

THE ROLE OF SOCIO-SPIRITUAL ELEMENTS IN LIFE: COMPARATIVE STUDY ON HERMANN HESSE AND SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH, LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The present research study deals with the role of socio-spiritual elements in life, and for this, a comparative study of the writings and literature of Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh has been examined and explored. It is a known fact that Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, both influential figures in literature and philosophy, explored the role of socio-spiritual elements in life, albeit from different perspectives and backgrounds. Hermann Hesse, a German-Swiss novelist, delved deeply into the individual's inner journey and the search for self-discovery. In works like "Siddhartha" and "Steppenwolf," Hesse explores the quest for meaning, spiritual fulfilment, and the reconciliation of the self within a larger societal context. His protagonists often undergo profound personal transformations through experiences that involve detachment from societal norms, seeking enlightenment through introspection, and embracing spiritual teachings from diverse sources. On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, an Indian philosopher, yogi, and poet, emphasised the evolution of consciousness and the integral development of individuals and society. He proposed a synthesis of spirituality and practical life, envisioning a spiritual transformation that encompasses not just personal growth but the collective progress of humanity. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy focuses on the unity of all existence with the realisation of a divine consciousness within each individual, seeking to manifest this consciousness in all aspects of life, including social, political, and cultural dimensions. The paper explores how Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh gave an insight into the philosophy of life through different spiritual education and policies with different dimensions so that humans can achieve the goal of cultivating internal strength and talent with distinctive and focused characteristics. While analysing Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo comparatively, Hesse's works often concentrate on the individual's internal struggles and his quest for self-realisation through diverse spiritual experiences, while Sri Aurobindo's philosophy expands to encompass a broader societal transformation through the evolution of consciousness and the integration of spiritual values into every aspect of human existence.

Keywords: Socio-Spiritual Elements, Philosophy, Inner Journey, Self-Discovery, Societal Transformation, Evolution of Consciousness

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, both prominent figures in literature and spirituality, offer divergent and reformative perspectives on the role and functions of socio-spiritual elements in life. Their works basically explore the human consciousness, the quest for meaning, and the interconnectedness between the individual and society, albeit through different lenses and philosophical frameworks.

Hermann Hesse emphasized the significance of introspection, personal experience, and unconventional paths to attain spiritual enlightenment. Hesse's writings often critique the constraints of societal conventions and advocate for

the cultivation of inner wisdom and authenticity. On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, an Indian philosopher, poet, and yogi, approaches socio-spiritual dynamics from a different angle.(Bloom, Harold, 2003)

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy revolves around the evolution of consciousness, integrating spirituality with the progress and transformation of society. His influential work, "The Life Divine," presents a comprehensive vision that harmonizes the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. Aurobindo envisions a future where humanity evolves towards a higher consciousness, leading to a more harmonious society. He emphasizes the integral development of the individual and society, striving for a spiritualized collective existence where social progress aligns with spiritual evolution.(Lisa M. Dallape and K. D. Verma, 1989)

Hermann Hesse, a renowned German-Swiss author, wrote extensively about spirituality, the individual's place in society, and the pursuit of inner fulfillment. His notable quotes on socio-spiritual elements in life have great significance; a few of them are explained as follows:

In Siddhartha (1922), "words do not express thoughts very well. They always become a little different immediately after they are expressed, a little distorted, a little foolish."(Baumann, 2002)

This idea suggests that when thoughts are translated into words, there is an inevitable loss or alteration of their original essence. This statement acknowledges that while words are a fundamental tool for communication, they are inherently imperfect at capturing the full breadth and depth of human thoughts and emotions. As thoughts are translated into language, they undergo a transformation, losing some of their original essence and often being subject to distortion or misrepresentation.

This recognition underscores the importance of considering the limitations of language in communication, encouraging empathy, active listening, and an awareness of the potential gaps between what is expressed and what is truly meant. It also highlights the need for nuance and open-mindedness when interpreting others' words, recognizing the inherent imperfections in verbal expression.

Hesse wrote,

"I live in my dreams. Other people live in dreams, but not in their own. That's the difference."(Jackson et al., 2010)

While not directly addressing society, these quotes touch upon spirituality, self-discovery, and the inner journey that often contrasts with societal norms and expectations. Hesse's writings often explore the tension between the individual's quest for self-realization and the pressures of conforming to societal standards.

Sri Aurobindo, an Indian philosopher, yogi, and spiritual leader, shared profound insights on spirituality and society. His teachings often focused on the evolution of consciousness and the transformation of individuals and society. His notable quotes on socio-spiritual elements in life have great significance. A few of them are explained as follows:

He stated that

"there is nothing the mind can do that cannot be better done in the mind's immobility and thought-free stillness."(Aurobindo, 2005)

The essence of this statement lies in the concept of mindfulness, meditation, or moments of mental stillness. It implies that by quieting the mind and allowing thoughts to settle, one can potentially access deeper levels of insight, understanding, and mental clarity. In this state, the mind might find more effective solutions, creative ideas, or a heightened awareness that might not be as accessible during periods of constant mental busyness.

The quote encourages individuals to recognize the value of cultivating mental stillness and embracing moments of thought-free awareness as a means to enhance the mind's capabilities and to achieve a more profound understanding or effectiveness in various mental processes.

He also stated,

"The first and lowest use of art is the purely aesthetic; the second is the intellectual or educational; the third and highest is the spiritual."(Kumar & Apitiit-srikakulam, 2018)

This statement includes that the aesthetic appeal of art is the most immediate and accessible, and its potential for intellectual and educational purposes enhances its significance. However, the pinnacle of art's impact lies in its ability to elevate the human spirit, offering a spiritual experience that transcends the mundane and touches upon deeper truths or higher realities.

This framework outlines a progression in the ways art can affect individuals and societies, acknowledging its multi-dimensional nature and its potential to serve not only as a source of pleasure or knowledge but also as a catalyst for spiritual elevation and transformation. Apart from these, many statements and quotes reflect Sri Aurobindo's perspective on the integral nature of spirituality and its relationship with individual growth, societal transformation, and the broader evolution of humanity.(Srivastava, 2015) His teachings emphasize the importance of inner spiritual development as a catalyst for positive change in both individuals and society at large.

While comparing Hermann Hesse and Aurobindo's perspectives on socio-spiritual elements in life, some differences and parallels emerge. They are as follows:

- 1) **They have the outlook of individual vs. collective evolution:** Hesse always focused on the individual's quest for self-realization and spiritual enlightenment, often in contrast to societal norms. Aurobindo, while acknowledging the importance of individual transformation, emphasizes the interconnectedness between individual growth and the collective evolution of humanity. He envisions a spiritualized society where the progress and advancement of individuals contribute to the edification of the collective.
- 2) **Their approach towards spirituality:** Hesse's works frequently discover spirituality through personal experiences, inner journeys, and the pursuit of an individual quest for truth. Aurobindo Philosophical Theory, on the other hand, merges spirituality with a cosmic vision in which the individual's spiritual growth is aligned with a broader evolutionary process, ultimately influencing society's evolution.
- 3) **They were the critiques of society:** Both Hesse and Aurobindo critique societal structures, but from different perspectives. Hesse tends to critique societal norms as restrictive to individual growth, advocating for personal freedom and unconventional paths. Aurobindo envisions a transformation of society itself, where spirituality catalyzes societal progress, leading to a more harmonious and evolved civilization.

Both authors, however, share a common ground in advocating for the importance of spirituality in human life. They emphasize the significance of transcending mere material pursuits and societal conventions to attain a deeper understanding of existence and a more profound connection with the spiritual dimension, whether through personal introspection and self-discovery (as in Hesse's works) or through a collective spiritual evolution that extends to societal realms (as in Aurobindo's philosophy).

Their writings offer valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between the individual, society, and spirituality, encouraging readers to contemplate the integration of these elements in their lives for personal growth and the betterment of humanity.

2. MULTIFACETED RELATIONSHIP IN THE LITERATURE OF HERMANN HESSE AND SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH

The multifaceted relationship portrayed in English literature spans a broad spectrum of human connections, complexities, and dynamics. English literature has consistently explored various types of relationships, examining their nuances, challenges, and evolution throughout history. Literature's multifaceted portrayal of relationships reflects the diversity and depth of human connections, offering insights into the intricacies of love, loyalty, betrayal, and the human condition.(Lisa M. Dallape and K. D. Verma, 1989) (Kumar & Apiti-srikakulam, 2018)These relationships serve as a mirror for society, allowing readers to explore, understand, and empathise with various facets of human interaction and emotion. Here, the discussion is about the multifaceted portrayal of relationships in the literary works of Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh.

2.1. MULTIFACETED RELATIONSHIP IN THE LITERATURE OF HERMANN HESSE:

Hermann Hesse's literature intricately explores the multifaceted relationship between the individual, society, and spirituality, often focusing on protagonists who embark on personal quests for self-discovery, grapples with societal expectations, and seek spiritual enlightenment. Several of his notable works illuminate this intricate relationship;(Michels, Volker, 2009) they are as follows:

- 1) The novel "Siddhartha" follows the journey of Siddhartha, a young man in ancient India who rejects conventional societal paths to seek spiritual fulfillment. Siddhartha's quest for self-discovery leads him to encounter various spiritual teachers, divergent philosophies, and ultimately, his own inner truth. Through

Siddhartha's experiences, Hesse illustrates the tension between individual spiritual growth and societal norms.(Adrian Hsia, 2009)(Misra, 2016)

- 2) Through his work "Steppenwolf," Hesse explores the internal struggles of Harry Haller, the protagonist, who feels alienated from society and battles with his dual nature—the refined human and the wild, untamed "wolf" within. This novel delves into the conflict between societal conformity and the yearning for personal authenticity and spiritual understanding.(SWALES, 2009)(Joseph Mileck, 1961)
- 3) The novel "The Glass Bead Game" by Hesse, although it discussed additional complex and multifaceted things in its narrative and structure, touches upon the theme of the individual's search for meaning and fulfilment within a highly structured and intellectual society. Hesse highlights the tension between spiritual and intellectual pursuits in a world that values achievements within rigid social constructs.(Hesse, 1943)(Bishop, 2009)

Hesse's literature consistently portrays individuals seeking deeper truths beyond societal conventions. He emphasizes the importance of inner exploration, often through spiritual or introspective means, in order to attain personal authenticity and a sense of belonging.(Bloom, Harold, 2003) Moreover, his characters grapple with the challenge of reconciling their inner spiritual aspirations with the demands and expectations of the external world.

Through his writing, Hesse encourages readers to contemplate the balance between the individual's inner quest for spiritual truth and the impact of societal influences.(KUMARI, 2020) His works resonate with those who seek to navigate the complexities of life by questioning societal norms, exploring diverse spiritual paths, and striving for a harmonious integration of the individual self within the broader context of society and spirituality.

2.2. THE MULTIFACETED RELATIONSHIP IN THE LITERATURE OF SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH:

It can be discussed that Sri Aurobindo Ghosh's literary and philosophical works delve into the intricate relationship between the individual, society, and spirituality, advocating for a comprehensive transformation that integrates spiritual evolution with societal advancement. His writings encompass a holistic vision that transcends the conventional boundaries between the individual self and the collective society, emphasizing the following aspects:

Integral Yoga and the Evolution of Consciousness: Sri Aurobindo's philosophy emphasizes the evolution of consciousness as a fundamental aspect of individual and societal progress. He proposed Integral Yoga, a path of spiritual realization that seeks not only personal enlightenment but also the transformation of human nature and society. This approach aims for a harmonious integration of the spiritual, mental, vital, and physical dimensions of existence.(Spiegelberg & Allen, 1960)

Unity of Existence: Aurobindo emphasized the interconnectedness and unity of all existence. He envisioned a spiritual evolution that extends beyond individual enlightenment and encompasses the collective evolution of humanity. This interconnectedness stresses the importance of understanding the individual's role in shaping society and vice versa.(Pearson, 1952)

Synthesis of Spirituality and Practical Life: Aurobindo advocated for the integration of spiritual principles into all aspects of human life. He believed that spirituality should not be confined to individual practices but should inform and guide societal structures, including governance, education, and culture. This synthesis aims to create a society where spiritual values underpin all activities and relationships.(Mishra, 2002)

Transformation of Society: Sri Aurobindo's vision extends beyond personal spiritual growth to envision a society where spiritual ideals guide human interactions, fostering unity, harmony, and progress. He envisioned a society that reflects spiritual principles, where individuals collaborate for collective upliftment and societal structures are aligned with spiritual truths.(Posner, 2015)

In his philosophical writings and poetry, Aurobindo presents a vision that reconciles the individual's spiritual evolution with the broader evolution of humanity. His works emphasize the interdependence between the individual and society, advocating for the conscious integration of spiritual values into societal frameworks.(Iyengar, 1974) Aurobindo's vision serves as an inspiration for those seeking a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between personal spiritual development and the advancement of society towards a higher consciousness.

3. SIMILARITY IN PHILOSOPHY OF HERMANN HESSE AND SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH:

When we discuss the similarity in socio-spiritual elements in the philosophical writings of Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh in literature, it has been found that Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh approached socio-spiritual elements in their philosophical writings from distinct cultural and philosophical backgrounds. (Carnahan, 1974) (Srivastava, 2015) There are some similarities in their exploration of these themes:

- 1) **Individual Quest for Self-Realization:** Both authors emphasize the importance of the individual's quest for self-realization and spiritual enlightenment. Hesse's protagonists, like Siddhartha or Harry Haller in "Siddhartha" and "Steppenwolf," respectively, embark on personal journeys seeking inner truth and spiritual fulfillment. Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga advocates for the individual's transformation and evolution towards a higher consciousness.
- 2) **Spiritual Plurality and Exploration:** Both Hesse and Sri Aurobindo acknowledge the diverse paths and teachings available for spiritual exploration. Hesse's works often showcase protagonists encountering various spiritual philosophies and practices in their quests. Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga doesn't prescribe a single path but allows for diverse approaches to spiritual growth, respecting the individual's unique journey.
- 3) **Critique of Societal Norms and Conventions:** Both authors challenge societal norms and conventions that may hinder an individual's spiritual growth. Hesse's characters often grapple with the restrictions and limitations imposed by societal expectations. Aurobindo, in his writings, critiques societal structures that hinder the expression and evolution of the true spiritual self, advocating for a synthesis of spirituality and practical life.
- 4) **Integration of Spirituality into Daily Life:** Both Hesse and Sri Aurobindo advocate for the integration of spiritual principles into daily life. Hesse's works suggest that true enlightenment involves not just personal introspection but also its application in everyday existence. Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy aims at integrating spiritual values into all aspects of human life, emphasizing their importance in shaping individual conduct and societal structures.
- 5) **Emphasis on Unity and Harmony:** Both authors emphasize the interconnectedness and unity of existence. Hesse's exploration of spirituality often leads to a sense of unity and interconnectedness with the world. Sri Aurobindo's vision also underscores the unity of all existence and advocates for a harmonious integration of spiritual ideals into individual lives and society.

Though they approach these themes from different cultural contexts and philosophical frameworks, Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh share a common ground in advocating for the significance of the individual's spiritual quest, the critique of societal norms that inhibit spiritual growth, and the integration of spiritual principles into everyday life for personal and societal transformation.

4. COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HERMANN HESSE AND SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH'S LITERATURE:

A comparative study involves examining and analyzing similarities and differences between two or more entities, such as texts, ideas, concepts, theories, cultures, or any other subject of interest. It aims to explore the relationships, connections, contrasts, and patterns between these entities to gain a deeper understanding of their characteristics, functions, or significance. While concluding the comparative study of Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh's literature concerning socio-spiritual elements in life, several overarching themes emerge. They are as follows:

- 1) **Individual Quest for Spiritual Fulfillment:** Both Hesse and Aurobindo emphasize the importance of the individual's pursuit of spiritual fulfillment. Whether through Hesse's protagonists' introspective journeys or Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, both authors advocate for the personal quest for self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment.
- 2) **Critique of Societal Constraints:** Both authors critique societal norms and constraints that hinder an individual's spiritual growth. Hesse's works often depict characters struggling against societal expectations, while Sri Aurobindo's philosophy questions the limitations imposed by societal structures on the expression of spiritual truths.

- 3) **Integration of Spirituality and Daily Life:** Both Hesse and Aurobindo stress the integration of spiritual principles into daily life. Hesse's characters realize that enlightenment involves not only personal introspection but also its practical application in everyday existence. Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy aims at integrating spiritual values into all aspects of human life, emphasizing their importance in shaping individual conduct and societal structures.
- 4) **Diversity of Spiritual Paths:** Both authors acknowledge the diverse paths and teachings available for spiritual exploration. Hesse's characters encounter various spiritual philosophies and practices, while Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga allows for diverse approaches to spiritual growth, respecting individual uniqueness.
- 5) **Unity and Harmony in Existence:** Both Hesse and Aurobindo emphasize the interconnectedness and unity of existence. Hesse's exploration of spirituality leads to a sense of unity and interconnectedness with the world, while Sri Aurobindo's vision underscores the unity of all existence and advocates for a harmonious integration of spiritual ideals into individual lives and society.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be discussed that Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, though coming from different cultural and philosophical backgrounds, share fundamental ideas concerning the individual's quest for spiritual fulfilment, the critique of societal constraints on spiritual growth, the integration of spirituality into daily life, the recognition of diverse spiritual paths, and the emphasis on unity and harmony in existence. Their works continue to inspire readers to contemplate the intricate relationship between the individual, society, and spirituality, urging a deeper exploration of these themes for personal growth and the betterment of humanity. In conclusion, while both Hermann Hesse and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh explore the intersection of spirituality and society in their works, they offer distinct philosophical viewpoints. Hesse focuses on the individual's journey towards self-discovery and spiritual fulfilment, often in conflict with societal norms, while Aurobindo presents a vision of a spiritually evolved society where individual growth contributes to collective transformation. Their comparative study offers valuable insights into diverse perspectives on the role of socio-spiritual elements in shaping human life and society.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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