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Sri Aurobindo's Theory of Social Evolution: A Metaphysical Exposition



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Abstract

The main topic of my essay is to explore how Sri Aurobindo's theory of social evolution is influenced by his metaphysical principles and ideas. Sri Aurobindo expounded metaphysical thought in his book 'The Life Divine', while his view of social evolution is observed in 'The Human Cycle'. He was a great yogi. And so he did not think about the change of the society by some external principles or rules like other sociologists. Sri Aurobindo realized that the transformation of the individual's heart is absolutely necessary for building a just society and therefore he repeatedly emphasized the spiritual development of the individual. Inspired by the German historian Karl Lamprecht's terminology of the stratification of human society, Sri Aurobindo undertook to introduce such stratification in Indian society. He realized that only through the change of the individual's heart will a just society be built, where the sense of solidarity will be awakened in the individual and as a result he will act for the welfare of all living in the world. Rishi Aurobindo believes that only through yoga can a person's inner transformation be possible. And only if this kind of change occurs in the society, the spiritual age will appear.

Keywords: *Metaphysical thought of Sri Aurobindo, Social Evolution, Human Nature, Yoga*

1. Introduction

Metaphysics is one of the branches of philosophy. The main task of this metaphysics is to go beyond the apparent form of things to know their inner form, i.e. to find out whether there is any invisible entity, such as soul, God, afterlife, etc., behind this visible world. Now standing in this current situation, one may think, where our society is constantly facing various problems, does this metaphysical thinking have any relevance at all? In answer to this type of question, one can say that metaphysics is basically a matter of philosophy; on the other hand, discussions about society are mainly done by sociologists. However, it can be seen that although sociologists try to solve various problems of society from their different perspectives, it cannot be said that they have been very fruitful in doing so. In this case, if we review the thinking of Rishi Aurobindo about social evolution, then we can see that the main basis of his thinking about the development of society is basically metaphysical thinking. That is, if we review his philosophical thoughts, it can be seen that there is a metaphysical principle and thought behind any kind of thinking. He believed that in order to build a just society, the first thing that is needed is the change of the individual. Now in my essay I will try to focus mainly on how Rishi Aurobindo's metaphysical thought affects social evolution. And while doing that, first of all I will briefly highlight the metaphysical thinking of Sri Aurobindo.

2. Review of the Literature

Before I write this article, I have been inspired by the texts of Sri Aurobindo's *'The Life Divine'* (where metaphysical thoughts are discussed) and *'The Human Cycle'* (where social evolution has been analyzed). In reviewing his thoughts on social evolution, I studied the book *'The Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo'*

by V.P.Varma and the second chapter of this book (Sri Aurobindo's Theory of Civilization and Culture) has greatly attracted me. Moreover, I followed the book '*A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*' to find out the philosophy of Charvaka and Acharya Shankara. I also read the book '*Contemporary Indian Philosophy*' to get better known to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

3. Objective of the Paper

The main purpose of this article is-

First, How Rishi Aurobindo's metaphysical thought affects social evolution?

Second, is it possible to apply Sri Aurobindo's thoughts regarding the evolution of society in the present age?

Third, when will a peaceful society be formed?

4. Sample Source and Methodology

The Present study based on extensive study of primary and secondary data collected from various books. And in this case the Research method I used is analytical method or philosophical analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Metaphysical Thought of Rishi Aurobindo:

Sri Aurobindo says that the question of which of the two, 'matter' and 'consciousness' is the origin of the world, has remained a conflict among philosophers throughout life. According to materialists, 'matter' is the essence of the world. According to them, there can be no greater proof than sense perception. They think that matter is the root of everything, consciousness is matter-dependent. For example, the Charvaka admits the existence of four elements- earth, water, fire, and air. They said, everything which exists, including the mind, is due to a particular combination of these four elements. The elements are eternal, but their combinations undergo production and dissolution. Consciousness is regarded as a mere product of matter. It is produced when the elements combine in a certain proportion. It is found always associated with the body and vanishes when the body disintegrates. 'Just as fermented yeast produces the intoxicating quality in the wine.'¹ On the other hand, according to the idealist, pure soul is the ultimate truth which is eternal and imperishable. They say, this world is changeable, and what is subject to change is impermanent and finite. So 'chit' or 'consciousness' is the principle of the world. What they mean by 'matter' is actually an illusion of consciousness. According to Shankara, ultimate reality, is Atman or Brahman which is Pure Consciousness or Consciousness of the Pure Self which is devoid of all attributes and all categories of the intellect. Brahman or the Lord who is the creator, preserver and destroyer of this world which is His appearance.

From the above discussion it is clear that the main goal of all philosophy is to discover a monism at the root of the world. This monism is a philosophical idea, according to which everything is made up of one and the same entity or object. This is the opposite theory of dualism. According to dualism, everything is made up of two different entities or principles, such as the body and spirit. For example, according to materialists, matter is the only truth, while idealist will say that consciousness is the only truth. But Rishi Aurobindo says both these philosophies are one-sided and they are stating a half-truth. Thus, both philosophies are monistic. But we experience the meeting of both mind and body within ourselves. Body and self-consciousness are inherent in each of us. So, their coordination is possible. But if instead of doing that we deny one and establish the other, then in that case, accepting only one theory. In this case, Rishi Aurobindo thinks that in order to reach the Absolute Truth, i.e. to meet Parama Brahman, coordination of both mind and body is necessary. However, he also said that whether the claim of materialism is true or the claim of idealism is true, the settlement of this ancient debate is not possible by our common experience. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo said, the solution of such problems is possible only through the expansion of consciousness and this expansion of consciousness will be effective only when one is aware of his inner

self and realizes the sense of oneness with the Supreme. And only with this realization will one realize that this Being is within him as well as pervading the entire world. Explaining the matter, he said, just as the waves of the ocean cannot be separated from the sea, similarly this world of ours is a manifestation of the Absolute, there is no difference with the Absolute. In this regard, Sri Aurobindo says, it is not possible to get this kind of understanding based on any kind of egoism, rather it is said that only if one is freed from all kinds of narrowness, one can understand that this world is true, so also consciousness is true and this consciousness is actually beyond the world. And this consciousness is pure consciousness, which Sri Aurobindo calls Brahma.

After a brief discussion of Rishi Aurobindo's metaphysical thought, I discuss the picture of social evolution that he presents in his essay *'The Human Cycle'* and subsequently I try to show how his theory of social evolution is also influenced by metaphysical thought.

5.2 Social Evolution

Sri Aurobindo's thinking about social evolution is known as 'Integral Social Philosophy'. This integral philosophy is basically a combination of metaphysics, epistemology, axiology. In his book *'The Human Cycle'* he explained the social evolution. Sri Aurobindo was greatly inspired by the German historian Karl Lamprecht. However, without fully accepting his (Karl Lamprecht's) ideology, Sri Aurobindo, inspired by the nomenclature of the stratification of human society by adopting German history, Sri Aurobindo took initiative to create such stratification in the Indian social system. However, the German historian Karl Lamprecht observed the history of Europe and especially Germany at that time and came to the conclusion that the progress of human society follows certain psychological stages. Although Sri Aurobindo was inspired by the ideology of Karl Lamprecht, he found some defects of Karl Lamprecht's thoughts. He said, First, Lamprecht does not explain the inner meaning of the successive phases of historical evolution, Secondly, he does not demonstrate the logical necessity of the specific succession of the five phases. Thirdly, he does not discover the ultimate teleology towards which the historical process is moving. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, accepted the spiritual element as the sole factor in social evolution rather than the psychological element as a factor in social evolution. In his book *'The Human Cycle'*, he has highlighted the different eras of Indian society, they are- 1) Symbolic (2) Typal 3) Conventional (4) Individualism and 5) Subjective Age

Sri Aurobindo equates the vedic age of Indian society with the symbolic age of Karl Lamprecht. The thinking and behaviour of the people of this vedic age was under the influence of symbols or symbolic mentality. The people of this section of the society were very religious. They thought that God's miraculous power was behind all their life and actions. In this type of social system all kinds of psychological, moral, financial matters were subordinated to this religious and spiritual one. After the vedic age, the typal age emerged in the society. At this stage of social order all human societies were planned to mold into a psychological and moral ideal. Even religion and spirituality were guided by these psychological and moral ideals and one of them was social prestige or reputation. Typal society later becomes conventional society. When the intrinsic aspect of an ideal is neglected and its external aspect becomes more prominent then the conventional age emerges in the society. As can be said for example, when a person gives more priority to his body or dress than the ideal of the heart. Similarly, at this stage of the social system, the influence and importance of each of these - birth, financial occupation, religious rituals, hereditary customs - began to be revealed in the caste system. Although originally caste was not the main factor in determining social caste, castes were distinguished on the basis of talents and abilities, i.e. qualities and actions. But later this caste system started to be judged by tradition and education and tradition became hereditary. As a result, the practice of always considering the child of a Brahmin as a Brahmin began. But later people's thinking changed and they became interested in knowing the truth through personal reasoning, ethics or inner motivation. As a result of this, the individualistic era began in the society; also, the age of reason, progress, rebellion, and freedom. At this stage of the social system, people understand that if they are to progress in the path of discovering the truth, they must play the role of a guide. He who will find out the real truth by his personal intelligence and judgment and when he realizes the real truth, he will try to rebuild the world's

religion, morals, society, political institutions, human-to-human relations. When one realizes that the whole society is in a state of darkness in the false web of custom and a creed is being imposed upon it without any judgment and analysis, the basis of which is the script of some ancient eclipse, the edict of the Pope, the judgment of various dogmas and scholars, the various classes of scriptures. And their statement is that no person living in the society can do any kind of research, experiment, search on their opinion, rather everyone should accept their opinion without judgment. In this level of social system, the rule of the same traditional customs is seen in all social and political fields. The individual must therefore stand up; a revolution of rationalism must be declared, its main goal being the destruction of lies and the discovery of new truths or the establishment of science. Standing in this individualistic age, people learned to understand that it is not enough to just know the external world; he must know his inner self. As a result, the age of subjectivity emerged in the society. At this stage man realizes that the logic by which he has been driven for so long is not enough to know himself but that he must be actively self-aware in order to reach the deeper regions of the mind. It is at this stage that man seeks to transform his own inner and outer life as well as the entire world or universe through the eternal truth, power, and desire of his heart. And when one after his untiring efforts discovers the spiritual element that lies behind his body and outer world, he realizes that the soul within him is his true nature and the purpose of God's conscious power is to awaken our true nature within. Therefore, the main goal of subjectivism is to realize our inner soul. Now naturally the question is, how is it possible to realize this inner soul?

5.3 Human Nature

Rishi Aurobindo mentions three types of transformations in the inner transformation of a person, there are—psychic transformation, spiritual transformation, and supramental transformation. He says that in every person there are two types of soul, namely – 1) desire Soul, 2) psychic Being. Desire Soul is arrogant. He is bound in body, soul, mind. He knows the world in fragments through his senses but he cannot perceive the wholeness that lies behind this world. Such a man is attached to our body and considers the body as truth. On the other hand, when one realizes that one must not only know the outside world but also know one's self inwardly – that is the true aspect of fruition. And when this sense is clear, the saint discovers a 'greater self'. This is what Sri Aurobindo called 'Psychic Being'. According to Sri Aurobindo, the first phase of consciousness i.e. *Psychic Transformation* is the awakening and activation of this feeling of man. *Spiritual Transformation* is possible as a result of psychic transformation. As a result of Psychic transformation, the saint then realizes the same Atma or God in everything in the world. As a result of spiritual transformation - all is Atma, all is Chinmaya. According to Sri Aurobindo, through psychic and spiritual transformation, the consciousness of the saint progresses towards supramental transformation. He says that this spiritual transformation takes place in phases – this is the general rule of spiritual transformation. There are four lands on the path of consciousness towards supramental – Higher Mind, Illuminated Mind, Intuitive Mind, and Over Mind. Sri Aurobindo says, mind is essentially a consciousness which measures, limits and cuts out froms of things from indivisible wholes and treats them as if each were a separate element. It perceives, senses or conceives things by analyzing them into their component parts. We have also seen that reality cannot be known by such a process, for that mind somehow has to rise above its normal activities and try to cultivate some capacity for unification.

The first condition for this change is that mind must somehow become aware of its own capacities and must be able to possess them- that is, to exercise some control over them. The emergence of such an observing intelligence that is conscious of its own actions is the emergence of, what Sri Aurobindo calls, the *Higher Mind*. He describes it as “the spiritual parent of our conceptive mental ideation”². In the higher mind, as he says, there is no need of the analytical activities that mind normally performs. Higher mind is a self-aware activity towards integration, its most characteristic movement is a *mass ideation*, a seeing of the inner relation of ideas with ideas. Truths, here, are not established by logic, they are sought to be seen in their wholeness- in their pre-reflective unity. In this stage, thus, there is the initial attempt to break away from the bondage of logic and rational analysis and to enter into the realm of the ideal.

But, it is still partial understanding, it is still not free from the empirical and rational pressure. There is as yet not a *luminous* seeing which knows things in a direct grasp. For this, what is needed is not a higher thought, but a mind of spiritual light. Light is essentially illuminative, and, in a special sense, creative also. Thought-process is very slow, it reveals its objects piecemeal, through gradual steps, but there is the need of a sudden and a direct insight. Therefore, the next stage into which mind can ascend is the stage of *Illumined Mind*. Thus, Sri Aurobindo says “As the Higher Mind brings a greater consciousness into the being through the spiritual Idea and its power of Truth, so the illumined mind brings in a still greater consciousness through a Truth-sight and Truth-light and its seeing and seizing power”³.

But these two stages of the ascent of mind can get their authority and fulfillment only by a reference to a third level- that of *Intuition*. Intuition is conceived as a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate to knowledge than any of the two previous stages. Describing its nature Sri Aurobindo says, “Intuition has a fourfold power, a power revelatory Truth-seeing, a power of inspiration or Truth-hearing, a power of Truth-touch or immediate seizing of significance... [and] a power of true and automatic discrimination of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth”⁴. Sri Aurobindo admits that Intuition can perform all the functions of reason and intelligence, with the difference that its grasp of the object is direct and not mediate like that of reason. Therefore, in a rough way the process of ‘integration’ starts in Intuition. But, that is not a process of complete integration. Intuition cannot be called the highest form of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo says, in this stage pure knowledge cannot be attained. Therefore, the next stage of development must be a faculty which, while possessing all powers of Intuition and of other preceding stages, must be capable of receiving the light from above.

This faculty, into which Intuition has to develop, is called by Sri Aurobindo *The Overmind*. Sri Aurobindo describes it as a “super conscient cosmic mind in direct contact with the supramental consciousness”⁵. Over-mind is capable of receiving the light from Supreme Truth-Consciousness. In fact, Over-mind is the proper link between mind and Supermind, it performs the mental activities in a spiritual manner, and its cosmic consciousness is a result of its affinity with Supermind. Sri Aurobindo says, Overmind is not Supermind. Overmind can view every power of the Supreme as a separate reality. It deals with separate possibilities, and so can make every possibility a separate existence complete in itself. But the integral view is completely missed here.

That view would be possible only when the veil separating the two hemispheres is removed and there is a final leap into the status of the Supermind. It is true that the individual is the instrument and the first field of transformation, but an isolated individual transformation is not enough nor wholly feasible. This transformation takes place finally on a cosmic level. Sri Aurobindo says, this kind of transformation is possible only when the saint is freed from all kinds of ignorance. Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo – spiritual evolution is possible only through the transformation of both body and soul. And he called this kind of transformation *Supramental Transformation*. Sri Aurobindo describes the nature of supramental transformation, he says, “In this comprehensive knowledge there is no independent centre of existence, no individual separated ego such as we see in ourselves, that whole of existence is to its self-awareness an equable extension, one in oneness, one in multiplicity, one in all conditions and everywhere.”⁶ Therefore, if we look at Sri Aurobindo's thinking, it can be seen that the whole world is governed by the power of Brahma and this power is the essence of every person.

Sri Aurobindo in his metaphysical thought never talked about the progress of a single individual, rather his goal was the progress of the entire mankind. The power of Brahma's, which Sri Aurobindo describes as *Supermind* or *Ritchit*, first descends into matter and again seeks to merge with its own being. Sri Aurobindo never described Brahma as a fixed entity in his philosophy. This metaphysical thinking of Sri Aurobindo is equally applicable to his social evolution. He said, only when real knowledge about the soul is possible, the spiritual age will emerge in the society.

This spiritual society is based on three basic truths and our main aim is to discover them properly, which are covered by the present social system. These three truths are – God, Freedom, and Unity. These three are different aspects of the same thing because the individual cannot attain freedom and unity unless he realizes God. Only when one can see God and gain Him will he know true freedom and attain unity. And only when all forms of egoism are severed from one's life will one get the taste of true spirituality. He said

that in this society a person will be guided by the rules of the divine nature of his heart instead of being guided by his own rules and the person who meets such a divine man in his heart feels all as one soul. Therefore, the realization of integral oneness with all is also an important condition of spiritual life. The aim of this spiritual being is not only to seek and attain God in oneself but to seek and attain God in all and to seek the liberation or fulfillment of oneself as well as the liberation and fulfillment of all. And a person's life will be complete only when he can realize this kind of unity with all the living beings of the world.

5.4 Yoga

Rishi Aurobindo said that self-realization is not possible through any ordinary experience, he spoke of 'Yoga' as a method of self-realisation. According to him, 'Yoga' is a kind of sadhana, through which man feels the unity of the Supreme Soul within himself and to attain unity, the awakening of human nature is necessary. He thinks that through 'Yoga' the reconciliation of this soul with the Supreme Soul is possible. Sri Aurobindo realized that transformation of both inner and outer life is necessary to meet the ultimate truth. The inner life is composed of mind and life whereas the outer life is physical. Sri Aurobindo says the transformation of body, soul and mind is 'Purnyoga'. He observed that different yogas emphasized different aspects. For example, hatha yoga deals with the various disciplines of the body, raja yoga deals with the transition of the mind, jnana yoga deals with various aspects of knowledge growth, bhakti yoga deals with the different paths of devotion, and karma yoga emphasizes action. But he thought that the overall development of human nature is not possible only through knowledge, action or bhakti, but he said that the overall development of human nature is possible only through the combination of knowledge, bhakti, and action, that is why his yoga is called 'Integral Yoga'. According to him, 'aspiration', 'rejection', and 'surrender' are the methods by which the sadhaka can attain perfection in the pursuit of Purnayoga. 'Aspiration' refers to the intense desire to attain God. 'Renunciation or rejection' means to free the body, soul, mind from all doubts, lust, ego etc. And 'surrender' means to completely surrender oneself to God through action, devotion, and knowledge. Thus, the main goal of Sri Aurobindo's yoga is to find the way for the entire human race to reach from ignorance to self-knowledge i.e. the recovery of the entire human race and the discovery of the 'divine life' on earth. Sri Aurobindo says that through the mutual exchange of individuals, a spiritual age will emerge in society. However, he said, even if this spiritual level is reached, the vedic age will re-emerge in the society, and gradually from the vedic age, passing through all the typical and conventional ages, the spiritual age will emerge., will again pass-through various levels to reach the supermind level, similarly as Rishi Aurobindo recognized the same in social evolution. Thus, Rishi Aurobindo mentions the 'cyclical process' in both metaphysics and social progress. And his thinking about society is unique from other philosophies because his metaphysical thinking is behind social evolution, which sets him apart from other philosophers.

Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical thought and spiritual elements as the only reason for social evolution, judging and analyzing all this, one may think that this kind of thinking of Sri Aurobindo has any relevance in our current social system at all? In today's society, where problems like violence, superstition, religious hatred are constantly consuming people, where farmers are facing various problems day after day, thousands of children are dying of hunger, is it possible to solve these problems through spiritual development? one can say that if this spirituality does not solve all these problems, then this kind of spirituality has no value in our present life.

In answer to this question, the aim of the spirituality spoken by Rishi Aurobindo is not to solve such problems of individuals in the society but the aim of his spirituality is to awaken our consciousness and see life in a new way. When the individual transforms into an inner-being, he realizes oneness with all in the world. Sri Aurobindo has repeatedly said that a just society can be formed through individual change. So it is not possible to suddenly solve this kind of problem of the society. So each of us should realize our inner self through spirituality. If we can change our hearts by advancing on the path of this kind of spirituality, then one day the problem of violence, superstition and religious hatred will be eradicated from the society.

6. Conclusion

Rishi Aurobind said, violence, superstition, religious hatred from society will go away only when the spiritual age will emerge in society. Before this spiritual age comes, most people have to emerge who are no longer satisfied with their practical life. Those who understand are not an external change; only spiritual evolution is our true goal and we have to apply it in our own life. Thus, those who realize the need for this kind of spiritual evolution and understand the necessity of such a change in social progress will show the future human society a new direction of spirituality, and their main point is to try to live in this spiritual change. But the question arises in this case is how all the people living in the society simultaneously are possible?

The answer to this kind of question is that all people living in the society may not be able to pass the spiritual level together, but the classification of society can be the kind of society where there will be a group of spiritual levels and there are some people who will live at the mental level and where the dispersion of spiritual light will be reflected. And below it can have a huge population that is influenced by spirituality, but they are not yet ready to reach the spiritual level. However, if this type of society is also possible, then we can say that the era will be much greater than the previous ages.

About this kind of spiritual evolution in the social field, some may say that this kind of thinking is lagging behind him instead of preparing social life for the future compared to the progress of society. This is because the key point of this age is that by any kind of external power or argument, cannot make the entire human society flawless. Sri Aurobindo realized individual's internal change is more important to build a just society. But this kind of change is so difficult that even if it is not possible for all people in the society.?

In this case, it can be said that the path of spirituality is not impossible. Because man has come out of his primitive nature and has been able to build his entire life through intellect, in the same way that human beings have the power by which he will pass through his heart's endeavors and pass all the limits of this external world to spiritual life. And when it comes to this spiritual life, the person will be able to understand 'unity' with all creatures and the world.

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