

## **Exploring Sri Aurobindo's Views on Human Nature and Human Values**

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*Abstract*

*Aurobindo accepted the notion of cyclical movement in human and cosmic history. He repudiated the straight linear theory of human progression. He had been one of the most creative leaders of the Indian renaissance movement. He devoted himself to the service of India at the time of the partition of Bengal. Aurobindo talked of the desirability and inevitability of the individual to develop beyond his mental consciousness. He stated that man is a complex being comprising of three elements – infra-rational, rational and supra-rational. This paper explores Dr. Aurobindo's views on human nature and human values.*

*Keywords: Renaissance, Infra-rational, Rational, Supra-rational.*

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## **Introduction**

Sri Aurobindo has been one of the most creative and significant figures in the Indian renaissance movement. He was gifted with surprising powers of intellect. He was a great sage, Yogi and philosophical thinker.

Sri Aurobindo devoted himself to the service of India at the time of the partition of Bengal. He began to be revered as the messiah of a new, inspired fervent nationalism. The articles which he contributed these days in the *Bande Mataram*, *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma* are full of political inspiration. He expounded on the theory of spiritual nationalism.

However, Sri Aurobindo renounced politics in 1910 and went to Pondicherry. Thereafter he worked after the spiritual redemption of humanity. Sri Aurobindo wrote extensively. Among his important writings, we have the *Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *Evolution*, *Superman* and the *Life Divine*.

He talked of the desirability and inevitability of the individual to develop beyond his mental consciousness. He wrote extensively on the problem of evolution. He was not merely concerned with individual man's destiny, he was concerned about the entire humanity.

Today, we see as to what was Sri Aurobindo's views on human nature and human values.

Man according to Aurobindo is a "complex being" comprising of three elements – infra-rational, rational and supra-rational. He argues that the infra-rational element in man is "a human enlargement of the little animal sector"<sup>1</sup> and is concerned with the satisfaction of physical and vital life.

The rational element differentiates man from animals and is concerned with the development of mental faculties. It enables man to understand and control himself and his environment. The supra-rational element is turned towards the Absolute. "Its special power is to realize the infinite in the finite, the eternal unity in all divisions and differences."<sup>2</sup>

However, Aurobindo contends that these three elements do not play the same role in every individual. Thus, in one individual infra-rational element may play a predominant role, while another rational element may play a decisive role. He says, "These three powers of being, the supra-rational, rational and infra-rational are present, but with an infinitely varying prominence in all our activities"<sup>3</sup> He holds that a man dominated by the infra-rational element is an "uncultured and undeveloped human being"<sup>4</sup> He calls him a barbarian, a "vital being"<sup>5</sup> Thought and action of the

vital being are motivated by instincts, impulses and spontaneous ideas. A man in whom reason plays a predominant role is called by Aurobindo the “mental being”.<sup>6</sup> Though and action of the mental being to governed by reason. According to him the spiritual being – man dominated by the supra-rational element – develops “a greater spiritual, supra-intellectual and intuitive, perhaps in the end a more than intuitive, agnostic consciousness”.<sup>7</sup>

Aurobindo also holds the view that man is an evolutionary being. He contends that man is capable of “an inner evolution, a progression from higher to higher type, a constant self-transcending”.<sup>8</sup>

Human evolution starts with infra-rational, vital beings. But material and vital nature is only a first form of our being and to overcome and rise beyond it is the very sense of human evolution.<sup>9</sup> “Our highest endeavor has been to become the mental being and to live in the strength of the idea”.<sup>10</sup>

The reason for using the intellect for the ordering of the inner and the outer life is undoubted the highest developed faculty of man at his present point of evolution. The mental being is superior to the vital being, as he can participate in his evolution consciously. Reason helps man to acquire knowledge to control himself and his environment. It helps in the development of science, art, invention and civilization. It enables man to develop various values, ideas and ideals and to develop ways and systems for their realization.

However, unlike most Western thinkers, Aurobindo believes that the rational or intellectual man is not the last and highest ideal of manhood. He observed that recently there has been a noticeable revolt of the human mind against this sovereignty of the intellect. Vaguely it is felt that there is some greater godhead than the reason.

According to Aurobindo, there are two worlds, the world of ideas and the world of life. So far as the world of ideas is concerned it is proper to the intellect. With the help of reason, man has been able to develop various values, ideas, and ideals. But so far as the world of life is concerned, it escapes from the full control of reason. And that bridge adequately the gulf between the world of ideas and the world of life is beyond the power and the province of the reason and the intelligent will.

The whole difficult reason is trying to govern our existence is that because of its inherent limitations it is unable to deal with life in complexity or totality. It is compelled to break it up into parts, make more or less artificial classifications, to build systems with limited data which are contradicted by other data.

According to Aurobindo, the reason is in its nature an imperfect knowledge with a large but still restricted mission. It can be used and has always been used to

justify any idea, theory of life, the system of society, or government.<sup>11</sup>

A rationalist makes two basic assumptions. First that his reason is right and the reason of others who differ from him is wrong and secondly that whatever may be the present deficiencies of the human intellect, the collective human reason will eventually be able to provide a satisfactory solution to all human problems.

However, Aurobindo does not agree with this. He says that though reason helps man to visualize certain values, ideas and ideals, it is insufficient in itself in helping man to realize these values, ideas and ideals. This is because though reason gives us knowledge, it only gives us half-knowledge and it cannot grasp the whole truth. It leaves the heart of almost every problem untouched and explores only the outsidings or the external aspects of various processes.

Aurobindo believes that though man is imperfect at the present stage of evaluation he is capable of attaining perfection by discovering and following his true nature. However, man can find true nature only if he recognizes two important factors. The first one is that his true nature is spiritual and not ego. And secondly, that he is a cosmic rather than an isolated being, “For the complete individual is the cosmic individual, since only when we have taken the universe into ourselves – and transcended it – can our individuality be complete.”<sup>12</sup>

It gives knowledge of only the physical surface of things. But the actual real truth is much larger, deeper down, more hidden and beyond the reach of reason.

The root of the difficulty is that at the very basis of all our life and existence, there is something which Aurobindo calls the Absolute or the Infinite on which the intellect can never lay a controlling hold. The reason deals successfully only with the finite it cannot grasp the infinite. Nor can reason found a perfect life for man or a perfect society.

However, according to Aurobindo man has the potentiality to go beyond his mental and rational capabilities because the real truth of man is found in his soul. Thus spirit rather than reason is the true sovereign in man.

Therefore, according to him, human life should not be governed by the inferior vital nature which leads to the satisfaction of ego in man. Nor should man recognize the supremacy of the mind. The secret of his social and individual salvation lies in “the reign of the spirit over mind and life and body”.

The true aim of an individual is to grow upward, wonderfully exceeded his animal beginnings, into something more than mental, more than human into a being spiritual and divine.

The ultimate values of life are spiritual and only in the full light of the liberated

self and spirit can it achieve them. Life seeks self-knowledge, it is only by the light of the spirit that it can find it. Life seeks for full growth of being but it can attain it only when the individual has realized that he is essentially a spiritual being and cosmic being. Life seeks power, however, it is only the power of the spirit and the power of this conscious oneness that can give it mastery of itself and its world. It seeks pleasure, happiness, bliss. Only the spirit has the secret of an unmixed and abiding happiness or ecstasy.

### References

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- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. **118**.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. **119**.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. **84**.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. **227**.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. **95**.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. **173**.
- <sup>8</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1977), p. **206**.
- <sup>9</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *War and Self-Determination* (Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1977), p. **594**.
- <sup>10</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. **227**.
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- <sup>12</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*: Book Two Part Two, XIX (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1970), p. **974**.