
UNIT 2 MAN AND HIS NATURE

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand Aurobindo's concept of the human being
- To appreciate the evolving and spiritual nature of human beings
- To see the collective destiny of the whole, including humans.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo's contribution to Indian philosophical problems are important and his rare insight into the literature of Indian philosophy coupled with an earnestness and serious purposiveness make it imperative on the part of students of Indian Philosophy to study him with care and detachment. Sri Aurobindo in his philosophy tries to synthesise the manifold views of the world and points out that realization consists in the total understanding of Brahman which satisfies the demands of knowledge and experience, freedom and immortality. In this unit we take up some salient notions that will help us to understand human nature according to Aurobindo.

2.2 THE INDIVIDUAL SELF IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF AUROBINDO

The nature of the individual has itself been a real problem, for we find various explanations for his existence. The individual soul is said to be a part of the material nature of spiritual ego or reality; its cognitive nature has been stated to be due to an accident of connection with outer objects and not belonging to it as a sentience-point (Varadachari 2011). In the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo immortality of the individual soul is accepted and therefore its rebirths are also accepted. The purpose of the individual atomic soul in trying to achieve its real nature of immortality in and through the process of rebirths into matter and other lower forms of life is not explained as adequately as may be desired in the philosophies of realistic Vedanta. If *Maya* had been inexplicable in *Mayavada*, it is no less true of the *Karma*. The explanation that it is inexplicable because its

origination is unknown will not fully satisfy the seeker after a real and valuable explanation. We find in the philosophies of realisms too, *Maya* gets a place if not as a deluding agent, at least as a power-concept or knowledge-concept. The creative act is one of Delight of Brahman or God.

We take a long extract from Sri Aurobindo to show the emergence of the individual man:

“The Universe is a self creative process of the Supreme Reality whose presence makes spirit the substance of things, - all things are there as the spirit’s powers and means and forms of manifestation. An infinite existence, an infinite consciousness, an infinite force and will, an infinite delight of being is the Reality secret behind the appearances of the universe; its divine Supermind or Gnosis has arranged the cosmic order, but arranged it indirectly through the three subordinate and limiting terms of which we are conscious here Mind, Life and Matter. The material universe is the lowest stage of a downward plunge of the manifestation, an involution of the manifested being of this triune Reality into an apparent nescience of itself, that which we now call the Inconscient; but out of this nescience the evolution of that manifested being into a recovered self-awareness was from the very first inevitable. It was inevitable because that which is involved must evolve; for it is not only there as an existence, a force hidden in its apparent opposite, and every such force must in its inmost nature be moved to find itself, to realise itself, to realise itself into play but it is the reality of that which conceals it, it is the self which the Nescience has lost and which therefore it must be the whole secret meaning, the constant drift of its action to seek for and recover. It is through the conscious individual being that this recovery is possible; it is in him that the evolving consciousness becomes organized and capable of awakening to its own Reality. The immense importance of the individual being which increases as he rises in the scale, is the most remarkable and significant fact of a universe which started without consciousness and without individuality in an undifferentiated Nescience. This importance can only be justified if the Self as individual is no less real than the Self as cosmic Being or Spirit and both are powers of the Eternal. It is only so that can be explained the necessity for the growth of the individual and his discovery of himself as a condition for the discovery of the cosmic self and consciousness and of the Supreme Reality. If we adopt this solution, this is the first result, the reality of the persistent individual; but from that first consequence the other result follows, that rebirth of some kind is no longer a possible machinery which may or may not be accepted, it becomes a necessity, an inevitable outcome of the root nature of our existence” (Ghose 1949).

The above long extract is to put in clearest light the entire relevancy of the growth of the individual immortal soul from a concealed or veiled consciousness towards the superconscient consciousness of the Divine shaping its immortality with its ascent in the Organic through reducing the impenetrable and refractory Inconscient in a series of rebirths. The individual soul’s delight it is , and not its karma, that mystifying force of bondage, beginningless and mechanical, that propels it to organize the Inconscient, plane by plane, and to integrate them in the single organism of his highest achievement – the Divine Body, pure, immortal too, a perfect instrument of its own inner light, truth, delight and Consciousness-power. Thus the individual soul in its involution and evolution is undoubtedly persistent, not in an unreal manner nor in the manner

of a fictitious stream nor is it helplessly caught up in the vice-grip of a terrible fate or karma or kismet (fate), wheeled forward and backward from one place of existence to another. In fact, the individual soul is a shaper of its own inner law of ascent and descent for the sake of enjoying that secret delight of its existence even when it is being overwhelmed by the tribulations of its ascending journey. It is, at first appearance, a coarse, selfish aggressive egoism placed in opposition to matter, struggling for survival, against it as well as against all that came to be with it. (Varadachari 2011)

Thus whether it is the breaking up of social organizations or of individuals, there emerge constantly recurrences or rebirths of these social forms and individuals till the equation of the social perfection and individual integral perfection is realised in all levels of true spiritual being.

2.3 INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

The relationship between the individual and the society appears at first look to be one of part and whole. The society is seeking its fulfillment in and through the individuals even as the fulfillment of the individuals is affirmed to consist in the fullest realisation of Society. The *angangi-bhava* (whole and part relation) or *sesa-sesi* (dependent-principal relation) between the society and the individual is the highest that humanism has been able to offer as a consolation to the distraught world.

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy we have a clear enunciation of the metaphysical reality of the society as well as the integrity of the individuals through his unique thesis of eternal oneness in the eternal multiplicity, whether it be of the organism or the society, planes or powers, individuals or the Deity. It is this metaphysical basis that makes multiplicity seek the freedom for its many individuals even as the individuals are impelled towards some sort of unity wherein lies their strength. The two moments in the history of growth of individual freedom in society and achievement of social solidarity are, even when in frenzied movement, explained by his thesis. (Varadachari 2011)

The individual soul truly grows into a universal being, that is, a being having universal responsiveness and love and value for all, even as the universal Being is enabled to manifest itself in and through each of the individuals. The mystical consciousness which is the pioneering spirit ever after adventure into planes and spaces beyond the intellect, according to M. Bergson, seeks to evolve into the universal consciousness by a leap or a burst into the same through concentration, not indeed of its consciousness nor by a surrender to the Divine All, but by the strength of its vital impulse (*vital*). This explanation does scant justice to the fundamental uniqueness of each soul and the continuity of evolution, as it aims at the abolition of the true individuality in the expanse of Mind-energy of the intuitive level. It forgets that the mystics are realists and are unique personalities who, in spite of their universal outlook and disinterested activity, are strong personalities. On the other hand, according to Sri Aurobindo, the individual is a real one of the eternal multiplicity of the Divine, mounting or ascending the evolutionary rungs by rejecting the lower with the help of the Divine, so that ultimately the lower may be orientated or transmuted so as to express more and more fully the higher and highest planes of the individual soul, which indeed is a Divine personality. (Ghose 1949)

Thus the individual in the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo does not have merely a temporary existence nor is it a term in the phenomenal creation due to the operation of a Maya or *upadhi*; on the other hand, it can be a portion, *amsa*, a ray, or organ of the Divine, if by these terms we understand an integral oneness of the soul with the Divine One in every respect as one of the eternal multiplicity. (Varadachari 2011) Thus it is that the individual soul is capable of realising the supreme formula of its identity with the Divine of Brahman in a real manner through a real evolution and real surrender to the Divine which it apprehends to be its complementary and not a counter-reality.

2.4 HUMAN DESTINY

The destiny of the human individual is not to attain after death a transcendental or divine body (*aprakrta-sarira*) or to achieve a merger or Divine Oneness after such a donning of the eternal luminous body, but even here to feel the Divine in oneself in His Oneness as also in His eternal multiplicity, and because of that presence undergo the changes in nature which are verily the formation of the *Aprakrta-divya-sarira*. This is the significant possibility of the indwellingness of the Supreme Divine 'superiorly' in the individual through a radical surrender and prayer to Him. The *Jivan-mukta* ideal is reinforced by the siddha-ideal, for it is not the *jivan-mukta* of the Advaita Vedanta that we arrive at but a more integral realisation of the Divine Personality in the individual. This is so much the case that the final movement of the Total Liberation of all individuals, if indeed that should happen, will be such that the eternal multiplicity is to remain a multiplicity of perfect unique personalities of the Divine (Varadachari 2011).

Sri Aurobindo's interest, and his main and abiding concern in all that he has given us, is in the future of the human individual, his race, and his prospects. In the Divine Life, Divine Race and Divine Unity he sees the secret founts of aspiration of man so far. His meridian or culmination is all that can make man yield his lower treasures, not once for all but only for a time so that attaining he could descend to transform or even in ascending transform his world and society and relationships in the pattern of transcending delights.

At the same time we need to realise that the fulfillment of the Divine consummation of integral all-sided existence is beyond the possibilities of the individual soul. In the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo the ideal of human unity is fashioned in the Superconscious life of each individual who has ascended and thereby fulfilled the mission set before himself at the beginning of the creature adventure to realise the divine pattern of his unique evolution of the Total All in the Divine, in His eternal multiplicity. The individual indeed becomes a Buddha and Siddha (realised or enlightened persons), not in the sense of having attained to a state of nirvana nor yet in the sense of possessing occult powers, but in the sense of fulfilling the Divine Eternity, Truth, Delight and Reality in terms of the Divine Knowledge of Gnosis. In that supreme consummation there is *puratva*, fullness in the individual as it is in the Divine, constantly renewing the Divine activity of bliss and love and varied infinities of relationships, none of which limit to detriment, frustrate to annihilation or force into neurosis or veil to bind. Every individual personality of the Divine in his fullest vision perceives all as the play of the Divine and himself as the exponent of unique beauties and creative *mayas* of the Divine.

2.5 MAN AND EVOLUTION

It is very important to remember that in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy man is not the crown of the evolutionary process. There are many religions which have said that man is the final product of evolution. But Sri Aurobindo holds that man is an intermediate creature, based firmly in the material consciousness and yet reaching upwards into the divine consciousness, into what he later calls the supramental. He makes the point that man has the capacity to cooperate with the evolutionary thrust and thereby to speed up the process of evolution. Previously the rocks did not have anything to do with becoming vegetables, the vegetables did not have anything to do with becoming fish, and the fish had no particular contribution to become land animals and so on because it was a natural process of development which took place over vast areas of the earth and millions of years of evolution. But with man it is different; "man is the first creature with the capacity to cooperate in the process of evolution," as Karan Singh (2008) remarks.

2.6 JIVATMAN IN AUROBINDO'S OWN WORDS

The following long extract is taken from Aurobindo's "Letters on Yoga" Subsection 4: The Central Being and is entitled "*Jiva – Jivatman*" (Ghose 1969). It will help us to appreciate the evolving understanding of human being that he had, besides give us the flavour of his almost poetic and powerful writing. The phrase "central being" in our yoga is usually applied to the portion of the Divine in us which supports all the rest and survives through death and birth. This central being has two forms - above, it is *Jivatman*, our true being, of which we become aware when the higher self-knowledge comes, - below, it is the psychic being which stands behind mind, body and life. The *Jivatman* is above the manifestation in life and presides over it; the psychic being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it.

The natural attitude of the psychic being is to feel itself as the Child, the Son of God, the *Bhakta*; it is a portion of the Divine, one in essence, but in the dynamics of the manifestation there is always even in identity a difference. The *Jivatman*, on the contrary, lives in the essence and can merge itself in identity with the Divine; but it too, the moment it presides over the dynamics of the manifestation, knows itself as one centre of the multiple Divine, not as the Parameshwara. It is important to remember the distinction; for, otherwise, if there is the least vital egoism, one may begin to think of oneself as an Avatar or lose balance like Hridaya with Ramakrishna.

The word *Jiva* has two meanings in the Sanskrit tongues - "living creatures" and the spirit individualised and upholding the living being in its evolution from birth to birth. In the latter sense the full term is *Jivatma* - the Atman, spirit or eternal self of the living being. It is spoken of figuratively by the Gita as "an eternal portion of the Divine" - but the word fragmentation (used by you) is too strong, it could be applicable to the forms, but not to the spirit in them. Moreover the multiple Divine is an eternal reality antecedent to the creation here. An elaborate description of the *Jivatma* would be: "the multiple Divine manifested here as the individualised self or spirit of the created being." The *Jivatma* in its essence does not change or evolve, its essence stands above the personal evolution; within the evolution itself it is represented by the evolving psychic being which supports all the rest of the nature.

The Advaita Vedanta (Monism) declares that the *Jiva* has no real existence, as the Divine is indivisible. Another school attributes a real but not an independent existence to the *Jiva* - it is, they say, one in essence, different in manifestation, and as the manifestation is real, eternal and not an illusion, it cannot be called unreal. The dualistic schools affirm the *Jiva* as an independent category or stand on the triplicity of God, soul and Nature. *Jivatma* is not the psychic being - we have fixed on *chaitya purusha* as the equivalent in Sanskrit of the psychic being. *Jivatma* is the individual Self - the central being. The central being is that which is not born, does not evolve, but presides over all the individual manifestation. The psychic is its projection here - for the psychic being is in the evolution and from within supports our whole evolution; it receives the essence of all experience and by that develops the personality Godward.

The Self is at once one in all and many - one in its essence, it manifests also as the individual self which may be described as in Nature an eternal portion of the Divine; in spirit a centre of the manifestation, individual but extending its universality and rising into transcendence. By *Jivatma* we mean the individual self. Essentially it is one self with all others, but in the multiplicity of the Divine it is the individual self, an individual centre of the universe - and it sees everything in itself or itself in everything or both together according to its state of consciousness and point of view. The self, Atman is in its nature either transcendent or universal (*Paramatma, Atma*). When it individualises and becomes a central being, it is then the *Jivatman*. The *Jivatman* feels his oneness with the universal but at the same time his central separateness as a portion of the Divine. The soul, representative of the central being, is a spark of the Divine supporting all individual existence in Nature; the psychic being is a conscious form of that soul growing in the evolution - in the persistent process that develops first life in Matter, mind in life, until finally mind can develop into overmind and overmind into the supramental Truth. The soul supports the nature in its evolution through these grades, but is itself not any of these things.

The lower Nature, *apara prakriti*, is this external objective and superficial subjective apparent Nature which manifests all these minds, lives and bodies. The supreme Nature, *para prakriti*, concealed behind it is the very nature of the Divine - a supreme Consciousness-Force which manifests the multiple Divine as the Many. These Many are in themselves eternal selves of the Supreme in his supreme Nature, *para prakriti*. Here in relation to this world they appear as the *Jivatmas* supporting the evolution of the natural existences, *sarva-bhutani*, in the mutable Becoming which is the life of the *Kshara* (mobile or mutable) *Purusha*. The *Jiva* (or *Jivatma*) and the creatures, *sarva-bhutani*, are not the same thing. The *Jivatmas* really stand above the creation even though concerned in it; the natural existences, *sarva-bhutani*, are the creatures of Nature. Man, bird, beast, reptile are natural existences, but the individual Self in them is not even for a moment characteristically man, bird, beast or reptile; in its evolution it is the same through all these changes, a spiritual being that consents to the play of Nature.

What is original and eternal for ever in the Divine is the Being, what is developed in consciousness, conditions, forces, forms, etc., by the Divine Power is the Becoming. The eternal Divine is the Being; the universe in Time and all that is apparent in it is a Becoming. The eternal Being in its superior nature, *Para Prakriti*, is at once One and Many; but the eternal Multiplicity of the Divine

when it stands behind the created existences, *sarva-bhutani*, appears as (or as we say, becomes) the *Jiva, para prakritir jivabhuta*. In the psychic, on the other hand, there are two aspects, the psychic existence or soul behind and in front the form of individuality it takes in its evolution in Nature.

The soul or psyche is immutable only in the sense that it contains all the possibilities of the Divine within it, but it has to evolve them and in its evolution it assumes the form of a developing psychic individual evolving in the manifestation the individual *Prakriti* and taking part in the evolution. It is the spark of the Divine Fire that grows behind the mind, vital and physical by means of the psychic being until it is able to transform the *Prakriti* of Ignorance into a *Prakriti* of Knowledge. This evolving psychic being is not therefore at any time all that the soul or essential psychic existence bears within it; it temporalises and individualises what is eternal in potentiality, transcendent in essence, in this projection of the spirit.

The central being is the being which presides over the different births one after the other, but is itself unborn, for it does not descend into the being but is above it - it holds together the mental, vital and physical being and all the various parts of the personality and it controls the life either through the mental being and the mental thought and will or through the psychic, whichever may happen to be most in front or most powerful in nature. If it does not exercise its control, then the consciousness is in great disorder and every part of the personality acts for itself so that there is no coherence in the thought, feeling or action.

The psychic is not above but behind - its seat is behind the heart, its power is not knowledge but an essential or spiritual feeling - it has the clearest sense of the Truth and a sort of inherent perception of it which is of the nature of soul-perception and soul-feeling. It is our inmost being and supports all the others, mental, vital, physical, but it is also much veiled by them and has to act upon them as an influence rather than by its sovereign right of direct action; its direct action becomes normal and preponderant only at a high stage of development or by yoga. It is not the psychic being which, you feel, gives you the intuitions of things to be or warns you against the results of certain actions; that is some part of the inner being, sometimes the inner mental, sometimes the inner vital, sometimes, it may be, the inner or subtle physical *Purusha*. The inner being - inner mind, inner vital, inner or subtle physical - knows much that is unknown to the outer mind, the outer vital, the outer physical, for it is in a more direct contact with the secret forces of Nature. The psychic is the inmost being of all; a perception of truth which is inherent in the deepest substance of the consciousness, a sense of the good, true, beautiful, the Divine, is its privilege.

The central being - the *Jivatman* which is not born nor evolves but presides over the individual birth and evolution - puts forward a representative of himself on each plane of the consciousness. On the mental plane it is the true mental being, *manomaya purusha*, on the vital plane the true vital being, *pranamaya purusha*, on the physical plane the true physical being, *annamaya purusha*. Each being, therefore is, so long as the Ignorance lasts, centred round his mental, vital or physical *Purusha*, according to the plane on which he predominantly lives, and that is to him his central being. But the true representative all the time is concealed behind the mind, vital and physical - it is the psychic, our inmost being.

When the inmost knowledge begins to come, we become aware of the psychic being within us and it comes forward and leads the *sadhana*. We become aware also of the *Jivatman*, the undivided Self or Spirit above the manifestation of which the psychic is the representative here. The true inner being - the true mental, the true vital, the true physical represent each on its plane and answer to the central being, but the whole of the nature and especially the outer nature does not, nor the ordinary mental, vital or physical personality. The psychic being is the central being for the purposes of the evolution - it grows and develops; but there is a central being above of which the mind is not aware, which presides unseen over the existence and of which the psychic being is the representative in the manifested nature. It is what is called the *Jivatman*. The psychic is a spark of the Divine - but I do not know that it can be called a portion of the *Jivatma* - it is the same put forward in a different way.

What is meant by *Prakriti* or Nature is the outer or executive side of the *Shakti* or Conscious Force which forms and moves the worlds. This outer side appears here to be mechanical, a play of the forces, *Gunas*, etc. Behind it is the living Consciousness and Force of the Divine, the divine *Shakti*. The *Prakriti* itself is divided into the lower and higher, - the lower is the *Prakriti* of the Ignorance, the *Prakriti* of mind, life and Matter separated in consciousness from the Divine; the higher is the Divine *Prakriti* of *Sachchidananda* with its manifesting power of supermind, always aware of the Divine and free from Ignorance and its consequences. Man so long as he is in the ignorance is subject to the lower *Prakriti*, but by spiritual evolution he becomes aware of the higher Nature and seeks to come into contact with it. He can ascend into it and it can descend into him - such an ascent and descent can transform the lower nature of mind, life and Matter. (Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, volume 22, pages 265-287).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) How does Aurobindo distinguish between Individual self and Brahman?

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- 2) Give a detailed account of the understanding of human nature as explained by Aurobindo.

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

The absolute may be regarded as the Being, the beginning and end of our metaphysical search. With care and caution, towards the end of our search, we can identify that Being or Absolute with God. For theists, such a God or Absolute is the unlimited existence, that is unalloyed bliss and perfect consciousness (*sat-cit-ananda*). We can respond to such a gift of existence personally or individually only through love.

2.8 KEY WORDS

- Nescience** : Absence of knowledge or awareness; ignorance
- Inconscient** : Unconscious; subconscious; wanting self-consciousness
- Jivatman** : *Atman* (the Self) is of two kinds - *jiva* or *jivatman*, and *Paramatman* or *Isvara*

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