



# RABINDRATNATH TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO COMPARATIVE STUDY ON HUMANISM: A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

Tagore and Aurobindo advocates for the harmonious blending of the material and spiritual components of life, fostering uniqueness within the context of global brotherhood and dignity of man. Rabindranath Tagore`s entire nobility and greatness has been related to his humanism which in turn is central to everything he did and thought throughout his life. Sri Aurobindo`s humanism is a continuous process of evolution towards higher consciousness. His integrated yoga theory focused on realising one's inherent divinity and transcending the ego, resulting in a communal transformation of humanity. Despite their disagreements, Tagore and Aurobindo shared a fundamental belief in each individual's dignity and potential, advocating for a comprehensive view of human existence that included both the material and spiritual realms. Their teachings continue to inspire those seeking the truth and a better world, providing significant insights into the nature of human identity, purpose, and potential.

**Keywords:** Humanism, Spiritual, Cosmos, materialistic, Dignity, Consciousness, Integrated, Evolution, Supermind.

Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo Ghose were the most prominent Indian philosophers of their time. Both were Vedantic who explored almost every ancient school of philosophy to discover of what is the relevant and valuable for present and future generations. Their humanistic ideas originated in the popular struggle against foreign domination, economic exploitation, social evils, caste, untouchability, sati, child marriage, slavery and forced work. The goal of both is to create such a world, where there is no exploitation, where there is goodwill in the person and the goal of man is to achieve full development of man. But there is a difference in the philosophical beliefs of both. They both are the backbone of Indian contemporary philosophy. Tagore and Aurobindo have brought a new dimension to Indian philosophy with fusion of Western philosophy. They made a significant contribution to the social, political, and educational philosophy in modern India. They established a new look to their philosophy in the scientific age which brought a great revolution in Indian philosophy. They kept the spirituality stable even in the eloquence of the materialistic age.

Tagore found himself buoyed up by the teachings of the Upanishads. In one of his early hymns, inspired by the Upanishads, he spoke of his aspiration. "Its aspect as the sacred syllable Om, it's the eternal and spiritual principal that permeates the universe".<sup>1</sup> The ascetical humanism of the Upanishads forms the core of Tagore's humanist credo. Indeed, Tagore's inter petition of India's spirit and tradition testifies to his preference for the humanistic and liberal elements in it. He says, "India has a spirit and own tradition, which has survived through all political upheavals. This spirit and tradition do not obey the mandates of the holy books and are little influenced by scholars. In fact, neither has been incorporated in theological or social code and its roots are deep in the heart of hearts of the masses themselves; from the first they have set themselves against restrictions and dogmas and its prophet came from the commonest of the common people".<sup>2</sup> This tradition he found affinity with that stormy petrel of medieval Indian humanism, Kabir, with whom he shared, "His willing acceptance of the here and now, hatred of superstition, hypocrisy and oppression".<sup>3</sup>

Sri Aurobindo is also like a Rabindranath Tagore but their thoughts and path of enlightenment are different and the ultimate goal was attainment of salvation. He had developed and elaborated system synthesizing fundamental ideas drive from various western and Indian sources. He introduced new terminology for traditional concepts. Sri Aurobindo tried to blend traditional spiritual liberation with western notion of material progress and the light of the theory of evolution. His ultimate aim was to transform human life into the life divine. Aurobindo was the theist, the absolutist and the mystics. Sri Aurobindo put forward holistic comprehensive account of reality, in which he integrated all form of existent matter, life, mind, and supermind into completely unified.

The people of all the nations were highly influenced by their ideas. They looked alike in their thoughts, but were completely different. Both of them witnessed the period of renaissance when science grew tremendously, and contributed significantly in the all around development of man. It influenced their

insightful thinking; and they were western in their rationalistic and analytic approach, and accepted the role of rationality and importance of scientific methods for economic development.

## **Rabindranath Tagore**

Humanism is reflected in his philosophy when he points out the divinity in man. According to Tagore religion is very basis of life and it is the way to search the deeper truth of life and human existence. In the book *The Religion of Man* Tagore expresses, "Religion inevitably concentrate itself on humanity, which illumines over reason, inspires our wisdom, stimulates our love, and claims our intelligent service. The Religion of Man is the religion of all humanity."<sup>4</sup> Through his religion of humanity man can cross is narrow boundary of space and time. Discarding his narrow covering of humanity, he realizes the ideal man within himself to the knowledge activity and love. Main is the right object of love and worship. Truth is the basis of great religion. Tagore rejects the view that truth is independent of humility. Tagore says that truth, which is the one with the universal being, must essentially be human, otherwise whatever we individuals realizes as the truth can never be called truth. It is meaningless to search for God in the temples rather he can be found in the common man. For him it is a more logical to make contact with God through man. He believes that God manifested himself among the poor and deprived. Tagore's philosophy on humanism is that God can be served by serving man especially the poor. Tagore repudiates narrow, dogmatic, exclusive views on religion.

Man's life is an eternal search of the absolute man. Man reaches the absolute man within himself. Tagore calls this absolute man *Manav Brahma*. *Manav Brahma* is the highest stage of humanity. When man realizes *Manav Brahma* and then there is no difference between man and *Brahma*. *Manav Brahma* can be realized through the social action in the spirit of love. It can never be attained in isolation. Man has the germ of morality. Due to this germ can rises to a highest level. This new step of life is called by Tagore the second birth. Tagore says, "This is the world of man's second birth, the extra natural world dualism of the animal life and the moral makes us conscious of our personality"<sup>5</sup> A moral man has the true knowledge of right and wrong, good and evil. It inspires man to elevate himself from the word of nature to the world of humanity. Moral life of man is a life where man ascends from selfishness to selflessness. The moral man desires to work for the betterment of his others fellow beings. Tagore's concept of good life consists on the realization that to live the life of goodness is to live the life of all.

Tagore's concept of man personality is finding its fruition through the realization of the feeling of intimacy with nature. From his childhood days, he is fascinated by the splendor of nature the rising of the sun, the chirping of the birds and the whistling of the wind through the trees. He is of the opinion that nature does not lose herself but reveals its true color to a person's self, having its own eternal bindings with human nature. Nature is not alien but is essentially related to man. In the vastness of nature, we are not unknown strangers; we are her kith and kin. He also compares the beautiful nature with our mother. Nature helps man to develop his personality in as much as man helps nature to reveal its beauty. Man grows along with nature in so far as

he can identify himself with nature and makes it his messenger of communication. With the help of nature man creates his own nature, creates beauty, and creates art. In his creativity and self-expression, man becomes conscious of the abundance, his ability to go beyond his physical finitude and through creation of art, strives to send his communication to the Supreme Person who reveals himself to him.

There is always a correlation between the extent of receiving from the nature and separating from the ego. There is now a deepening of self-knowledge, and self-development at the higher level of relatedness to nature is communion or unity. Tagore thinks that the unity of man and nature has its source in the One or the Absolute. The spirit and nature are the twin aspects of the Absolute. It is in man's consciousness of a deeper unity with nature, with the universe, and finally with the Supreme Person who has created this universe for man. Communion as a higher mode of relationship between man and nature is characterized by inwardness and depth. The depth has an educating purpose. Nature teaches man the way we teach others. The communion as a matter under discussion is the experience of joy, freedom and love.

In this paper, there is the 'inter-personal relationship' of the 'I' and 'Thou' relationship in Tagore's humanistic thoughts. The assertion of the primordial relationship is the essence of Tagore's humanism and he calls his humanism the Religion of Man. But the term, 'Religion' does not suggest that man is under the control of an infinite spiritual being like God. The function of religion is to bring the individual into concord in reason, in love, indeed with the Supreme Man, the Universal being. The reality of the Supreme Person is as much dependent upon the personal being as the latter is dependent upon the former. So, God is also a personal being like man. Tagore believed that the state of realize our relationship with all through the union with the divine is the ultimate end and fulfillment of humanity. Therefore, the spirit of One in God has the many for the realization of the unity and the truth behind this spiritual union is love. He thinks that man is above all a lover, his freedom and fulfillment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension. By this power of comprehension, this permeation of his being, he is united with the all-pervading spirit. Through love, human society is for the best expression of man, and that expression, according to its perfection, leads him to the full realization of the divine in humanity. The moral development lies in man's growth to his unselfish and true self through good and desirable acts. In his moral life, man has the sense of obligation and his freedom at the same time. Morality relates to conduct which essentially is a function of our will. Morality cannot be reduced to mere good conduct. It is a way of attaining to what one ought to be through right or good doing. Morality consists in being good through good action. Such action is possible through discrimination between the desired and the desirable. Selfishness or egoism is normally desired, but it is not desirable because it hinders the proper development of social relationship and the growth of the true self of man.

Tagore equates love with truth and truth with beauty. He says that. "It is only when one can detaches from the narrow boundaries of selfishness, can one have a true vision of the beauty, which is omnipresent and realize its everlasting relation with truth".<sup>6</sup> This is the ultimate object of our existence, that we must ever know that beauty is truth and truth is beauty; we must realize the whole world is in love, for love it gives

birth, sustains it, and takes it back to the bosom. Tagore thinks that there is no other concept of truth, except human truth. The entire universe is linked up with us, and it indicates that the truth of the universe is the human truth. Tagore believes that truth and beauty are also dependent upon man. Beauty is in the ideal of perfect harmony which is in the Universal Being. Truth is the perfect comprehension of the Universal Mind. We, individuals approach it through our accumulated experience and through our illumined consciousness.

Tagore believes in the Gita's concept of freedom; true freedom is not the freedom from action but freedom in action. He says that, "there may be two types of freedom outer freedom and inner freedom, where outer freedom is the freedom from the guidance of pleasure and pain, and inner freedom is from the narrowness of self-desire"<sup>7</sup>. We have our own freedom of will, which can only find its true meaning in relation to the freedom of other wills. The more our will is freed and widened, the stronger our relationship with the universal world of reason. This is the bond of union through which man is related to the world and he feels an exceeding joy through this communion. There is a popular belief that Tagore's idea may be roughly coined as spiritualistic. At least, by going through some of his writings, one may have such a perception. But this will not be a complete interpretation about him. While Tagore's thoughts can be considered spiritual but it is not a mysticism of irrationality. Spiritualism of Tagore is not equivalent to Godliness. His God manifests himself in the divinity of man.

### **Sri Aurobindo**

Holistic monism is a crux of position held by Aurobindo. All comprehensive integrality is basic characteristic of Aurobindo's philosophy. His integral monism reconciles supra-cosmos, supra-terrestrial and cosmic view of existence. Aurobindo made it clear that his system comes closest to the position of Gita, and we know that Bhagwat Gita is digested the Upanidh which contains synthesizing Vedic wisdom.

The integral monism of Aurobindo is not pure monism although it sees in one unchanging, pure, eternal-self, and foundation of all cosmic existence. It is not qualified monism although it place the external supreme Prakrti in one manifested in the form Jiva. It avoids determinism that would insure its universal comprehensiveness.

Sri Aurobindo attempted reconciliation between all antithetical forces and principles as core of his philosophy. He maintained that ultimate constitution of reality of all differences, distinctions dissolve into one undivided completely harmony and all-inclusive unity. It was identity of all variety of the experiences, the oppositions, and differences, that daily life does not represent the ascential nature of reality. The reality is eternally growing and manifesting into the manifold things spontaneous illusion. According to Sri Aurobindo, "The ultimate reality is inaccessible which breaks reality into fragments and misses its holistic essence. Hence, reality is non-conceptual, non-verbal, and indescribable. It is logically indefinable and indeterminable.

It cannot be comprehended to tool of rational analysis. The reality cannot be described means of intellectual tools of materialism or idealism”<sup>8</sup>.

In the life divine, Aurobindo described, “The ultimate reality as for us there is supreme reality, which is eternal, absolute, and infinite because it is absolute and infinite. It is essence indeterminable and yet though in this way, it is unknowable to us. It is not all together and everyway unknowable. It is self-evident in itself and although inexpressible yet self-evidence to knowledge by identity which spiritual way must be capable for that spiritual being is essence an original and infinite reality not other than the supreme existence”<sup>9</sup>. Aurobindo conceived reality as Brahman or Sat-Chit-Ananda existence, consciousness, and bliss. It is absolute no need, no desires and no deficiently but has three potentiality for creating names and forms. Shankaracharya placed the absolute Sat-Chit-Aanada as the immutable static passive and non-creative code of the changing universe. Brahman is transcendental consciousness. Aurobindo concept of Sat-Chit-Aanada is uniquely different from Shankara. He conceives Sat-chit-Aanda as both static and dynamic changeless and changing, being consciousness and force. The absolute has eternal real and creative power which creates the cosmos shakti or force as ascensional power of such a done under both consciousness and force are real in it.

Aurobindo observes, “The force is inherent in existence. Brahma and shakti are not two who are separate we must conclude that both eternal status and eternal dynamic are both of true reality. Dynamic and status are equally real and none of them is an illusion”<sup>10</sup>.

Sri Aurobindo reality is not mere consciousness of the body of life; mind and the spiritual grades of consciousness represent the hierarchy constitution of Sat-Chit-Aanda. The manifestations of Sat-Chit-Aanda into different forms are not an illusory change but the becoming of the divine. The absolute creates out of its own being different realities and all of them. Sat-Chit-Aanda is synthesizing harmony of different principles. It is full of possibilities and realities. Aurobindo postulated the hierarchy in reality one is lower and other is higher and God is harmony of principles and possibilities.

In the Advaita Vedanta Shankara, the material world is conceived as relative to empirical consciousness and hence it is only dependent reality for Aurobindo. The world is as much as real Brahman. It is real manifestation of Brahman in the time and space. That is why existence cannot be ruled out as mere illusion. The consciousness force was the principle of manifestation.

The theory of evolution occurs not in stage of steady ascent but it is many sided and divergent. The evolution of new realities from the primordial vital impetus is comprehensible and incalculable. The cause of evolution is many directions quite different from this creative view of evolution. Hegel put forward the theory of continuous graded evolution progressing through interconnected hierarchical stages. The whole series of stages that are yet to come into being can be calculated and predicted for haggling all the principles evolve one by one from the pure being. The evolution is manifestation of involved realities. It is theology of Sri Aurobindo evolutionism has the singular virtue of representing the purposefulness of reality. It is thesis of

evolution for integration in the sense. It is clearly distinguishable from the other theories of evolution. For Aurobindo reality falls itself with a definite inherent, intentionally the path of evolution is the path towards the integration of the real. The evolution is not a simply an increasing complex configuration of matter and form presided over by chance.

The process of evolution is infinitely diversified self-determination of ascentally indeterminable reality. The evolution is a process of progressive self-manifestation of the absolute. Aurobindo says, "Universe is real if it does not reveal to us in its forms and powers the reality that it is if it seems only a persistent yet changing movement in space and time. This must be not because it is unreal but because it is progressive self-expression, a manifestation, an evolving and self-employment of that in time which our consciousness cannot yet see in its total or ascensional significance". Aurobindo conceived conscious as shakti or force. The absolute is Chit-Shakti. The world is real and it is God, it is divine and made of the existence the cosmos evolves and reveals the divine gradually and successively in open and concrete existence. The spirit manifests, uncovers and unveils itself on this earth. The cosmic evolution regulates the spirit gradually until it is explicitly manifested.

The creation of the world matter appears to be the negation of spirit because it has characteristics of inertia consignment and divisibility. Similarly, life conceived as opposed to absolute because it subjects death desire and incapacity. Man also suffers from limitation imperfection an ignorant. Sri Aurobindo's integral Advaita is an obvious attempt to transcend the empirical opposition between spirit and matter as well as Brahman and cosmos. The opposition between them is merely apparent and ascensional or appears to be opposite. The distinct is nothing but the limited manifestations of the absolute, matter is a lower form of spirit the imperfections of life matter and mind are temporary and they are disappearing in the course of evolution. When the divine manifests in its supreme effigy in matter becomes conscious life immortal powerful mind and omnipresent perfect.

According to Aurobindo, creation is a circular process, a descent into matter from the absolute Brahman and an ascent from matter to Brahma. The absolute expresses itself in its circular process therefore the world is not real due to Maya and Avidya or ignorance. Ignorance is one aspect of knowledge itself and power of belonging to Brahman. The world is created out of the Brahman and it is a play on Leela of Brahma. Reality is perpetual creativity starting from the consent matter and going towards the super consent divine. Nothing in this process is unreal contingent or accidental thus every entity is potentially capable of attaining the super consent state, which is the final destination of all existence.

According to Aurobindo, the conventional doctrines of evolution are incomplete. He explained only development from matter to mind and omit the next higher stages and cannot explain why mind evolves out of matter through life. He says that we can explain the problem only on the postulate that there was a corresponding descent from mind to matter. First, the spirit evolves in matter and in the sense, spirit takes the

form of matter, which is in consent that consciousness is implicit involved and un-manifest in matter. The spirit is matter in its latent and un-manifest condition. There is no essential between differenced spirit and matter. The difference between them disappears when we take into account the intermediary realities between spirit and matter between the two extremes of spirit and matter. We have a series of realities, which gradually emerge in cosmic evolution. The evolution is process of the expression and manifestation of divine. It is a dual process of the involution or creation or decent and evolution ascent. The creation and manifestation are two aspects of the divine process. Creation means the dissent of divine into matter or lower forms of realities. Here divine takes form of matter and there is the involution of spiritual matter. The evolution means the manifestation of higher spiritual and supra-mental grades of reality or consciousness. There is greater and greater manifestation of principles. The creation means the involution of spirit in lower grades of reality the descent of super-mind in the lower realities take place in creation of the cosmos.

The evolution is a process of manifestation of divine and it follows the process of involution. The stages of the descent from Brahman and Brahmins are the super-mind, the over-mind, the mind, the life, and the matter. The opposite movement of ascent starts from matter and the evolution necessarily presupposes involution. It is a descent of the higher hemisphere of reality of bliss, the lower hemisphere of reality consisting of matter, life, psyche, and mind. The evolution is possible only because involution has already taken place. It is due to descent of spirit in matter, life, and mind. These can ascend to the higher regions of spirit. Matter can evolve itself into life only because life is inherent in it. The life can ascend to mind only because mind has already been descended into life, the entire lower hemisphere can ascent to higher one only because the higher is already not. It is not possible for evolution to proceed out of nothing. Evolution is the reserve out complementary process of involution.

Sri Aurobindo theory of evolution is spiritualistic as he postulated Sat-Chit-Aanda as a source of human evolution. The goal of evolution is not limited one like, adjustment of individual to natural environment as propounded by biological evolutionists nor can it be realization kingdoms of ends as advocated by Kant. For Aurobindo, the goal of evolution is nothing less than to become Sat-Chit-Aanda from which the entire cosmos has emerged. It is the evolution of divinized man and a divinized cosmos. That is why evolution must be integral and not partial.

The philosophy of holistic monism assumes that all existence converges in one being whose ascential nature is existence consciousness and bliss. The world is created out of a being it is a play of Leela of this being. The soul cause motive an object of cosmos existence is eternal and inalienable play and delight of this is our ascential being or real self, who is concealed from us by mental ego also, enjoys that play and delight since it is one in being with the divine consciousness. If we aspire for a divine life, we have to unveil this concealed self in us by mounting from our present status to a higher status and true self or Atma. However, the unity of Sat-Chit-Aanda and the divided mentality are two opposite entities, one of which must be false, the other is to be true, one must be abolished, and other must be enjoyed.



The solution of this problem consists in intermediate link between two, which can explain them and establish between them such a relationship that will make it possible for us to realize that one existence consciousness and delight as well as the mold of mind, life, and body. The intermediate link is called the super-mind. The super-mind or truth consciousness is a principle superior to mental ego and exists, acts and proceeds in fundamental truth and unity of things.

Aurobindo conceived super-mind to be intermediary principle between Sat-Chit-Aanda and human evolution. The world creation and manifestation take place through the super-mind, the creation, the cosmos, and manifestation of the superior depends on super-mind. Aurobindo says, “We find that in the principle of super-mind itself it has three poises... the first finds the inalienable unity of things, the second modifies that unity is as to support the manifestation of the many in one and one in many, the third further modifies it is as to support evolution of diversified individuality, which by the action of ignorance becomes in us at a lower level, the illusion of a separate ego”.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, this study is the coordination of the humanism of Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Both Tagore and Aurobindo are focused on spirituality and visions of the social ideals are also combined. Spirituality is not a hindrance in human development, it is a seeker. Seeks of human soul and rid off the limitations. Just as we consider the feelings of lust, anger, greed, attachment, morality, non-sorrow etc. To be part of human personality, similarly, spiritual experience obtained by seekers and thinkers of high order is also considered as part of human personality. We believe that the subject of spiritual consciousness is mysterious and it is true that this subject transcends the limits of our experiences, but it is also true that the sense of mysticism is part of our normal experiences. Getting into the entanglements of practical life, our sense of mysticism starts getting frustrated, but it is not completely destroyed. This mystical religious experience has been received by the great men of every country. This feeling cannot be described, because it is unique and exclusive. Whenever an attempt has been made to describe them, it has been incomplete. For this reason, there is a difference in the description of these experiences obtained by the thinkers living in different cultural and historical traditions. However, the effect of these experiences is equally on these perceivers. In a way, a sense of neutrality arises in them towards worldly pleasures and sorrows. They can evaluate people and events without any hesitation. Only great men who have such experience are called saints. Saints are the best standards or ideals of any civilization and culture. Such virtuous persons are the guides and builders of the society. Therefore, full of spiritual experience, of indifference towards one's own happiness and sorrow keeping the spirit, trying to remove the inequalities and sorrows prevailing in the human society, the great man is the only true humanist and such a humanist person will arise only when he keeps the spirituality of just like Tagore and Aurobindo the strong desire to remove the social inequalities.

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