Auroville, Integral Yoga and the Future of Mankind
A talk by Sraddhalu Ranade,
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Our theme today is Auroville, the Integral Yoga and the Future of Mankind. As you will see that all three of these topics are intricately and profoundly related.

The future of mankind can be understood only in terms of its development so far over the past billions of years. And taking a vast sweep of time and space, we find that there is only one constant: many species have appeared and disappeared. The dinosaurs are gone. Many others which we do not even know about had existed for millions and billions of years and have vanished. But through all those changes, there is one constant. And the constant is not a form, but a profound impulse in Nature which we can describe as evolution. That's the only thing we can find consistent over the billions of years.

Even before life appeared, there was the evolution of matter itself. As you are aware, scientists say that the Universe began after the Big Bang as only hydrogen gas. Out of hydrogen gas bit by bit, by a constant intense compression in the heart of the sun, all the other elements of matter have evolved.

There is an evolution even in dead matter. And out of that somehow, life has emerged. And then life has evolved into varieties of forms and complexities. And out of that somehow, the human mind emerged. We don't know exactly how these transitions have taken place, but they have taken place and that is clear.

And we notice in this entire evolutionary movement something quite peculiar. First, that evolution has a single direction. It is
not like walking around in the garden, where you can go to one plant and then back to another and wander around randomly. In evolution, it is not a random movement. Every species grows from lesser complexity to greater complexity. Some of them seem to stop at some point, but they do not revert. The crocodile, for example, is as old as the dinosaur. While the dinosaur was wiped out, and the human beings came much later and evolved to develop mind, the crocodiles are supposed to have remained pretty much what they were then. But they have not devolved. There is directedness to evolution. And we cannot explain it.

We cannot explain it purely in terms of Darwinian evolution, random mutation, or survival of the fittest. We find also that in the development of complexity, sometimes there are stages which are utterly useless. And while we could still dismiss them as random mutation, we find a chain of useless mutations which suddenly lead to something very useful. For example, the formation of the eye. The eye itself appears after going through thirteen different steps, all of which are utterly useless. And after the thirteenth step is complete, suddenly there is a working eye. There is a gradual change of form, and yet there seems to be a directedness and a purpose in the evolution of that form, which we cannot explain by random mutation.

In the end, as we study the processes of evolution, we are compelled to recognise that there seems to be some intention, however subconscious, however veiled: something which wants to become. Maybe it doesn’t know how to become, but the urge to become is directed. And this direction has brought us to what we are as human beings today. Where we will go from here, the future of humanity, is dependent on what this deep impulse seeks.

Where is this impulse located? In matter, it appears to be something almost automatic. So automatic and repetitive that we can even call it a law of physics. But in life, it acquires a different character. It is still there as an impulse, but no more bound into a law, more like a habit or a desire. It is there in the single cell. We don’t know how it formed, but after it formed there is a certain urge. An urge, first of all, to protect itself from destruction, and then to reach out and absorb the rest of the Universe into itself. And perhaps it is that urge in the animal, or in the human in us, which we can describe as desire. An urge to reach out and absorb everything that is out there. Everything that is useful, at least, or that is beautiful, or that is effective. And there is still the same instinct as in the single cell, to protect oneself.

But in the mind, in the human being, there is also the same urge, taking a different form, quite distinct from desire: it is the urge to know, the urge to become something more than what I am: the urge to conquer the Universe, to conquer Nature, and perhaps take it one step beyond what Nature herself has done. So I want to study how the plant grows. I want to study the properties of matter and apply that knowledge to improving the processes of Nature.

These multiple urges embedded in us point vaguely to the direction that evolution is taking us. It is ultimately, when you observe where we are going, the direction set by this deepest urge. There is nothing else which sets the direction for evolution. This deepest urge is inborn. The child newborn hardly a few seconds, just out of the womb, when it hears the voice of its parents, turns to look in that direction. What is it seeking? It is this urge to want to know the source of the sound which it has heard while in the womb. Now it wants to see it. And when an object is given in its hand, it wants to grab it. Put your finger in its hand, it closes. It wants to catch. And then as it grows older, it wants to bite, smell, taste, break. And as soon as it can think, it wants to question. So this deep-rooted urge in us is, in fact, the driving force of our entire life.

This urge takes various colourings with different kinds of emphasis in each one of us. For some of us it takes the form of "I want to
know”. For others, it takes the form of “I want to conquer; I want to master; I want to lead; I want to achieve.” For some it takes the form of “I want to arrange things to make them more beautiful, to make them more useful, more perfect.” For others, to be of help. These are broadly four different colours of expression, while the urge itself is common to all of us. When we understand the source of this urge and what it is seeking consciously or unconsciously, then we can know in which direction human evolution is growing.

Here, the big picture at least shows us something very interesting. There is, in the early stages of human existence, an individuality fragmented. We all shrink from the Universe for our survival, fight to conquer for our personal benefit. But after a while, there is an instinct which says, “OK. Two of us have a common enemy. Let’s fight him together.” If there is this giant tiger that is coming to kill me, well let’s all group together because alone we cannot fight him. So, an instinct of the herd forms for protection and creates the coagulation of a small unit. And as that develops, the unit fights against other units for its survival. And gradually larger units form: aggregates of family, aggregates of tribe, of community, nationality or culture. There is a progressive evolution towards a larger and larger collective unity.

And here comes the big problem. And the problem for us is this: there is obviously an urge to unite in group life because we need it. But there is also an urge for me to do as I want, opposed to the group’s needs. Sri Aurobindo points out that in evolution, both of these exist: the impulse for individual fulfilment and the impulse for collective fulfilment. And the two are interdependent, so you cannot isolate them any more. What I find in my life...in anyone’s life...what you find in Auroville, is that I cannot actualise myself entirely, I cannot develop myself fully, I cannot fulfil my highest ideals, unless I have the support of others. If nothing else, in order for me to have more time, I must be able to have someone’s help to prepare my food, to free up my time. I cannot be growing my own wheat, cleaning it, polishing it, and then cooking it. I won’t have time to actualise my artistic impulses. So there is automatically a need for mutual support and collectivity. More than that, in order for me to develop my faculties, my artistic ability itself, I need the interaction of others: someone to appreciate; someone to share with. So the perfection of the individual aspiration needs the collective support.

But for the collective development also, if the collective consciousness is to grow, we as a tribe or a community or a nation, if we are to grow to our actualisation as a nation, as a culture, we need our individuals to grow. And if the individual says “Look, for a while at least, keep me out of your demands.” The nation should be able to say “Alright, but develop yourself (ie - the individual), and then come back to me and help me grow.”

So the collectivity needs the individual for its growth; the individual needs the collectivity for its growth, and yet their demands are almost contradictory to each other. Observe what happens: the moment there is a need for collective life, say we all share the need for food: so we assign the task of preparing the food to a few of our people. Three will grow the food, two will prepare it and one will serve it, so that others can have more free time. What happens now? One of the three has fallen ill, so we have to create such an arrangement that if someone falls ill, someone else is taken into the group. And if someone has to go for a holiday – he’s tired of the work he has done for too long – we need to make such an arrangement that whenever he goes on holiday, he has to inform X. Someone else will be taken as a replacement. So, we have to create another machinery, another system, another law, another regulation. Eventually, just to sustain that simple activity, you have to create an entire administrative or organisational entity. And that machinery is designed to ensure that the food comes every day on time. Otherwise, suddenly it rains. We all go for food. The Solar Kitchen says that X didn’t come because it was raining; Y didn’t