Introduction

Consciousness -

The main focus of this study is what is consciousness and its various facets affecting life. But consciousness is a subject of enormous depth and complex in understanding and one may get lost in same. At the present stage of humanity, mind seems to be the greatest instrument of expression of consciousness which man possesses. Should the mind be by-passed? Can it be destroyed? (For manonāśa - annihilation of mind, is a prerequisite for altered states of consciousness as per Yogavāsiṣṭha).

What is mind? Where does it exist? How yoga will help common man to transcend the mind?

To answer all above questions, one has to study the functioning of the mind, mental problems and mental personality. By studying the mechanism of mind, we need to know how to transcend the mind to reach the consciousness, which is free from tardy processes.

Process of Evolution -

A part of this research work is on the study of Darwin’s law of evolution, how this evolution takes place? Why giant creatures like Dinosaurs became extinct and mammals were created? Why bring giant creatures into existence if they were to be by-passed? Modern science has not been able to solve mystery of mutation which is sudden arrival of new species. How to resolve the mystery of mutation?

The process of evolution is physical and quantitative evolution following Darwin’s law of Evolution from amoeba till the birds and animal species. Darwin’s theory was one of the significant contributions to the
understanding of process of life. But this evolution of species is not attributed to chance or natural selection as Darwin suggests. However, laws of evolution have not remained as they were conceived by Darwin as survival of the fittest, capacity to adaptation etc., they were formulated mostly on the basis of materialistic and mechanistic principles. Randomness and chance also played a great part in them.

In this process, we find two major factors in multiplicity of creation which are 1) Heredity (continuity) and 2) Variation. Science studies this growth and explains how simple forms become complex. It is psychological and qualitative in human beings. Process of evolution is a continuous movement from disordered to order, the unrefined to the refined and from gross to subtle.¹

Modern thinkers like Śrī Aurobindo do not divide the universe into sentient (cetana) and insentient (jaḍa) parts. Every form of existence is the combination of matter and consciousness. Consciousness searches suitable instrument, for its expression in matter. Hence different objects in the world differ in manifestation of consciousness in matter. This expression is different in stones, mountains, trees, animals, birds and human--beings. In each species, when this expression overflows, the consciousness changes its expression or species. Same is explained by Pantañjali in Pāntañjala Yogasūtra² -


jaa%yantrpirNaamaĀ p'kr%yaapUrat\ || PYS, IV.2
“The transformation from one species or kind into another is by the overflow of natural tendencies or potentialities.”

This means transformation involving fundamental change of nature or change in genes, chemical composition. It is not just change of state as ice gets transformed to water. But these changes are bound by limitations set by natural tendencies and potentialities and one cannot go beyond them.

Evolution is a natural spontaneous process and it can be accelerated using force of will. Swāmī Vivekānanda, therefore, regards yoga as a means of acceleration of the natural process of evolution. Śrī Aurobindo regards evolution of forms by itself as meaningless as it is devoid of aim and purpose. He considers evolution of consciousness as primary and fundamental. According to him, evolution of form is only derivative from evolution of consciousness. Many modern philosophies strive to find the meaning of evolution in the evolutionary process itself, but Śrī Aurobindo puts all the emphasis to ‘involution’ which contains the meaning and direction of entire evolutionary process.

He says\(^3\), “Man has evolved from Matter—or rather Nature has evolved first the plant, then the animal, then Man in a regular succession out of Matter. What is involved is not Man, but mind and life and spirit.” Involved means that, they are there even though there seems to be no mental activity (as in the tree) and no mental or vital activity (as in the stone); as the evolution goes on the involved life appears and begins to organize itself and the plants appear and then the animals; next mind, first in the animal, and then man appears. So man has the choice to become a

devil or divine being. Man seems to be most suitable vehicle for evolution of consciousness.

A fable from Aitareya Upaniṣad which tells us that the gods rejected animal forms successively offered to them by the Divine, and only when the man was produced the gods exclaimed:

“This indeed is made to perfection”

Above statement supports the theory that man leads the evolutionary process. He has immense potentialities. Having studied laws of nature man aspires to conquer nature and go beyond her limitations.

So in Śrī Aurobindo’s philosophy, evolution is a continuous process where involution and evolution constitute the rhythm of creation or rhythm of existence. The concept of avatāra in Hindu religion indicates new direction to stream of evolution. Śrī Aurobindo writing about avatāra says -

“Avatāra is not restricted to human kingdom, but it is a descending force at all level whether human or subhuman. Whenever a creative surge appears in evolutionary field, one witnesses a fresh descent or avatāra.”

The process of evolution of consciousness is beautifully explained by Śrī Aurobindo in his book ‘Letters on Yoga’

The famous daśāvatāra-s (ten incarnations of God) have been explained by Śrī Aurobindo as ‘parable of evolution of consciousness.

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4. Aitareya Upaniṣad, I.ii.i.3
Avatārahood would have very little meaning if it were not connected with evolution. The Hindu procession of the ten Avatars is itself, as it were, a parable of evolution. First the Fish Avatar, then the amphibious animal between land and water, then the land animal, then the man -lion avatar, bridging man and animal, then man as dwarf, small and undeveloped and physical, but containing in himself the godhead and taking possession of existence, then the rājasika, sāttvika, nirguṇa avatāra-s, leading the human development from the vital rājasika to the sāttvika mental man and again the over mental Superman. Kṛṣṇa, Buddha and Kalki depict the last three stages of the spiritual development - Kṛṣṇa opens the possibility of over mind, Buddha tries to shoot beyond the Supreme Liberation, but that liberation is still negative, not returning upon earth to complete positively the evolution; Kalki is to correct this by bringing the Kingdom of Divine upon earth, destroying the opposing asura forces. The progression is striking and unmistakable.

Śrī Aurobindo’s unique contribution to the understanding of evolution is the emphasis on principle of Involution, which will be studied in further chapters.

**Concept of Evolution of Consciousness in Haṭhayoga** -

According to Yogi Swātmārāma’s Haṭhayoga, by practicing prāṇāyāma, mind can be controlled. All of us have various planes of existence, which are areas of consciousness called as cakra-s. When prānic
energy is awakened through practices of *prāṇāyāma*, it is circulated through *cakra*-s which are centers of consciousness. These *cakra*-s are the instruments of spiritual illumination and man is then reborn into new dimensions of experience and existence.

Altered states of consciousness – which is the main focus of this research work- are in fact the milestones on the road of evolutionary process.

Many yogi-s, mystics, saints, sages have claimed that they have experienced these states and that anyone following their path can attain the same. This research work will be focused on the ancient texts, life sketches of ancient and modern masters in order to find out what, how and why of these states, the epistemology of these states!

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