

BIOCOMOLOGICAL AND COSMOTHEANDRIC VISION OF SRI AUROBINDO

Sivanandam PANNEERSELVAM¹

ABSTRACT. *The central concept in Aurobindo's philosophy is evolution. It is a basic concept and all other doctrines centre round it. Aurobindo represents the spiritual evolution of the universe. The spiritual evolution which has to proceed from matter to life and from life to mind and from mind to supermind shows that divine life is possible in this life itself. Since mind is finite, it is bestowed with limited powers of consciousness. The nature of evolution indicates that mind is followed up with a higher integral consciousness or the supramental consciousness. Aurobindo presupposes that beyond mind, there is Supermind, the gnostic power of consciousness, which is in eternal possession of truth. This conception gives a new hope and a new prospect of life for the future of mankind. The mental man has evolved but a spiritual man is yet to evolve. Man is born into the world at the level of being and non-being. This non-being is a process of becoming. This implies a new departure for both man and the world. Thus man's progress consists in his ceaseless aspiration to transcend himself.*

KEYWORDS: Evolution, Involution Consciousness, Mind, Supermind, Superman, Spirituality, Ideal social order, Intuition, Gnostic being

Introduction

The Life Divine, the work of Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) represents the spiritual evolution of the universe. The spiritual evolution which has to proceed from matter to life and from life to mind and from mind to supermind shows that divine life is possible in this life itself. The uniqueness of Aurobindo is that he is concerned about the aspiration of the individual. He has examined the spiritual being in one's own self and helps others in similar evolutionary ascent which is considered as real service to the mankind. His integral philosophy takes into account the problems of man. He considers man as the part of the cosmic evolutionary process. Man is an ideal combination of matter, life and mind. Since mind is finite, it is bestowed with limited powers of consciousness. The nature of evolution indicates that mind is followed up with a higher integral consciousness or the supramental consciousness.

Man, according to him, is a transitional being. By this, he means that man is not a final being. Man is mind-imprisoned in a living body. Mind is not a highest power of consciousness. Thus mind is not in possession of truth. It is only an ignorant seeker. Hence Aurobindo presupposes that beyond mind, there is Supermind, the

¹ University of Madras, Chennai, INDIA

gnostic power of consciousness, which is in eternal possession of truth. This Supermind is the Superman. The Supermind is in the eternal possession of Truth. This conception gives a new hope and a new prospect of life for the future of mankind. Man must proceed to reach the level of divine person to overthrow the desire-soul or the little ego. The desire-soul is the egoistic existence. It is limited by the egoistic walls. In the surface-soul or the desire-soul there is no real soul-life. But how to proceed from desire-soul to the Divine soul? This is a basic issue in Aurobindo. He says that it is possible by a psychic man. The mental man has evolved but a spiritual man is yet to evolve. In this context, Aurobindo talks about three levels of existence. They are: (1) the level of the being, (2) the level of the being and non-being and (3) the level of the non-being. Man is born into the world at the level of being and non-being. This non-being is a process of becoming. This implies a new departure for both man and the world. Thus man's progress consists in his ceaseless aspiration to transcend himself.

According to Aurobindo, it is always the future of man, which is more important and significant than his present and the past. Thus the concept of man is the genetic evolutionary one. Man is not only engaged in his own greater perfection and happiness but also in the general liberation and higher evolution of his fellow creatures. The lower life of plants and animals are conditioned by nature, the material life of man and his species tend to harness the forces of nature to make the human life both happier and nobler. Man has to evolve his capacities of knowledge with greater mastery over them. This is the extension of consciousness.

1. Consciousness and Spirit-in-Man

Consciousness is the expression and the manifestation of the Spirit-in-Man. It is the medium of the Divine in man. So it is the absolute and the fundamental determinate of the Divine, Satchidananda. Man is bound to undergo the extension of consciousness. The extension of consciousness demands openness on the part of the individual. Consciousness is absolute and fundamental. It is the creator of the whole world. It is Satchidananda. For Aurobindo, man is a spirit using the mind, life and body for an individual and a collective experience and self-manifestation in the universe. The Satchidananda itself descends in the finite for the delight of self-manifestation. Self is as real as the Absolute. This means that in the integral philosophy of Aurobindo, the individual is as much real as the Universal. The ultimate reality is a unity manifesting in triunity – of essentiality, commonality and individuality. The unity is an inseparable one. Here the individual is related to the Universal and cannot exist without it. The Universal is closely related with the Transcendent, which expresses Himself through individual, and Universal. Aurobindo in his work, *Ideal and Progress* (1951) says as follows: "For the particular, the individual can have no self-existence, no truth, no valid force except in so far as it reflects rightly and relates and confirms itself justly to the universal, to the all-being, the all-knowledge, the all-will and follows its true drift towards self-realization and vast delight in itself" (Aurobindo 1951a). Further he says that the

universal also has no self-existence, truth or validity except as it expresses the Divine Being, Knowledge, Will, Power, and Delight of Him which surpasses the entire universe.

2. Evolution

Aurobindo's concept of the future of mankind depends on his concept of evolution. The future of mankind actually depends on the success of yoga as a method of social development. The gnostic consciousness, like the mental consciousness, will create a race of gnostic spiritual beings. Let us see the nature of the future transformation of man otherwise, known as gnostic being. Aurobindo is in search of a divine being who is governed by universal spirit. He feels that divine is everywhere and also in part of his own being. He would be universal but free in the universe, individual but not limited by a separate individuality. He would be a perfect individual fulfilling individuality, commonality and complete self-mastery. The supramental being would act as a cosmic individual. His awareness, will and action would be in union with the Absolute. The gnostic being will have a complete knowledge of all existence. How to achieve this is a fundamental question for Aurobindo. The ascent of the mind into the Supermind, through the descent of Supermind into mind is possible by removing the veil, which separates them, yet veil can be removed by our intense aspiration for the light and through yoga with the help of the divine power (*sakti*). The process of evolution continues from mind to Supermind through the intermediate strategies of higher mind, illumined mind, and intuition and overmind. With the descent of the Supermind, nature becomes transformed into Supernature and human beings into gnostic beings. It is not sufficient for individuals to achieve their own divinization. It is necessary that larger and larger groups of people can be divinized. Does this mean that the whole human race is raised to the higher level? The answer is negative. Aurobindo remarks in *The Life Divine* (1990): "There is not the least probability or possibility of the whole race rising in a block to the supramental level – but only in the capacity in the human mentality when it reaches a certain level or a certain posit of stress of the evolutionary impetus, to press towards a higher place of consciousness and its embodiment in the being" (Aurobindo 1990c).

The uniqueness of Aurobindo is that his notion of the Superman is something original in the Indian philosophical tradition. Sometimes it is argued that it is similar to that of *jivanmukta*. But the concept of Superman has a wider scope than that of the liberated individual (*jivanmukta*). Very correctly, Haridas Chauduri says in his book, *Sri Aurobindo: The Prophet of Life Divine* (1951) that there have been numerous instances of *jivanmukta* in the past, but the Supermanhood is yet to blossom forth in the course of further evolution (Haridas, 1951, p.169). A *jivanmukta* attains the supreme spiritual excellence and makes no further attempt to bring down the higher light and power into the flux of evolution. He fails to see the descending movement of God towards self-objectification, and as a result, misses the significance of the cosmic process. The Superman on the other hand has grasped the reality in its

fullness. He has perceived the spirit in its splendor and in matter. He feels himself one with the creative impetus. He sees the true meaning of evolution in the involvement of spirit in matter. The Superman of Aurobindo is that it is the synthesis of different aspects, human and divine. Superman presents certain divine and harmonious Absolute, of all that is essential in man. To take all that is essential in human beings and to lift him higher to light and joy is the essential function of divinity.

The central concept in Aurobindo's philosophy is evolution. It is a basic concept and all other doctrines centre round it. No doubt, the concept of evolution has the following important questions: Is evolution an automatic drive of material forces to known or unknown or knowable ends? Does it involve a rigorous mechanical necessity? Is there any teleology underlining the evolutionary process? Is man the final product of evolution? What is the aim and end in view of evolution? Aurobindo posits on the authority of his spiritual experience the fundamental presence of Divine consciousness in all things. This Divine consciousness has a static poise and a dynamic poise. It has seeped into all the different strata of the evolutionary process. This is the involution of the Divine. It is because of this involution, inert matter is able to break its life and that in turn is succeeded by the formation of mind. Evolution does not stop with the emergence of mind. It is not the highest product. Man is not the final product of evolution. It is not an aimless process. It is a purposeful unfolding of the spirit.

The unification of mankind is inevitable for human evolution, according to Aurobindo. In *The Life Divine* he says: "If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in nature, then man, as he is, cannot be the last term of that evolution" (Aurobindo, 1951b, p.1009). What is interesting is that his concept of evolution is significantly concerned not only with the physical or cosmic evolution from matter to life and mind but also with the parallel evolution of consciousness. If evolution of consciousness is only a kind of an uncoiling process of what is coiled in involution, humanity, he says, is but a penultimate stage in terrestrial evolution. The involution of the spirit into matter, marking the beginning of terrestrial evolution must inevitably culminate in the ultimate evolution or the emergence of the spirit out of the mental man in the form of a spiritualized Superman or Supramental being, otherwise, known as the "gnostic being".

3. Spirituality

According to Aurobindo, man cannot transcend his nature (*svabhava*) beyond certain limitations. Man according to Aurobindo, is the most complex that has been created, the richest in content of consciousness and the curious ingenuity of his building. He is the head of the earthly creation, but he does not exceed it. If a Supramental being is to appear, Aurobindo says, in the terrestrial creation, it must be a new and independent manifestation, just as life and mind have manifested in matter, so Supermind must manifest there. Such a divine manifestation in man, according to

Aurobindo, did really occur once already in a body and mind adequately evolved or prepared for the reception of the divine spirit of the highest order, when man first appeared on this planet earth. For Aurobindo, man is essentially a spiritual being with spiritual aspirations to exceed his mental status and therefore his mental evolution is only an additional aid for his spiritualization. This spiritual man is the sign of the new evolution.

Man's urge towards spirituality is to reach the final manifestation of the spirit on earth and the goal of humanity is a spiritual religion. The goal of spirituality is the flowering of the Divine in collective humanity. In *The Ideal of Human Unity*, this has been emphasized by Aurobindo as follows: "A religion of humanity means the growing realization that there is a secret spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all alone." (Aurobindo, 1950, p.775). Something cannot emerge of nothing. There is involution of consciousness in matter and there is a gradual unfoldment of that consciousness into varied forms of matter and also into life in matter and into mind in life. It is this consciousness in different grades and at different levels, which evolved, and as a complementary part of process the forms which are essential for its operation take shape. Thus life evolved out of matter, mind out of life, because they are already involved there; matter is a form of veiled life, life a form of veiled mind.

Aurobindo supports the view that present man is the summit of evolution. He is a transitional being and is bound to grow further and consciously transcend himself and so to rise to a higher level of consciousness and to become higher being than what he is today. Till now, evolution was a spontaneous and apparently unconscious process determined by the working of nature; it was moving slowly and inadvertently as things in nature normally moves. But man has now reached a stage when he can consciously evolve and so compress centuries into years. But the change depends on an awakening within man by conscious effort of his latent or unborn higher powers any by bringing his psychic being into active participation. Aurobindo's contribution here is that he foresees that the ideal of human unity would be no longer an unfulfilled ideal but an accomplished fact. There is Divinity waiting to be manifested. There is essential unity in the apparent diversity and the many are now moving towards the realization of the Oneness. He traces in *The Human Cycle*, the social and cultural development of the human race and envisaged the advent of a spiritual age evolving out of the present rational age. His argument is interesting. He says: "If the spiritual change of which we have been speaking is to be effected, it must unit two conditions which have to be simultaneously satisfied but are most difficult to bring together".

The main message of Aurobindo is about the evolutionary process on the earth, and the growth of consciousness. His greatest life work, which is supremely unique collaboration with the Mother, was the descent of the Supramental consciousness. The supramentalism of consciousness is the goal towards which nature is aiming at and for which man is striving. It is the next step the earth and man are destined to take in their evolutionary ascent. The important step in his evolution is that which raises man to a higher and larger consciousness. His dream about the next step in

evolution has been fulfilled by the descent of Supramental consciousness on the 29th February 1956 as has been declared by the Mother of the Aurobindo Ashram. She gave a message on the 24th April 1956, which goes as follows: "The manifestation of supramental upon earth is no more a promise, but a living fact, a reality. It is at work here and a day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be able to recognize it." As the Supramental consciousness has contacted the earth's atmosphere and has begun its realizing power, the evolution of a spiritual society becomes easier than ever before. It prepares the ground for the evolution of a spiritual man and ultimately of Supramental being which will present to the world a major transformation.

The Supermind is something beyond mental man and his limits. On the 29th February 1956, the foundations were laid for an evolution of a supramental race, which will be as much higher than the present humanity, as the present humanity is higher than the animal world. This means that the world will move towards the manifestation of Spirit in matter, the establishment of divine life on earth and the evolution of a new race, though in terms of earth time it may take several centuries of its full manifestation.

4. Supramental Consciousness

Aurobindo's understanding of evolution of consciousness is something novel and ideal. It is self-aware force of existence. It is neither a mere mechanical nor unintelligent force as the scientists think, not a mere vital force or the *elan vital* of which Bergson speaks, which cannot be aware of itself, but a conscious self-aware force. In *The Life Divine* (1990) it is said: "A conscious-Force, everywhere inherent in Existence, acting even when concealed, is a creator of the worlds, the occult secret of Nature" (Aurobindo 1990a, p.352). This conscious-Force is present everywhere. Consciousness is not restricted to the higher forms of life only. It is present, below the mental level, in the vital and material existence as a sub-conscious energy and above the mental level as Super-conscious energy.

Consciousness is invisible in the material sphere, appears at the vegetable level and dominates at the human level. This energy, Aurobindo calls it the Mother or the Divine sakti. Aurobindo says: "Consciousness is a Force, inversely force is consciousness and all the forces are conscious. Consciousness is a Force; it is inseparable and convertible. Force is inherent in Existence. Therefore it is Cit. It is the essence of Existence. Therefore all is Sat. Consciousness is both Sat and Cit, it is also Bliss or Ananda, for to be conscious means joy. Hence Consciousness is Satchidananda – Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. In Aurobindo's approach, to understand the reality of the universe we must also know the process by which the Reality manifests itself in the universe. The process of manifestation of the Absolute, otherwise known as "involution", wherein the consciousness aspect of Brahman conceals itself in the universe and slowly evolves out of it. In the words of Aurobindo (1990), it is "a self-involution of Brahman from its involved conditions, a self-involution of consciousness in form and a self-evolution out of form" (Aurobindo

1990a, p.18). It is because of this involution, evolution has not become a transformation. "The Inconscient is the Superconscious's sleep," says Aurobindo, in *Savitri* (Aurobindo, 1990b). As a result of this, evolution becomes meaningful and possible. Ascent without descent, evolution without involution is unthinkable.

Evolution means making more and more manifest, the unmanifest consciousness that dwells in every being. Thus for Aurobindo, it is a progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit or Consciousness in material conditions. It is a creation, a self-creation and a bringing out of what is implicit in Being. Spirit or Consciousness is the source from which everything emerges and into which everything disappears. Aurobindo makes evolution both a continuous and emergent. A continuous evolution without emergence is a contradiction in terms. There is continuity in evolution, for it is the same Consciousness that evolves throughout the process. This means that the different stages of evolution between Matter and Spirit are not entirely different from one another. They are related by one Conscious-Force, which is present everywhere in different organizations. If they are different from each other, we cannot talk of the evolution of the one from the other. But at the same time, there is the emergence of the new capacities, which were once in unmanifest condition. Here the word "emergence" means the arrival of higher, spiritual and supramental grades of beings, consciousness and powers in successive order. In the process of evolution, their emergence is unpredictable and miraculous. Thus evolution is emergence in this sense. It does not conform to the fixed path determined by our logic. One principle is different from the other, not in its potentiality, but in the manifestation of this potentiality. It is by rising to a new higher state of consciousness a real unification of the world is possible. This new consciousness will not be an elevated ordinary human mentality but a new higher spiritual consciousness. This new spiritual consciousness can be reached only by a spiritual endeavor or spirituality. If this is accomplished, then humanity will not be an ordinary one but a spiritual one with an entirely new mode of thought and knowledge. By this stage, man becomes a Superman. Unity, mutuality and harmony will be the new basis of this new Supramental consciousness.

5. Ideal Social Order

Aurobindo develops an ideal of social development, which requires a clear conception of the nature of subjectivity, both at the individual and collective level. He sees certain parallelism between the individual and the group. He is of the view that the self is neither a body or the vital ego, nor the rational mind. Similarly the self cannot be identified with any one-sided expression of our mind, ethical or aesthetic. The true self, according to him, is the spiritual individual. The individual self as well as the group, he claims, has also a body, a living organism, has a mind, has ethical ideals. But he is more than this. His inner being is exhibited in three levels: the infra-rational, the rational and the supra-rational. The infra-rational is exhibited in the bodily sensations and vital instincts. The rational is exhibited in the intellectual, ethical and the emotional. The supra-rational also is a complex structure having its own inner stratification. The infra-rational requires to be sublimated, which is

possible only through the supra-rational. No doubt, reason is useful here; but it cannot be the sole master. Further Aurobindo says that the individual is not only himself but is in solidarity with all of his kind (Aurobindo, 1958, p.54). An ideal order of social development must recognize the mutual interdependence – an interdependence that does not annul the autonomy of each – of three terms: the individual, the community and humanity. Aurobindo claims in *The Human Cycle* (1958): "The individual has to live in humanity as well as humanity in the individual: but mankind is or has been too large an aggregate to make this mutuality a thing intimate and powerfully felt in the ordinary mind of the race, and even if humanity becomes a manageable unit of life, intermediate groups and aggregates must still exist for the purpose of mass-differentiation and the concentration and combination of varying tendencies in the total human aggregate." (Ibid, p.82). These are the foundations on which the future order of social development depends.

Aurobindo exhibits the ideal social order in his *The Human Cycle*. This takes into account the three poles of human existence: the individual, the community and mankind in general. Each has its own destiny, its own needs, its own law of growth. According to Aurobindo, mankind is marching towards an ideal of perfection. But within the fold of this common destiny of mankind, each individual and each community has to follow its own unique line of development. The law of social development requires a harmony between the needs and the interests of these three terms of existence. The ideal relationship between the individual, the community and humanity provides the perspective from which Aurobindo offers valuable comments upon the various social and political theories. He says: "The perfect social state must be one in which governmental compulsion is abolished and man is able to live with his fellow man by free agreement and co-operation." (Aurobindo, 1958, p.110). But how to bring about this ideal state? Aurobindo suggests a method, which he calls "spiritual anarchism". This method should concentrate upon a growing number of spirituality evolved individuals who would channelize their spiritual energy in the direction of uplifting both the community and mankind at large. In such spirituality-developed, individuals should recognize a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore it is the great need of the human being.

Evaluation and Conclusion

No doubt, Aurobindo's concept of the future of mankind is based on the concept of evolution. But the theory of evolution can be challenged on the basis of insufficient foundations. Can we say that man has the capacity to develop into a higher evolutionary being? Seeing the earthly nature, it is difficult to believe in the evolution of the Supramental consciousness. Moreover, why evolution should stop at man? This is the view of the many Positivists, Pragmatists, Instrumentalists and others. Not only in the present, in past also there was such philosophical thinking. It is argued by many critics that man has to attain his manhood and not the Supermanhood. Even if the superman is born, he shall be a different species, not an evolution out of man.

Another criticism is that even granting that Aurobindo's metaphysical contentions about the nature of creation, there is no guarantee about the spiritual evolution of man. The principle of evolution has not been sufficiently and finally established in science and hence cannot be accepted in metaphysics. Moreover, it is argued that evolution is not proved by observation. The principles of creation appear to be permanent and unchanging. The evolution of life and mind does not prove the evolution of Supermind, since mind and Supermind belong to quite different levels. No human race exhibits signs of Supramental nature. Psychoanalysts like Freud argue that man hardly advanced from the animal in his motives and impulses. Man's progress is only in degree and width.

The above criticisms cannot be valid. First of all, it should be understood that theory of evolution is based on Aurobindo's deep, personal, yogic experience. The personal experiences differ. Since the validity of the experience can be established by sufficient training and sincere self-analysis. His theory of evolution is based on his yogic experience. He shows the limitations of science. The integral theory affirms other theories and improves upon them. The evolution of the unevolved principles on earth, as well as the descent of the higher powers from their own bases, is quite compatible with the perfection of the whole.

Moreover, the theory of evolution is proved by observation and by reason and intuition. The scientific theory of evolution is itself an argument in favour of the spiritual evolution. Man's future evolution has its roots in his own type, since the impulse towards self-exceeding is also his fundamental principle. To be a man fully, he should be a gnostic being, a Superman. The spiritual human society will realize the three essential truths of existence – God, Freedom and Unity, which are the three aspects of one and same truth. None of the three can be realized without the realization of the other two. Aurobindo says: "When man is able to see God and to possess him, then he will know real freedom and arrive at real unity, never otherwise." (Aurobindo, 1958, p.283–284). The spiritual society will live as collective soul and not as a collective ego. It will be the outcome of the realization of God within and on this earth. To find the Divine self in the individual and collectivity and to realize spiritually, mentally, vitally, materially its greatest, largest and deepest possibilities in the inner life of all and their outer action and nature. (Ibid, p.286). Since the inner divine compulsion grows in the individuals, society will lift the outer compulsions. In a perfect spiritual society, all will be perfectly free.

References

Aurobindo, Sri, (1950). *The Ideal of Human Unity*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Aurobindo, Sri. (1951a). *Ideal and Progress*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Aurobindo, Sri. (1951b). *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II. New York: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Library Inc.

- Aurobindo, Sri. (1958). *The Human Cycle: The Psychology of Social Development*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Aurobindo, Sri. 1990a. *The Life Divine*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Aurobindo, Sri. (1990b). *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Aurobindo, Sri. (1990c). *The Life Divine*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Haridas, Chaudhuri. (1951). *Sri Aurobindo: The Prophet of Life Divine*. Calcutta: Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir.

