

**SRI AUROBINDO'S INTEGRAL YOGA**

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

Integral Yoga is Aurobindo's new attempt at attaining the liberation of man. Its newness rests on its aim, standpoint and totality of method. It transmutes the traditional conception of liberation that rests on the individual salvation, and instead emphasizes the total spiritualization of the universe, with a view to establishing perfect harmony between the outer and inner spheres of life. Integral Yoga cultivates all the capacities of man so as to use them for an integral realisation. The goal of Integral Yoga is not self-annihilation in another world but spiritual transformation within this world. It seeks to bring to full self-realization the omnipresent reality, not by leaping from this world into another, but by developing all the capacities of man, and integrating them for a total transformation. Aurobindo integrates into his system the great truths of the monistic pantheism of Advaita, the practical spiritualistic dualism of Samkhya with the practical disciplines of the yoga of Patañjali, the threefold ways of the Bhagavad Gita, and the basic structure of Tantrism. But such a universalistic and synthetic approach of Integral Yoga is not free from limitations.

In the vision of Sri Aurobindo, the Integral Yoga will enlarge, enrich and ultimately transcend the modes of life and thoughts of today's traditional religions, and consequently he visualized a universal community of men with altogether new values and visions. This gnostic community will be guided by supramental values, and the members will effect a kingdom of God here on earth.

Keywords: *Integral Yoga or Purna Yoga, Spirit, Supreme Being, Liberation or Mukti, Saccidananda, Union, renunciation, Consciousness, Supramental, etc.*

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The Purna Yoga or Integral Yoga presents the new interpretation regarding the liberation of Hinduism. Influenced by the traditional yogas, and much more convinced by their limitations, Sri Aurobindo presents Integral Yoga that assimilates the whole faculty and nature of man. He defines Integral Yoga as "the turning of one or of all powers of our human existence into a means of reaching divine Being." For him, the final liberation does not mean abandoning the world, but transforming the very cosmos and consciousness into the divine. It is not merely the liberation of the Spirit, but is also the liberation of nature, and the transmutation of the lower Nature into the Supreme and Supramental nature. The aim of Integral yoga is to transform the physical life into the life divine. He envisages a triple transformation: the physical, the psychic, and the spiritual transformation. This would mean a complete synthesis of divine knowledge, divine love and divine action, leading to an integral perfection of all the members, parts and planes of being - the divine Supermind in the divine body, "a temporal sign of the Spirit's victory here over Death and Matter".

Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is so named because it seeks to incorporate the essence and processes of the old yogas, blending their methods and fruits into one system. Sri Aurobindo's yoga is integral in various senses. First of all it demands of the aspirant a total dedication and surrender of his own self and being to the Supreme Being, with all his aspirations, powers and faculties, so that the 'Life Divine' may begin here and now. It is integral insofar as it seeks an integral and total change of consciousness and nature, not for the individual alone, but for all humanity and the entire cosmos. Integral Yoga does not aim at an isolated escape of the body-life-mind triune, but its purpose is to divinise them too by the transforming power of the descending Supramental force. The emancipation of the whole of humanity is the aim. The scope of it is to lead man to the divine superman, the very divine in all its integrality embodying the human form for a new evolutionary status.

It is also integral in the sense that there is no dichotomy between spirit and matter in Sri Aurobindo. Unlike the traditional yogas, Integral Yoga does not seek release from the cycle of birth and

death but seeks a transformation of life and existence, by, for, and through the divine. In most yogas, the ascent to the divine is emphasized. Instead in the Integral Yoga, the ascent to the divine is just the first step; the real goal is the descent of the new consciousness that has been attained by the ascent. Besides, Sri Aurobindo's Purna Yoga discards nothing, and accepts everything, including evil, as coming from the Supreme Purusha; all evil is but a negative aspect of the good; darkness is want of light. Everything, every atom, every being is on an eternal march or spiritual evolution.

A. NEW INTERPRETATION OF THE YOGA

Integral Yoga, as already mentioned, is not altogether a new yoga, but a new interpretation of the elements of the traditional yogas. Sri Aurobindo was asked once in what way his Yoga was 'new' and whether it had been tried in earlier times. He advised the disciples not to lay stress on the 'newness' or novelty of the Integral Yoga, but rather on its truth. However he clarified: "I have never said that my yoga was something brand new in all its elements. I have called it the integral yoga and that means that it takes up the essence and many processes of the old yogas - its newness is in its aim, standpoint and the totality of its method."

The first and foremost feature that distinguishes Sri Aurobindo's yoga from the rest is its aim. The traditional Yoga systems are based on a vision which aims at the release of the soul from matter. The final goal is liberation, and this goal has to be gained by freeing the soul from matter, life and mind. In contrast to the traditional yogas, Integral Yoga does not seek liberation, but transformation. The ultimate aim of traditional yoga, i.e., the liberation, or the ascent of the soul to spiritual heights, is only the first stage in the process of bringing the spirit into matter, life and mind for a total transformation. One should aim at a total transformation of this earthly life into the Divine Life. Therefore, a divine fulfillment even in the material is the real object of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

Secondly, the Integral Yoga does not seek individual salvation, but works for a cosmic salvation which works for the divinization of the whole mankind and of the whole universe so that even the physical universe can "feel the thrill of a Divine Life".



It endeavours to change ultimately the whole earth and not merely some privileged individuals. Against the individual salvation of the traditional yoga systems, Sri Aurobindo declares that the Integral Yoga should be for all humanity: "A perfect and complete delight in the Divine, perfect because pure and self-existent, complete because all-embracing as well as all-absorbing, is the meaning of the way of Bhakti for the seeker of the integral Yoga".

Thirdly, it is new and revolutionary in its methods as well. It does not emphasize just some part of the being for the divine realization, but strives to take up the entire being. Unlike the traditional yogas, the Integral Yoga does not suppress the lower forms of consciousness. True yoga should be one that touches and transforms not only the higher forms, but also the whole of our being, spiritual, mental, vital and physical. In the absence of a total transformation yoga becomes incomplete. To realize the ultimate goal, the yogin cannot permanently leave the realm of body, life and mind; by remaining in intimate contact with these realities, he can be the instrument of their spiritual transformation, when the Divine has descended to the earth. The goal of existence will not be achieved by the separation of the various aspects of reality, but by their ultimate harmonious union, which will be achieved through the descent of the Divine on earth.

The ancient forms of Yoga stressed the renunciation of life to reach the Divine. The earth was considered to be a source of bondage or an illusion, and the body as a hindrance to the attainment of the Divine, and therefore they are to be discarded for the final liberation. Aurobindo opted for a world-affirming yoga system, which re-established the great heritage of India. The Integral Yoga grants positive value to the phenomenal world: it is "not as an invention of the devil or a self-delusion of the soul, but as a manifestation of the Divine." It is the divine spirit that is active in every fibre of the material being. Aurobindo makes a close relation between the phenomenal world and the Divine Absolute so as to consider that "all psychosomatic phenomena are but signatures of the World Spirit, and conversely, that the World Spirit plays itself into manifold being through the various modes of psycho-materiality." The Integral

Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is an attempt to do away with the dichotomy between the material and the spiritual, and rather to uphold the harmony between them. Again, for Aurobindo, it is not enough that one reaches the highest stage, rather one has to bring down the highest divine into the terrestrial plane. The earthly is not illusion, but the manifestation of the Divine.

B. NATURE OF INTEGRAL YOGA

Sri Aurobindo's Purna Yoga rests on the direct experiences. For him, the Reality is to be apprehended not by the mental faculty, but by experience. Mental, theoretical and philosophical studies are necessary, and can pave the way for the ultimate transformation of the 'natural man' into divine being, but it is through Yoga that one can reach to the state of the divine being. Yoga prepares the ground for the dawn of divinity: "The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo has, for its object, nothing else than this preparation of the field, so that when the supramental light descends, it may find the soil fit to receive it." It is commonly understood that the aim of Yoga is to realize mukti or transcendental freedom by rising above the limitations of the body, life and mind, and to rest permanently in that state of freedom on some lofty summit of spiritual attainment. Sri Aurobindo goes beyond this ordinary understanding. The aim of the Integral Yoga is not simply the attainment of transcendental mukti or freedom, but "an active participation in the creative joy of the Divine and co-operation with it in the divinization of the empirical world and of the whole embodied life here and now." The fruit of his yoga is not a conceptual system, but an inexpressible Peace and Nirvana.

Describing the nature of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo says, "Yoga means union with the Divine - a union either transcendental (above the universe) or cosmic (universal) or individual or, as in our yoga, all three together." The Integral Yoga suggests various simple means that are accessible to all for attaining such union with the Divine. His Yoga system does not emphasize much on the breathing or the yogic postures as in the Hatha Yoga or the Raja Yoga. His system is free from the rigid religious rites and observances. What he suggests is only some



disciplines of purification and spiritualization that everybody can follow.

The Integral Yoga intends to bring human nature to the divine perfection. Human nature is transformed into the image and likeness or fundamental oneness of the divine nature. For the realization of this oneness, one has firstly, to open oneself to the Absolute, and eliminate all that prevents one from opening oneself to the Absolute, and secondly, the Divine has to enter into the human. These two aspects are closely related because, in the former the individual opens himself to the Absolute, and in the latter, the Divine enters into union and makes itself the Master of his activity. In this union, man becomes an instrument of the divine, and it is in this union that he identifies his self with the Divine Self.

C. Aim

A systematic presentation of the basic principles of Yoga was made by Patanjali in the Vedic period. In the twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo looked back to the age-old yoga system in a new light, and he has developed the Integral Yoga. The ultimate aim of Patanjali's yoga terminates in the self-realization at samādhi which leads to mukti or liberation. Sri Aurobindo accepts the stages of samadhi, but takes it as the beginning of his Integral Yoga. These are only the stepping-stones in the long march to the realization of the Supreme Truth, the saccidananda.

His aim is the total realization and transformation of the personality. In his yogic practices, man should not stop at the ecstatic state of samadhi but should reach the state of total transformation from man to Divine man. And this is possible only in the state of Supramental consciousness which is attained through the practice of the Integral Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo presents the theory of evolution according to which man who is evolved from the lower grades of consciousness to the higher consciousness has to march towards the higher realms, and to be transformed to the grade of superman or perfect-man, and then to the Divine man of the Supramental consciousness. In other words, it is a development from the mental to the Supramental state. Sri Aurobindo's ambitious project

is not merely the perfection of man, which is attained in samadhi, but the transformation of man into the Divine through the involution of the Divine into man. The aim of man is, then, to realize the descent of the Supramental consciousness, and man then attains the total perfection or total transformation. The Integral Yoga is a preparation for this total transformation. While Patanjali's yoga leads to the state of samadhi and thereby to the state of human perfection, the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo inspires the man to go ahead and proceed further and receive the Divine or the Supramental consciousness and transform himself into the status of Divine man. The Integral Yoga enables man's union with the Absolute in the building of the divinized supermanhood on this earth. In his state man is transformed into a new personality from the ordinary mental to the Supramental where there is complete harmony of Sat, Cit, and Ananda. The whole human race is then raised to the enjoyment of the blissful existence of Saccidananda.

The Integral Yoga is "a growing into oneness with the nature of divine being". It purifies one's false nature in order to transform it into divine perfection, that is, it seeks to make the Divine the inner spiritual principle of man's action, with the mind, life and body merely serving as an external expression. The individual has to transcend the lower or imperfect nature to attain the higher divine nature, which is his real nature. The Integral Yoga is a way of complete Self-realization, an entire transformation of life. The discovery of one's true nature is not for its own sake, but for being a channel or instrument of the Divine in the supramental transformation of humanity. The Integral Yoga is not limited to the attainment of divine nature and the consequent harmony with it, rather it functions as a channel in the transformation of society. Its aim is to rise and enter into a higher divine consciousness and to manifest this higher consciousness upon earth. The true object of the Integral Yoga is of two levels: a growth of the spirit in nature, and a spiritual change of consciousness. This full



object of yoga can only be accomplished when the conscious yoga in man becomes outwardly co-existent and connected with life. While the traditional yogas demand a complete renunciation of worldly life, Aurobindo's Integral Yoga proposes an affirmation of life in the world. It is through the concrete reality of the earth that the aspirant reaches to the divine realization. The mind, life, and body are not merely ladders to rise to higher peaks, but are also instruments to bring down below the glories of the highest. The transformation and the glorification of the earth is one of the main contributions of Integral Yoga.

The aim of the Integral Yoga could be described as "conversion of the human soul into the divine soul and of natural life into divine living." Integral Yoga does not reject the physical, vital and mental realms; these are the indispensable instruments for the divine ascent and descent. They have to be controlled, purified, and transformed rather than destroyed. Through the transformation of all these elements, man strives for the psychic and spiritual transformation, which is the goal of the Integral Yoga. Aurobindo's dynamic view of yoga is an effort towards the realization of the potentialities of human personality, and the union of the human individual with the Divine, which ultimately leads to the manifestation of the Divine on earth.

D. SYNTHETIC CHARACTER

The Integral Yoga is a synthetic one as it synthesizes the different traditional yogas to arrive at a synthesis of God and human life. There has always been a dilemma so as to how to connect the Divine and the secular, or God and the World. Sri Aurobindo's answer to such a perennial dilemma is presented in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, which has, as its aim, to "reunite God and Nature in a liberated and perfected human life or, in its method, not only permits but favours the harmony of our inner and outer activities and experiences in the divine consummation of both." Integrating various elements of the traditional yogas, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is directed at two goals: to assemble, concentrate and discipline all the qualities, capacities and motive forces in man, and to elevate them to a diviner

spiritual level, and move beyond the liberation of the soul into a wholly transcendent realm of isolated unity to a cosmic enjoyment of the power of the Spirit.

Yoga is essentially the union of the human consciousness with the Eternal and the Transcendent. Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga assimilates the triple path of the Gita and aims at a total transformation. Corresponding to the three principal powers of the individual - will, knowledge, and love - there are three yogas: the yoga of work (Karma Yoga), the yoga of knowledge (Jnana Yoga), and the yoga of love (Bhakti Yoga). In Karma Yoga one surrenders all actions towards God. Jnana Yoga takes its stand upon the individual's mind and seeks to turn his consciousness towards the Divine. In Bhakti Yoga the love of man is turned towards the Divine. Sri Aurobindo says: "By knowledge we seek unity with the Divine in his conscious being: by works we seek also unity with the Divine in his conscious being, not statically, but dynamically, through conscious union with the divine Will; but by love we seek unity with him in all the delight of his being."

The Integral Yoga takes up the essence of these yogas, but presents a synthetic interpretation. It aims at achieving union with the Divine on this earth itself, and not in some heaven beyond. It is not only the individual, but also the earth-nature that is transformed. The Integral Yoga touches the very core of the Indian yoga system, of which "highest ideal [...] is neither to turn back into the maternal depths of Nature, nor to rise up to the heavenly Spirit, rejecting Nature, but to discover that ultimate ground of existence in which Nature and Spirit are unified." For Aurobindo, Yoga is "nothing less than to break up the whole formation of our past and present which makes up the ordinary material and mental man and to create a new centre of vision and a new universe of activities in ourselves which shall constitute a divine humanity or a superhuman nature."

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