

Absolute Mind in the Philosophy of Hegel and Super Mind in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy : A Comparative Analysis

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The concept of mind is a very serious issue which has been discussed by both Western and Indian philosophers, of course in different ways. So there are a number of theories related to this issue. We find different explanations of mind in Western thought starting from the Greek philosopher Plato. In Indian philosophy, orthodox and heterodox schools, the *Bhagavad Gitā* and so on have offered different views on mind. There are, however, some similarities and differences regarding the concept of mind in the philosophy of Hegel and Sri Aurobindo. This paper seeks to highlight these similarities and differences.

Major philosophical movements of the West, namely Existentialism, Pragmatism, Phenomenology and Analytic Philosophy grew out of a reaction against Hegel. Even after Hegel's death, his influence was perceptible in philosophical discussions. Although the cultural war between continental and analytic philosophy has lost much of its original meaning now, Hegel still remains as strong as ever. He has been adopted by some prominent philosophers in the analytic tradition as they recognize that they share some of the same problems faced by Hegel. It is not accidental that many philosophers see Hegel as the chief antidote and alternative to much problematic position such as Cartesian subjectivism, naive

realism, extreme liberalism and mental-physical dualism. So, Hegel is still very much important. *The Philosophy of History, Lectures on Aesthetics, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and *Phenomenology of Spirit* are the major works of Hegel.

Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, was a versatile genius—a poet, metaphysician, seer, patriot, lover of humanity and a political and mystic philosopher. His philosophy is similar to Advaita Vedanta of Shankara. Nevertheless, his explanations of the Absolute, the world, mind and the evolution have some distinctiveness. He does not deny the world by calling it *Māyā*, but describes a divine life in this world. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is based on the concept of one absolute, transcendental, ultimate Reality, yet he also recognizes the empirical world in which we live. He taught people to become aware of their self and feel the presence of divinity hidden in this world. But as a contemporary Indian philosopher he has interpreted a Reality and the *Saccidānanda* in the light of 20th-century science.

The Absolute mind of Hegel is an answer to Kantian philosophy. Kant states that because the categories of mind are limited to the knowledge of the finite empirical experiences or the phenomena, knowledge of the noumenal or transcendental reality is impossible. Human

intellect cannot know the noumena. Kant's argument is that categories of mind are limited to the world of experience which cannot categorize the reality in totality. As a response to Kant, Hegel developed the idea of '**Absolute idealism**'. He states that categories themselves are reality. What can be known is the reality. There cannot be a reality or 'thing in itself' unknown to human mind.

Hegel's idealism can be summed up as '**Rational is Real and Real is Rational**'. Absolute idealism is a fundamental aspect of Hegelian metaphysics. The entire reality is taken into the framework of Absolute mind or reality. He has presented a monistic philosophy, according to which the absolute reality progressively manifests itself dialectically in the form of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Here all the dualism and dichotomy are to be solved and overcome to attain the Absolute. His goal was to reduce the realities to more synthetic unity within the system of absolute idealism. Hegel's Absolute mind is the highest triad which is the union of lower triads passing logically. The logical process is called dialectical process or dialectical method. Dialectical method consists of three phases:

- i. Thesis (Logic): first stage of dialectics, it is the pure form of thought. Logic is the pure idea of reason.
- ii. Antithesis (Nature): second stage opposite to logic. It is otherness to logic. Logic loses its inwardness and comes in relation to objective reality (animals, plants, other humans and non-organism).
- iii. Synthesis (Mind or Spirit): final or higher stage. Mind is the synthesis of logic and nature. Mind reduces the nature to its inwardness and mind returns from the outwardness to its self. Logic is the 'idea' in mind and nature is 'idea of othernesses' in human mind. They both are ideas in

mind and it is identically synthesized.

This dialectical process continues until we reach the ultimate concept, the absolute idea. It is a circular process; ultimately, thought or logic reaches a synthesis that is identical to the starting-point, but all, that was implicit there, has now been made explicit. In his book, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he has explained the evolution of mind through subjective, objective and finally reaching the Absolute mind or spirit. Finite mind reaches the infinite Absolute mind through two stages.

1. Subjective mind or spirit:

Subjective mind deals with, among other things, anthropology and psychology. In this stage, mind dissociates from nature, and thus becomes self-conscious. It is the self-conscious awareness of the finite individual thinker, who acknowledges the self as individual ego. It is the human consciousness having a tendency of skepticism about the world of objects. The individual ego has a negative attitude towards the world.

2. Objective spirit or mind:

It deals with history, politics, sociology etc. Mind recognizes the relation with external world and objectifies itself. He forgets about one's own self.

3. Absolute mind:

The absolute idealism of Hegel reaches its culmination in Absolute mind. It is the reality in totality or holistic reality. The dialectic process is nothing but self-development of absolute from abstract to more concrete knowledge. The Absolute mind itself is the ultimate Reality or God and the absolute itself is the reason or mind present in the implicit form. Absolute mind is the higher triad. Hegel says that if we approach the matter from the point of view of man's knowledge of the absolute, the approaches are made at three levels—art, religion and philosophy. The absolute can be

apprehended conceptually, that is, in the form of speculative philosophy which is the synthesis and higher level of art and religion. From Hegel's philosophy, we can say that it is impossible not to admire the grandeur of his system. Its influence is due to its universal scope, its coherence, and the vast amount of material which is systematically arranged in it.

Sri Aurobindo and his philosophy

Arabinda Akryod Ghose (1872-1950), later known as Sri Aurobindo, is one of the finest thinkers and philosophers of the Indian sub-continent. He had a thorough Western upbringing and education. Nevertheless, he showed keen interest in the study of Indian culture and assimilated and interpreted the same to provide it a new orientation. He simply brushed aside the Western conception which dubs Indian culture a kind of occultism or superstition. The major works of Aurobindo are, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Life Divine*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, and *The Ideal of Human Unity*. Apart from these, there are also two volumes of collected poems, and his great epic *Sāvitrī* which is written in about 27 thousand lines.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy bears the stamp of a number of influences. He was well acquainted with the comprehensive system of some of the Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, also well acquainted with some of the idealistic philosophers of recent times. Hegel, Whitehead and Bergson seem to have exercised some influence on his mental make-up.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is called Integral non-dualism or Purna-Advaita. Haridas Choudhary said that 'The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo may be aptly described as Integral non-dualism or (Purna-Advaita) or

Integral Idealism (Purna Vijnāna) or Integralism (Purna Vāda).'¹ His philosophy is Advaita because he accepts the reality of one supremely spiritual, non-dual and suprarational reality as *Saccidānanda*—*Sat* (Existence), *Chit* (Consciousness), and *Ānanda* (Bliss). His philosophy is also designated 'Integral Yoga', because Divine life on earth is the ultimate destiny which is attained through Integral Yoga. It integrates finite consciousness with the infinite supramental consciousness, temporal with the transcendental and integrates matter and spirit by both accepting and sublimating both.

Sri Aurobindo negates both materialism and asceticism. Integral Yoga is a union of the spiritual and the material or finite and the Absolute. Theory of evolution or creation is an important aspect of his philosophy. Creation, according to Sri Aurobindo, is a '*Joyful game or Lilā*'. Joy is the secret of creation. The creation in relation to the *Saccidānanda* is called *lilā*. For Aurobindo, the creation for the sake of joy or *lilā* is *Māyā*. For him, it is not an illusion or magic played by the magician. He presents it as a 'rule of Law'—a definite pattern or process in the creation of the world. This Law is called '*Māyā*.' For Aurobindo, creation is a double and cyclic process, the ultimate Reality manifests Itself in worldly forms and comes back to Its original higher state. Evolution of matter into the Absolute is *ascent* and Its involution in matter is *descent*. Evolution is possible only because involution has already taken place. Evolution presupposes involution, because we cannot rise up to the status of the Absolute unless It descended down to us. Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is teleological. He says that achievement of divine life is the creative fulfilment of a man's life on earth. The highest achievement is not the individual fulfilment but

divinization of the collective humanity. He believes that the divinization of life would be a new birth for humanity as it can wipe out all evil from the world. According to him, 'Spirit is a final evolutionary emergence because it is the original involutory element and factor. Evolution is an inverse action of the involution: what is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution. What was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence.'²

In creation, the Reality expresses Itself into eight stages or levels. They are: Existence→ Consciousness-Force→ Bliss→ Super mind (Higher hemisphere) Mind→ Psyche→ Life→ matter (Lower hemisphere). In these stages the first four belong to higher hemisphere and the last stages belong to lower hemisphere. In ascent, matter rises to life, psyche, mind and the super mind. In descent, the Absolute being comes down to the world or in *matter, life, psyche and mind* through the four stages of *existence, consciousness-force and bliss*. There is a meeting point of the upper hemisphere and the lower. There is a veil that separates mind and the super mind. There are certain links, however, that connect mind and the super mind. They are *higher mind, illuminated mind, intuitive mind and over mind*. If that veil is turned apart, the light from the super mind will enter mind and, as a result, the whole terrestrial existence will be transformed and this transformation will ultimately make preparation for the divine life.

The evolutionary growth, according to Sri Aurobindo, is a triple process; it involves the process of *widening, heightening and integration*. In the process of widening when life emerges, matter sufficiently widens itself to accommodate life in it. Secondly, in the

process of heightening, there is a movement from the lower to the higher; matter rises to life, and life to mind and so on. The third process is integration with the process of heightening and widening. The lower principles are not neglected, instead the higher ones get integrated with the lower ones and it is uplifted and transformed. It is the important character of the evolutionary process. Integration is the original contribution of Sri Aurobindo to evolution which is metaphysical and not empirical.

The concept 'Super mind' is important in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. It is the connecting link between spirit and matter. It gets the holistic, unitary and total picture of the world. Those who attain super mind are called **Gnostic being**, leading a Divine life in this world. Mind has the capability to rise upward, towards the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo developed his concept of mind from the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, which refers to the *Manomaya Ātmā, Prānamaya Ātmā, Vijnānamaya Ātmā* and *Ānandamaya Ātmā*. The last one is the Absolute. Sri Aurobindo's 'mind' is not simple and uniform, but consists of various subdivisions or levels. These various levels referred to as passing from the one to another is explained in his books including *Sāvitrī* which has poetic references to many types of mind.

The super mind is the dynamic form of *Saccidānanda*, but it is not the opposite of the mind. Super mind belongs to the higher hemisphere and the ideal of mind. Sri Aurobindo calls the super mind the child of *Saccidānanda* and parent of the mind. Mind and super mind differ in the manner of apprehending reality. Super mind gets the unitary or non-dual picture of reality and does not differentiate it by dividing it. Mind by its nature divides the whole reality into parts. So, mind is not capable of having knowledge of the Absolute Reality—

Saccidānanda. Mind first breaks the unitary reality into parts and they are synthesized again into the whole. In spite of all these differences between mind and the super mind, mind feels an urge to realize the supra mental state. So the spiritual aspects of the super mind are already present in mind. That is why Aurobindo says that 'Mind is actually a fall from Super mind.' It is beyond subjective freedom. Super mind has two aspects:

- Super mind as Truth Consciousness having the consciousness of *Saccidānanda*
- Super mind as the ideal and culmination of mind.

Similarities

Sri Aurobindo tried to connect the Absolute with the finite as Hegel did. Both reconciled the collectivity and individuality. Hegel explained the logical evolution of the finite human to the Absolute mind passing through the lower triads of logic, nature, and mind, subjective and objective mind. There is also an unfolding or manifestation of the Absolute in the lower triads. Similar to this, Sri Aurobindo explained the involution of the Absolute or *Saccidānanda* into mind, psyche, life and matter and evolution of matter into life, psyche, and mind and to the super mind.

Idealism of Hegel is a union of logic and metaphysics where, in other words, mind becomes God. A similar thought can be traced in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

According to him, super mind is a link between mind and the Absolute. It has the nature of the Absolute and it is the culmination of mind. The super mind passes through higher mind, illumined mind, and intuitive mind and finally over mind.

The Absolute for Hegel sees the reality in totality; there is a holistic view of reality. The partial view is transformed into complete view or knowledge. The super mind in Aurobindo's philosophy is described as supreme-truth consciousness, because it is conscious of the truth of the basic unity of the Reality and the non-dual nature of the Reality. Both philosophies explain the unity-in-multiplicity.

Sri Aurobindo says that the human race must rise from its present level of consciousness to a higher level if it is to survive, and hence the need of philosophy and religion. Hegel also stresses this need. There are more similarities between them. It is clear that their philosophies are absolutistic and monistic regarding the concept of reality. Sublation or preservation of lower triads in the evolution is an important step in both philosophies. So we can conclude that there are many differences and similarities between the absolute mind of Hegel and super mind of Sri Aurobindo. Though both explained mind differing from the traditional, materialistic and rationalistic approaches, they tried to give a universalistic view on mind. These details are enough to assert that Hegel and Sri Aurobindo are still live topics to be studied and discussed. ■

REFERENCES

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