on the contrary, it is this

widespread sense of superiority that is responsible for the form given to the experiences....

In any case, the indisputable fact remains: man feels superior and wants to dominate, woman feels oppressed and revolts, openly or secretly; and the eternal quarrel between the sexes is perpetuated from age to age, identical in essence, innumerable in its forms and hues.

Of course man throws the whole blame on woman, just as woman throws the entire blame on man. In truth the blame should be equally distributed between the two and neither can boast of being superior to the other. Moreover, until this notion of superiority and inferiority is eliminated, nothing and no one can put an end to the misunderstanding that divides the human species into two opposite camps, and the problem will not be solved.

So many things have been said and written on this problem, it has been approached from so many angles, that a whole volume would not be enough to expound all its aspects. Generally speaking, the theories are excellent, or, in any case, all have their own virtues; but the practice has proved less successful and I do not know whether from the point of view of realisation we have made any headway since the Stone Age. For in their mutual relationships, man and woman are at once rather despotic masters and somewhat pitiable slaves to each other.

Yes, slaves; for so long as one has desires, preferences and attachments, one is a slave of these things and of the people on whom one is dependent for their satisfaction.

Thus woman is enslaved to man because of the attraction she feels for the male and his strength, because of the desire for a home and the security it brings, and lastly because of the attachment to motherhood. Man too on his side is enslaved to woman, because of his possessiveness, his thirst for power and domination, because of his desire for sexual

relations and because of his attachment to the little comforts and conveniences of married life.

That is why no law can liberate women unless they liberate themselves; likewise, men too, in spite of all their habits of domination, will cease to be slaves only when they have freed themselves from all inner enslavement.

And this state of veiled struggle, often unavowed but always present in the subconscious even in the best cases, seems unavoidable, unless human beings rise above their ordinary consciousness to identify themselves with the perfect consciousness and unite with the Supreme Reality. For as soon as one attains this higher consciousness one realises that the difference between man and woman reduces itself to a purely physical difference.

As a matter of fact, there may have been on earth in the beginning a pure masculine type and a pure feminine type, each with its own special and clearly differentiated characteristics; but in course of time, the inevitable mixture, heredity, all the sons that looked like their mothers, all the daughters that looked like their fathers, social progress, similar occupations – all this has made it impossible today to discover one of these pure types: all men are feminine in many respects and all women are masculine in many traits, especially in modern societies. But unfortunately, because of the physical appearance, the habit of quarrelling is perpetuated, perhaps even aggravated by a spirit of rivalry.

In their best moments, both man and woman can forget their difference of sex, but it reappears at the slightest provocation; the woman feels she is a woman, the man knows he is a man and the quarrel is revived indefinitely in one form or another, open or veiled, and perhaps all the more bitter the less it is admitted. And one wonders whether it will not be so until there are no longer any men or women, but living souls expressing their identical origin in sexless bodies.

For one dreams of a world in which all these oppositions will at last disappear and where a being will be able to live and prosper who will be the harmonious synthesis of all that is best in the human race, uniting conception and execution, vision and creation in one single consciousness and action.

Until such a happy and radical solution is reached, India remains, on this point as on many others, the

land of violent and conflicting contrasts, which can nevertheless be resolved by a very wide and comprehensive synthesis.

Indeed, is it not in India that we find the most intense adoration, the most complete veneration of the Supreme Mother, creatrix of the universe, conqueror of all enemies, mother of all the gods and all the worlds, dispenser of all boons?

And is it not in India too that we find the most radical condemnation, the uttermost contempt for the feminine principle, Prakriti, Maya, corrupting illusion, cause of every fall and every misery, nature that deceives and defiles and lures away from the Divine?

The whole life of India is shot through with this contradiction; she suffers from it in both mind and heart. Everywhere feminine deities are erected on her altars; the children of India await salvation and liberation from their Mother Durga. And yet is it not one of her children who said that the Avatar would never incarnate in the body of a woman, because no rightminded Hindu would recognise him! Fortunately, the Divine is not affected by such a narrow sectarian spirit or moved by such petty considerations. And when it pleases him to manifest in a terrestrial body, he cares very little whether or not he is recognised by men. Besides, in all his incarnations, he seems always to have preferred children and simple hearts to the learned.

In any case, until the manifestation of a new conception and consciousness compels Nature to create a new species which would no longer have to yield to the necessity of animal procreation and thus be under the obligation of dividing into two complementary sexes, the best that can be done for the progress of the present human race is to treat both sexes on a footing of perfect equality, to give them the same education and training and to teach them to find, through a constant contact with a Divine Reality that is above all sexual differentiation, the source of all possibilities and harmonies.

And it may be that India, the land of contrasts, will also be the land of new realisations, even as she was the cradle of their conception.

*On Education,
Collected Works of the Mother, vol. 12*