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Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin —A Comparative Study

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Abstract

‘Teilhard De Chardin’ started his exploration on the basis of scientific investigations, described everything in terms of their inherent possibilities and lastly, he established a theory of spiritualistic mentality. His philosophy is totally devoted to a synthesis among the world of matter, life and spirit and also at the same time the unity of the many with one. We see that unification is the main purpose in his philosophy. Another most important and at the same time fundamental point is the theory of transformism or evolutionary process which is “.....a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow”². It is clear to us that Chardin thinks of the material objects as the starting point of the cosmic evolution and Omega Point is the superior state of evolution. According to him, biological development of the different creatures shows a tendency that the universe is making process to an ultimate goal. Where in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo we find that he gives importance to finite objects in which reality is potentially inherent. From his evolutionary theory, we see that each and every step of evolution is necessary for the proper realization of the Absolute Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo welcomes both finite as well as infinite being. Accordingly to him, the reality descends itself into finite objects in order to come back to itself. Naturally, Being, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the ultimate truth and the world is real precisely for it exists in Being and is created by Conscious Energy which is one with Being. Being and non-being are not contradictory but complementary to each other.

Keywords: *Sri Aurobindo, Chardin, Evolution, Spirituality, Matter, Life, Mind*

1. Introduction

In Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy Consciousness is not a capricious something but it is an unchanging, self-luminous ultimate reality. It is the Being which is the fundamental basis or essence of everything. This consciousness is the reality which is the inherent in Existence. This Consciousness assumes the role of cosmic reality which is also the basis of individual Existence. Consciousness as such, pure and transcendental, is the abstract nature of reality separated from the world and men. But it is the reality throbbing with the delight and bliss of Existence manifesting itself in all the objects of the world by its force. It is the aim of human consciousness to identify itself with that all comprehensive Conscious Spiritual Reality in an ever ascending process through the different stages of Integral Knowledge. The French philosopher is well known for his theory that man is evolving towards a final spiritual unity- not only mentally but also socially. He wanted to reconcile and unify science with religion and lastly somehow resembling Christian Science. He reveals his view on the basis of scientific investigation.

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² De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard (1959). *The Phenomenon of Man*, Collins, London, p.219.

2. Objective of the paper

The paper deals with a comparative study between Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo. If we analyse the philosophy of both it is clear to us that both of them have admitted the evolutionary process which helps us to realize the ultimate truth. Both philosophers accepted that the evolutionary process starts from matter which ultimately reached to beyond itself. Chardin accepted this ultimate truth is God where Sri Aurobindo accepts Brahman to be the ultimate reality.

3. Discussion

The first of his evolutionary process is matter, which gives rise to a complex structure full of limitless energy and invariable precondition of life. As he says, “Plurality, unity, energy; the three faces of matter”³. Matter has a potentiality, for which from matter life proceeds and such a development was possible because matter had the potentiality. This shows that life is not an accidental phenomenon but is a stage in the development of the universe. He says, “Life evolves out of matter, begins with the cell which is the natural granule of life”⁴. Chardin got his idea of relationship between matter and life from biological sciences. He thinks also that the whole universe contains a relation of interdependence, passing from one stage to another and matter has a structure of disorder but at the same time it proceeds towards an ordered whole, i.e, the manifestation of energy which is found in matter. So life is a continuity of matter but matter has characteristics that are different from life which means that there is a discontinuity.

In the further stage of progress, life comes to evolve the conscious human being, a culmination of evolution. Chardin would say that such evolution is possible because the possibility of man is potentially contained in the force of life. In Chardin’s philosophy, Man is not a caprice or accidental product, but he is the crowning point of cosmic evolution possessing supreme characteristics. Man is the higher form of evolution, where human personality is revealed.

These different orders of evolution suggest that there is a spiritual element inherent in the whole creation as it is found in the Christian theology that the universe is the body of God. Man is no doubt a finite being but also he has a spiritual tendency towards the unification with God. It may not be God proper but may be the manifestation of God in Christ. The God in Christianity comes to share with man’s existence and destiny. Here God is called the Omega Point, as the end of human journey. At this point “.....the noosphere will be intensely unified and will have achieved a ‘hyper personal’ organization”⁵. God is present in the universe. He is Transcendent, Eternal and Personal. There is a continuous progress in the universe and has to recognize and proceed towards the ultimate point- God, but Chardin never says that man can completely identify himself with God.

Chardin thinks that the ideal of Christ being realised by every man will give him access to God. All the bad things will disappear from him and he will become the perfect man. He thinks that such men will construct an ideal society in which every man will be free from sin, will be full of

³ De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard (1959). *The Phenomenon of Man*, Collins, London, p.40.

⁴ De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard (1959). *The Phenomenon of Man*, Collins, London, p.79.

⁵ De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard (1959). *The Phenomenon of Man*, Collins, London, pp.18-19.

love and attain the greatness of Christ. Mankind as a whole, says Chardin, “Accordingly achieve more intense, more complex and more integrated mental activity, which can guide the human species up the path of progress to higher level of hominisation”⁶. Society does not enjoy itself consciousness and has no objective value, on the other hand, compassion, mutual action, sense of humanity have an important role for man’s progress. It is also true that man’s understanding the truth of his being will help him to realize ‘Cosmic sense of a spirit of the Earth’ due to which human thought comes to harmony with one another.

Ideas of order and harmony in the universe have derived by Chardin from Science. The scientific picture of reality has made him understand the order and harmony in the universe and man will be able to establish the kingdom of God in this earth by developing the spiritual qualities, which are found in him, for the whole universe is animated by spirit. He could say that it is the one Spirit which is in all things of the world and man. The Absolute is present in everything that lights up and expands. In the words of Chardin, “Everything is filled with an essential flavour of the absolute”⁷.

So, the order of Teilhard de Chardin’s evolutionary process is-
Matter →Life →Man →towards God (the Omega Point is God, thought man cannot reach the identity with God, i.e, identification between man and God is absent in his philosophy).

The above discussion of Chardin’s philosophy may make us wonder that his thought and that of Sri Aurobindo do have the same philosophical attitude. It is true that both have similarities to some extent but Sri Aurobindo has explained philosophical truth in a greater and more comprehensive way and the fundamental realization of the philosophers is different. Here our task is to show some points of similarity and difference between them to get an insight into the philosophical revelations of Sri Aurobindo.

The similarities between two great thinkers can be stated in the following points-

From the philosophy of both, Chardin and Sri Aurobindo, it is known to us that they have accepted an ultimate goal towards which human beings are proceeding. Chardin says that God, in the evolutionary process, is the ultimate truth. Sri Aurobindo accepts Brahman to be the ultimate reality.

Potentiality of the spirit in matter has been believed by both of them. Chardin says, “Matter has always had a history; it is subject to a genesis; it is in process of ascending towards higher states. Matter is a limitless source of energies, with the potentiality to produce forms in which it will go beyond itself”⁸ Substance or Matter in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy is only a form of Spirit⁹.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of Supermind, a state of Bliss, a bridge between the world and ultimate reality, “.....as a Truth-Consciousness in which the Divine Reality, fully manifested, no longer

⁶ De Chardin, Pierre Teilhard (1959). *The Phenomenon of Man*, Collins, London, p.17.

⁷ Emile, Redeau (1967). *Teilhard de Chardin- A Guide to His Thought* (Translated by Rene Hague), Collins, London, p.66.

⁸ Emile, Redeau (1967). *Teilhard de Chardin- A Guide to His Thought* (Translated by Rene Hague), Collins, London, p.52.

⁹ Sri Aurobindo (1977). *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, p.10.

works with the instrumentation of the Ignorance”¹⁰. This point resembles Chardin’s thinking of man where he says, “Man is nothing else than evolution becoming Conscious of itself” and “that consciousness of each one of us is evolution looking at itself, and reflecting on itself”¹¹.

The last point is that man full of perfection is nearer to God, and ideal society which is full of love is based on the perfect life of human being. Teilhard de Chardin says, “.....matter and life were only the half-hidden symbol of this structural organization of society”¹². In Sri Aurobindo, we have seen that our realization of truth, revelation of Spirit in ourselves out of Vital, Mental, Physical existence help us to have a Divine Life on earth. Sri Aurobindo says, “A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity”¹³. A total transformation of the whole being, which is possible by our realization of Consciousness, is needed for bringing a new collective existence.

After discussing the similarities of the thoughts of Chardin and Sri Aurobindo, we can look forward to their differences in the following way-

Sri Aurobindo, an Absolutist, establishes his view on the basis of mystical experiences. He himself believes that our life is Yoga and our realization of Truth is possible by Yoga. But here Chardin got his idea from the investigation of Science. In support of this view we can quote a remarkable line, from the book, Teilhard de Chardin- A Guide to his Thought, “The whole of Teilhard’s work is based initially on a scientific philosophy of the material and biological universe”¹⁴.

Both Teilhard and Sri Aurobindo believed that human beings have to reach an ultimate destiny. Sri Aurobindo has described this goal as Brahman or Sachchidānanda and the whole universe is the manifestation of this reality. Chardin may think that the universe has a physical as well as a spiritual value and as the body of God, it is endowed with a minimum degree of consciousness but admitting such a view he makes a separation between God and the world. Here Sri Aurobindo differs because he thinks, Brahman manifests Itself as the world. Unless the reality comes down to the lower objects, the lower objects or beings can never rise to the higher. There is an identification between the world and the Spirit.

In Chardin’s philosophy we see three stages of the evolutionary process. These are- a) structure of matter, b) living beings, and c) man. God is supposed to be the ultimate point of the world but God is not coming into existence as a product of evolution though. He is the creator of the world and controls the universe. But evolutionary processes, in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy are- Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind, Bliss, Consciousness- Force, Existence and Supreme Consciousness is manifesting itself in different stages.

Chardin says that the ultimate goal is to become Christ or the perfect man who is nearer to God though there is not a complete unification of man with God as stated in Christian theology. But

¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo (1970). *The Synthesis of Yoga* (SABCL, Vol. 28), Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, p.266.

¹¹ Emile, Redeau (1967). *Teilhard de Chardin- A Guide to His Thought* (Translated by Rene Hague), Collins, London, p.47.

¹² Emile, Redeau (1967). *Teilhard de Chardin- A Guide to His Thought* (Translated by Rene Hague), Collins, London, p.56.

¹³ Sri Aurobindo (1977). *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, p.1059.

¹⁴ Emile, Redeau (1967). *Teilhard de Chardin- A Guide to His Thought* (Translated by Rene Hague), Collins, London, p.74.

Sri Aurobindo does not speak of God in the traditional sense of the term. He says that everyone can become the Supermind by knowledge and spiritual experiences and also through Self-Knowledge or realisation of Consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo believes in the two processes of evolution-descending and ascending processes which are necessary for the manifestation and evolution of the Supreme Consciousness. It is not only the fact that different orders are coming into existence as progress towards the Super Mind but Brahman is also going down to the different stages to give rise to different orders, which are at a distance from the Supreme Consciousness. But just in this description of the evolutionary process Chardin speaks of the ascending order but he is silent on the descending order. This is so because there is a separation between the existence of God and other beings.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is oriented to the realization of the one vision of Truth but Chardin has presented a philosophy which reveals many partial truths, all struggling to realize a unity, though the unity remains always a distant goal. So Teilhard's philosophy ends in such a position that it is very difficult to reconcile his view either with a scientific theory of evolution or with Orthodox Christian teaching.

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