

The Reconciliation of Sacred Love and Secular Love: From Sri Aurobindo's Perspective

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The very term 'love' primarily implies one of the very basic emotions of human beings, which influences one's thoughts, actions and behavior in various ways. It is related to the different needs, interests and desires of an individual. But it is not merely an emotion; rather it is a complex human experience that has various dimensions as reflected in the different spheres of human life. Love shapes ethical systems, religious practices, artistic expressions and social institutions as well. Considering these various ways in which love is related with human life, philosophers have inquired, 'Is love primarily spiritual or worldly?' 'Can love or romantic affection lead to moral or spiritual transformation?' These questions have shaped philosophical theories regarding love. And based upon their analysis, philosophers as well as theologians have divided love into two broad categories, sacred and secular.

Sacred love and Secular love:

Sacred love is understood as love directed towards the Divine Reality or the Ultimate Truth or God. The purpose of such love is to realize one's unity with the divine reality or to attain liberation. Hence, such love is spiritual and transcendent in nature. It emphasizes upon the practice of selflessness, self-transcendence and non-attachment.

Secular love implies love towards human beings which is primarily emotional and relational, especially romantic, familial, leading towards interpersonal affection as well as social solidarity between human beings within worldly life. It is related to individual's desire and personal fulfillments. It is connected with the social, cultural and personal experiences of the individual.

However, sacred love is often thought to be opposed to secular love. Most religious traditions in the west as well as in the east acknowledge both kinds of love, but consider sacred love as higher, purer and spiritually transformative, while secular love is considered to belong to ordinary human life. Since secular love is associated with human desire rooted in the physical world, many religious traditions consider it to be a hindrance towards the realization of the ultimate truth or the highest reality. Sacred love, on the other hand, being selfless and non-possessive, is regarded as a means towards the realization of the spiritual truth.

However, the objective of the present paper is to show that despite the apparent differences between sacred love and secular love, the two can be reconciled. And the paper seeks to show this in the light of the thoughts of Sri Aurobindo. And in this regard the paper would like to focus upon the thoughts of Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo and his philosophy:

Sri Aurobindo was one of the greatest spiritual thinkers of India, a yogi, a rishi, whose aim was to bring about the resurgence of the entire mankind through the awakening of spirituality within it. The significance of his spiritual thoughts lies here that, Sri Aurobindo has attempted at a reconciliation of spiritualism with that of materialism. In fact, we know that apart from being a spiritual thinker, Sri Aurobindo was also a social and political thinker. During the early period of his life he was actively involved with the freedom struggle of India and emerged as one of the greatest nationalist leaders of India. He inspired the then freedom fighters with his ideals of unity, nationalism and internationalism. Such socio-political thoughts and ideals have as their basis the deeper spiritual and metaphysical thoughts and principles that form the core of Sri Aurobindo's general philosophical speculations. The question is where does love stand in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy? It is in the realization of the unity with the Ultimate reality that Sri Aurobindo admits sacred love. And in his philosophy sacred love ultimately paves the way to secular love leading to human unity. Therefore, in this paper I would like to focus upon three things, Sri Aurobindo's understanding of love as a unifying force transcending religion, his critique of organized religious divisions, and his vision of secular unity rooted in spiritual evolution.

Sacred love according to Sri Aurobindo:

It may be noted that the great seer was deeply influenced by the philosophy of the Advaita Vedānta and conceived reality as the one eternal all pervading Brahman or the Sacchidānanda, the realization of which is the highest aim of human life. However unlike the Advaita Vedānta of Saṅkara, Sri Aurobindo regarded the material world also as real. In fact he attempted at a reconciliation of materialism and spiritualism. In his magnum opus *The Life Divine*, he pointed out that if everything is Brahman (Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma), then matter also is Brahman and hence matter also is real. Sri Aurobindo explained that since the Supreme Spirit or the Divine Reality is all-pervading, it is already present within us as well as in the external material world. The aim of human life is to discover the divine and then to work for its manifestation in the entire material world. As a result of this there will be a radical transformation of our entire phenomenal life and a Divine Life characterized by unity, peace and harmony would emerge upon earth. Sri Aurobindo was convinced that mankind can realize such a life through a gradual process of spiritual evolution of consciousness. What is evolution? Sri Aurobindo points out that the Supreme Spirit (Saccidānanda), which is essentially one, descended straight into the grossest and the densest matter, in order to realize its manyness. This descending process is called involution. The Spirit that remains involved in the inconscient matter again begins its slow but sure movement upwards, i.e. back to its source of origin in order to realize its original unity. This ascending process is called evolution. The first principle that evolves in this process is matter. From matter, evolves life, and from life, there is evolution of mind, i.e. at present there is appearance of the mental man. But Sri Aurobindo says that man who is capable of possessing higher consciousness would definitely take its leap into the next higher spiritual realm that is into the realm of Supermind. Since the process of evolution presupposes involution, evolution or the ascent of mental man into the level of Supermind would be possible only if Supermind or the Divine Reality itself involves or descends into the lower realm of mind, life and body. And for this the individual needs to attain perfection of his mind, life, body (the physical, the vital and the mental) and of his entire being. According to Sri Aurobindo, this would be possible through the practice of integral yoga as proposed by him. The practice of integral yoga would bring about triple transformation of the entire human nature and prepare the individual to act as the medium of the divine

manifestation. The individual being would thus act as the key to the evolutionary process of the world. With the involution or descent of the Supermind into the entire being of man as well as into the phenomenal world, there would be a Supramental divine transformation of the earthly existence and a divine life of unity, peace and harmony would dawn upon earth. The triple transformation consists of psychicism, spiritualization and supramentalisation.

Psychicism implies the awakening of the psychic being or the true soul in man. The awakening of the psychic being, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the first step towards the attainment of a spiritual life. And the first condition of the complete emergence of the soul is its attempt to establish direct contact in the surface being with the spiritual reality. The soul seeks this reality through some special and core features that represent reality, i.e., through Truth, Good and Beauty, which according to Sri Aurobindo are the primary characteristics of the Reality. It tries to achieve this contact through the thinking mind, the heart and the pragmatic will. It is the part of the work of the soul to influence mind, heart and vital being and turn their ideas, feelings, enthusiasms in the direction of what is divine and luminous. The thinking mind is drawn always towards the impersonal reality; in its search it becomes conscious of a spiritual essence, an impersonal reality. The mind feels something of which it becomes intimately and invisibly aware, - a supreme truth, a supreme good, a supreme beauty, a supreme purity, a supreme bliss. As a result the mind becomes pure, large, tranquil, and impersonal. It becomes aware of the unchanging Self, the pure bareness of an essential existence, the formless Infinite and the nameless Absolute. As a result, a spiritualized consciousness is achieved; the soul itself merges into the spiritual silence. But this transformation through the mind does not lead to integral transformation.

A second approach made by the soul to come in direct contact with the ultimate reality is through the heart. And here it is through the love and adoration of the All Beautiful, All Blissful, the All Good that the soul tries to come into contact with the ultimate reality. As a result of this approach through love and adoration, the mind becomes aware of a supreme personal being. The spiritual man becomes a devotee or bhakta. He becomes directly aware of his soul and its dictates, unites his emotional with his psychic personality. He changes his life and vital parts by purity, God's ecstasy, characterized by an intense, overwhelming love of God and joy, love of men and all creatures into a thing of spiritual beauty, full of divine light and good. He develops into the saint and reaches the highest inner experience.

Thus in Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical framework sacred love primarily reflects as one of the means through which the soul comes in contact with the ultimate reality and thereby realizes the divine unity. As a result of which there is spiritual transformation of the inner being of the spiritual aspirant. Now that which is significant here is, this divine unity was for Sri Aurobindo, the basis of unity and brotherhood within mankind as a whole. He advocates secular love in the form of unity and human fraternity within mankind based on the realization of the divine presence within all human beings. Thus, sacred love paves the way towards secular love. Thus, for Sri Aurobindo love is a unifying force that transcends religion. It may be inquired here that how Sri Aurobindo interpreted religion?

Sri Aurobindo's concept of religion:

Sri Aurobindo viewed religion not as dogma but as a spiritual progression towards divine life on earth, focusing on inward transformation rather than external rituals. According to him, the inmost essence of religion, apart from its outward machinery of creed, cult, ceremony and symbol, is the search for God

and the finding of God. Its aspiration is to discover the Infinite, the Absolute, and the Divine. In this regard it relies on intimate relation or the relation of unity between man and god, an ecstatic love and delight, an absolute surrender and service, submitting every part of ones being towards the Divine and a descent of the Divine into man. Thus for Sri Aurobindo, true religion is that which ultimately leads towards spiritual transformation and evolution of the entire being and existence of man. And here sacred love or love towards the divine being plays a very important role. And such love ultimately paves the way towards secular love or love towards the entire humanity which finds completion in Sri Aurobindo's concept of 'religion of humanity'.

Religion of humanity:

Religion of humanity is a spiritual concept that aims for the inner unity, freedom and brotherhood of entire humanity, moving beyond external political structures toward a spiritual consciousness that recognizes oneness in all. At the basis of Sri Aurobindo's concept of unity lies his deeper spiritual and metaphysical belief. Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between real psychological unity and external political unity. By psychological unity he means the inner feeling of oneness, and political unity implies unity fostered externally through political measures. The Vedantic principle or the belief that the all-pervading reality is present within every human being and hence there lies no difference between them is the primary basis of the feeling of unity that Sri Aurobindo refers to as the psychological unity. It is this idea of unity that Sri Aurobindo wanted humanity to realize through the revival of the values of nationalism and internationalism within the entire mankind. He felt that mankind should realize the identity of their individual selves with the Supreme Self and the fact that the same eternal self is present within every individual being. Such an understanding of the nature of their true selves would help to foster the feelings of unity, equality, brotherhood, fraternity and liberty amongst them. Hence, love and realization of unity with the Divine Reality forms the basis of secular love or the feeling of unity and fraternity within humanity.

When we come across Sri Aurobindo's concept of nation, there we find that he regarded the nation as the self-manifestation of the Supreme Spirit and referred to the nation as the 'Goddess incarnate' or the mighty mother. And through such concept he wanted to generate the feelings of love, veneration, devotion amongst the people of India towards their motherland. Such love towards the motherland is secular love which has sacred love as its basis. This suggests that in Sri Aurobindo's concepts of nation and unity, sacred love merges with secular love and there hardly remains any distinction between the two.

Nationalism:

Quite naturally Sri Aurobindo interpreted nationalism in terms of spirituality. For him nationalism was not a mere patriotic spirit or sentiment that stood for a political programme; it is for him a religion that has come from God; it is a creed that we shall have to live. To practice nationalism, here again Sri Aurobindo says that the nationalists need to realize the Divine power within them, they must have faith in the divine power and love for God. Since God resides within every being, love for God would make the nationalists love every other being and undergo suffering for the liberation of the motherland. Thus nationalism as a religion was actually a process of spiritual self-realization.

However, this concept of nationalism as a religion underwent a change when he returned from the Alipore jail. During his one year cell life in Alipore he underwent some deeper spiritual experiences which brought about a change in his spiritual thoughts and practices. This had its reflection also in his political ideas and practices. He now began to uphold that Sanatana dharma, eternal religion, itself is nationalism. The mission of India was to spread this eternal religion throughout the world.

This eternal religion, according to Sri Aurobindo, was the Hindu religion. But it was not in any way confined to one particular country or India, or to one particular religion or hinduism. It was universal in the sense that it embraced within itself all other religions of the world. According to Sri Aurobindo the Vedantic truth that God is in all beings and in all things, and it is in Him that we move and have our being, constituted the essence of this religion. Sanatana dharma, by embracing the essential truth of all other religions within itself, aims to bring about unity and harmony, foster brotherhood and fraternity within mankind as a whole. The ideal of sanatana dharma was the realization of 'humanity in God' of 'God in humanity'. Thus, Sri Aurobindo's objective was not merely to foster the unity of his own nation, but the growth of human unity or world union. And hence he regarded nationalism as an effective and necessary means towards the growth of internationalism.

Internationalism:

The fundamental basis of such international unity or unity of mankind is the Supreme Consciousness or the Spirit which is gradually evolving itself while moving upward towards the realization of the original unity. In the words of Sri Aurobindo 'The oneness that is secretly at the foundation of all things, the evolving spirit in Nature, is moved to realize consciously at the top; the evolution moves through diversity, from a simple to a complex oneness. Unity the race moves towards and must one day achieve.'¹

Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo human unity would ultimately result through the process of evolution of human consciousness. He had the firm conviction that such unity could not be fostered by external, social or political measures. What is needed is the removal and replacement of human egoism that is the cause of all discords and disparities within individual communities and nations. And it has to be replaced by the arousal and realization of love, fraternity and brotherhood within mankind. For this a real psychological sense of unity has to be nurtured within mankind and this would become possible through the actualization of what Sri Aurobindo regarded as the 'religion of humanity'.

Sri Aurobindo explained that 'the religion of humanity' is an intellectual and sentimental ideal, a living dogma with intellectual, psychological and practical effects; it is a spiritual aspiration and rule of living that can cause change of soul in humanity. Love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood and a living sense of human oneness are the basis of such an ideal.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo, 'A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual and dogma or outward rite'.² 'A religion of humanity is the growing realization that there is a secret spirit, a divine reality, in which we are all are one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here'.³ Thus the development of the religion of humanity demands that every human being should ultimately realize the spiritual oneness of his own being with the supreme spirit and thereby with the human race as a

whole. This would help in the regeneration of a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity, equality and a common life.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion what we find is that, in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, sacred love merges with secular love. For him love is primarily a spiritual force that connects the individual with the Divine Reality. And further love becomes a dynamic power that connects individuals with each other because all beings share a common spiritual origin. Love becomes the living bond of creation and the basis of harmonious existence, unity and fraternity within the entire humanity. Such love crosses the boundaries of narrow religious sentiments, dogmas and rituals and embraces the entire mankind within a spiritual whole, cultivating peace, reverence and compassion within mankind.

Secondly, Sri Aurobindo's 'religion of humanity' ultimately paves the way towards 'global harmony'. His philosophy therefore proposes a form of 'spiritual secularism' which implies not the rejection of religion, but the transcendence of sectarianism through universal spiritual awareness. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo's idea closely resembles modern secular ideals but it differs in foundation. While political secularism implies separation of religion and state, legal equality, and external tolerance, Sri Aurobindo's spiritual secularism implies transcendence of religious divisions, spiritual equality and inner realization of unity and transformation of consciousness.

Relevance:

Sri Aurobindo's vision remains remarkably relevant today. At present, although globalization has increased interaction among religions and cultures, yet conflicts persist due to psychological and ideological divisions. Here Sri Aurobindo's thoughts offers for interfaith dialogue, that is, positive, cooperative and constructive interaction between individuals and groups from different religious traditions, spiritual beliefs or humanistic backgrounds that would dispel stereotypes and promote peaceful coexistence. Upon By emphasizing inner transformation, Sri Aurobindo shifts attention from institutional reform to human consciousness itself.

However, Sri Aurobindo's vision also raises certain questions, like; can there really be spiritual transformation of the entire mankind on a collective scale? Considering the political realities, does not evolutionary spirituality too idealistic for political realities? Further, is it possible for mystical philosophy to influence public policy? Thus, critics often argue that Sri Aurobindo's ideas appear utopian. However, in this regard it may be pointed out that social change historically begins with shifts in human consciousness and values. And Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary philosophy is an indication towards it. Moreover, in an age marked by religious polarization and global uncertainty, Sri Aurobindo's thought offers such a philosophical framework which would help us to establish a world united not by uniform belief, but by awakened consciousness and universal love.

References:

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Ibid, p.577 Ibid



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