

EVOLUTION AND THE ASCENT TOWARDS SUPERMIND

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Consciousness Turned towards the Supramental Light

Photo credit: Suhas Mehra

Introduction

Human life in the present is characterised by a preponderance of the rational and vital tendencies of man, and indeed all of human history has been a meandering march through primarily the three external layers i.e. the physical, vital and the mental. It is true that many ancient civilisations had seized the primordial truth in its eternal essence, long before the general mass of humanity had even risen to a level of basic comprehension of the same, but the ancient expression of the Truth was still a realisation within the outer physical crust of consciousness, held in place by rituals, convention and fixed type. Undergoing cycles of emergence, sustenance, decay, disintegration, and finally a rediscovery on a successively higher and wider plane, the eternal truth as manifest in the civilisational life of man has waxed and waned a countless number of times. Making the present the vantage point for viewing the journey of man from where it currently stands to where it may be destined to head is the central purpose of this research paper. We will look at the further evolution of human consciousness in the light of Sri Aurobindo's vision using the framework and terminology of his Yoga, and also aim at arriving at a plausible future spiritual vision for humanity as a whole.

The Idea of Evolution

“A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter in a constant developing self-formation till the form can reveal the indwelling Spirit, is then the key-note, the central significant motive of terrestrial existence” (Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p.824). In Sri Aurobindo’s vision, all of creation is a self-manifestation of the vast, infinite Spirit or Truth Consciousness that limits itself into denser and denser grades of consciousness like mind, life and matter through the process of involution and subsequently releases itself through a progressive expression of its latent potential through a reverse cycle of evolution, finally culminating into a spiritual manhood that is a perfect and complete expression of the Godhead in man. Under this scheme of things, the lowest involute of Supreme Consciousness is the inconscient underlying matter, followed by life, mind, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind and Intuitive Mind. The last three are refined and relatively higher states beyond the ordinary mind but still are part of the Ignorance or the lower hemisphere. Overmind is an intermediary plane which connects the lower hemisphere with the higher hemisphere comprising Supermind and the triune of Sacchidananda (Truth, Consciousness, Bliss), both of which come under the region of Knowledge (*Dalal*, p.26). Consciousness in the Ignorance is characterised by a gross separation and a rigid individuality whereas in the Knowledge it becomes increasingly rarefied, finer and luminescent, there is distinctness but an underlying oneness and harmony. “These gradations may be summarily described as a series of sublimations of the consciousness... there is a succession of self-transmutations at the summit of which lies the Supermind or Divine Gnosis” (*Ibid.*, p.938). Supermind is that level of consciousness, which in essence is the Divine executive agency, the forbearer of the Divine’s will and is characterised by unity in diversity. Here, the backdrop of Sacchidananda remains unhampered even though there is the first emergence of a sense of multiple centres of consciousness.

“This terrestrial evolutionary working of Nature from Matter to Mind and beyond is a double process: there is an outward visible process of physical evolution with birth as its machinery ... and an invisible process of soul evolution with rebirth into ascending grades of form and consciousness as its machinery” (*Ibid.*, p.825). Modern science has testified to the fact of physical evolution and the traditional spiritualists have embraced the idea of soul’s evolution leading to a final release from the cycles of rebirth. But both the materialist and the spiritualist have not been able to conceive of an idea of an integral spiritual evolution in man – the very terrestrial manifestation in man of a consciousness so high and undivided that its description within the frame of matter-life-mind Ignorance is nearly impossible. However, such an evolution is not just a possibility but an inevitability given the dual involutionary-evolutionary nature of consciousness in all-that-is and the self-delight nature of Sacchidananda, his unceasing propensity towards Lila or

cosmic play. Above the world-process and right alongside it there are higher levels of consciousness that exist and often reach down to embed themselves in the lower nature creating an upward thrust in the lower elements to express and emerge as the next higher elements. At the highest level, the supramental consciousness is always at work penetrating the earthly life and lifting it upwards towards a greater light and harmony. The most conscious agency of bringing this supramental light on to the earth plane is a human soul which has evolved to a good degree within the bounds of Ignorance and by virtue of its seeking and psychic development poses to be a fit instrument of the Knowledge realm to which the supramental belongs.

The Psychic and Spiritual development

As the human soul advances in terrestrial evolution, it develops a psychic being inside, which is the repository of all Truth, beauty, goodness, virtue. In time, it projects a soul personality based on the essence of many lifetimes. In order to ascend, man has to make this psychic the central authority in his being. As the mind of man transcends many of its outer limitations and gets in touch with the luminous being within, it tastes the vast, infinite, peaceful Reality beyond and undergoes transformation. Other ways in which the spiritual transformation happens is through the consecration of the heart to the Divine, the consecration of the Will to the Ishvara, the separation of Purusha and Prakriti in the different parts of our being. These approaches give to the being of man a spiritual turn and elevate his consciousness but for an integral, irrevocable transformation to take place, the being of man has to ascend to the supramental and the supramental consciousness has to descend into the being of man.

Ascent towards Supermind

The higher reaches of consciousness beyond the mind cannot be grasped in their fullness by our ordinary mentality. It is only after we have had some experience of the intermediary consciousness between the mind and Supermind that we can even begin to taste the nature and true glory of Supermind. The spiritual change in us that surpasses the intellect is the starting point from which the possibility of going from spiritual to supermind arises.

In the normal course, evolutionary nature first operates within inconscience and later has to work amidst Ignorance in order to seek for the higher light and truth. But no amount of personal effort and aspiration can reach this light and truth. It is only because the higher truth is already involved in the lower principles, that this involution creates a pressure for its emergence in the lower. This holds for Supermind and its intermediary power, the Overmind, as well. While we may suppose that even through the process of the evolutionary nature, some contact with and a subsequent descent of

the Overmind might take place, this would be an extremely long and tedious process and also the illumination and intuition received from above would inevitably be subjected to the lower laws of the mind, vital and physical. So, a descent of the powers of the Superconscient is a must condition so that they may formulate themselves independently in our being. This descent, in turn, needs to be met by a complete surrender of the lower consciousness for the full transformation to take place.

“In themselves these grades are grades of energy-substance of the Spirit: for it must not be supposed, because we distinguish them according to their leading character, means and potency of knowledge, that they are merely a method or way of knowing or a faculty or power of cognition; they are domains of being, grades of substance and energy of the spiritual being, fields of existence which are each a level of the universal Consciousness-Force constituting and organising itself into a higher status. When the powers of any grade descend completely into us, it is not only our thought and knowledge that are affected – the substance and very grain of our being and consciousness, all its states and activities are touched and penetrated and can be remoulded and wholly transmuted. Each state of this ascent is therefore, in general, if not a total, conversion of the being into a new light and power of a greater existence” (*Ibid.*, p.938).

While there is no fixed order of descent or ascent in evolutionary nature and the levels in nature all interpenetrate and influence each other, for the purposes of mapping out the upward evolutionary course we take the levels after mind to be Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, Overmind and then Supermind. The higher mind is a domain of truth ideas, idea force deriving from the Supermind where the true law of things is perceived and transmitted to the mind for further intellectual formulation. It has the qualities of universality, vastness and peace associated with it. As the higher mind descends into our being, it is met with a barrage of lower influences and so its light is mixed and compromised, nevertheless, it serves the purpose of lifting the ordinary mind beyond itself and into a higher light. Next in the series of ascension is Illumination, which is the power to see Truth, seize upon it directly as a vision and transmit its light to the lower members. Here again, the mixing of lower and higher influence happens and it is a struggle for the Light to retain its purity and express it through the mind, reason and will. Higher still, is the Intuitive Mind, which is the power to know the secret truth of things, to know the exact relation of truth to truth. This power of intuition transcends reason and when it descends into the lower being, it qualitatively changes all of one's being including reason, will, heart, life perceptions. In general, it can be said that each of these higher powers when they descend into the lower human being are met by a resistance from the Ignorance and a negation from the Inconscient and compounded still by influences from the circumconscient or

environmental obscurity. The reason for the lower forces having and asserting their power is that within evolutionary nature, each element has been given its right to existence and the force to establish, maintain and further its dominion. The only difference is that within the Ignorance, the play of forces is a clash and a struggle while in the Knowledge, the play is a mutual and multiple harmony of varied elements.

A power still stronger to meet and override the lower barriers to a relatively greater extent is the Overmind, which is the level of cosmic consciousness, of one Vast Infinite with a multitude of individualities. It is the level where one experiences oneself as the Self of all things. All thought, feeling, inspiration, action is experienced as a wave of the Universal Consciousness crashing upon one's being and individuality as merely a "field of manifestation" (*Ibid.*, p.951) for the cosmic. Yet, since the Overmind is acting within the mental plane, its action gets limited by the divisive, separative nature of the mind. Also, even though Overmind may imprint a cosmic largeness and universal consciousness upon the entirety of the seeker's being, it is not able to completely eradicate the nescience that lies at the foundation of all being in manifestation. That eradication is the work of Supermind. Thus, even though through the Overmind, the mind steps higher and is transformed, it is not able to exceed itself fully. For this transformation to be complete, a descent from the source or the Supermind is needed. Supermind is Gnosis, it is power of knowledge through identity, it is the level of consciousness which completely dwells in unity even though there multiplicity begins to get formed within its plane. It is with this final descent and the concomitant ascent that the being of man is fully occupied, owned, assumed, integrated and transformed in the spiritual light and knowledge. Here too, though, there are a few difficulties – the action of Supermind can act on any of the different parts of the being, though usually it starts from the mind or the heart, nevertheless there is a great complexity to the different parts of the being as they respond and re-adjust themselves to each other under this potent higher influence; another problem is that descent of the higher levels is not linear or in a series, it can often be simultaneous and as one level descends it paves the way or necessitates the descent of a higher one before the earlier power has fully integrated itself; a third complexity comes from the fact that often the inner being of man gets spiritualised much more rapidly than its outer being, which is in an invisible relationship with a whole host of outer influences.

Conclusion

We have seen in this paper that man is an evolving being and that nature in her force of evolution secretly tends towards an evolution in the Spirit. The journey of spiritual transformation is long and all-encompassing and it is only with a manifold realisation that the being of man is ready for the dual action of ascent

and descent (into and by the higher realms of consciousness respectively). Of all the higher levels which come with their unique splendour and gifts, it is the Supermind, which is the last determining and absolutely transforming power of Sacchidananda, the Supreme Reality and Truth. An individual gaining the Supramental experience is not the destiny of man or the future of terrestrial evolution. It is indeed the establishment of the individual as a centre of supramental consciousness upon earth, and the existence of many such individuals, who can embody the dynamic co-creative play of Purusha and Prakriti that is the real destiny of mankind. Additionally, the establishment of Supermind on the terrestrial plane is not the leapfrog ascent into the highest but is in reality the establishment of an entire range and grades of consciousness levels on to the earth plane such that anyone aspiring to rise to the summits of divine consciousness will have the entire steps of the ascent laid out for them. The Supermind is the harbinger of the divine life on earth, a life whose nature and form will be unlike any clever contraption of the present mind of man or the narrow force of all his hitherto attempted idealism.

The Divine Life - The Gnostic (Supramental) consciousness is the completely self-aware, self-actualising, spontaneous, dynamic consciousness that is beyond all laws and customs and is the repository of all truth and the relations between varying truths and their mutual harmony. In being this, it is the source and the creatrix of the Divine Life and no other externalising, surface consciousness can realise or even hope to touch what the Gnostic consciousness can itself bring. The Divine Life that this consciousness brings is unlike any constructed or construed life that is the work of the analysing mind or the possessing life-force. While man may try to garner one formula after another of organising his affairs and his communal life more perfectly than before, this kind of perfection is only like a pyramid of cards that falls down under its own weight and precarious balance of forces. The only communal life that can reach the heights of man's innate possibilities and reflect the implicit truth of this universe is the life of gnostic men as they come together in a natural harmonious co-existence, united in one truth and celebratory in the diversity of this truth. Unity and plurality are the two wings of this communal living and self-knowledge and world-knowledge its dual dynamism. Each gnostic individual is different from the other and yet shares the truth of the other as part of his own one undivided self.

As we stand at this juncture of the great flux of the present times characterised by a collapse of the old and faint glimmers of new possibilities, let us open ourselves to the highest aspirations that our true inner natures merit, let us concentrate our force upon this high aspiration and seize the vast riches and miracles of the great Spirit as it works through us and upon us to realise on earth that which it cannot anywhere else, for earth is its ultimate playground of chaos and creativity.

Bibliography

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If you are made of pieces which are not only different but often quite contradictory, these pieces necessarily create a division in your being. For example, you have one part in yourself which aspires for the divine life, to know the Divine, to unite with Him, to live Him integrally, and then you have another part which has attachments, desires — which it calls “needs” — and which not only seeks these things but is quite upset when it does not have them. There are other contradictions, but this one is the most flagrant. There are others, for instance, like wanting to surrender completely to the Divine, to give oneself up totally to His Will and His Guidance, and at the same time, when the experience comes — a common experience on the path when one sincerely tries to give oneself up to the Divine — the feeling that one is nothing, that one can do nothing, that one doesn't even exist outside the Divine; that is to say, if He were not there, one would not exist and could not do anything, one would not be anything at all... This experience naturally comes as a help on the path of total self-giving, but there is a part of the being which, when the experience comes, rises up in a terrible revolt and says, “But, excuse me! I insist on existing, I insist on being something, I insist on doing things myself, I want to have a personality.” And naturally, the second one undoes all that the first had done.

These are not exceptional cases, this happens very frequently. I could give you innumerable examples of such contradictions in the being: when one part tries to take a step forward, the other one comes and demolishes everything. So you have to begin again all the time, and every time it is demolished. That is why you must do this work of sincerity which, when you perceive in your being a part that pulls the other way, makes you take it up carefully, educate it as one educates a child and put it in harmony with the central part. That is the work of sincerity and it is indispensable.

And naturally, when there is a unity, an agreement, a harmony among all the wills of the being, your being can become simple, candid and uniform in its action and tendencies. It is only when the whole being is grouped around a single central movement that you can be spontaneous. For if, within you, there is something which is turned towards the Divine and awaits the inspiration and impulse, and at the same time there is another part of the being which seeks its own ends and works to realise its own desires, you no longer know where you stand, and you can no longer be sure of what may happen, for one part can not only undo but totally contradict what the other wants to do.

The Mother, (CWM, Vol.8, pp.284-86)