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An Overview Of Sri Aurobindo's Theory Of Evolution.

Archana Tripura

Guest Lecturer

Government Degree College, Longtharai Valley

Department of Philosophy

Abstract

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh was born on 15th August 1872 in Calcutta, in a Hindu family. He was a patriot of India, an advocate for freedom, a thinker, a writer of poetry, and a reformer of spiritual beliefs. He developed a new approach to spiritual practice, which he named integral yoga. The central theme of his vision was to enable a divine life on earth and spiritual realisation. He founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry. One of his prominent disciples, Mira Richard has truly and symbolically embodied 'the mother' role at the Ashram. Although Sri Aurobindo died on 15th December 1950, his Ashram still remained the centre of learning and spiritual discipline. His main literary works are the life divine, synthesis of yoga, savitri and an epic poem. He also translated and wrote commentaries on Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita.

Keyword: Saccidananda, Pure Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Involution, Evolution

Introduction

Sri Aurobindo created a philosophical framework that combined aspects of traditional Indian philosophy with contemporary Western ideas. In his philosophical works, Sri Aurobindo presented his unique perspective on human progress and spiritual evolution. The central theme of Sri Aurobindo's theory Evolution is 'The Divine Life'. He discussed how human life can be divine through his concept of the superhuman. He asserts that men are transitional beings and that his state is not the ultimate stage of evolution towards the superhuman; it remains unfinished. The concept of Superhuman suggests that when an individual achieves superhuman status, it results in liberation not just for themselves, but for all of humanity as well. The transition from humans to Superhuman represents the next milestone in the evolution of the Earth. Aurobindo suggests that despite advancements in psychology, physical development, and science, humanity has yet to achieve its ultimate stage. The way to reach the final stage is through Integral yoga.

His philosophy mainly centered around the word 'Integralism,' and he asserted two negations: the materialistic denial and the refusal of the ascetic. The materialists are those who believe in the world of senses and deny the metaphysical world, whereas idealists accept spirit as the only reality. Despite being opposing theories, Aurobindo seeks to combine materialism and spiritualism. Aurobindo believes that the assertion of a divine life on earth and an enduring essence within temporary existence holds no significance unless we acknowledge both spirit and matter.

The nature of reality- Saccidānanda

Sri Aurobindo defines saccidānanda as the essence of reality. It is a combination of the terms "Sat" meaning being, "Cit" meaning awareness, and "Ananda" meaning bliss. This implies that pure consciousness is a state of everlasting joy. It is where opposites meet and merge completely, creating a state of non-duality. Cosmic consciousness is a meeting place of matter and spirit and leads to the consciousness of the unknowable. The unknowable is referred to as Brahman, which is ultimate, marvelous, and beyond description. Sacchidananda consists of three principles, also called the triune principle: Existence, Consciousness-Force, and Bliss.

Existence- Pure existence is universal and boundless, transcending beyond space and time. Sri Aurobindo suggests that energy, which is scientifically boundless, can comprehend both minute and immense

movements, and cannot be constrained by our conventional measures of space and time. **Consciousness force-**

Force is inherently conscious because all levels of existence, whether at rest or in motion, exhibit conscious energy. According to Aurobindo, consciousness should not be regarded as merely a mental phenomenon; otherwise, it risks becoming cosmic in essence. This is because he uses the word "cit," which is the root of the principle of creation. **Bliss-** Brahman is conceived not only as sat and cit, but also as Anānda. It is the infinite bliss and delight from which the world originates. Creation finds its sole purpose in delight. The boundless delight and bliss of saccidānanda manifest in all aspects of existence and conscious activities. This infinite delight is capable of expressing itself in countless ways.

Essence of creation

According to Sri Aurobindo, creation is nothing but an expression of joy. Delight is both the origin and conclusion of creation, the foundation of life and death, and the reason for continued existence. Creation is simply a delightful play — Maya or Lila. Maya is the power of creation and is perceived as a rule of law in creation. Maya is seen as an illusion when compared to the ultimate reality. The world is referred to as Maya because it does not reflect the fundamental truth of infinite existence. Aurobindo suggests that creation involves a two-fold process: Involution and Evolution. Firstly, It begins with the spirit descending into physical forms, followed by these worldly forms rising back to their original elevated state.

Involution- Involution refers to the process through which the energy of creation arises from an unchanging, timeless, and formless reality that exists beyond space. It is the outcome of the descent and concealment of the divine. In this process the reality expands to encompass sat(being), cit(consciousness), and ananda(bliss). Saccidānanda, through the supermind, descends into mind, life, and matter. Sri Aurobindo portrays creation as the descent of the spirit into Ignorance. He aligns with Vedanta's perspective that creation arises from ignorance, or Avidya. Our ignorance leads us to believe that the world and our perceived selves are the only realities that exist. This results in forgetting the true nature of reality. But why did God choose ignorance to create this universe? And why not knowledge? The answer to these questions is that if God made creation out of knowledge, then it would be a higher creation. Ordinary humans lack the ability to understand this higher world, except for seers and sages. He believes that Ignorance is not a separate power; it is an

integral part of Divine consciousness. It does not contradict Divine knowledge. Ignorance exists between the two extremes of divine consciousness and complete ignorance.

Evolution- According to Aurobindo, Evolution falls within the realm of spirituality. For him, evolution implies the existence of involution and evolution can only occur due to the prior existence of involution. This process involves an individual who has attained complete supramental gnosis (knowledge) and has realized the supramental state of existence, not only on a personal level but also collectively. As humans are transitional beings, the intention of our inner spirit drives us towards evolving from man to Superman in Earth's evolution. According to Sri Aurobindo, the evolutionary process goes through eight stages: pure existence, consciousness, bliss, Supermind, mind, psychic, life, and matter. These eight stages are divided into higher and lower hemispheres, which are the two realms of reality. The higher hemisphere includes pure existence, consciousness, force, and bliss, which are the true principles of saccidananda. The lower hemisphere includes mind, psyche, life, and matter.

Evolutionary growth is a threefold process of widening, heightening, and integration. The process of widening refers to expanding the scope to incorporate new principles. The second process of heightening ascending from one step to another, higher step. It involves working on possibilities and scope to upgrade into higher forms. The ascent of humanity to a divine life is the human journey. The final and most crucial stage of the evolutionary process is integration. Integration is a process that involves both ascending and descending phases. The lower moves into the higher and undergoes a complete transformation; thus, the lower rises into the higher. For example, when matter transforms into consciousness, the concept of "the material" also transforms. Matter could no longer be perceived in the same way it had been previously. For instance, Carvaka believed the mind to be a by-product of the body and considered it to be another sense organ.

He attempts to connect the gap between the mental realm and the supermind by proposing a series of intermediary stages, including mind, higher mind, illumined mind, intuition, and overmind. These developments draw humanity nearer to the concept of the Supermind. Consequently, as the Supermind interacts with the ready individual, it raises them to a state of superhuman existence. This change enhances human life to a Gnostic or Divine level. Aurobindo's interpretation of the Gnostic or Divine life suggests that it is a life experienced in the complete essence of existence, not in a heavenly realm, but here on earth. This way

of living includes the totality of awareness, strength, and joy, along with a universal and transcendent state of being.

Conclusion

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy can be regarded as Idealistic because it conceives reality as spiritual and ideal for mankind. He tried to reorganize and rearrange the knowledge and ideas he gained through meditation and presented his own theory. As he was also influenced by ancient Indian philosophy, we see a resemblance between the philosophical approach of Vedanta and his own.

Evolution is a complex journey that cannot be fulfilled in a single lifetime, but rather requires multiple incarnations to achieve. That is why rebirth is an essential element of this system. Everything, encompassing matter, life, psyche, mind, and supermind, represents different expressions of Brahman, the eternal essence known as saccidananda.

Sri Aurobindo's concept of evolution has evoked interest both in the West and East. The theory of evolution, while widely accepted, is not without its complexities and areas of ongoing research.

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