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**Workshop “Spiritualities and identities in the dialogue of civilizations”
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Swamiji has made my task very light. I believe in one thing. When I think about religion as an institution, I find that it is equal to the corporate sector which survives on consumer-numbers. The more numbers I have in my shop, the more profit I make. If I make a popular advertisement, that my product is better than the other one's, then I draw more numbers. I can make a propaganda that by going to the other shop you lose and by being with me you gain, by giving subsidies. This is what happens in any corporate sector. And I simply equate that to any institutional religion. So, this is where we need to acquire and learn to have a different faith.

For me, faith is in the people, in the person who is equal to His Image, to God's image. And that is what I learned in all my philosophy, in my theology and in my sociology. That you and God, that I and the Creator can never be separated. And this is where I need to discover myself, within myself, that He is in me and I in him. Or in it, or in her, where there is no gender, no other value than oneself.

Recently, in October, I think, we had the same workshop – “Dialogue of Civilization and Development of Peoples” – in Beirut, Lebanon. Well, then I was thinking. My friends, if we are here today, it is not because of anything else except that, first and primarily, we are human persons. Because of our identity as human persons.

That is the primary identity. And after being identified as humans, we think of the second one: in what gender are we? Male or female? And the third one, where we come to say: in what colour are we? What is our stature? Are we short, tall, white or brown, green or yellow? The fourth one we know of is: the language we speak. What means of communication do we use? Is it English, Tamil or French? But, before that, we will have already spoken. By the first speech, we identified ourselves as human persons.

The fifth one: what kind of dress are we wearing? What are our habits? Do we dress like Swamiji or in T-shirts, as some of you are wearing now, or in skirts...? The sixth one is economy. Are you rich or do you look like a rich person? Do I look hungry or well-fed?

And the last one is religion.

Can we know each other's religion or faith? We never ask to identify each other first, by the religion we belong to. But, today, the last one has become the first. We have started identifying each other, grouping each other into religious fundamentalism. This is what it leads to: the disaster in human unity. This has already been used in history. Take any kind of war. War has been designed by the majority, making the minority a scapegoat of human misery. Hitler needed to use the Jewish minority as scapegoat, to answer the misery of the German majority. The same thing with capitalism; it washes itself with the minority having violence on their own society. Take Iraq. The worst historical truth is 11 September, where religion was made a terrorist religion. The repercussion being that, because a powerful country said it, our neighbour, who was a human person next to us, has suddenly become a terrorist.

So, with this, belief and spirituality say that we, as human persons, have to build our own world. Because the world is ours. Luckily, matter is one, one globe. We live in artificial

territories, in fear of the other. Because the other might grab what we have ourselves grabbed. Being born in India, in Italy, France or any other country is only an accident. I didn't choose to be born in India. Not one of you chose to be born in your country. But, luckily, we are in one world. And that is enough for us to have a social globalisation. We are led to see and spread ourselves to identify who are the small people, the small people who are oppressed, the small people who are deprived, the small people who are untouchables. Small people. The majority who have been totally, socially, economically, politically and culturally alienated from the socio-economic political livelihood resources.

This is the group that we got to identify in the village where we live, in the district called Karur, in the Tamil Nadu state. In that district, we started to identify ourselves with the most oppressed. The preferential option, people of concern: Dalit, women, rural poor and children. So, 24 years ago, we started to live with them, as "educated" people hoping that we knew everything of society; we wanted to learn from them. And to learn from them, we went to live with them. So, by living and learning, we discovered the reasons of poverty, of oppression and the possibilities within the community for overcoming oppression and poverty. So, we attempted dialogue, a dialogue not only of speaking with them but of taking their work as our way of life, of learning from what they knew, sharing what we knew. So 24 years ago, this dialogue has built up.

Today it has resulted in a women-movement called SWATE which has about 12,000 members. In the past, a woman was not even allowed in a bank, because she was not credible. Today, the same woman is owner of 18 million rupees. As Swamiji said, collectively we are rich. We are usually small, individually; one person has about 1000 rupees. But, collectively, 18 million is not small money, in the Indian context. Women have control over the produce in the region, like millets, over distribution of food grains and small cooperatives, challenging male domination. We are equal in contributing to the betterment of the family. And together, as male and female in the family, we have the responsibility to send our children to school. Together, we have a shared responsibility to fight for our welfare, to fight for livelihood rights. And suddenly, we have these women being organized as SWATE. It is a big challenge to men, who are limping behind them, to get strength from women...So, today, in the Tamil Nadu state alone, they have 150 000 members challenging the liquor policy, demanding equal budget share and the change of policies in favour of women. And they are also locally linked up with the National Alliance of Women's Organizations (NAWO) and, internationally, with the World March of Women. This is something. An individual woman in a family who has become aware of herself, in dialogue within herself. Now, she is able to link with the Global Women's March.

The strength of this action, the realization of this particular reality did not happen by focusing on religion as an institution. It focused on our identity as human persons, on identifying ourselves with the poor majority and committing ourselves to believing that it is possible. It is really possible that the small people, with conscious and collective numbers, can create another world, and break the myth that the small cannot win. The small can only win because the world is ours.