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**THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRAL YOGA IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI
AUROBINDO**

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Introduction

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), one of the foremost philosophers, yogis, and visionaries of modern India, presents a unique synthesis of spirituality and philosophy through his concept of *Integral Yoga*. Deeply rooted in the spiritual heritage of India yet profoundly modern in outlook, his yoga represents a comprehensive system that unites the material and the spiritual dimensions of existence. Unlike traditional yogic paths that aim primarily at liberation (*moksha*) or escape from worldly life, Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga aspires to a *divine life on earth*—a total transformation of human nature into a higher, divine consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo defines yoga as a “methodized effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent existence.” His *Integral Yoga*—also known as *Purna Yoga*—integrates the essential principles of the major yogas of India: *Karma Yoga* (the path of action), *Jnana Yoga* (the path of knowledge), and *Bhakti Yoga* (the path of devotion). It aims not only at individual liberation but also at the transformation of earthly life through the descent of the *supramental consciousness*.

The philosophical foundation of Integral Yoga lies in Sri Aurobindo’s metaphysical vision of *Sachchidananda*—Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss—as the ultimate reality that manifests itself in the world through evolution. Integral Yoga, therefore, is both a path of self-realization and an evolutionary process leading from the human to the divine. It harmonizes the inward spiritual ascent toward the Divine with the outward transformation of nature, emphasizing that “*All life is yoga.*”

In this context, the present article seeks to explore the aim, nature, process, and philosophical implications of Integral Yoga as propounded by Sri Aurobindo. It examines how his synthesis of spiritual practice and metaphysical insight provides a vision of human perfection that transcends mere liberation and aspires for the divinization of life itself.

Aim of Integral Yoga

Sri Aurobindo, as “the conversion of the human soul into the divine soul and of natural life into divine living” describes the entire definition of the aim of integral yoga.¹ Most yogas, except such paths as Natya Yoga, only develop a single aspect of the being, and have as their aim a state of liberation or

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

transcendence. However, the aim of integral yoga is the transformation of the entire being. Because of this, the various elements of one's make-up Physical, Vital, Mental, Psychic, and Spiritual, and the means of their transformation, are described in great detail by Sri Aurobindo, who in this way formulates an entire integral psychology. The goal is then the transformation of the entire nature of one's being. Nothing is left behind.ⁱⁱ

Corresponding to three principal powers of the individual-will, knowledge, and love-there are there Yogas: the yoga of work (*karmayoga*), the yoga of knowledge, (*jnana yoga*), and the yoga of love and devotion (*bhakti yoga*). Integral yoga takes up the essence of the theses three yogas, but differs in its aim according to its comprehensiveness.ⁱⁱⁱ Sri Aurobindo's integral union aims at the integrality of the divine, the fulfilment of the individual's divine destiny upon earth. It is a union with the divine in life rather than a union with supreme in some heaven beyond.

In integral yoga, the goal is not only a transcendent liberation, nirvana, or moksha as in other spiritual paths, but also, in addition to that, the realisation of the Divine in the physical world as well. All of which is part of the same process of integral realisation. An integral realisation of Divine Being; not only a realisation of the One in its indistinguishable unity, but also in its multitude of aspects which are also necessary to the complete knowledge of it by the relative consciousness; not only realisation of unity in the Self, but of unity in the infinite diversity of activities, worlds and creatures. Therefore, it is also, an integral liberation. Not only the freedom born of unbroken contact of the individual being in all its parts with the Divine, *sayujyamukti*, by which it becomes free even in its separation, even in the duality; not only the *salokyalukti* by which the whole conscious existence dwells in the same status of being as the Divine, in the state of *Sachchidananda*; but also the acquisition of the divine nature by the transformation of this lower being into the human image of the divine, *sadharmyamukti*, and the complete and final release of all, the liberation of the consciousness from the transitory mould of the ego and its unification with the One Being, universal both in the world and the individual and transcendently one both in the world and beyond all universe.^{iv}

“Sri Aurobindo defines yoga as, a methodized effort towards self-perfection by expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent existence we see partially expressed in an in the cosmos.”^v Yoga means not only union but it also means the prose or method by which that union is achieved. Sri Aurobindo's yoga does not deal with superficial psychological motives or with the surface manipulations of the mental realm. It aims at a spiritual change of consciousness, a re-founding of life, and growth of the spirit in nature. *That is*, human existence functions as a means of reaching the divine or becoming one with the divine.^{vi}

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

Integral yoga is a way of complete self- realisation: a complete transformation of conscious on each plane of being corresponding to a complete transformation of life. This character of integral yoga is described by Sri Aurobindo thus: our mind, will heart life body, and inner and inmost existence, our super conscious and subconscious, as well as our conscious parts must all be thus given, must all become a means a field of this realisation and transformation and participate in the illumination and change from human into a divine consciousness and nature.^{vii}

Integral yoga's aim is to rise and enter into a higher divine consciousness and to manifest this higher consciousness upon earth. This includes change of consciousness as well as change of life. The old yogas demanded a complete renunciation of the worldly life, but integral yoga aims at new transformed life. Life becomes a field of experience and training in which the seeker free from ordinary desires and attachments in the mind, life, and body, *that is* the ordinary life, is dealt with from a new inner attitude. In the new life all connections must be founded on a spiritual intimacy other than any of one's present connections, which implies a transition from ego- centeredness to God centeredness. Integral yoga has for its end more than the ordinary aims of humanity; its aim is to live in the divine, in God and in mere egoism, but simultaneously not apart from nature and mundane existence.^{viii} The true object of integral yoga is of two kinds; a growth of the spirit in nature and a spiritual change of consciousness. This full object of yoga can only be accomplished when true conscious yoga in man becomes outwardly co-existent and connected with life; 'All life is yoga'.

Integral yoga is Sri Aurobindo's name for his synthesis of yoga methods it complements all partial approaches by integrating the entire being of man through a synthesis of *karma*, *Jnana*, and *bhakti* yoga. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "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."

It is clear by now that the aim of integral yoga is not only freedom from bondage of human nature but also its perfect control with a view to transform, spiritualise and divinise it. According to Sri Aurobindo, integral yoga "is a difficult yoga to follow and not many can really meet the demands it makes on the nature. It is a slow and difficult process; the road is long it is hard to establish even the necessary basis. The old existing nature resists and obstructs and difficulties rise one after another and repeatedly till they are overcome."^{ix} The difficult and complex way of integral yoga is therefore not a path for anyone to follow but only for those who accept to seek its aim, and for those whose inner strength is supplemented by the true aid of the guru.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

This yoga can only do to the end by those who are ready to abolish ego, and cannot do if there are the demands and instincts of the lower parts of human nature. This means the old habits of the mental, vital and physical formations. The path of integral yoga is not a short cut to the divine, spiritual victory needs the struggle and labour to reach the heights; his yoga is bitter like poison in the beginning' because of the difficulty and struggle, but in the end sweet as nectar, because of the joy realisation, the peace of liberation.”^x

Integral Yoga

What is Yoga? The etymological meaning of the word is union. Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root verb *yuj* implies bind, join, unite, control. It means the connecting or union of the individual consciousness with something higher, something transcendent, something eternal and divine.

Literally yoga is the unification of *jibatma* with *paramatma*. It integrates our body, mind and thought process. This in return controls our life style, reduces stress and makes one free from diseases. Sri Aurobindo described yoga in different ways. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, he described yoga as 'union'. Yoga is both – a path and the destination to a superior consciousness. This unifying power differentiates the human being from an inferior animal. Yoga is the exchange of an egoistic for a cosmic consciousness lifted towards or informed by the supra-cosmic, transcendent unnamable who is the source and support of all things. Yoga is the passage of the human thinking animal towards the God-consciousness from which he has descended.^{xi}

The word Yoga literally implies union i.e., spiritual union of the individual soul and is used in this sense in Vedanta. The Gita defines yoga as that state in which there is nothing higher or worth realizing and firmly rooted in which a person is never shaken even by the greatest pain. The state which is free from all agony and misery is Yoga.

In his own writings it is found that 'yoga is the union of that which has become separated in the play of the universe with its own true self, origin and universality' and 'the union of the soul with the immortal being'. The essence of yoga is the contact between the human being with the divinity.

In *The "Synthesis of Yoga"* and in his "Letters on Yoga", Sri Aurobindo laid out the psychological principles and practices of the Integral Yoga or Poorna Yoga. The aim of Integral yoga is to empower the person who practices it for the attainment of a conscious identity with the Divine, the true Self and to transform the psyche, life and body so they would become fit instruments for a divine life on this Earth.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

The integral yoga is the way of a complete God-realisation, a complete Self-realisation, a complete fulfillment of our being and consciousness, a complete transformation of our nature-and this implies a complete perfection of life here and not only a return to an eternal perfection elsewhere.^{xii}

It implies realisation of God. It helps to become a part of a divine work. The object of this Yoga is not to liberate the soul from Nature, but to liberate both soul and nature by sublimation into the Divine Consciousness from whom they came.^{xiii}

“Integral Yoga is a way of complete God-realization, a complete Self-realization, a complete fulfillment of our being and consciousness, a complete transformation of our nature and this implies a complete perfection of life here and not only a return to an eternal perfection elsewhere.”

Yoga self-determined, self-directed advancement towards this life of the divine is the supreme prerogative of man. Yoga is the psychological discipline by means of which man crosses the frontiers of his surface awareness and enters into the domain of his inner being which opens to the divine for its descent. So the individual must prepare a leap beyond psyche. The preparation for this leap is called Integral Yoga.

It is an elaborate discipline capable of transforming one’s mind-set and one’s life. So, in this stage philosophy joins with yoga. What philosophy establishes theoretically, we can practically realize through yoga. It guides us to open all the doors of our body, life, soul and psyche to the divine light that is coming from above. The specific elements of Jnana yoga, Bhakti yoga and Karma yoga are woven into the texture of Integral yoga thus constituting the basis of its synthetic philosophy.

Aurobindo describes the universe in the integral yoga, in the integral philosophy as three-dimensional.

1. The first dimension: The vertical and concentric hierarchy-

i. Faculties: Physical, Vital, Mental and higher domains. (vertical) ii. The Types of the being: The outer being, The inner being, The psychic being (horizontal)

. The vertical and the horizontal components are inter-related to each other. All these faculties and levels are to be transformed by the integral yoga has to transform the vertical and the horizontal components.

2. The second dimension: The Triple Foundation-

i. The Call and Response ii. The Calm and Equality iii. The Surrender and Aspiration.

3. The third dimension: Sadhana-

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

i. Sadhana- Work ii. Sadhana- Meditation iii. Sadhana- Love and Devotion.

The double liberation (soul and nature), the triple transformation (psychic, spiritual and supramental) and fourfold perfection (body, prana, heart and buddhi) are the special features of Sri Aurobindo's yoga.

Liberation, transformation and perfection contain progressive departures from the conventional paths of yoga and the natural contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the spiritual accomplishments of mankind. They are intended to bring into focus the basic components of the Divine Life which is indicated by Sri Aurobindo as the final destiny of the advancing being of man and advancement of consciousness by stages

Sri Aurobindo declares "It has not been found in experience whatever might have once been hoped that education and intellectual training by itself can change man." The yoga sadhana alone can achieve. All would be transformed, the Earth the body and death itself. The progressive change of the individual must spring from an inner source.

This is Sri Aurobindo's guidance and system of practice. He did not try to develop a new religion. He did not try to mix the older religions into a different new religion since it will be a deviation from his aim.

"The movement of nature is two-fold: divine and undivine. The distinction is only for practical purposes since there is nothing that is not divine. The undivine nature, that which we are and must remain so long as the faith in us is not changed, acts through limitation and ignorance and culminates in the life of the ego; but the divine nature acts by unification and knowledge, and culminates in life divine. The passage from the lower to the higher may affect itself by the transformation of the lower and its elevation to the higher nature. It is this that must be the aim of an integral yoga."^{xiv}

Integral yoga is Sri Aurobindo's name for his synthesis of the yoga method. The integration of the yoga method takes up the essence of the *karma* yoga, *jnana* yoga, and *bhakti* yoga yogas, but differs in its aim underlying its comprehensiveness. We have seen that it is possible to strive and arrive at God by means of work alone, by means of knowledge alone, by way of the love alone. However, all these are partial realisations. But for a seeker of integral path Sri Aurobindo emphasises that all the three should converge. "Integral yoga is a way of complete God-realisation, a complete Self-realisation, a complete fulfilment of our being and consciousness, a complete transformation of our nature-and this implies a complete perfection of life here and not only a return to an eternal perfection elsewhere."^{xv}

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

Sri Aurobindo observes, “the method we have to pursue, is to put our whole conscious being into contact with the divine and to call him in to transform our entire being into his, so that in a sense God himself, the real person in us, becomes the *sadhaka* of the Sadhana as well as the master of the yoga by whom the lower personality is used.”^{xvi} Aurobindo’s integral yoga aims at integrity in divine revelation, the fulfilment of the individual’s divine destiny upon earth. It is a union with the divine in the life rather than a union with the supreme in some heaven beyond. Its aim is therefore not only related to the divine realisation of the individual, but also to bring down supramental consciousness into earth-nature.

To do the integral yoga one must first resolve to surrender entirely to the Divine, there is no other way, this is the way. However, after that, one must have the five psychological virtues, five psychological perfections and we say that the perfections are Sincerity or Transparency, Faith or Trust (Trust in the Divine), Devotion or Gratitude, Courage or Inspiration, Endurance or Perseverance.

For Sri Aurobindo the triple transformation needs to be based on a total and integral change of consciousness. It can be complete only when psychic movements inward to inner being and the opening upward to higher existence are supported by the action of supramental consciousness and force.^{xvii} The descending force of the divine which works through supermind transforms the mental, vital, and physical states of the person; but as long as there is a gap between the divine and earth existence there can be no radical change of surface existence.

This threefold transformation culminates in the supramental transformation of the human being that is the ascent to the state of super mind or the supramental descent into lower nature, physical nature. Illumined sight will see the cosmic harmony of existence in the soul material existence, and transformed hearing will hear the cosmic symphony in the soul of the sound. In the rhythm of concords one sees the supramental descent will be the consummation of all ways of God realisation. It will integrate harmoniously all human relations with God.

Philosophical Implications of Integral Yoga:

As per Sri Aurobindo the absolute reality is *Sachchidananda*. This triune principle involves bliss, force and existence. Transcendent is the final reality. The ultimate reality becomes the world by super mind. Thus, super mind is the principle of being and the principle of becoming. In the theory of Sri Aurobindo, the being and the becoming are real. The one and the many are the two aspects of the same reality. The Absolute is above multiplicity and unity as it is beyond stability and motion.

1. Sri Aurobindo and the Absolute Reality-

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PEER REVIEWED

The absolute reality is *Sachchidananda*, pure existence, consciousness-bliss. The three aspects of the Brahman are one.

2. Sri Aurobindo's Theory of knowledge and Intuition-

Aurobindo does not rely on the intellect as an instrument of knowledge. He relies on spiritual intuition. Sri Aurobindo recognises different methods of knowledge to different aspects of experiences. The instruments of knowledge are the five senses vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Also the sixth sense the sense-mind and reason play an important role. The senses and sense-mind are inadequate to know the fundamental reality the Absolute

3. Sri Aurobindo's Conception of the Self-

The Brahman manifests in the form of purusha and prakriti. The former is lord of the nature and the latter the executive energy. It is responsible for the formation and movements in the worlds. The prakriti has three gunas and has two natures the lower and the higher. Higher nature is the conscious divine, it is free from ignorance and the lower one is of ignorance, mind, life and matter. The *Sachchidananda* manifests the super mind and its power.

4. Sri Aurobindo's Attitude towards the World-

The world is real as per Sri Aurobindo. The divine is hidden in the material world. The divine being arises in the universe as spirit, in mind, in life and in matter. Thus, evolution takes place by involution.

5. Sri Aurobindo's Vision of the Perfect State-

Sadhaka of integral yoga aims at the highest, to possess the fullness of God in every part. The perfection of the human being is the main goal of this yoga. As per Aurobindo the perfect state is the supramental gnostic being. The supramental gnostic nature is the consciousness and power of the infinite. When the evolution reaches the supramental level there will be a radical change.

Transformation of an individual:

Man is born as an ignorant, divided, and conflicted being. Initially he is a product of the original unconsciousness inherent in. He does not know the nature of Reality, including its source and purpose; his own nature, including the parts and integration of his being; what purpose he serves, and what his individual and spiritual potential is, amongst others. In addition, man experiences life through division and conflict, including his relationship with others, and his divided view of spirit and life.^{xviii}

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY**PEER REVIEWED**

To overcome such limitations, man must follow a process of self-discovery in which he uncovers his divine nature. To that end, Sri Aurobindo suggests a process i.e. Triple Transformation. It includes Psychic Transformation, Spiritual Transformation and Supramental transformation.

(1) Psychic Transformation: It is a movement within, away from the surface of life, to the depths, culminating in the discovery of the evolving soul. From that experience, he sees the oneness and unity of creation, and the harmony of all experienced in life.

(2) Spiritual Transformation: As a result of making the psychic change, the mind of human being expands and he experiences knowledge through light, intuition, and revelation of knowledge, culminating in supramental perception. Light enters from the heights and begins to transmute various parts of his being.

(3) Supramental transformation: After making the psychic and spiritual change, the human being makes the supramental and most radical change. It is basically a complete transformation of the mind, the heart, the emotions, and the physical.

Philosophy and spiritual vision:

One of Sri Aurobindo's great philosophical achievement was to introduce the concept of evolution into Vedantic thought. Samkhya philosophy already proposed such a thought earlier, but Sri Aurobindo refused the materialistic inclinations of Darwinism and Samkhya and proposed the evolution of spirit along with that of matter and the evolution of matter was a result of the former.

He reveals the limits of the Mayavada of Advaita Vedanta and solves the riddle of the link between the ineffable Absolute and the universe of diversity by discovering a hitherto unknown and unexplored dimension of consciousness, which he called the super mind. The super mind is the dynamic nature present in the transcendent Satchidananda as well in the foundation of evolution: a unitary dimension of which our individual minds and bodies are minor subdivisions.

Sri Aurobindo refused the main concept of Indian philosophy that states that the World is a Maya (illusion) and to live as a renunciate was the only way. He says that it is possible to transcend human nature and to transform it and to live on the earth as a free and advanced individual with a dynamic consciousness and a divine nature that can perceive the truth of things and proceed on the basis of inner oneness, inward unity, love and light.

Sri Aurobindo is the original philosopher of modern India. His philosophy is almost similar to original Vedanta with new trends. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is integral non-dualism or integralism or synthetic philosophy. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is "negation of two negations of Idealism and

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY**PEER REVIEWED**

Materialism i.e. spirit and matter.” Sri Aurobindo stresses that evolution is of the physical forms and also evolution of consciousness. Higher consciousness results in the future evolution of man in to superman.

Sri Aurobindo’s thought of evolution of consciousness as the true meaning of the world movement must be noted for different reasons by the broad mind. Spiritual movements are not other worldly, they belong to this world. Sri Aurobindo’s vision and content of Life Divine on Earth is not a theory but a clear future reality. So, the Gospel of perfect man in perfect society is no longer regarded as a dream and it is a grand truth.

Conclusion:

I have made a long journey with Sri Aurobindo’s concept of Integral Yoga. Yoga itself is the system that teaches how to control our body and mind in the belief that we can become united with the spirit of the universe. All types of *yoga*, by using different methods, try to achieve the knowledge of the inner self, where there is infinite joy, eternal bliss, peace, perfection and liberation.

In integral yoga, the goal is not only a transcendent liberation (nirvana or moksha) as in other spiritual paths, but also, in addition to that, the realisation of the Divine in the physical world as well. The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo (which he also referred to as synthetic, Supramental, or purna yoga) advocated a total transformation: Physical, vital, mental, and spiritual. In the big picture which he envisioned, moreover, this transformation was for the purpose of not merely individual, but cosmic, salvation. The liberation of the individual was, for Aurobindo, an illusion; what was required was the divinization of the totality of the cosmos, and to literally bring the Kingdom of God on earth. Liberation of the spirit from the cycle of birth and death was not sufficient for the perfection of man's spiritual realization.

In short, integral yoga seeks not a renunciation of life and liberation from the world but a transformation of life and the world, not a rejection of egoistic parts of one being but their transformation and integration into a divine nature. To help this transformation, Sri Aurobindo emphasises the need for total rejection of one’s egoistic desires and a complete surrender to the divine supramental force.

Sri Aurobindo himself never achieved the supramental transformation. Only the Mother, whom he considered an avatar, professed to have done so. Sri Aurobindo said that in The Mother he found surrender to the Divine down to physical body itself, the cells of the body (not merely the mind and emotions), the likes of which could not be found in any human being.

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWED

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