

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga

By

Sirapuram Shirisha

Department of English, Chaitanya (Deemed to be University), Hanamkonda, Telangana
506001

G. Damodar

Department of English, Chaitanya (Deemed to be University), Hanamkonda, Telangana
506001

E-mail: vc@cdu.ac.in

Abstract

Sri Aurobindo speculates a theory of evolution which is a fundamental assumption of his metaphysical system. Evolution is the reverse process of creation or involution. Involution is the immanent movement of the Divine from the higher conscious being to the lower conscious being and finally to the most inferior conscious being, the consent matter. In involution, there is the self-willed descent of the Divine to the world of multiplicities. So, Sri Aurobindo thinks that in evolution there will be an ascent or progressive actualization of the latent consciousness till it reaches the original state of Divine consciousness. What is implicitly involved in involution becomes progressively explicit in evolution in a hierarchical march from matter to the higher levels of consciousness. This upward march of consciousness from subject to life and life to mind is being pursued unconsciously. Sri Aurobindo believes that beyond the mind there are other higher levels of consciousness that will be actualized in the future. Nature is continuously pursuing the progress of conscious manifestation though this is going on in an unconscious way. The purpose of Yoga is to accelerate the process of evolution in a conscious way. Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga aims at the divinization of the human race by a conscious endeavor which nature has been stressing upon unconsciously.

Key Words: Integral Yoga, Involution, Consciousness, Manifestation, Divinization.

Introduction

In Indian philosophy as well as cultural tradition yoga has been a widely used term with varied shades of meaning. It is usually understood as the art of attaining a union with some God or pursuit of self-transcendence. Usually in a theistic religious framework achievement of Godhood is considered to be the ultimate goal of life. That is considered as liberation or Moksha. Yoga is the path through which a super mundane existence is supposed to be achieved. In Indian tradition various yogic path stake for granted the presence of a soul and its disembodied existence. For the attainment of liberation, different yogic practices are suggested.

A yogi-whatever path he may follow to achieve liberation or Godhood must live a life of righteousness and must have detachment from material pursuits. A liberated state is imagined to be a state of freedom and bliss. The soul does not enter into the cycle of birth or death. By liberation, one transcends the state of bondage and worldly attachment. As long as one lives a life of attachment, one cannot achieve the state of Godhead or liberation. Of course, this should not mean that yoga is complete suppression of human propensities but some take it to mean moral refinement and spiritual sublimation despite an active life. One may follow any path, jnana, karma, or bhakti, one can practice yoga if one lives a life of spiritual sublimation¹⁻³.

Understanding yoga in this traditional sense we shall now discuss Sri Aurobindo's concept of integral yoga which appears to be somewhat of a departure from its conventional meaning. The purpose of integral yoga is the actualization of Divine life on earth. Its aim is to bring the divine transformation of humanity and establish a race of supramental beings on earth. Sri Aurobindo believes that man has a self, an Atma, in him that guides and presides over his physical, vital, and mental being. Sri Aurobindo calls the self-psychic being, the integrating principle of the physical, vital, and mental aspects of a person. He has discussed the different steps of integral yoga ⁴⁻⁵.

Its first step is called by him psychicisation. The psychic being becomes an active integrator by bringing transformation in the lower beings – the physical, vital and mental. Through psychicisation the physical body develops the right habit, the vital being acquired the right impulse and the mind gets the right vision. All the work, feeling, and thought are turned towards the Divine. So, through psychicisation a harmonious integration is brought in all the aspects of a person's being that drive towards the Divine. It makes the mind quiet in all turbulence and feeling and the act gets spiritually transformed. The pattern of thinking and living is controlled by the soul and the person turns into a psychic personality ⁶⁻⁷.

The second step of integral is spiritualization which follows psychicisation. In spiritualization, there is an upward opening by which the Divine spark within is heightened to the supreme consciousness. The occasional spiritual flasher or realizations in exalted moments might be there in the past. But normal human nature would undergo self-perfection and reach a state of permanent ascension to the One Divine and convey his living presence and message in all that we see, touch and listen.

The third step in integral yoga is super metallization. It can raise the mind to the super mind and can establish complete harmony. The effect of the super mind will be realized in all parts of the being. The super mind will be a permanent constituent of the earth-consciousness. Humanity will be transformed into a Divine race. In this way, integral yoga can facilitate the manifestation of the Divine in all beings and in the physical universe ⁸.

The very purpose of integral yoga is to bring a cosmic transformation and to take evolution to its ultimate goal of supramental consciousness. Sri Aurobindo thinks that integral yoga initiates the Godward journey for the spiritualization of all aspects of human existence. By this Man will undergo a spiritual metamorphosis. It will bring universalization and transcendentalization to human nature. As long as man is at the mental plane even if he develops philanthropic or altruistic impulses still, he cannot attitude are no doubt good virtues but that does not bring perfection to human nature. Without the manifestation of the Divine, human nature cannot undergo a total transformation. Without a spiritual metamorphosis of the human race conflicts and discords will not be wiped out from the world. So Sri Aurobindo imagines that a spiritual transformation by integral yoga can bring abiding perfection. Human ego and mental or vital propensities will be replaced by the Divine spirit. His will bring a universal integration of all beings. A spiritual unity will be established among all beings and this goal can be achieved by the path of integral yoga ⁹.

Further integral yoga aims at transcendentalization of the human personality. He feels his identity in all and all the existence in him. Through this he becomes one with the Divine and feels identical with the Absolute. This brings self-perfection. That state will be achieved by supramental transformation.

Like a religious mystic Sri Aurobindo imagines that the supramental transformation of the human race can come through the union of human aspiration and Divine grace. In every mystical and metaphorical style, Sri Aurobindo describes that by intense human aspiration, the Divine would descend to the person's consciousness. The aspiration of the yogi makes a self-opening to the Divine grace and makes a total surrender to the Absolute. He gives added connotation to human aspiration and distinguishes it from ambition or self-longing liberation. Aspiration is the articulation of the psychic being to know and to be one with the Divine. It is not for personal achievement but for the spiritualization of humanity. Similarly, his self-surrender must be voluntary and total. The yogi in his thought, feeling, and actions must be surrendered to the Divine. Sri Aurobindo's notion of self-opening is that it should be inward and upward. The inner mind, vital and physical must be opened to the Divine consciousness so that it will be enlightened by the Divine speaker. By upward self-opening, the yogi will be in active touch with the supreme consciousness. Thus aspiration, self-opening, and self-surrender constitute the path in integral yoga to get Divine grace ¹⁰.

The yogi in his mission for supramental transformation will not cease to work. He will not live like an ascetic rejecting everything in a state of devotion. On the contrary, he will do his duties having the least attachment to their consequences. Like a philosophy of *niskama karma*, he is simply an agent of his work sacrificing the result of the Absolute. He has no personal craving for any mental gain or pleasure. Rather in his work, he establishes an identity with the Divine. This identity is called *identity-in-difference*. As being a manifestation of the Divine, he is different; but essentially, he and the Divine are identical. All the selfless and undetached works of the yogi are a self-offering to the Divine.

Here a point of distinction is noteworthy between the traditional idea of yoga and Sri Aurobindo's idea of integral yoga. Yoga in the traditional belief is considered as an art of achieving a union with God through any means suitable to the temperament of the yogi. Religious mystics and men of ecstatic faith speak of *moksha*, *nirvana*, Liberation, God's realization, attachment to heaven, etc. through the path of intense devotion or love of the Lord. But Sri Aurobindo's entire approach to yoga is not for individual liberation or God-realization. He has a vision of a new race of supramental beings on earth. He expects that through integral yoga the path to the actualization of a new race is possible. So his purpose is for the Divine Life for the whole of humanity.

In other words, the very objective of integral yoga is to bring a spiritual or divine transformation of man's material life. His motto is to take the process of spiritual evolution to its ultimate goal. The evolutionary process starting from matter has come to the state of mental consciousness. Unless the higher states of the consciousness get manifold in human nature social conflicts, discords – say all evils-will not be annihilated from the world. The practice of integral yoga would enhance the process of evolution and a new race of Gnostic beings would appear on earth. Integral yoga is the conscious cooperation of man with the natural process to facilitate the ideal of Divine Life on earth. The objective of integral yoga is not for any subjective achievement, but for a transformation of earth consciousness into cosmic consciousness so that a race of Gnostic beings will evolve.

The whole idea of spiritual evolution and integral yoga is based on gross assumptions. They are metaphysical speculations and not based on factual evidence. Sri Aurobindo appears to be a visionary but his vision of future sounds somewhat utopian and impractical. It is the dream of a mystic that human race will undergo a spiritual metamorphosis in future. His notion of creation which is the descent of the infinite into the world of finites is also a gross speculation.

The idea of integral yoga is imagined from a mystic's perspective. The speculation that intense human aspiration will be corroborated by Divine grace to bring a spiritual transformation is a matter of religious faith. A yogi or mystic lives in his own world and articulates a metaphysical view based on his faith. His worldview is grounded on some initial assumption or postulates. Once his postulates are taken for granted some claims follow which are rationally derived from the postulates. Of course, a mystic or yogi's initial postulates or assumptions are supposed to be based on his experience, but the experience is not an objective phenomenon but somewhat a subjective belief that can appropriately be described as a 'blik' in the language of R.M. Hare. A blik is an unverifiable and unfalsifiable interpretation of one's experience. Blik becomes an emotional epistemic metaphysical doctrine to interpret the existence and human condition. It presents a worldview apparently seems to be rational and intellectualized.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo's Speculation That Evolution Is Marching Onward To Reach The Super Mind And That A New Race Or Species Will Appear On Earth Is The Prophecy Of A Mystic Which Can Be Taken As A Blik. So Too The Idea That Integral Yoga Will Shorten The Time For The Emergency Of Super Mind And Super Mentalization Of The Human Race Is Another Prophecy Or A Blik. His Understanding Of Man As A Transitional Being, The Dividing Line Between Two Hemispheres Is Fascinating. Sri Aurobindo And His Admirers Honestly Believe That A New Race Of Gnostic Beings Will Appear On Earth By Adhering To The Path Of Integral Yoga. But One Important Message Of His Thought And Yoga Is That He Is Not Concerned With Individual Fulfillment But With Humanity As A Whole. A New Society Or Race Will Be Guided By A Higher Consciousness Where All Individuals Who By Living In All Each One Lives In His Consciousness Are No Doubt A Great Ideal. Whether Man Will Evolve Into Superman Or Not Is Not Important, But A Consciousness That Concerns Every Man For The Peace, Harmony, And Well-Being Of Humanity At Large Is No Doubt A Great Ideal. Despite His Speculation, And Mystical Prophecy Sri Aurobindo's Humanistic Appeal For A Better World And Finer Human Beings Is His Important Message To Be Sought As One Of The Noblest Ideals.

Integral Yoga

His yoga is the Purna yoga or the integral yoga. The integral includes yoga for the vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual aspects of the human being. Sri Aurobindo's aim is the supreme and to achieve it one has to reach perfection in each of these fields when this is achieved the perfection of an individual is achieved. He further explains that when the stage of perfection we aim for is achieved we realize that the truth that we are in search of is made up of three main aspects love, knowledge, power, and beauty .these four qualities will be automatically and spontaneously expressed in the perfected being, "The psychic will be the vehicle of true and pure love the mind will be the vehicle of infallible knowledge, the vital will manifest an invincible power and strength and the body will be the expression of a perfect beauty and a harmony."

Sri Aurobindo's yoga begins with the body or the physical. Both the physical and the mental are equally important and necessary, but he places the perfection of the physical first because he believes all creation begins with matter, and life is later stage in development.

Some philosophers and spiritual leaders feel that the body is unconscious, a burden, and a hurdle that cannot be pushed away, discarded or passed over. But in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, it is an instrument bestowed with life and energy that is an aid or a means to

transformation. He believes that the body should be trained and strengthened accordingly. The body is in no way to be neglected. It is the starting point of sadhana. He does not speak alone, of the need for strength, he stresses greatly the necessity of grace, beauty, and harmony, as beauty is the very spirit of the physical world.

The development of the physical also impacts positively the mental and the vital. The physical is the most essential for the descent of the divine consciousness because eventually, it is the only means to bear and express the divine consciousness. Sri Aurobindo recognizes that the body has its limits, “we are bound by a poor and limited physical nature; we are bound consequently by a poor and limited life power.”

He believes that if perfection is set as the goal of life the body cannot be ignored but has to be made an essential part of the transformation, “A total perfection is an ultimate end which we set before us, for our ideal is the Diviner Life which we wish to create here, the life of the Spirit fulfilled on earth, life accomplishing its own spiritual transformation even here on earth in the conditions of the material universe. That cannot be unless the body to undergoes a transformation.” He also says, “The body itself must reach a perfection in all that is and does which we can now hardly conceive.”

Liberation from the cycle of birth or moksha is the aim of humans in many spiritual teachings. But in Sri Aurobindo’s integral yoga, he believes there is a reason for our birth, and meaning to this life. He believes that we are not merely born birth after birth on earth to live in such a manner as to realize moksha, but we are born to realize divine consciousness on the earth itself. On this idea, Sri Aurobindo has based his integral yoga.

There are three stages in this yoga, the first is a downward movement where the supreme reality descends and penetrates everything however deep or dense it is. This is involution. The next stage is evolution, and it is an upward movement - spiritual evolution. Human beings can do this because they are at the intermediate stage and not the final stage of evolution even though they mark the evolution of the consciousness, and so therefore, have the ability to reach the supramental. Once this stage has been attained, the final stage, the essence of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga takes place. It is the most crucial stage, here the supramental consciousness is brought down on the earth and the whole of humanity is divinized.

It is not enough that only the second stage or the attaining of the supramental consciousness is achieved. Sri Aurobindo does not believe in attaining the divine conscious for one-self alone and leaving the whole of humanity in its own plight. The goal is to bring salvation to one and all, to transform the world into the supramental. Sri Aurobindo’s yoga is unique due to this aspect of his yoga and also due to his practice of perfecting and transforming the human being on the whole.

Sri Aurobindo explains his yoga as “the acquisition of the divine nature by the transformation of this lower being into the human image of the divine, adharmukti, and the complete and final release of all.” He also tells what he means by transformation; transformation of the self, the transformation of humanity, “By transformation, I do not mean some change of nature- I do not mean, for instance, sainthood or ethical perfection or yogic siddhis (like the tantrik’s) or a transcendental (Chinmaya) 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 about a strong and assured step forward in the spiritual evolution of the being of a greater and higher kind and of a large sweep and completeness than

what took place in a mentalized being first appeared in a vital and material animal world. A partial realization, something mixed and inconclusive, does not meet the demand I make on life and yoga.”

Conclusion

The Goal Of Integral Yoga Is To Become Aware Of The Divine, To Integrate The Physical, Mental And Spiritual Aspects Of Ourselves, And To Manifest The Divine On Earth. According To Sri Aurobindo, All Life Is Yoga, While Yoga As A Sadhana Is A Methodized Effort Towards Self-Perfection, Which Brings To Expression The Latent, Hidden Potentialities Of Being. Success In This Effort Unifies The Human Individual With Universal And Transcendental Existence. Integral Yoga Reunites "The Infinite In The Finite, The Timeless In The Temporal, And The Transcendent With The Immanent.

References

- [1]. Bruteau, worthy is the World: The Hindu Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971, p. 63.
- [2]. The Life Divine I, Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972, p. 601.
- [3]. The Life Divine I, Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972, p. 406.
- [4]. Zaehner R. C., Evolution in Religion, London: Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 8.
- [5]. The Life Divine I, Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972, p. 93.
- [6]. The Life Divine I, Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972, p. 601.
- [7]. Maitra, The Meeting of the East and West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1988, p. 126.
- [8]. The Life Divine I, Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972, p. 94.
- [9]. Brh. Up., 1.4.10.
- [10]. The Life Divine II, Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972, p. 627.