



The Intrinsic Nature of Integral Yoga: An Overview of Sri Aurobindo's Works

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ABSTRACT

The Indian philosopher and religious mystic, Sri Aurobindo Ghose, explored his social, political, spiritual, and yogic philosophy in various genres of literature. He believed in the transforming power of man's inner reality. There are different systems of Yoga like : Karma Yoga, Jnan Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Hatha Yoga etc. but what is proposed by Sri Aurobindo is to bring about synthesis of all the systems of Yoga. Most of the time, Yoga only develops a single aspect of the being, but Sri Aurobindo emphasizes on the transformation of the entire being in his spiritual odyssey, *The Synthesis of Yoga*. He founded the system of "Samagra Yoga"(the yoga-based philosophy and practice of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, Mirra Alfassa), very purpose of which is to bring about a cosmic transformation and to achieve the goal of supramental consciousness. Sri Aurobindo has used 'Yoga' as a tool for spiritualization of all aspects of human existence. By this Man will undergo a spiritual metamorphosis. So, transformation is the keyword of his Integral Yoga. According to Sri Aurobindo, " All life is Yoga." (Ghose, p8). The primary objective of this paper is to analyse his concept of Integral Yoga , which has a dynamic approach to life and is intensely practical.

KEYWORDS: Integral, Transformation, Synthesis, Inner Reality, Spiritual, Samagra, Supramental, Metamorphosis, Consciousness.

Introduction:

"Yoga as a sadhana is a methodized effort towards self perfection....."(Ghose 6).

The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root yuj meaning to bind , join, attach, and yoke. It also means union or communion. It is the true union of our will with the will of God. " It thus means the yoking of all the powers of body, mind and soul to God", says Mahadev Desai in his introduction to *The Gita According to Gandhi*. Yoga's history has many places of obscurity and uncertainty due to its oral transmission of sacred texts and the secretive nature of its teachings. The early writings

on yoga were transcribed on fragile palm leaves that were easily damaged, destroyed or lost. The development of yoga can be traced back to over 5,000 years ago, but some researchers think that yoga may be up to 10,000 years old. The word yoga was first mentioned in one of the oldest sacred texts, the *Rig Veda*. It was slowly refined and developed by the Brahmins and Rishis who expressed their beliefs in the *Upanishads*. The most renowned of the yogic scriptures is the *Bhagavad-Gita*, composed around 500 BCE. In the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna explains to Arjuna the meaning of Yoga as a deliverance from contact with pain and sorrow. It is said :

“When his mind, intellect, and self (ahamkara) are under control, freed from restless desire, so that they rest in the spirit within, a man becomes a Yukta – one in communion with God. A lamp does not flicker in a place where no winds blow; so it is with a yogi, who controls his mind, intellect and self, being absorbed in the spirit within him. When the restlessness of the mind, intellect and self is stilled through the practice of yoga, the yogi by the grace of the spirit within himself finds fulfillment. Then he knows the joy eternal which is beyond the pale of the senses which his reason cannot grasp. He abides in this reality and moves not therefrom. He has found the treasure above all others. There is nothing higher than this. He who has achieved it, shall not be moved by the greatest sorrow. This is the real meaning of Yoga – a deliverance from contact with pain and sorrow.” (Iyengar 19, Light on Yoga).

Another foundational work in Yoga tradition is the *Yoga-Sutras* compiled (sometime between 500 BCE and 400 CE), by the sage Patanjali, who is considered as the father of yoga. If you want to learn about the core of who you are, and how that core affects your everyday relationships, perceptions, and actions, then the practices and principles described in *Yoga Sutras* can help. Yoga itself existed long before Patanjali. He did not create yoga, but he brilliantly compiled its essence in a text called *Patanjala – Yoga – Darsanam*, meaning “ view of yoga according to Patanjali.” Before the 20 th century, history indicates that the medieval Indian yoga scene was dominated by the various texts such as the *Yoga Vashistha*, texts attributed to *Yajnavalkya* and *Hiranyagarbha*, as well as literature on *Hatha Yoga* , tantric yoga and *Pashupata Shaivism* yoga rather than the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. Despite so many texts, Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga is unique in many aspects with respect to other traditional yogic paths and practices.

Sri Aurobindo (born Aurobindo Ghose; 15 August 1872 – 5 December 1950) , an Indian philosopher, yogi, maharishi, poet, and Indian nationalist, propounded a philosophy of divine life

on earth through spiritual evolution. The evolutionary philosophy describing Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is explored in his work *The Life Divine*. He rejected the traditional Indian approach of striving for Moksha (liberation from the cycle of death and birth), as a means of attaining happiness. Traditional yoga preaches about importance of individual salvation without any concern of the family or society or people of the world. Individual reaches his own heights and peaks of realization after years of painstaking efforts. Old yoga does not believe in salvation, because mind, life and body are an ignorance, an illusion – the only reality is the featureless relationless Self or Brahman. On the other hand, Integral Yoga aims at perfection and transformation of human life. For that there is no need to escape from life, or from Earth to find and realize the Divine. You can realize the divine here on this Earth and transform this earthly life into Divine life. Here individual Sadhna aspires with a sense of Truth of Oneness for a collective aspiration. A collective mass of people tries to reach the spiritual heights. Each form is bound to be transformed towards the Divine collectively. This collective yoga helps in transforming even the ignorant participants of the Earth. Also, old yoga was made up of fixed religious or spiritual practices, rituals, and teachings. It was not correct to break those rules and regulations. Everybody was bound to follow the same practice, same rules, same dress codes etc. On the other hand, Integral Yoga is beyond all sects, religions and philosophies. It breaks all old patterns, norms, dogmas and formations. There is no fixed teaching, no fixed practice, and no fixed dress code. There is no set mental teaching or prescribed forms of meditation, but it is only by faith , aspiration and surrender that this self – opening can come.

Man is a physical, mental and spiritual being; yoga helps in promoting a balanced development of all the three beings. According to Sri Aurobindo, the current status of human evolution is an intermediate stage in the evolution of being, which is on its way to the unfolding of the spirit, and the self-revelation of divinity in all things. Yoga is a rapid and concentrated evolution of being, while unassisted natural evolution would take many centuries. Sri Aurobindo recognizes three types of being : the Outer being, the Inner being, and the Psychic being. The Outer being includes the physical, vital and mental levels of Being, which characterises our everyday consciousness and experience. The inner being includes the inner realms or aspects of the physical, vital and mental being. They have a larger consciousness than that of the everyday consciousness. The inner being is also a transition between the Outer being and the Psychic being. By doing yoga practice (sadhana), the inner consciousness is being opened, and life turns away from the outward to the

inward. The inner consciousness becomes more real than the outer consciousness. Psychic being is Sri Aurobindo's term for the principle of Divine spirit in every individual. The Psychic is the "Innermost Being", the permanent being that supports the physical, vital and mental principles. It uses mind, life and body as its instruments. In Integral Yoga the goal is to move inward and discover the Psychic being, which then can bring about a transformation of the outer nature. This transformation of the outer being by the Psychic is called Psychicisation. This Psychic transformation is the decisive movement that enables a never-ending progress in life, through the power of connecting to one's inner spirit or Divine Essence. Unlike other Yoga practices Integral Yoga does not propose any kind of physical asanas, breathing techniques or external movements. It is more psychological in nature, with internal reflection and self analysis.

Yoga is neither a philosophy nor a science. It is much more than ordinary sciences. The sciences provide only little bit information about the creation in the universe. But Yoga provides the realization of true knowledge and God. Yogi becomes one with the knowledge. The following questions have confounded humanity since the very beginning. Who am I? Who created the universe? What is the purpose of life and creation? Who gave us a physical body to live in and for what purpose? Can God be seen, contacted, experienced and realized? What is birth, rebirth, death, sleep, dream, meditation and samadhi etc.? Do the saints really achieve the miraculous powers (Siddhis) through yoga? Are the miracles realities? If so, how the miracles are performed? Yoga gives answer to all such eternal questions by realizing the truth face to face. One may say yoga is a science of verification and realization of true religion of God and the absolute reality of self and creation. The nature of the principal Yogic schools, each covering in its operations a part of the complex human integer and attempting to bring out its highest possibilities, it will appear that a synthesis of all of them largely conceived and applied will result in an integral Yoga. But they are so disparate in their tendencies, so highly specialised and elaborated in their forms, so long confirmed in the mutual opposition of their ideas and methods that we do not easily find how we can arrive at their right union.

It has been observed that there still exists in India a remarkable Yogic system which is in its nature synthetical and starts from a great central principle of Nature, a great dynamic force of Nature; but it is a Yoga apart, not a synthesis of other schools. On the other hand, an integral Yoga includes a vital and indispensable element in its total and ultimate aim the conversion of the whole being into

a higher spiritual consciousness and a larger divine existence. Our parts of will and action, our parts of knowledge, our thinking being, our emotional being, our being of life, all our self and nature must seek the Divine, enter into the infinite, unite with the Eternal. But man's present nature is limited, divided, unequal, – it is easiest for him to concentrate in the strongest part of his being and follow a definite line of progress proper to his nature: only rare individuals have the strength to take a large immediate plunge straight into the sea of the Divine Infinity.

Sri Aurobindo's *The Synthesis of Yoga* is based on Integral concentration of our entire conscious being. In Aurobindo's words, "By transformation I do not mean some change of the nature – I do not mean, for body. I use transformation in a special sense, a change of consciousness radical and complete and of a certain specific kind which is so conceived as to bring of a greater and higher kind and of a larger sweep and completeness than what took place when a metalized being first appeared in vital and material animal world. If anything short of that takes place or at least if a real beginning is not made on that basis, a fundamental progress towards this fulfillment, then my object is not accomplished. A partial realization, something mixed and inconclusive, does not meet the demand I make on life and Yoga." (Ghose, 398). The major topic in Aurobindo's integral Yoga is – Triple transformation, which describes the process through which reality is transformed into the divinity. The Triple Transformation refers to the two-fold movement of spiritual transformation – the inward psychicism by which the individual comes in contact with the inner divine principle (Psychic Being), and the spiritual transformation (Spiritualisation). For Sri Aurobindo, both these stages are equally important, as both are prerequisites for the third , the most difficult element of change in the triple transformation – the Supramentalisation of the entire being. The triple Path of devotion, knowledge and works attempts the province which Rajayoga leaves unoccupied. It differs from Rajayoga in that it does not occupy itself with the elaborate training of the whole mental system as the condition of perfection, but seizes on certain central principles, the intellect, the heart, the will, and seeks to convert their normal operations by turning them away from their ordinary and external preoccupations and focusing them on the Divine. It differs also in this – from the point of view of an integral Yoga there seems to be a defect – that is indifferent to mental and bodily perfection and aims only at purity as a condition of the divine realization.

World Health Organization seems to support the same concept of Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, defining the topic of health. According to WHO – "Health is a state of complete physical, mental

and social well being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity.” (WHO 1964). Therefore, the contribution of yoga in providing this integrated whole benefit to individuals who are practicing yoga in the day to day life, is huge. In practicing yoga, several people relate it with physical development only, but that is not correct. Yoga is holistic as it provides physical, psychological, spiritual and social benefits. “ The first wealth is health,” American philosopher, abolitionist, and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1860. Emerson’s quote cited by Harvard economist and health expert David E. Bloom in Finance and Development’s lead article, reminds us that good health is the foundation on which to build – a life, a community and an economy.

Conclusion:

Ahead of International Yoga Day celebrations on June 21, 2016, AYUSH Minister Shripad Naik Yesso released a ‘Yog Geet’ (yoga song):

Tan Man Jeevan Chalo
Savare,
Yog Marg Apnaye.
Vair Bhav ko Tyag Sabhi
Hum,
Geet Milan Ke Gaye.....

The three-minute-and-15-second song has been written and produced by Deeraj Saraswat, Gandhar T D Jadhav and Gatha Jadhav have lent their voice to the song and Sumanto Ray is the composer. This song highlights the significance of Yoga, even in the 21st century. The modern lifestyle is filled with tension and the modern man is living in a competitive environment due to technological advances in various fields. In recent times, Covid-19 pandemic has led to a substantial loss of human lives and has created unprecedented challenges for the public health system, not just in India, but across the world. For this, we need to adopt a healthy lifestyle and that can be achieved through the utilization of Integral Yoga. Old yoga preaches about the importance of salvation without any care and concern of the family or society or people of the world. But Integral Yoga aims at perfection and transformation of human life. For that, there is no need to escape from life, or from Earth to find and realize the Divine. You can realize the Divine here on this Earth and transform this earthly

life into the Divine life. This Collective yoga helps in transforming even the ignorant participants of the Earth.

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