

A Bird's Eye View of Reality in Aurobindo's Philosophy

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ABSTRACT: *The concept of Reality is the basic problem of metaphysics to which Sri Aurobindo has given impetus in his philosophical writings. We observe new interpretation of the concept in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy. The ultimate Reality involves himself into the lower forms of matter and matter can ascend up to the level of higher consciousness through the process of evolution. Nobody can deny the fact that some kind of consciousness is inherent in the material objects. The ultimate Reality is Sachchidamanda which is existence (sat) Consciousness force (cit) and Bliss (Ananda). Sri Aurobindo followed Vedanta's concept of Brahman but has given a re-orientation to it. The object of this paper is to highlight Aurobindo's concept of Reality which is different from other Indian and western philosophers.*

KEYWORDS: *Aurobindo, Bliss, Consciousness, Existence, Reality.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Contemporary Indian philosophy Sri Aurobindo is regarded as a neo-vedantin. He has great contribution towards philosophical thinking. His concepts of evolution, reality, yoga, consciousness etc have tremendous influence upon contemporary Indian philosophers. Sri Aurobindo, the prophet of "Life-Divine", should be regarded as one of the greatest mystic philosophers in the history of philosophy. He has given a new orientation to the concept of Reality in the Vedanta system. He has given the interpretation of reality and the upanisadic concept of Brahman or Sachchidananda in the light of twentieth century Science.

II. AUROBINDO'S CONCEPT OF 'REALITY'

According to Sri Aurobindo, the supreme Reality is Brahman, the Divine. It is supreme Bliss, the free, abundant activity and absolute passivity. It is absolutely indeterminate, eternal and infinite calmness. Only a perfect man can realize the divine calmness within himself and perceive the spontaneous flow of energies from its silence to work in the universe. The ultimate reality is utterly transcendent and indescribable. Sri Aurobindo is aware of the scientific development which regards energy underlying all phenomena as the one ultimate principle of existence. Aurobindo does not regard physical energy as the ultimate Reality underlying the entire universe because, we cannot explain the life, mind, spirit and higher values with this. So, Sri Aurobindo conceives that Divine involves into the matter through the process of involution and matter evolves up to the level of Divine through the process of evolution. "We perceive that our existence is a sort of refraction of the Divine existence, in inverted order of ascent and descent"ⁱ The concept of Reality, in Hegel, is interpreted in terms of thought. To Hegel, thought is Reality. Bradley regards Reality as the undivided harmonious whole of experience, in which all aspects of experiences are included. In the philosophy of Bergson, Heraclitus and the Buddhists, Reality is pure becoming, external duration. Sri Aurobindo, like the Vedanta denies the Absolute Reality of becoming and holds that becoming is only the movement of Being or pure existence. Reality in Aurobindo, should not be regarded as unknown and unknowable as Kant and Spencer believe. When man transcends the limitations of his personality he can go back to the Absolute in a Supreme Identity. As he says, "It is indefinable and inconceivable by finite and defining mind; it is ineffable by mind created speech; it is describable neither by our negations, neti-neti, for, we cannot limit it by saying it is not this, it is not that, nor by our affirmations, for we cannot fix it by saying it is this, it is that, iti-iti. And yet though in this way unknowable to us, it is not altogether and in every way unknowable; it is self-evident to itself and, although inexpressible, yet self-evident to a knowledge by identity of which the spiritual being in us must be capable, for that spiritual being is in its essence and its original and intimate reality not other than this supreme-existence."ⁱⁱ

Sri Aurobindo conceives Brahman as Integral Reality, all embracing, omnipresent and omnipotent. It is not only "one without a second" but also "All this is Brahman" (Sarvam-khalu-idam-Brahman). Although the Absolute Reality is indescribable yet from the point of view of the human consciousness it can be said that Reality has a threefold character. It is a triune principle: it is Existence (sat), Consciousness Force (cit), and Bliss (ananda). Hence Aurobindo often refers to the Reality as Sachchidananda.ⁱⁱⁱ

III. THE PURE EXISTENCE

We can discover in all phenomena the elements of the Divine in various forms. Existence is obviously present in all, from soul to matter. The Existence (sat) of Brahman appears to us as Atman (self), Isvara (God or divine being) and purusa (Conscious being or spirit). In Vedanta, existence is conceived to be a universal and ineffable reality, but the evidence advanced in support of this is that an analysis of the three aspects of life (waking life, dream and the state of dreamless sleep) reveals the universal and indefinable status of existence. Sri Aurobindo feels that science also helps in the relational apprehension of reality. The energy discovered by science is boundless and it is impossible to bind it in terms of our measures of space and time. Space and time create their own limitations, and the pure existence cannot be bound by any limiting factors. It is boundless not because it is infinitely extended in space and time. Hence, the pure existence cannot be conceived by our limited (by space and time) experience and it is the ground of all existences-cosmic and individual, and is necessarily indeterminate. It is beyond all kinds of attributes of this phenomenal world.

IV. CONSCIOUSNESS FORCE

According to Sri Aurobindo, Sachchidananda is not only the Pure Existence but also the Consciousness Force. As we have seen that “the Absolute is neither Being or Becoming, neither One or many, but is beyond both Stability and Movement. Unity and Multiplicity are, in fact, our mental representations of the Absolute.”^{iv} On the other hand, we have seen that our insight into the nature of Reality reveals itself as boundless energy-as infinite existence. The truth is that these two ways of apprehending the Absolute are not opposed to each other. Consciousness Force is inherent in existence. “Siva and Kali, Brahman and Sakti are one and not two who are separable. Force inherent in existence may be at rest or it may be in motion, but when it is at rest, it exists none-the-less and is not abolished, diminished or in any way essentially altered”.^v

The Consciousness (cit) of Brahman which is always a Force (Sakti) manifests as ‘maya’, ‘sakti’, and ‘prakriti’. Consciousness Force, the own Nature of the Divine, measures the Immeasurable, informs the Formless and embodies the Spirit. The three forms of Consciousness Force correspond to three aspects of Pure Existence-Atman, Isvara and Purusa. These three forms also exist fundamentally in an inseparable union with the three corresponding aspects of existence. Hence there is no contradiction in saying that the Absolute is both Pure Existence and Consciousness Force.

Bliss: Among the three aspects of the Absolute the Delight of Existence or Bliss is one of them. Sachchidananda is not only sat or cit but also ananda. “Brahman is infinite Bliss or infinite delight of the creative play of the Force”^{vi}. The Sachchidananda through His consciousness Force manifests Himself as this world out of sheer Bliss. Bliss gives us the ‘why’ of the creation. “Out of Bliss all things arise”, says the Taittiriya Upanishad. As Aurobindo observes, “World Existence is the ecstatic dance of Siva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly to the view; it leaves that while existence precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be; its sole absolute object is the joy of the dancing.”^{vii} This joy of dancing or Bliss is also universal and ineffable as Pure Existence or Consciousness Force. But here a question arises; if the Sachchidananda is infinite Bliss or self delight how do the sufferings, pains and evils exist in the Universe? As answer to this question S. K. Maitra says that the presence of evil and pain in no way contradicts the universal principles of Bliss which is the motive force of the whole universe.^{viii} Sri Aurobindo is aware of these problems and holds that man cannot enjoy his infinite Bliss so long as he confirms himself in the form of limitations. To attain it, he has to transcend all kind of limitations and rise high. Aurobindo believes that man is his fragmentary and partial bliss is destined to enjoy supreme bliss by undergoing triple transformation—the psychic, the spiritual and the supramental in the course of cosmic evolution.

V. CONCLUSION

Sri Aurobindo, through evolution, has given a fine picture of Reality or Brahman which is already asserted in the Upanishads and also in Sankara Vedanta. His Sachchidananda seems to be Isvara of Sankara which is immanent in the evolutionary process. His Reality can be realized only by the mystic, seers or yogins. Aurobindo is able to reflect the urge of the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagawad Gita while discussing about the concept of Reality. Thus V.P. Verma rightly says, “He is a very significant interpreter of Indian philosophic idealism and historic culture.”^{ix}

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