

THEORY OF EVOLUTION-INVOLUTION IN SRI AUROBINDO'S THOUGHT SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This article is verily based upon the Aurobindonian philosophy of life within the process of ascent-descent of soul and its journey in the cosmic phenomenon. He has propounded this theory through various writings and represented it exquisitely in his epic Savitri as an archetypal pattern. In involution Existence, Consciousness-Force, Bliss, Supermind, Mind, Psyche, Life, and Matter are in descending order whereas in evolution there must be an ascending order. The spirit manifests itself here in the body must be involved from the beginning in the whole of matter and in every knot formation and particle of matter, life, and whatever is above mind. By virtue of the principle of manifestation of Sachchidananda, for it is that which lies hidden in matter.

Keywords: Ascent-Descent; Evolution-Involution; Sachchidanand; Superconscious-Inconscious; Supermind

INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) is a well-known figure in Indian English literature especially in poetry. Sri Aurobindo's personality was multi-faceted with wide range of knowledge that there is rarely anything beneath the sun which is beyond his reach. He was a revolutionary leader, a born poet, a social thinker and spiritual philosopher, a visionary humanist, a mystic, a prophet, a scholar, an educationist, but first and foremost according to his own accounts, he was a poet.

We see Sri Aurobindo as a great occult scientist; meet him as a mystic of mystics using the medium of poetry to convey to humanity his deep and profound experience of spiritual life. Here an attempt has been made to bring out concept of Evolution-Involution propounded by Sri Aurobindo as one of symbolic and archetypal pattern in his super epic *Savitri*.

Sri Aurobindo uses a number of bipolar terms and concepts to explain the complexity of cosmos. Amongst them the concept of Evolution-Involution is very prominent.

Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours. (*Savitri* 4)

To

Teased the Inconscious to wake ignorance. (*Savitri* 2)

At the physical level, there is inconscience and inertia. The consciousness is lost in the depths of matter, although it is there involved in its thick layers.

An inertia sunk towards inconscience,
A sleep that imitates death in her repose.
A puny splendour of creative force
Is made his spur to fragile human works
Which yet outlast their brief creator's breath. (164)

After the involution comes the evolution. What is hidden must emerge. What is involved must evolve. If consciousness of the Reality is hidden and involved in matter, it must evolve out of it and recover its Truth, Beatitude and Bliss in Manifestation. That is the real meaning of evolution-involution.

According to Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolutionary progression, before there could be any evolution, there must be an involution of the Divine. Otherwise there would not be an evolution but a successive creation of things new.

The spirit which manifests itself here in a body must be involved from the beginning in the whole of matter and in every knot formation and particle of matter, life, mind and whatever is above mind. By virtue of the principle of involution; evolution must lead to the full manifestation of Sachchidananda, for it is that which lies hidden in matter.

The seed of Godhead sleeps in mortal hearts,
The flower of Godhead grows on the world-trees:
All shall discover God in self and things. (446)

The term of evolution then coincides with its origin. Consequently, the outgoing of the Absolute into the relative can have no other purpose than a return to the point of departure. If the Absolute is the sole origin of reality, then it must also be its only end. The „closed finality“ is a necessary corollary of Sri Aurobindo's monism of the fundamental principle. All comes from the Absolute and to the Absolute all must return.

The affirmation of divine life on earth and of an immortal spirit in mortal existence presupposes the control of spirit over both the human body and Matter, rather Matter in the womb of eternal spirit.

He shall light up Truth's fire in Nature's night,
He shall lay upon the earth Truth's greater law;
Man too shall turn towards the Spirit's call. (709)

The main thrust of Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is the integral character of the various levels of Being in the universe. The lower forms, mind, life and body are waiting to be taken up and transformed by the light, power and joy of the spiritual consciousness and only by such transformation can the potential value that lies concealed in them be revealed.

Sri Aurobindo explains his philosophy of evolution in *The Riddle of this World* thus:

If we regard the gradation of world or planes as a whole, we see them as a great connected complex movement; the higher precipitate their influences on the lower, the lower react to the higher and develop or manifest in themselves within their own formula something that corresponds to the superior power and its action. The material world has evolved life in obedience to a pressure from the vital plane, mind in obedience to the pressure from the mental plane. It is now trying to evolve Supermind in obedience to a pressure from the Supramental plane. (qtd. in Ray 98)

The theory of evolution aims at realizing the ultimate Reality which is Sat Chit and Ananda just as it also aims awareness of the ultimate value. It is, as Sri Aurobindo observes, “a discovery of the reality of things by which human existence can learn its law and aim and principle of its perfection.”(qtd. in Sharma 5)

Its powers have come from the eternal heights

And plunged into the inconscient dim Abyss
And risen from it to do their marvellous work. (*Savitri* 648)

Evolution lies in becoming more and more conscious, gradually “awakening to self”. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes that “Man becomes God, and all human activity reaches its highest and noblest when it succeeds in bringing body, heart and mind into touch with spirit” (Sri Aurobindo, *The National Value of Art* 249)

The aim of Sri Aurobindo is the release of the spirit-substance of man from its prison in Matter, the cause of pain and suffering. The core of his mystico-philosophical thought is the functional principle that knowledge is being. Knowledge in his schema is something more than analytical categorizing; it is total understanding. According to him, all knowledge is the knowledge of God and we have our being in the Divine. Knowledge of the one essence of all existence helps transfigure the lower into a higher integral whole. The integration of Yoga and Philosophy for the purposes of spirituo-psychological growth of man is unique. His system, which aims not only at realizing the supreme spirit, the Sachchidananda, but also at bringing it down to lower orders of reality, so that the lower might be elevated to higher consciousness, discloses:

Something of the divine possibilities for man, as well as the greatness of the Power manifest in what man now is. By truer and deeper insight into the nature and meaning of the world he can aid man bring diviner potentialities and more spiritual values into personal and social life. (Langley 113-14)

Spiritual experience alone is the basis of Sri Aurobindo’s theory of evolution.

Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual evolution aims at cosmic liberation, which is Supramental conversion. The spiritual evolution is a graded evolution of the spiritual consciousness which lies involved in the Inconscient, an inverse reproduction of the Superconscient, which is lost in itself. Matter, Life, Psyche, Mind and Supermind are the important grades of evolution, each successive order being more expressive of the inner truth than the preceding one, that is, Life is more evolved and more expressive of the Divine than Matter. The Supermind is the highest order and constitutes the self-awareness or Truth-Consciousness of the Supreme. There are, however, many intermediary orders between Mind and Supermind, which the evolution has to pass through when it ranges between any two decisive planes. The stages are interpenetrative. Sri Aurobindo also reminds us that the idea of the Supermind has been in existence since ancient times:

There was in India and elsewhere the attempt to reach it by rising to it; but what was missed was the way and to make it integral for the life and bring it down for transformation of the whole nature, even of the physical nature. (qtd. in Goswami 51)

An ascent to the higher plane involves change of consciousness. “Evolution for Sri Aurobindo means both a higher stage of mind and all conscious and a simultaneous transformation of matter itself” (Diwakar 332)

In the involution process Existence, Consciousness-Force, Bliss, Supermind, Mind, Psyche, Life and Matter are in the descending order. In evolution there must be an ascending order since one cycle has to be complete before the next and higher cycle begins. Supermind, which is the creative force and possesses the power of

development, provides the force of ascension. Evolution according to Sri Aurobindo, is not the abandoning of the lower orders of existence but their transformation as it proceeds. It may be said that the whole of creation is a process of involution and evolution: it is the spirit in which all is involved and out of which all evolves.

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