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SRI AUROBINDO'S "THE LIFE DIVINE"

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo's "The Life Divine" is the reverberation of the attempt to understand how best man can know and fulfil the purpose of his life. The central belief of "The Life Divine" is that if matter has evolved from spirit then spirit too can be said to have evolved from matter. Sri Aurobindo's faith is that the whole of man must be radically transfigured so that his spiritual nature might permeate every aspect of life. The Divine descends from pure existence through the play of Consciousness – Force and Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind into cosmic being. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, consciousness is a fundamental thing. It is the energy, the motion, the movement of consciousness that creates the universe and all that is in it not only the macrocosm but also the microcosm. In reality, the consciousness that works in the energy determines the form and the evolution of form. But in man's material world and in his own thing, consciousness has a double aspect. They are force of knowledge and force of ignorance. Life established and maintained its operations with difficulty on a foundation and in an environment of general Death. Man's mind is an observer of actual, an inventor or discoverer of possibilities, but not a seer of the occult imperatives that necessitate the movements and forms of a creation.

Keywords: Spirit and matter, Supramental supermanhood, Overmind, Consciousness, Supermind.

Sri Aurobindo's "The Life Divine" is the reverberation of the attempt to understand how best man can know and fulfil the purpose of his life. The central belief of "The Life Divine" is that if matter has evolved from spirit then spirit too can be said to have evolved from matter. The French spiritualist, philosopher Roman Rolland also declares that Sri Aurobindo is indeed a seer in the ancient mould whose life-long determination is to seek the means that would enable man to live a life divine, not in some unknown mythical heaven,

but there and then. Sri Aurobindo elaborates the objective of spiritual evolution in his metaphysical treatise, "The Life Divine". He says that man has to evolve out of himself a divine manhood, a spiritual and supramental supermanhood. The complete spiritual metamorphosis of man resulting in the gradual but vast transformation of the entire mankind is Sri Aurobindo's cherished vision.

Sri Aurobindo's faith is that the whole of man must be radically transfigured so that his spiritual nature might permeate every aspect of

life. Sri Aurobindo sees the possibility of the spiritual evolution of man. His conclusion is that that the individual and his group, that man and men are inseparably linked together and that progress meant the growth of man everywhere.

The Divine descends from pure existence through the play of Consciousness – Force and Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind into cosmic being. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, consciousness is a fundamental thing. It is the energy, the motion, the movement of consciousness that creates the universe and all that is in it not only the macrocosm but also the microcosm. In reality, the consciousness that works in the energy determines the form and the evolution of form. But in man's material world and in his own thing, consciousness has a double aspect. They are force of knowledge and force of ignorance. Life established and maintained its operations with difficulty on a foundation and in an environment of general Death. At first it maintains in infinitesimal points of life, in quanta of life-form and life-energy in increasing aggregate that creates more and more complex organisms.

Consciousness also establishes and maintains a growing but precarious light in the darkness of an original Nescience and a universal ignorance. The knowledge gained is of phenomena, not of the reality of things or of the foundations of existence. The first aspect of cosmic existence is an infinite and an indeterminate to man's perception. Man gives name to the Energy, the Nature, but the word conveyed no meaning. It was possible for human science to detect the process or many processes of material things, but this knowledge does not throw any light on the major question on creation of Universe. All the unexplained processes of Nature would find their meaning and their place if this hypothesis proved to be tenable. The growth of the tree out of the seed would be accounted for, like all other similar phenomena, by the indwelling presence of the Real-Idea. The Infinite's self-perception of the significant form, the living body of its power of existence emerges from its own self-compression in energy-substance, would be carried internally in the form of the seed, carried in the occult consciousness involved in that form, and would naturally evolve out of it. There would be no difficulty either in

understanding on this principle how infinitesimals of a material character like the gene and the chromosome could carry in them psychological elements to be transmitted to the physical form that had to emerge from the human seed; it was the same principle in the objectivity of Matter one can find in his subjective experience.

Life begins with a formulation in which consciousness is still submental and therefore to man as mental beings appears to be inconscient or at most subconscious. Man's own investigation into this stage of life studying it from outside could not be more fruitful of the secret truth than his examination of Matter. Even when mind develops in life its first functional aspect is a mentality involved in action, in vital and physical needs and preoccupations, in impulses, desires, sensations, emotions, unable to stand back from these things and observe and know them.

In the human mind there is the first hope of understanding, discovery, a free comprehension; here he might seem to be coming to the possibility of self-knowledge and world-knowledge. But in fact his mind can at first only observe facts and processes and for the rest it has to make deductions and inferences, to construct hypotheses, to reason, to speculate. In order to discover the secret of Consciousness it would have to know itself and determine the reality of its own being and process. As in animal life the emerging Consciousness is involved in vital action and movement, so in the human being mind-consciousness is involved in its own whirl of thoughts, an activity in which it is carried on without rest and in which its very reasonings and speculations are determined in their tendency, trend, conditions by its own temperament, mental turn, past formation and line of energy, inclination, preference, an inborn natural selection. Man does not freely determine his thinking according to the truth of things, it is determined for him by his nature. He can indeed stand back with a certain detachment and observe the workings of the mental energy in him but it is still only its process that he sees and not any original source of his mental determinations. He can build theories and hypotheses of the process of Mind, but a veil is still there over the inner secret of himself his consciousness, his total nature.

It is only when one follows the yogic process of quieting the mind itself, a profounder result of his self-observation becomes possible. For, first he discovers that mind is a subtle substance, a general determinate or generic indeterminate when the mental energy throws into forms or particular determinations of itself, thoughts, concepts, percepts, mental sentiments, activities of will and reactions of feeling. But when the energy is inactive it can live either in an inert torpor or in an immobile silence and peace of self-existence. Next he sees that the determinations of his mind do not all proceed from itself; for, waves and current of mental energy enter it from outside. This energy takes form in it and appears already formed from some universal mind or from other minds and are accepted by him as his own thinking. He can perceive too higher planes of consciousness from which a superior mind energy works through him or upon him. Finally he discovers that this mental being supports the mind substance and mind energy. The mental being or Purusha first appears as a silent witness. One would have to accept the determinations of mind as a phenomenal activity imposed upon the being by Nature, by Prakrit, or else as a creation presented to it by Prakriti. But afterwards one can find that the Purusha, the mental being, can depart from its posture of a silent or accepting Witness. It can become the source of reactions such as accepting, rejecting, and even ruling and regulating, become the giver of the command, the knower. A knowledge also arises that this mind-substance manifests the mental being, is its own expressive substance and the mental energy is its own consciousness-force, so that it is reasonable to conclude that all mind determinations arise from the being of the Purusha. But this conclusion is complicated by the fact that from another view-point man's personal mind seems to be little more than a formation of universal Mind, an engine for the reception, modification, propagation of cosmic thought-waves, idea-currents, will-suggestions, waves of feeling, sense-suggestions, form-suggestions.

If mind is accepted and assimilated into the self-expression of the individual mental being, the personal Prakriti of the Purusha there is no doubt its own already realised expression, predispositions, propensities, personal temperament and nature which comes from the

universe can find place in the universe. Over mind consciousness is such a state or principle beyond individual mind, beyond even universal mind in the Ignorance. Also it carries in itself a first direct and masterful cognition of cosmic truth. Here, it is clear that both the individual and the cosmos come from a transcendent reality which takes form in them. The mind and life of the individual being, its self in nature must therefore be a partial self-expression of the cosmic being. Also, a self-expression of the transcendent reality, both through the individual and the cosmic being reality occurs.

Man can see that what the expression shall be is also determined by the individual himself. Only what he receives in nature, assimilates, formulates, his portion of the cosmic being or of the reality can find shape in his mind and life and physical parts. But the original question set out for him by the phenomenon of the universe is not solved by the over mind knowledge. The question, in this case, whether the building of thought, experience, world of perceptions of the mental person, is truly a self-expression, a self-determination proceeding from some truth of his own spiritual being. A manifestation of that truth's dynamic possibilities, or whether it is not rather a creation or construction presented to him by Nature, and only in the sense of being is said to be his own or dependent on him. It might be a play of a cosmic imagination, a fantasia of the Infinite imposed on the blank indeterminable of his own eternal pure existence. These are the three views of creation that seem to have an equal chance of being right, and mind is incapable of definitely deciding between them. Each view is armed with its own mental logic and its appeal to intuition and experience.

In Overmind, in all the higher ranges of the mind, man finds recurring the dichotomy of a pure silent self without feature of qualities or relations, self-existent, self-poised, self-sufficient, and the mighty dynamis of a determinative knowledge-power, of a creative consciousness and force which precipitates itself into the forms of the universe. This opposition sublimates itself into the coexistence of an impersonal Brahman without qualities, a fundamental divine Reality free from all relations or determinates and a Brahman with infinite qualities, a fundamental divine Reality who is the source and container and master of

all relations and determinations Nirguna, Suguna.

If man pursues the Nirguna into the farthest possible self-experience, he arrives at a supreme Absolute void of all relations and determinations, the ineffable first and the last word of existence. If he enters through the Saguna into some ultimate possible of experience, he arrives at a divine Absolute, a personal supreme and omnipresent Godhead, transcendent as well as universal, an infinite Master of all relations and determinations who can uphold in his being a million universes and pervade each with a single ray of his self-light and a single degree of his ineffable existence.

The Overmind consciousness maintains equally these two truths of the Eternal which face the mind as mutually exclusive alternatives; it admits both as supreme aspects of one Reality. But if the supreme Absolute is indeed a pure indeterminable, then, no creation, no manifestation, no universe is possible. And yet the universe exists. One has this logical impossibility that the existence of the Supreme Being and the power of his existence are entirely opposite to each other, two supreme contradictions; for, Brahma is free from all possibility of relations and determinations, but Maya is a creative imagination imposing these very things upon it. If it is accepted it can only be as a suprarational mystery, something neither real nor unreal, inexplicable in its nature, not expressible by the reason. It is perfectly understandable that the Absolute must be indeterminable in the sense that it cannot be limited by any determination or any sum of possible determinations, but no in the sense that it is incapable of self-determination. The Supreme Existence cannot be incapable of creating true self-determinations of its being, incapable of upholding a real self-creation or manifestation in its self-existent infinite.

A supramental truth consciousness is at once the self-awareness of the Infinite and Eternal and a power of self-determination inherent in that self-awareness. The first is its foundation and status, the second is its power of being, the dynamics of its self-existence. All that a timeless eternity of self-awareness sees in itself as truth of being is the conscious power of its being manifested in time-eternity. To Supermind, therefore, the Supreme is not a rigid indeterminable, an all-negating Absolute. The

Infinite of Being must also be an Infinite of Power containing in itself an eternal repose and quiescence, it must also be capable of an eternal action and creation. An infinite power cannot be solely a force resting in a pure inactive sameness, an immutable quiescence. It must have in it endless powers of its being and energy. An infinite consciousness must hold within it endless truths of its own self-awareness. Creation would then be a self-manifestation. It would be an ordered deploying of the infinite possibilities of the Infinite. In manifestation a fundamental reality of the Existence would appear to man's cognition as a fundamental spiritual aspect of the Divine Absolute. Divine Absolute would emerge all its possible manifestations, its innate dynamisms.

Man's mind is an observer of actual, an inventor or discoverer of possibilities, but not a seer of the occult imperatives that necessitate the movements and forms of a creation. The original determinant or determinants, if it or they exist, are veiled from him by his ignorance. His fundamental cognition of the Absolute, his substantial spiritual experience of it is the intuition or the direct experience of an infinite and eternal Existence, an infinite and eternal Consciousness, an infinite and eternal Delight of Existence.

Man can experience a pure causeless eternal bliss so intense that he is that alone. Existence consciousness seem to be swallowed up in it, no longer ostensibly in presence. A similar experience of pure an absolute consciousness and a similar exclusive identity with it is possible, and there can be too a like identifying experience of pure and absolute existence. But to a supermind cognition these three are always an inseparable Trinity, even though one can stand in front of the others and manifest its own spiritual determinates. Each of these experiences has its primal aspects or its inherent self-formations, but all of these together are original to the triune Absolute. Love, joy, and beauty are the fundamental determinants of the Divine Delight of Existence, and one can see at once that these are of the very stuff and the nature of that Delight. This authenticity becomes still more evident when he regards the fundamental spiritual determinants of the absolute Existence. They are its triune powers, necessary first postulates for all its self-creation or manifestation, - Self, the Divine, the Conscious

Being, Atman, Ishwara, Purusha. If man pursues the process of self-manifestation farther, he shall see that each of these aspects or powers reposes in its first action on a trinity. Knowledge inevitably takes its stand in a trinity of the Knower, the Known and Knowledge. Love finds itself in a trinity of the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love. Will is self-fulfilled in a trinity of the Lord of the Will, the object of the Will and the executive Force. Joy has its original and utter gladness in a trinity of the Enjoyer, the Enjoyed, and the Delight that unites them. Self as inevitably appears and finds its manifestation in a trinity of Self as subject, Self as object and self-awareness holding together Self as subject-object. The Absolute is not limitable or definable by any one determination or by any sum of determinations; on the other side, it is not bound down to a indeterminable vacancy of pure existence. On the contrary, it is the source of all determinations. Its indeterminability is the natural, the necessary condition both of its infinity of being and its infinity of the power of being. It can be infinitely all things because it is nothing in particular and exceeds any definable totality. It is this essential indeterminability of the Absolute that translates itself into man's consciousness through the fundamental negating positives of his spiritual experience, the immobile immutable Self, the Nirguna Brahman, the Eternal without qualities, the pure featureless One Existence, the Impersonal, the Silence void of activities, the Non-being, the Ineffable and the Unknowable. On the other side it is the essence and source of all determinations, and this dynamic essentiality manifests to him through the fundamental affirming positives in which the Absolute equally meets him. It is the Self that becomes all things, the Saguna Brahman, the Eternal with infinite qualities, the One who is the Many, the infinite Person who is the source and foundation of all persons and personalities, the Lord of creation, the Word, the Master of all works and action; it is that which being known all is known. These primary aspects of the Absolute are fundamental spiritual determinates or indeterminates answering at this spiritual end or beginning of the descending and ascending Manifestation. One is no longer bound and limited in the inner status of his being by the determinations and creations of Nature. On the other, the dynamic side, this

original freedom enables the Consciousness to create a world of determinations without being bound by it. Also it enables it to withdraw from what it has created and recreate in a higher truth-formula.

All aspects of the omnipresent reality have their fundamental truth in the Supreme Existence. It is important to observe the sense that is acquired in such a total cognition of cosmic being by the phenomena of the Ignorance. Man's knowledge of the creation would be the knowledge of a temporary structure of evanescent consciousness and being. It might be objected that the supramental cognition is, after all, not the final truth of things. Beyond the supramental plane of consciousness which is an intermediate step from Overmind and mind to the complete experience of Sachchidananda are the greatest heights of the manifested spirit. Here surely existence would not at all be based on the determination of the One in multiplicity. It would manifest solely and simply a pure identity in oneness. But the supramental truth-consciousness would not be absent from these planes, for it is an inherent power of Sachchidananda. It might be said again that even so in Sachchidananda itself above all worlds of manifestation, there could be nothing but the self-awareness of pure existence and consciousness and a pure delight of existence. The Absolute is not a mystery of infinite blankness nor a supreme sum of negations. Nothing can manifest that is not justified by some self-power of the original and omnipresent Reality.

Man is the first to make conscious evolutionary change. He can thus consciously rise up and become the ultimate Supramental Being embodying that plane in his being. Sri Aurobindo explains how man consciously doing evolution of the spiritual man culminates in a supramental being and existence. He explains how the Triple transformation overcomes man's limitations. Sri Aurobindo describes the three stages of human transformation which he calls "The Triple Transformation". It begins with the psychic transformation where one moves within and discovers the soul which in turn opens the person to all manners of inner, universal, and cosmic experience. That movement continues with the spiritual transformation where man rises above his mentality, experiences the

planes of spiritual mind, including silence, illumination, intuition, cosmic consciousness, as well as the Light descending and transforms the individual parts of the being. This process culminates in the supramental transformation where all aspects of the being – from mind to the vital and even to the physical – are transformed into their ultimate supramentalized status. Sri Aurobindo indicates that man is born an ignorant, divided conflicted being; a product of the unconsciousness inherent in Matter that he evolved out of. As a result, he does not know the nature of Reality, including its source and purpose, his own nature, including the parts and integration of his being, what purpose he serves in life, what his individual and spiritual potential is, the true, integral relationship that exists between spirit and life. He indicates that only when man attains his supramental nature that all of these forms of ignorance and division can be overcome.

Sri Aurobindo realizes that the entire universe is only an objectivisation of the Supreme. The Supreme has brought himself out of himself to live himself and even to see himself in a cosmic mirror. It is the Being and Becoming. This Becoming's goal is to union with the Creator which is achieved in absolute freedom, full consciousness and a loving willingness.

The earth is the chosen centre of the material universe and its evolution in this eternal Being. It is a kind of symbolic

crystallization of universal life. The earth is a symbol of the divine possibility and potential in Matter. It reveals the hidden Divine Consciousness.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the cosmic manifestation is the result of a double movement: involution and evolution. Involution is the first movement by which the supreme Consciousness-Force undergoes a process of self-limitation and simultaneous densification until it assumes the form of a dense material Inconscience. Between the plane of the supreme Consciousness and the Inconscience are formed in this process of involution many planes of consciousness and universal principles and worlds each characterised by certain powers and forms of consciousness.

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