

**Sri Aurobindo's universal vision of the Life Divine and his
philosophy about evolution of consciousness**

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Abstract:

Sri Aurobindo was one of the outstanding writers in Indo-Anglian literature. He wanted to combine the best elements of the Indian and western philosophical tradition. One need not relinquish his body to achieve the Life Divine. It can be found on earth if he perfects his human might and the race. It is clearly established in Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* that there is the possibility of transformation of human life into divine life and this earth is not a place for rejection but a basis for transcendence to a higher plane of life. The central motive of terrestrial existence is an evolution of consciousness. A change of consciousness is the major fact of the next evolutionary transformation. It is the spiritual change of individuals that alone can transform the race and bring about this new perfected Divine Life on Earth.

Key words: consciousness, evolution, divine life, Gnostic being, spirit and transformation

**Sri Aurobindo's universal vision of the Life Divine and his
philosophy about evolution of consciousness – A Study**

Sri Aurobindo was one of the outstanding writers in Indo-Anglian literature. He is the Yogi, the philosopher or the prophetic engineer of the Life Divine. Once he wrote about himself, “No one can write about my life because it has not been on the surface for men to see” (*On Himself, Sri Aurobindo* volume 26, 378). He was also motivated by the significant vitality and diversity of the Indian intellectual tradition. He supposed that the writings of the Vedantic sages and the Buddha reflect the prodigy of the yogic Indian mind. However, later on, according to Sri Aurobindo, the Indian philosophical tradition became narrow in viewpoint and lost its enthusiasm and vitality. As against this, western philosophy managed to retain its dynamism and continued to grow. Sri Aurobindo wanted to combine the best elements of the Indian and western philosophical tradition.

Throughout his life, Sri Aurobindo had shown limited interest in religion and became an advocate of Hinduism. He considered Vedanta to be the essence of Hinduism. He accepted Shankara’s Advaita philosophy which stressed the illusory nature of the universe and futility of action. Since he accepted Advaita interpretation, he was not willing to take up yoga initially. Around 1904 he realized that the Yoga, the result of spiritual seeking, would help him carry out his political programme. He indulged in political revolutions secretly and openly. In one of such activities he was arrested in Alipore Bomb case. In Alipore jail, he spent the first month and a half of his imprisonment in solitary confinement. In that lonely place, he tried to meditate and realized that the mind rebelled and the body became too exhausted. In Alipore jail, he had a period of inner turmoil. He was given a copy of the Gita. He realized what Krishna told Arjuna. He felt that Vasudeva surrounded him. There was a tree that he could see outside and that tree was Vasudeva and Krishna for him. Sri Krishna was holding over him through his shade. He could feel Krishna’s arms in the coarse blankets. He could see Vasudeva, Sri Krishna and

Narayana in the darkened souls and misused bodies of the prisoners, thieves, the murderers in the jail. Sri Aurobindo called this universal vision of the Divine in individual awareness as the 'cosmic consciousness'.

Sri Aurobindo's two realizations of 1908 such as the passive Brahman and Cosmic consciousness are regarded as the final goal of yoga. His 'yoga of self-perfection' had four constituent elements. They are shuddhi or purification, mukti or liberation, bhukti or beatitude, and siddhi or perfection. In June, 1908 Sri Aurobindo started an English newspaper, 'Karmayogin' a weekly Review of National religion, Literature, Science and Philosophy. Also, he mastered the art of writings as the editor of 'Bande Mataram'. He had a number of spontaneous spiritual experiences. He had encountered many spiritual teachers. A Marathian yogin named Vishnu Bhaskar Lele had given him an opening to spiritual experience.

The psychic being in traditional Hindu thought would be the Atman, the divinity within man. Through his personal experience and in his philosophical works Sri Aurobindo had analyzed the physical dimension, emotional dimension, the psychological dimension and then the other deeper dimensions of the human body. He had also explained that since 'matter' was not different from 'spirit', gradual evolution of matter would convert it into pure spirit. Despite the difficulties in the way which might decelerate the process, the advancement of humanity in the direction of spiritual perfection would continue. He supposed that India's tradition of spiritual thought and practice was very progressive and the whole of humanity could benefit from this in its spiritual journey. He wanted India to take the lead and for this reason, thought that India ought to be free to play her true role in the spiritual renewal of the world.

Sri Aurobindo's principal work in prose is *The Life Divine*. It is regarded as one of the most important metaphysical treatises of the present century. *The Synthesis of Yoga* also has the same philosophy of *The Life Divine* in view of yogic practice. His last years were full of his spiritual service. On 1938, November 24 he fractured his right thigh while walking. After this accident, he stopped answering letters and revised 'Arya' series for publication. He gave priority to his work 'The Life Divine'. During India's Independence Sri Aurobindo's fame as a yogin and philosopher had spread throughout India, Europe and America.

One need not relinquish his body to achieve the Life Divine. It can be found on earth if he perfects his human mind and the race. The Jnana or Knowledge can be a path to the path to the Divine. This is his message of Sri Aurobindo to the world. His *The Life Divine* is the effect of the attempt to understand how best man can know and fulfill the purpose of his life. It has two parts, the first volume has 28 chapters that define the goal of man and the second book also has 28 chapters that show how one actually proceeds along the spiritual path. It is clearly established in *The Life Divine* that there is the possibility of transformation of human life into divine life and this earth is not a place for rejection but a basis for transcendence to a higher plane of life. He has elaborated the objective of spiritual evolution in *The Life Divine*. He says that man has to evolve out of himself divine manhood, a spiritual and supramental supermanhood. The humans might not be the ultimate form of life to emerge on earth. They may view the emergence of a new type of individual out of the current intermediary human form.

In the very first chapter of *The Life Divine*, the earliest obsession of Man is depicted. This obsession is with the ideals of God, Light, Freedom, and Immortality. It manifests itself in the insight of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search for pure truth and unmixed Bliss,

the sense of a secret of immortality. These ideals were contrary to their normal experience. The manifestation of God in the matter and the goal of nature in her terrestrial evolution lie on the realization of the following changes: Knowing, possessing, and being the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, converting one's physical mentality into the Supramental illumination, building peace and a self-existent bliss, establishing infinite freedom in a mechanical world, and discovering and realizing the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation.

The central motive of terrestrial existence is an evolution of consciousness. A change of consciousness is the major fact of the next evolutionary transformation. There is no reason to suppose that this transformation is impossible on earth. In fact, it gives the truest meaning to earthly existence. Man's urge towards spirituality is an indication of the inner drive of the Spirit within towards emergence. Man must recognize the eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of his bodily mansion. Man is the wearer of this mutable robe and he must accept Matter of which it is made as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves His garbs and builds the unending series of His mansions. Then only there will be an affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence will have a base. A materialist may deny his Spirit easily but it is impossible for him to persist permanently in his statement. So, in these unfruitful contradictions, the human mind must always seek a complete affirmation and it can find such affirmation only by a brilliant understanding.

The human mind is the seat of consciousness. It has the unique capacity of functioning at the distinct levels namely the physical, the biological, the psychological, and the spiritual. Each of these levels is characterized by an awareness of the world outside and the inner world of the

Mind. It is possible for Mind to rise beyond itself into certain heights or planes of consciousness. They receive some modified light or power or the supramental consciousness into themselves and know that by an illumination or intuition or direct contact or experience. One needs a consciousness as a starting point which is called the Supermind which is the being super-eminent and lifted above ordinary mentality or on the contrary, it may bear the sense of all that is beyond the mind. Consciousness and Bliss are the nature of the divine being.

Man is separated in mind, life, and body from the universe so he is incapable of knowing others. His knowledge of others is limited. He must come in conscious unity with them. To do that, he must come in contact with the Universe. Mind, Life, and Body are limited. They are each at cross-purposes with the others. However, there is a higher consciousness or soul in each. If man becomes a self-conscious and truly thinking being, he can begin to harmonize these contrasting parts and create unity in himself.

In man, there is a conflict and ignorance in his relationship with the world. He needs to find a principle of harmony, joy, and unity. It is only through the highest possibilities of Mind, that is, Supermind, the truth-consciousness, this can take place. The utmost mission of Mind is to train man's obscure consciousness which has emerged out of the dark prison of Matter, to enlighten its blind instincts, random intuitions, vague perceptions till it becomes capable of this greater light and higher ascension. The mind is a passage, not a culmination. The divine soul reproduces itself in similar liberated souls as the animal reproduces itself in similar bodies. Therefore, whenever a single soul is liberated, there is a tendency for an extension and to an outburst of the same divine self-consciousness in other souls of man's terrestrial humanity.

Divine descends from pure existence through the play of Consciousness-Force and Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind into cosmic being. All attachment to world-existence is an illusion, but the call for liberation is also a circumstance of the illusion. The theory of illusion cuts the knot of the world problem. It does not disentangle it and it is an escape, not a solution. The physical body, the life, the mind and understanding, the Supermind, and the Ananda are the five levels of the spirit. The higher one rises the nearer one gets to the condition of the highest perfection of Man's spiritual evolution. It is easy to rise to the Ananda when one rises to the Supermind. Aurobindo has been sure that the Supermind would come down to earth to transform man into his destined divine perfection.

An evolution of consciousness is the central objective of terrestrial existence. There are three types of theories of existence, says Aurobindo. They are Supracosmic, the Supraterrestrial, and the Cosmic-terrestrial Theories. According to the Supracosmic Theory, whether the reality is real or illusory is beyond the universe. This reality is termed as Absolute by the western philosophers. As it is Ultimate and Absolute, one cannot imagine it and it cannot be described. Man is not related to the Supracosmic. The Supraterrestrial Theory is about earth based creation. It is opposite to the Supracosmic theory; it holds that the reality is here. All imagination and assumption help to find a way to escape from the challenges and the problems of life. In the Cosmic-terrestrial Theory there is a link between the reality above and the reality here. There is also the claim of the immortality of the soul. Death is not the end. When a man dies, he continues his existence. He lives in other worlds and his soul continues its life on other planes. It is very obvious that the true home of man is beyond. This world is a preparatory stage. Earth-life is meant to qualify oneself for a berth in heaven. There is a view that this whole creation is a Lila of Divine Being. It is a sport of god.

Man has the dualities of life and death, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, truth and error, good and evil as the first formations of egoistic consciousness. He can have the dissolution of this egoistic construction by the self-opening of the individual to the universe and to God. He has the realization of the All in the individual by the transformation of the limited ego into a conscious center of divine unity. He knows that genes and chromosomes are the cause of hereditary transmissions, not only of physical but of psychological variations. But he does not discover how psychological characteristics can be contained and transmitted in this inconscient material vehicle. He does not see or know, but it is interpreted to him as a logical account of Nature-process, that a play of electrons, of atoms and their resultant molecules, of cells glands, chemical secretions and physiological processes manages by their activity on the nerves and brain of a Shakespeare or a Plato to produce or could be perhaps the dynamic occasion for the production of a *Hamlet* or a *Symposium* or a *Republic*. He fails to discover how such material movements could have composed or necessitated the composition of these highest points of thought and literature.

When Sri Aurobindo explains about the evolution of Man, he indicates that Man is the first to make a conscious evolutionary change. He can consciously rise up and become the ultimate, the Supramental Being (embodying that plane in his being). Then he explains how the Triple Transformation does overcome man's limitations. The three stages of human transformation are described which Aurobindo calls "The Triple Transformation." It begins with the Psychic transformation, where one moves within and discovers the soul, which in turn opens the person to all manners of inner, universal, and cosmic experience. That movement continues with the Spiritual transformation where man rises above his mentality and experiences the planes of the spiritual mind, including silence, illumination, intuition, cosmic consciousness, as well as

the Light descending and transforms the individual parts of the being. This process culminates in the Supramental transformation where all aspects of the being from mind to the vital and even to the physical are transformed into their ultimate supramentalized status..

In the current domains of life, men have limited minds. These domains of society too are inadequate to give conscious guidance for the emerging world. Neither the current scientific formula, nor a perfected economic society, nor democratic existence, nor the varying structure of governance is enough to create a higher, perfected, divine society and existence that the world is moving towards. Even religion itself, for all its insights into the nature of the spirit, has not fundamentally changed human life and society.

Human beings are very much attached to their own thoughts, opinions wants, and desires. They also act automatically to the unfolding of life, experiencing pleasure and pain, happiness and its opposite. However, if they developed the poise of detachment in the mind, heart, emotions, and nerves, they would not be subject to ups and down, to pleasure that is limited and transient as well as to pain.

Here, Sri Aurobindo points out that inner calm, equality, and detachment is the first soul movement that enables man experience Delight. Also, he says that only a total spiritual direction can transform humanity. Only a full emergence of the soul, of Supramental Supernature, can bring about this evolutionary miracle. And this can only occur as a result of a radical change in the nature of the individual. Since Gnostic beings live in a consciousness where all contradictions are cancelled or fuse into one another in a unified self and world-knowledge, there will be no conflict between one's spiritual individual life and his collective divine life. There would be perfect harmony and balancing of himself, his being, and the unfoldings of life through

the collective. It is the spiritual change of individuals that alone can transform the race and bring about this new perfected Divine Life on Earth.

As a result of this new way of living, the old ways of life would disappear; such as the mental idols, the constructed principles and systems, and the conflicting ideals. In this new gnostic life, there would naturally be an end of the war, political strife and all the negatives that issue from it. There would be the end of the reactions to success and frustration, vital joy and grief, peril and passion, pleasure and pain, the changes and uncertainties of fate and struggle. All mental, psychological, vital, and physical suffering would thus cease. The new life would be a constant miracle. There would be a total fullness of life, a Life Divine.

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