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THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION OF SRI AUROBINDO AND ITS
COMPATIBILITY WITH SCIENTIFIC EVOLUTION

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Introduction:

Now a days we know from the radiometric dating that, earth is about 4.5 billion years old. But the ancient human was evolved about 2.8 million years ago. We can say that, it is most probably the earliest species of today's modern human being. But life existed many years before the origin of ancient man. Needless to say it was much undeveloped with simple bodies. In some cases it consisted of only a few cells. So, naturally the question arises in our mind that how did today's intelligent human beings come from those ancient undeveloped cells? The answer of this question is evolution, with which no one can disagree. But what is evolution? According to Charles Darwin, "evolution is the change in the characteristics of a species over several generations and relies on the process of natural selection." Science has explained this evolution in its own way. It is also explained in philosophy in a very clear and detailed process. So, the analysis of science and philosophy is consistent with each other? In this research paper, we will begin to discuss the relevance of philosopher Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution and the scientific evolutionary theory and will explore the metaphysical values of Sri Aurobindo's theory.

Scientific Theory of Evolution:

Charles Darwin was an English biologist of the 19th century. He was the first to propose evolution through direct observation. He was the first to realize that all the species have arisen from some common ancestor and supported this observation with evidence. He called this branching pattern of evolution as natural selection. There are various theories about life originated on the earth. However there is no dispute that life first originated in sea water. The arguments put forward by scientists are as follows: First, the presence of various salts in most living cells and body blood and other fluids, which are similar to the mineral salts of sea water. Second. Many simple and single-celled organism still live in sea water.

The scientific hypothesis of how life on earth originated is as follows: about 260 billion years ago, the Earth's atmosphere contain abundant methane, ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and water vapor, nitrogen and carbon dioxide; but oxygen was not a gas. Frequent volcanic eruptions increase the temperature of the atmosphere, and ultraviolet rays cause these compounds to combine to produce amino acids and nucleic acids. This process has been tested and proven in the laboratory. Later, amino acids

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and nucleic acids combine to form nucleoprotein molecules. Nucleoprotein molecules gradually acquire the ability to replicate themselves and give rise to life. The process of origin of the earth and its continuation of origin of life is called chemical evolution or expression.

Then proto viruses are formed from nucleoprotein and the viruses are formed from those proto viruses. Virus refers to a state that is intermediate between the animate and the inanimate. Then probably bacteria and later protozoa are formed. The nucleus of bacteria is primitive in nature; hence they are called primitive cells. Later protozoa were found to have well-formed nuclei.

Chlorophyll was created in some unicellular organism, as a result of which food synthesis became possible and oxygen started to be created as a by-product of food synthesis. Then the number of breathing organisms began in two streams- plants on the one side and animals on the other. The evolution of life does not actually happen in a straight way, but evolves continuously in numerous complex branches.

As new species emerged through evolution, it is seen that, many species are lost in time. We can take an example of dinosaurs. It has been found that the longer a species has the ability to survive in time, the longer it can be survive in the evolutionary cycle. That is, the species that can adapt more to the environment is called adaptation.

Sri Aurobindo's Theory of Evolution:

Although the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo mainly advocated monism, his philosophy has a novelty and uniqueness. His philosophy has a novel interpretation of the material world and consciousness. As he explained the higher spiritual consciousness like other Indian philosophers, he also explained the material objects of the nature. And he resolved the conflict between two opposites by his extraordinary philosophical technique. He combined this two in his philosophy; hence his philosophy is called **Integral Monism**. The main essence of his philosophy is Brahma. The world is created as a result of various manifestations of Brahma. By following science transcends even its mundane process of science and merges with the Ultimate Entity Brahma. We have seen earlier in Darwin's theory of evolution how the world evolved from single-celled animals to numerous-celled animals. We have also seen that hoe from this evolution of animals came the origin human. But the evolution didn't stop there. There are many differences between those ancient men of the first stage of creation and today's man. It can be said that, compared to those primitive people, today's people are a different organism. So far the theory of evolution is supported by science. Sri Aurobindo explained a process supporting this evolution in his legendary book *The Life Divine*. Although the evolution of science explains the origin of humans

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from single-celled animals, but in the early stages of creation of the world, when no lives were exists, there was only inanimate matter, how life arose from that inanimate matter has been explained by some chemical methods which we already know. But we still have a question in our mind that, what is the purpose of origination of life from this unconscious matter? And is there no end of this evolution?

We find the answer to this question in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. As he explained the process of creation of the life from matter, he also explained the various stages of evolution of consciousness and mind. Overcoming the evolution of science, how human consciousness can be evolved to become a better being, we find a vast explanation in his philosophy. And he didn't stop at just explaining, the process of how to upgrade our consciousness is also described in his book *Synthesis of Yoga*. He explained the process very proficiently. Based on his philosophy, following him, the evolution process is explained here.

The main element of the metaphysics of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is conscious being which is Brahma. He said' "All this is Brahman; this self is the Brahman and the self is fourfold." ¹ Although he sees truth as highly spiritual, he also places the material in it. According to him, both material and soul are true. Actual philosophical understanding is possible through their true combination. He felt that, there is a meeting point of conscious and matter in the world. Here the matter is real to the consciousness and the conscious become true to the matter. He speaks of an omnipresent reality that cannot be known from our limited perspective, he is called the Brahma. We cannot know this *Saccidānanda* Brahma. Initially there is only a belief in this all-pervading truth. In describing the process of the world, he mentions two methods. The first method is the descent into the material form of the self-contained entity. In this phase, the world is moving downwards. Then again the development is upward. That is, then it again moves towards the ultimate entity. He mentioned this phase as ascension. This second method is called **Evolution**. But first we need to know how the world was created and why it was created. According to Sri Aurobindo, the world was created by *Māyā* and Brahma created the world for *Līlā*. To him, creation is nothing but joy. This joy is the reason for existence. So, it is said that, creation is just a fun-game (*Līlā-khelā*) of Brahma. The world, of which we are part of, appears to us as 'motion'. Again this motion appears to us as a conscious creator that manifests itself through new forms. But the moment when we try to understand the purpose of this movement and the reason for these various forms, we realize the rhythm of this universe which is the expression of joy. And then we feel oneness with that. This joy of the world system is called *Līlā* of that *Saccidānanda*.

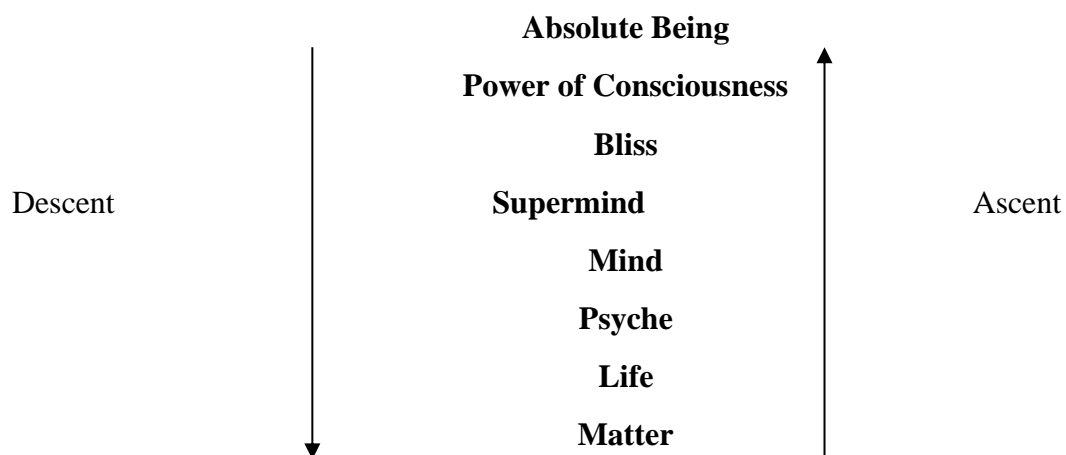
Māyā is generally used in two different senses. In the first sense, it is constructive and creative energy. And in the second sense, it is an illusionary process. Sri Aurobindo didn't accept the second

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meaning because then the position of the world will illusion. He clearly said that, this world is not false (*asat*). His doctrine contracts with Sankaracharya's Advaita theory which states that the world is unreal (*asat*). So, it can be said that Sri Aurobindo takes the first meaning of *Māyā* and said that *Māyā* is the power which created the world and which manifests the shape of the infinite being as the power of *Satcitananda*. This is what he called 'Divine *Māyā*'.

Then Sri Aurobindo spoke about the eight principles of the world. These are: Absolute Being, power of consciousness, bliss or happiness, supermind, mind, psyche, life and matter. The first four prevail in the upper worlds and the last four in the lower world.



According to him, the source of all these is *Saccidānanda* (truth, consciousness and bliss). He is also immersed in inanimate and gradually emerged. Life is the manifestation of His will and mind is the appearance of His creative power. So, there is no doubt about the origin of matter from *Saccidānanda*. Judging in this way, it will be seen that, consciousness is present in a latent state even in what is called inanimate or unconscious matter. As the person can be said to be conscious even when he is asleep, and also even when he is at the condition of senselessness. According to him, this *Saccidānanda* Brahma is the creator of this world. Human consciousness is only a part of that great conscious Being which is active everywhere. This consciousness is present and active everywhere in matter, plants and animals. It is manifested more in the human mind. But its development beyond human consciousness is inevitable because this is the power of the creator of the world. The full development of that power is the goal and end of this world.

So, according to Sri Aurobindo, spiritual power ascends first to the body, then to the life (*Prāṇa*) and then to the mind. Then the mind will ascend again to the higher levels. Life arose from matter because life was latent in inanimate matter. *Prāṇa* upgraded to the level of mind because mind was latent in *Prāṇa*. According to Sri Aurobindo, evolution is not possible from emptiness. In this way, after the

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creation of the world, first matter, then life (*Prāna*) i.e. unicellular and bicellular organisms and then human beings with mind was originated.

Triple Transformation:

According to Sri Aurobindo, evolution did not stop here. Human evolution will go on. According to him, evolution proceeds in a threefold manner. These are: **widening, lightening** and **integration**. Widening method means creating new theory along with the existing one. The second method means ascending from one step to another through improvement. But the most important part of evolution is the third step where nothing is discarded, but everything is integrated.

The first phase of transformation: Describing the triple transformation, Sri Aurobindo said that, "...there must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul instrumentation; on that or along with that, there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the darkness of our subconscious; last there must supervene the supramental transformation, - there must take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental consciousness into our entire being and nature." ² The first stage of the triple transformation is the expansion of the being, along with the unfolding of the qualities of the being. Now the question is, how this quality is revealed? According to Sri Aurobindo, humans have two aspects- a mortal exteriority and the other an eternal interiority. This eternal essence is the conscious being. Body, mind and *prāna* (life) are the parts of the external being. They are used and directed by the consciousness as per its need. Body and soul are subject to death. But conscious being is immortal. This conscious being is the main essence of the man. *Prāna* is the center of desire, emotion, anxiety, etc., conscious being is its director. According to Sri Aurobindo, egoistic being is also different from conscious being. Egoistic being is a mortal entity composed of physical, mental and spiritual entity. But conscious being is eternal and immortal.

According to him, there are two way of evolution. One is the upgradation of the outer body through the birth cycle; the other is the development of the inner being. An upgraded consciousness also requires appropriate changes in the body. On the one hand consciousness is developing, and on the other hand its suitable body or receptacles is being created. In this way, matter will become the worthy vehicle of the Supreme Spirit. But the question is how the eternal consciousness being can be connected with the external entity?

In response to this, Sri Aurobindo spoke of three approaches. **Firstly**, *jīvātmā* can be the tryst of every feeling. In meditation, *citta* (mind) turns inward. Mind became calm and peaceful by continuous

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meditation. This peace is then transmitted from mind to *prāṇa*. But mind has a higher endeavor. This elevation of mind is possible through spiritual effort. This ascendant mind gradually enters into a nameless, formless being. But even this does not completely change the base.

Secondly, through the practice of devotion and love, one can attain the feeling of inner being. Devotional practice brings about a proper change of mind. But complete change of mind is not possible even by devotional practice. The absolute transformation will be achieved when the transformation of the mental state of mind is possible without canceling the nature of the self.

Thirdly, through the practice or the will of the purification of determination (*saṅkalpa śuddhi*), the connection of consciousness with the external entity is possible. According to Sri Aurobindo, the ego is connected with our desires. Desires are associated with the ego. Dissolving these desires is purification of determination. That means, determination free from instinct is the pure determination. It is the negative aspect of determination. But it also has a positive side. Ego surrenders the pure determination to Brahma. Then he entered to the divine world of pure consciousness. Then he has no determination.

Sri Aurobindo said, “A combination of all these three approaches, the approach of the mind, the approach of the will, the approach of the heart, creates a spiritual or psychic condition of the surface being and nature which there is a larger and more complex openness to the psychic light within us and to the spiritual self of the Ishwara”³ But Sri Aurobindo thinks that, it is closer to the union of these three types of practices. This is the first step of *siddhi*.

The second phase of transformation: In the second phase, the conscious being is improved. The transformation of consciousness takes place in this phase. In the first phase, the ascension of being had begun. It has completed in the second phase. The gradual ascension of the being happens in this phase of transformation. According to Sri Aurobindo, this ascent has three steps. The first step consists of the higher mind. In this stage the mind can distinguish between partial ignorance and partial knowledge. His spirituality and knowledge are enhanced. New forces are transmitted in action. The second step is illumined mind. Light of knowledge emerges in this mind. All things are visible together in this state of mind. But it is not the integral knowledge. Overmind represents the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo said, “The overmind change is the final consummating movement of the dynamic spiritual transformation, it is the highest possible status- dynamic of the spirit in the spiritual mind plane.”⁴

The third phase of transformation: In this phase, Sri Aurobindo talks about the integration of consciousness with everything. This integration is possible by perpetuation the conscious entity.

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According to him, this is the ultimate transformation of human being. For this transformation, being possesses self-knowledge. His life with ignorance (*avidyā*) came to an end and this is how the great man of *vijnanamaya puruṣa* (gnostic being) appeared in the world.

In this context, it is necessary to know what the scientific spirit is. According to Sri Aurobindo, it is soul that does not know where to stop. One who is perhaps ignorant of the limitation of the intellect and who only seeks a solution to every problem creates a new situation at the next step. This process of upgradation of soul cannot be completed in one birth. This requires multiple births. Aurobindo accepts reincarnation. According to him, reincarnation is an aspect of evolution and a step of ascension. Evolution has progressed from matter through life to the level of human. Hence he called birth a special 'vehicle' or a special path by which the progress of the evolutionary process is possible. But one thing to remember in this regard is that, according to Aurobindo, there is no reincarnation of *jīvātmā*, but the reincarnation of his appeared part e.g. *chaityapuruṣa* in nature. In each birth, *chaityapuruṣa* takes what is necessary for the experience of life and rejects all that is not necessary, takes a new body and prepares himself for a new earthly life. According to Sri Aurobindo, this accumulation, elimination and preparation require a break between two births. Human soul and mind also need to be strong enough to rise above the attachment of the gross body. So he thinks that evolution is a progression from ignorance to knowledge. But he never called *avidyā* (ignorance) lack of knowledge. *Avidyā* is focusing on parts, forgetting the wholeness of oneself. That means, incomplete or partial knowledge he called *avidyā*. In this context it may be noted that, he spoke of seven types of ignorance, which are:-

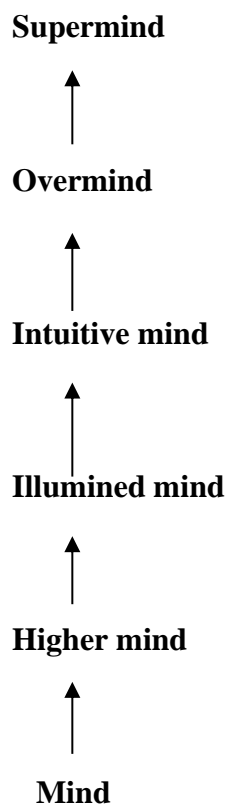
1. The Original Ignorance
2. The Cosmic Ignorance
3. The Egoistic Ignorance
4. The Temporal Ignorance
5. The Psychological Ignorance
6. The Constitutional Ignorance
7. The Practical Ignorance

By elimination the above seven types of ignorance, the consciousness attains the truth and ascends to the Supermind level. But there are many stages between the mind and the Supermind through which the

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Supermind can descend to the mind and it can gradually ascend to the higher level of Supermind. According to Sri Aurobindo, this is the law of evolution. These stages are:



Higher mind: The higher mind is above the consciousness of the ordinary mind. It does not have to search for truth like the ordinary mind. Through this stage of mind, one directly and spontaneously perceives truth. This level of consciousness is simple and distinct. The higher mind has two aspects—knowledge and determination. The knowledge of this mind is manifested in eternal intuition, not acquired by the logic or by worldly means. The determination aspect of the higher mind is the aspect of turning truth into reality. The higher mind is always acting upon the body, soul and heart by its mental force.

Illumined mind: The next stage of ascent is illumined mind. This stage is brighter than the previous stage. Its power and intensity are very high. Illumined mind is not limited to the higher consciousness. This mind is manifested by heavenly light. This light envelops action. In distinguishing this light from ordinary light, Sri Aurobindo says that, ordinary light is caused by unconscious material

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power, but the light which enlightens the illumined mind is the divine manifestation of the Divine Being. Illumined mind expands the limits of the sage's insight vision. At this level the sage attains the *siddhi*.

Intuitive mind: Beyond the illumined mind lies a greater power, what Sri Aurobindo called intuition. Obviously this intuition is a kind of *aloukika sannikarṣa*. This intuition is a glimpse of a ray that descends from the distant Supermind into us in the form of a point. According to Sri Aurobindo, this ability of intuition is of four kinds- the ability of true vision, the ability of true hearing, the ability of true touch and the ability of spontaneous realization of truth.

Over mind: The next stage is the over mind. Sri Aurobindo gave a description of overmind. He said, "... an extension of a free and pure essential self- consciousness or it is an identification with the all" ⁵ That means, the self-being of the overmind level is the expansion of free and pure self-consciousness or the expansion of oneness with all. This expansion makes itself into universality. At this stage, the ego gradually disappears. Sri Aurobindo called this stage of mind the 'super conscious cosmic mind'. It is capable of receiving Light from Supreme Truth Consciousness to become closer to the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo said, "To this we owe immediately most of the larger, deeper and more forceful dynamic action of our surface mind; this, when we become conscious of it or of its impress on us, is our first idea or our first realization of a soul or inner being, Puruṣa."⁶ The difference between the Overmind and Supermind is that in the Supermind consciousness, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, *cit* and *śakti* are the same whole truth. But they are different in Overmind consciousness.

Supermind: Sri Aurobindo said, "A last transition from Overmind to Supermind and a descent of Supermind must therefore intervene at this stage of evolutionary Nature."⁷ That means, the ascension from overmind to Supermind and attaining the consciousness of the supermind is the extreme stage of the evolution. The Supermind consciousness is the all pervading divine consciousness. The knowledge of this level is the integral knowledge of the unique monistic nature of this Absolute Being. But according to Aurobindo, a person can rise to the level of overmind by his own will and technique. But to pass from the overmind to the Supermind of divine life requires the grace of that Brahma. At this final stage of evolution, man no longer remains a 'mental man'. He becomes 'superman'. Sri Aurobindo called this super man, **Gnostic being**. He referred to this supermind soul as God. He said, "We have to regard therefore this all containing, all- originating, all consummating Supermind as the nature of Divine Being, not indeed in its absolute self-existence, but in its action as the Lord and creator of its own worlds. This is the truth of that which we call God."⁸ The supermind brings about two changes in consciousness- universalization and transcendentalization.

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Conclusion:

Sri Aurobindo's evolution can undoubtedly be said to be a highly spiritual and metaphysical theory that explains the overall evolution of man. He described the creation of the world, then inanimate matter, then the emergence of life from inanimate matter, then emergence of man who have mind and also explained how the evolution of human mind and consciousness is growing on. The concept that we find in his philosophy that man becoming a God through the development of the mind is truly admirable. And we get a detailed explanation of how to develop this mind in his book *Synthesis of Yoga*. There he mentions the method of improving consciousness through yoga, which enables physical, mental and spiritual transformation. For that reason, the yoga prescribed by him can be called **Integral yoga**. According to Sri Aurobindo, the aim of this yoga is not only the liberation of individual, but also the liberation of the human race or the liberation of the whole human community and the ultimate goal of this yoga is the realization of the divine life in the material mortal world. Sri Aurobindo is highly optimistic that, divine life will surely descend in mortal life. So it can be said that, Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is more advanced, comprehensive and informative than scientific evolution which enriches us much more. Considering all aspects, his evolution can be called metaphysical evolution.

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