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Sri Aurobindo's Theory of Evolution

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Abstract:

Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is a philosophical theory of evolution based upon philosophical speculation and not an empirical investigation. Aurobindo stated that the ultimate reality is of the nature of a dynamic principle. Reality is all attempting to manifest itself and through its self-manifestation is trying to come back to itself. So, there are two processes going on in the Universe. One is the process of downward movement called involution. The other is the process of upward movement called evolution. Evolution presupposes involution, in fact, evolution is possible only because involution has already taken place. According to Aurobindo, Evolutionary growth is a triple process; it involves processes of widening, heightening and integration. In simple language it means that at first it involves an extension of scope and the incorporation of co-existence forms, then it involves a development and growth towards higher form. But, in this process nothing is to be completely rejected, everything finally has to be integrated. The process of widening, therefore, means providing greater scope for the operation of every new element or principle. The second process of heightening means ascent from one step or grade to another higher grade. But the most important character of the evolutionary process is integration. Evolution is not growing from the lower grades to the higher ones—supersending and rejecting the lower ones as they are crossed. Now, I will discuss Aurobindo's theory of evolution in this paper....

Key words: Evolution, Widening, Heightening, Integration, Eight stages of Reality

1. Introduction

SRI Aurobindo's theory of evolution is a philosophical theory of evolution based upon philosophical speculation and not an empirical investigation. Aurobindo stated that the ultimate reality is the nature of a dynamic principle. Reality is all attempting to manifest itself and through its self-manifestation is trying to come back to it. So, there are two processes going on in the Universe. One is the process of downward movement called involution. The other is the process of upward movement called evolution. Because the ultimate reality has come down to the world. So the world can move up to the ultimate reality. So the world can move up to the ultimate reality. In the world there is prior involution. Evolution is possible because of this prior involution. Therefore according to Aurobindo, involution and evolution are related processes.

2. Objectives of the Paper

- This paper tries to explain the theory of evolution.
- This paper tries to focus the relation between involution and evolution.
- This paper tries to explain the process of evolution.
- This paper tries to explain the eight stages of reality.

Evolution is an inverse action of the involution: What is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution; what was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence." This being the basic law that Evolution must follow, what would be the procedure of its ascent'? Firstly, "An evolution of forms of Matter more and more subtle and intricately organized so as to admit the action of a growing, a more and more complex and subtle and capable organization of consciousness" which would form the indispensable physical foundation. Secondly, "An upward evolutionary progress of the consciousness itself from grade to higher grade, an ascent, is the evident spiral line or emerging curve that, on this foundation, the evolution must describe." Thirdly, "A taking up of what has already been evolved into each higher grade as it is reached and a transformation more or less complete so as to admit of a total changed working of the whole being and nature, an integration, must be also part of the process, if the evolution is to be effective." A complexity of forms, an ascent and then an integration are the three principles of evolution.

In involution we find the plunge of the spirit into ignorance. In evolution we find the journey of ignorance to pure knowledge which is of the nature of pure spirit. While in involution the spirit comes down to the world, in evolution there is the opposite journey. While involution is the process of descent, evolution is the process of ascent. Aurobindo in his book attempted to give a definition of evolution. He stated that evolution is "A heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still un-manifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from mind into the spirit."

Aurobindo stated that the process of evolution is a triple process. Three factors are involved in this process. They are the following.....

- The first is the process of widening. That means in the process of evolution there is a widening of the field. In this process greater room is provided for each principle it emerges.
- Secondly there is the process of heightening. In the process of evolution there is a movement from the lower to the higher. Every new stage that emerges is higher than the earlier one. In the process of evolution there is a movement from higher to still higher one. This is indicated by the term heightening.
- The third component factor of evolution is the process of integration. In the process of evolution, Aurobindo pointed out, the lower grades are not discarded. They are taken up, lifted up and transformed. By transformation they are incorporated into the higher grades. That is indicated by the term integration.

Thus according to Aurobindo widening, heightening, and integration are the three processes involved in evolution. For integration the descent of the higher principle into the lower principle is required. Without the descent the lower principle cannot be incorporated into the higher principles. So it is clear that for Aurobindo the process of evolution requires prior involution. Understood in this sense evolution is an ascent through descent. Evolution is not growing from the lower grades to the higher ones—superseding and rejecting the lower ones as they are crossed. On the contrary, it implies that the lower ones are uplifted and transformed. Integration in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo means ascent through descent. The higher descends into the lower and transforms it completely, in that way the lower ascends to the higher.

Aurobindo stated that the starting point of evolution is ignorance. The middle point is ignorance and the final point is knowledge. From the point of view of the inner life of the spirit evolution is a movement from Absolute ignorance to knowledge (video S.K. Maitra's book *An Introduction to The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*, page-45). According to Aurobindo, evolution first takes place in the matter. It is significant to note that Aurobindo quoted a line from the taittiriya Upanisad: "Matter also in Brahman". For Aurobindo matter is also a manifestation of the ultimate reality and hence has the ability to raise itself to the level of ultimate reality. While discussing evolution Aurobindo mentioned eight phases or stages of reality. These stages may also be regarded as the stages of evolution. The first four stages represent the spirit coming down to the world.

These four stages are:

- Existence
- Consciousness-force.
- Bliss.
- Supermind.

According to Aurobindo they constitute the upper-hemisphere of reality. The four remaining stages represent the world's upward movement to the spirit.

These four stages are....

- Matter
- Life.
- Psyche.
- Mind.

It is on account of the descent of the spirit in Matter, Life, and Mind that these ascend to the higher regions of the spirit. Matter can evolve into life only because life itself has been involved in it, life can ascend to mind only because there has been a descent of the mind into a life already, the entire lower hemisphere can ascend to the higher one only because the higher is already in the lower one. Sri Aurobindo feels that the lower can not evolve into the higher unless the higher is already in it because evolution can not proceed out of nothing, because it cannot violate the principle of 'nothing out of nothing'. Therefore, he conceives evolution as the reverse process of involution. According to Sri Aurobindo, "Spirit is a final evolutionary emergence because it is the original involutory element and factor. Evolution is an inverse action of the involution: what is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution. What was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence." Sri Aurobindo says that evolution in the realm has passed through matter, life, psyche and mind and has reached so far the realm of mind. Life evolves in Matter and therefore is 'matter-bound'. Mind evolves in Life, and therefore, it is both 'matter-bound and 'life-bound'.

These four stages such as Matter, Life, Psyche and Mind constitute the lower-hemisphere. The Absolute reality comes from pure existence through Consciousness-Force and Bliss to the Supermind. On the other hand in the reverse way matter has risen up to mind through the intervening stages of Life and Psyche. There is a meeting point of the upper-hemisphere and the lower-hemisphere. There is a thin veil that separates the mind from the Supermind. If that veil is turned apart then the light from the Supermind will enter mind and as a result our whole terrestrial existence will be transformed and this transformation will ultimately make preparation for the Divine Life (The metaphor of life is frequently used by the mystics).

Moreover, Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution come across along with the description of cosmic evolution, a description of the evolution of the individual also. Evolution, according to Sri Aurobindo, is as much individual as cosmic. In fact, he recognizes the immense importance of the individual and feels that the individual is the medium through which spirit reveals and discloses its being. Therefore, the integral theory of evolution attempts to describe the basic feature of individual's evolution also. This becomes one of the distinctive characteristic of Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion it is noted that Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is based on philosophical speculation. According to Sri Aurobindo evolution is possible because of prior involution. Therefore according to him, involution and evolution are closely related. He stated that the process of evolution is a triple process. Three factors are involved in this process. These three factors are widening, heightening and integration.

4. References

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