

**SRI AUROBINDO'S APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL**

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Email: pratapkativarapu@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The problem of evil is the philosophical problem of how to resolve the conceptual tension between two beliefs: firstly, that the universe is created by a God who is both omnipotent and perfectly benevolent, and secondly, that the universe contains evil. The problem is how the good God can allow that which is the direct opposite of His nature to exist. Sri Aurobindo adopts a fresh approach to this ever-baffling problem. He avoids the extreme views of absolute denial or complete affirmation of evil, but accepts the reality of evil, without allowing it any absolute status. According to Aurobindo evil is only an accidental characteristic of the world. The world as such is not evil, and it is only in the middle stage of the world-evolution that there is the possibility of evil. There are two types of evil, namely, physical evil or pain, and moral evil or sin. Physical evil is a cosmic experience common to both animal and man. Since animals have only the consciousness of pain and not of sin, they do not have moral evil. It is man who has moral consciousness and, therefore, it is he who suffers from evil. Evil does not exist in saccidananda. It is the mind that is the seat of evil. The contradictions of the world and of human life are due to the fact that the Absolute has not yet manifested itself fully in the world. The world is still ruled by the principles of inconscience and ignorance which are the cause of Pain and evil. They will be eliminated in the higher stages of evolution. The world is not destined to be ruled by ignorance and inconscience forever, and there will be the transformation of consciousness. Thus Sri Aurobindo offers the principle of evolution as an integral solution to the problem of evil. In this regard, the present article deals with comparing and contrasting the views of Aurobindo with those of Vedantic, Upanishadic and Stoic thinkers

Keywords: *Brahman, Atman, Saccidananda, Play(Lila), Inconscience, Ignorance, Consciousness etc.*

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INTRODUCTION

'The Problem of Evil' has always been a hard metaphysical nut for all religions and philosophical circles. It is much more a theological problem, and the very problem poses a threat to the God's existence. If everything is Divine, then God must be the cause of everything. If everything comes from the good God, how can there be evil? Can the Divine create evil in His pure delight? If the world is a lila of Brahman, if it is manifested out of the bliss of Brahman, then whence come pain, suffering, and evil? The world, instead of appearing as the abode of bliss, presents itself as a vale of tears. It presents a serious threat to the monistic or Advaitic thinking. "The problem of evil is a stumbling block to all monistic conception." Evil seems to be a direct contradiction of bliss, and seems to be opposed to all that is good, beautiful and blissful.

The problem of evil is then the problem of the coexistence in the same world of two totally opposed orders, one of good and the other of evil. God is identified with the good. The problem is how the good God can allow that which is the direct opposite of His nature to exist. The problem of evil is the philosophical or theological problem of how to resolve the conceptual tension between two beliefs: firstly, that the universe is created by a God who is both omnipotent and perfectly benevolent, and secondly, that the universe contains evil." The innumerable study of the problem of evil found it an insoluble problem. We can never arrive at a unitary conception of the universe if evil and good are regarded as contradictories. The Advaita system considers the world and the evil to be unreal and concentrate more on liberation from the World. But such considerations challenge the very monistic thinking of Advaita. For fear of falling into pantheism, Western Philosophy separated God from the world, and consequently God had only an external relation to the world. With such an external relation, a unitary system cannot be constructed. Unless we take God's relation to the world as immanent, the problem of evil cannot be solved.

AUROBINDO'S APPROACH

According to Aurobindo, a fresh approach has to be adopted for the solution to the ever-baffling problem. He avoids the extreme views of

absolute denial or complete affirmation of evil, but accepts the reality of evil without allowing it any absolute status. For him, the problem seems to be the result of the false ways of putting the question. He prefers to begin the philosophical discussion with the 'good' rather than the 'evil'. It is wrong to consider the good as the normal happening, and the evil as the extraordinary, and our habitual thinking projects only the 'extraordinary', and sidelines the 'ordinary' and usual happenings. It is when one concentrates more on the 'evil' that the World becomes really a problem. The world, which is expressed in plurality, as such is no evil, since it is only a mere division of the One into Many. He believes that all evil is good in preparation, or to use his own Words "all evil is in travail of the eternal good." As Zaehner says, "This is because what the mystic experiences in cosmic consciousness transcends time - he sees all things in one all-comprehensive sweep, in eternity, as God sees them." Aurobindo does not take a pessimistic view of life and existence. To the pessimist, the world is full of sorrow and suffering and there is no joy in life.

The sum of the pleasure of existence far exceeds the sum of the pain of existence, - appearances and individual cases to the contrary notwithstanding, - and that the active or passive, surface or underlying pleasure of existence is the normal state of nature, pain a contrary occurrence temporarily suspending or overlaying that normal state. But for that very reason the lesser sum of pain affects us more intensely and often looms larger than the greater sum of pleasure; precisely because the latter is normal, we do not treasure it, hardly even observe it unless it intensifies into some acuter form of itself, into a wave of happiness, a crest of joy or ecstasy.

Normally good and bad are opposed to each other in the sphere of morality. But the problem is whether we can regard good and evil as opposed to each other metaphysically also as they are so regarded in our practical and moral life, Can the Absolute as good and blissful be regarded as opposed to evil, pain, suffering etc.? If we consider evil as opposed to the bliss of the Absolute, then we make the dualism of two equally real and independent principles. Evil cannot be, therefore, regarded as ultimately opposed to the bliss of the Absolute, if



monism or Advaitism is to be maintained. We cannot think of it as an independent principle, rather something that goes along with the Absolute. The problem of evil could then be better understood only in relation with the basic Indian understanding of Brahman and Atman. The conception of Brahman points towards the fact that It is the ultimate reality behind all appearances, manifestations and events. Accordingly, any event is the self-development of the Brahman itself.

ORIGIN OF EVIL

The question of the origin of evil is a problem that relates to 'how' and not to 'why'. For the Upanishadic thinkers, creation is God's lila, His creative activity which has no object except His Bliss. If that is so, there is no room for evil in God's creation. Evil is not a permanent factor of the world, but arises under a certain stage at certain conditions, and it disappears when the conditions change. Therefore it is only an accidental characteristic of the world. The world as such is not evil, and it is only in the middle stage of the world-evolution that there is the possibility of evil. The question is; At what stage evil entered into the World? The answer has to be sought by analyzing the two types of evil that have been recognized, namely, physical evil or pain, and moral evil or sin.

Physical evil is a cosmic experience common to both animal and man. Since animals have only the consciousness of pain and not of sin, they do not have moral evil. But man is ethical in the sense that he is conscious of both good and evil. It is man who has moral consciousness and, therefore, it is he who suffers from evil. Evil does not exist in saccidananda. It is the mind that is the seat of evil. Falsehood and evil are the creations of ignorance, and hence have no place in the Supreme Nature which is the perfect knowledge. When knowledge takes over ignorance, evil and falsehood disappear. Human nature contains both true and wrong consciousness, and the very human values like truth and error, good and evil are relative and uncertain. There is then no objective existence for evil and falsehood. Where there is the unity of consciousness, error and evil vanish. Evil is, therefore, not the essential characteristic of the universe. It emerges only at a certain stage of evolution, that is, on the plane of the mind. For

Aurobindo, ethics that sees things both as good and evil, is in the middle stage of the process of evolution. Though man is ethical, he is only half-ethical, and there is the possibility for supra-ethical:

[There is] first non-ethical, then infra-ethical in the animal, then in intelligent animal even anti-ethical for it permits us to approve hurt done to others which we disapprove when done to ourselves. In this respect man even is only half-ethical. And just as all below us is infra-ethical, so there may be that above us whither we shall eventually arrive, which is supra-ethical, has no need of ethics.

The function of ethics is to enable man to liberate himself from the clutches of ignorance and prepares him for receiving the light of the Divine. Ethical standpoint applies only to a temporary phase of existence, and it cannot be applied to the whole of existence.

One of the major reasons for man's pain is the sense of discomfort of this world, and the dream of a better life in the next advanced evolutionary stage. It is not a pessimistic discontentment, rather a 'Divine discontentment,' which is the direct consequence of the spiritual character of evolution. It reminds man of his higher destiny than of his present life, and instills in him an ardent desire for a higher life. Even the aim of yoga is 'to sense' or 'to aspire' for the next step of evolutionary life, and not to shun the world or its pain and struggle. Evolution does not stop with the ethical stage; it makes a further advance towards the integral consciousness that liberates man from dualities and separatedness.

EVOLUTION AS INTEGRAL SOLUTION

Evil is a fact, and one cannot find a solution by ignoring its existence. Aurobindo criticizes the traditional attempts to solve the problem of evil. The Stoic thinkers considered evil as being meant for trial and ordeal. For Aurobindo, such conception will bring down the goodness of the Absolute

"For one who invents torture as a means of test or ordeal, stands convicted either of deliberate cruelty or of moral insensibility and, if a moral being at all, is inferior to the highest instinct of his own creatures."

The Indian tradition assigned the law of karma as the cause of the problem of pain and evil. Aurobindo questions the very proposition too:



Who created or why or whence was created that moral evil which entails the punishment of pain and suffering? And seeing that moral evil is in reality a form of mental disease or ignorance, who or what created this law, or ,inevitable connection which punishes a mental disease or act of ignorance by a recoil so terrible, by tortures often so extreme and monstrous?

How can the good God inflict pain on man who is guided by ignorance, of which man is not morally culpable?

We cannot think of a supra-cosmic God who creates evil and then not be affected by the same pain. If God stands outside of the world, and if he is completely free from suffering and allows suffering for the world, then he is really a cruel God. But if God remains in the world and is of the world, then we cannot accuse God of cruelty, because it is He who suffers. Therefore the problem of evil cannot be solved by an extra-cosmic God. The saccidananda of the Vedanta is not Such a God, rather a God who manifests himself in the forms of the world. He is both transcendent and immanent. It is Brahman who becomes the whole universe. So the suffering and pain of man is borne out of Him. Saccidananda cannot be charged with cruelty since He Himself suffers. As Matter, Life, and Mind are the self-expression of saccidananda, so pain, pleasure, and evil are the results of the self-expression of saccidananda in the world of ignorance. All these principles can be ultimately reduced to saccidananda, and they are not contradictory to the bliss of saccidananda, and therefore do not challenge the monistic position. The contradictions of the world and of human life are due to the fact that the Absolute has not yet manifested itself fully in the world. The world is still ruled by the principles of inconscience and ignorance. Pain and evil are the products of the inconscience and ignorance. They will be eliminated in the higher stages of evolution. The world is not destined to be ruled by ignorance and inconscience forever, and there will be the transformation of consciousness.

The principle of evolution can, therefore, offer a solution to the problem of evil. The evolutionary standpoint enables us to reconcile evil

with the Absolute without affecting in any way the Advaitic position. Evil is not permanent; it arises only at certain stage of evolution, and it will be transformed into Bliss or good in the further evolutionary process - Supramental stage. Advaita is forced to call evil as unreal in order to maintain Advaitism. It is only an escape, and not a solution to the problem.

Aurobindo recognizes the reality of evil, and yet he shows the way how evil is to be transformed into good in the higher stages of evolution. Evil can be fully removed only by a cosmic liberation and not by individual liberation alone. Such a transformation is possible only by the descent of the Supramental principle into the material. It is only a higher principle that can liberate the world from evil. For Aurobindo there is no final solution to the problem of evil until we have turned our inconscience into the greater consciousness, made the truth of self and spirit our life-basis and transformed our ignorance into a higher knowledge. All other expedients will only be makeshifts or blind issues; a complete and radical transformation of our nature is the only true solution.

Though the existence of evil is a fact, the descent of the Supramental forces transform the very attitude towards it. The presence of pain and evil does not, according to Sri Aurobindo, contradict the universality of Bliss. They are only a mode of manifestation of Bliss. Aurobindo writes in Savitri:

Bliss is the secret stuff of all that lives.

Even pain and grief are garbs of world-delight,
That hides behind thy sorrow and thy cry.

At a higher state of evolution, pain and evil will lose their essential character and will turn into the principle of Bliss. So Bliss is the inherent characteristic of all existence, every finite being and all cosmos. It is present everywhere in latent manner, but is not able to manifest itself overtly at present on account of ignorance and inconscience. When there is the Supramental descent, through the development of knowledge, there will be the fullest manifestation of the Bliss. Aurobindo thus reaffirms the world existence as divine lila: "World-existence is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly to the view: it leaves that white existence precisely where and what it was,



ever is and ever will be, its sole absolute object is the joy of the dancing.”

Following the great Vedantic traditions, Aurobindo sees the entire phenomenon as an embodiment of consciousness-force. For him, both spirit and matter are truly real. They are modes of Reality, different modes with different properties, apparently contradictory but essentially one and the same. Vedanta has two great findings to offer, i.e., *tad ekam*, the supreme Reality is one, and *sarvam Khalvidam brahma*, 'All this is Brahman'. Only by combining both these ideas do we get the integral truth of Reality. Not only the Divine is one without a second, but he is also everything. 'All this is in Brahman,' 'Brahman is in everything,' and 'All this is Brahman' are the threefold findings of Vedanta. These three claims are held by the great Vedantins like Sankara, Ramanuja and Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo surpasses the claims of the both Sankara and Ramanuja, asserting that God's presence is not only in the soul, rather he is all this - body, life and mind: "It is not enough to realize that he is within each one of us and we are all within him; we go a step further and realise that all this is the Divine.”

The realization of the Oneness of reality is achieved through Evolution. Aurobindo's conception of evolution is integral. It involves biological, human, social, intellectual, and personal development, and concrete spiritual transformations and achievements. He sees an integration of both immutable and mutable world. He holds both visions of the world together in a living union, the eternal, immutable, and perfect on the one hand, and the moving, progressive, and achieving on the other. Both are expressions of the Divine.

Evolution means a process of the manifestation of the unmanifest Consciousness-Force that dwells in every being. It is a process of self-revelation of the Spirit from its concealed and absorbed condition. Evolution, thus, contains an upward, downward and an inward movement. The soul that dwells within us is a spark of the Divine. Evolution means the development of this psychic being so that it may illumine and transform our surface mind, life and body. The awaking of the soul and the development of the soul-personality is essential for any evolution of the human beings. The

destiny of man is to receive the Higher consciousness and to be transformed into the Divine Man. The descent of the Higher Consciousness, or the Supermind will transform ignorance and inconscience into Knowledge. After supramentalisation, evolution proceeds through knowledge till the triune principle of *saccidinanda*, viz., Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss, emerges. The advent of the Higher Consciousness is an event of unspeakable joy for all creation.

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