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**YOGA: PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF SRI AUROBINDO AND
*PATAÑJALI***

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Yoga system, one of the most advanced systems of Indian philosophy, constitutes an integral part of the rich tradition of India. The source of yoga is untraceable and lost in antiquity. The term ‘yoga’ is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘*yuj*’ which means ‘to unite’ or ‘to integrate’. The word ‘yoga’ is used in different senses. It signifies spiritual unification--the union of the soul with the absolute, the awareness of the mind and complete suppression of the mental modes. The renowned sage, *Patañjali* defined yoga as “*yogaḥ cittavṛtti nirodhaḥ*”¹ which means —yoga is the pause of the modifications of the mind. *Chitta* is mind; *vṛttis* are thought impulses; *nirodhaḥ* is stoppage. On the one hand, yoga focuses on keeping a person healthy, and on the other hand, it integrates physical development with good conduct to maintain overall well-being. Yoga is one of those ideas that evolve with the expansion of human consciousness. In one form or another, yoga has always been a part of mystic traditions throughout the annals of history and human civilization. In the early beginnings, it might seem that yoga was more or less concerned with the development of the potential of the material body. It was perceived that the capacities and powers of the body were not limited to the traditional functioning of the bodily senses. They could be developed through a particular self-training of the body and the activation of its life energies. The goal was declared to be the realization of God, union with the Divine Consciousness at the core. Yoga is most recognized as a spiritual and ascetic discipline rooted in the Indian ethos and culture. A few forms of yoga--including breath control, simple meditation, and adoption of specific bodily postures--are widely practiced across the world for preventing health hazards and promoting mental relaxation.

The Yoga system addresses both theory and practice for the realization of the ultimate truth concerning the human being and the world. According to *Patañjali*, yoga is a spiritual effort to attain perfection through the control of sense organs, the gross body, the subtle mind, the intellect and the ego. It guides practitioners to achieve the highest wisdom through the spiritual realization. *Patañjali*’s ‘*Yoga-sutra*’ is the first and foremost systematic and authoritative presentation of yoga in both its

¹ *Yogasutra*- 1.2

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theoretical and practical aspects. The Yoga philosophy is closely connected with *Sāṅkhya* philosophy. Yoga presents a practical path for the realization of the self, whereas *Sāṅkhya* emphasizes the attainment of self-knowledge by means of concentration and meditation. Thus, Yoga and *Sāṅkhya* are the practical and theoretical sides of the same system. Both the systems uphold that liberation can be attained through knowledge, and to attain this knowledge, it is necessary to control the body, mind, senses, intellect and ego. Yoga admits three *pramānas* (means of knowledge), which are also accepted by the *Sāṅkhya* system. These three *pramānas* are: perception, inference and verbal testimony. Furthermore, the twenty-five metaphysical principles accepted by the *Sāṅkhya* are also approved by the Yoga system.

But, in Sri Aurobindo's view the term 'yoga' basically means 'Union' and so, the necessary aim of all forms of Yoga is the realization of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo explains yoga as a practical psychology that can be used as an instrument by all human beings to realize their potential and thereby fulfill the cosmic laws of evolution. It is obvious that within the history of Sri Aurobindo's *sādhanā*, yoga holds a special place and significance. It is not suggested here that mankind should entirely halt the development of modern civilization and return to the atmosphere of yogic *sādhanā*. It is connected with the distinctive spiritual progress that he envisaged and emphasized, and it also assumes new importance. All philosophies of yoga presuppose that the greatest evil is the separation of the finite from the infinite, and that the restoration of this original unity is the aim of yoga. However, Sri Aurobindo places this in line with the final nature of his philosophy. He considers that the ultimate destiny of the process of evolution is a Divine life in which all beings will be liberated. Sri Aurobindo also declares that, the process of life, in a sense, is itself a yoga. As a result, each activity is an associate activity toward the conclusion of unity, being an associated expression of the infinite within us. "The object of the yoga is to enter into and be possessed by the Divine Presence and Consciousness, to love the Divine for the Divine's sake alone, to be tuned in our nature into the nature of the Divine, and in our will and works and life to be the instrument of the Divine. Its object is not to be a great yogi or a Superman (although that may come) or to grab at the Divine for the sake of the ego's power, pride or pleasure. It is not for *Mokṣa* though liberation comes by it and all else may come, but these must not be our objects. The Divine alone is our object."²

² Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL Vol. 22/24, p. 503.

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The yoga of Sri Aurobindo, widely known as Integral Yoga, is a yoga of earth transformation. The aim of this yoga is not to provide a gateway to another life, nor to avoid worldly existence, but rather to bring about a radical transformation of life itself. In ancient yogic perspectives life was often regarded either as a delusion or as an incorrigibly misleading existence, filled with evil, pain and suffering. The only solution of this dismal state was to seek an exit-to quit the game of creation and escape the cycles of birth and death. Different systems were devised to unhinge the doors of nature and dismantle the great mechanism of creation, in which the soul was held captive by the mysterious *Māyā* and the iron law of karma. The individual soul, therefore, sought to flee the enigma of creation, leaving the mystery of *Māyā* unsolved. Inner perfection of the soul, in this view, did not bring about a transformation of our nature. The soul continued to move in restricted groves set by past momentum and was eventually halted by the growing pressure of detachment and the exhaustion of its tendencies. Once disentangled from this grip, the soul could finally undo the material knot that bound it to earth and humanity, thus escaping into the silence of the ineffable. “The aim of the yoga is to open the consciousness to the Divine and to live in the inner consciousness more and more while acting from it on the external life, to bring the inmost psychic into the front and by the power of the psychic to purify and change the being so that it may become ready for transformation and be in union with the Divine Knowledge, Will and Love. Secondly, to develop the yogic consciousness, i.e., to universalize the being in all the planes, become aware of the cosmic being and cosmic forces and be in union with the Divine on all the planes up to the over mind. Thirdly, to come into contact with the transcendent Divine beyond the over mind through the sacramental consciousness, supramentalise the consciousness and the nature and make oneself an instrument for the realization of the dynamic Divine Truth and its transforming descent into the earth-nature.”³

Integral Yoga is, in its character, a synthesis that integrates within itself the earliest yogic attempts of humanity. It takes their essence and carries their efforts to their highest point. Its aim however, is utterly different. There must be a right balance between the soul and nature, a profound harmony between the inner and the outer life. Therefore, the seeker on this path must not focus solely on the discovery of the Divine Presence behind creation. The sincere aspirant will find more than enough material in the actual observations of this yoga. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wrote extensively and spoke freely with disciples on every subject related to the yogic endeavor, as well as

³ Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL Vol. 22/24, p. 509.

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on life as seen from the vantage of the supramental vision. Their thought is also a lasting inheritance for generations to come. Their dedicated yet mighty action still reverberates within the depths of matter and in the very core of the human heart. We must cultivate the habit of becoming attentive, listening with concentration, and attuning ourselves to the silence behind the noise of surface life.

According to Sri Aurobindo the spiritual improvement of the whole humanity may be attained through the method of supramental yoga. In his view, the spiritual ascent of all mankind is the ultimate goal of the supramental yoga. According to Sri Aurobindo, human beings may achieve perfection by following the technique of supramental yoga. Here the term perfection does not mean the perfection of spirit but rather it means the perfection of the entire personality both physical and spiritual. It is necessary, therefore, that the body of an individual must undergo transformation so that it may perform its functions in accordance with the highest spiritual of the human personality. In his view, the body of an individual must be ultimately divinized. The proceedings of an individual may become divinized when his body becomes divinized. The Vedic seers addressed this as *jyotirmayadeha* (a luminous body) achieved through spiritual transformation. Sri Aurobindo also believed that the human body could be divinized and made luminous through *adhyātma yoga*. He laid stress on quietness and peace of mind for the practice of supramental yoga. In his view, silence and equanimity of mind are the most important prerequisites for practicing supramental yoga.

Hence, Sri Aurobindo has suggested the present humanity to improve and uplift the power of consciousness. Since the basic cause of the lack of peace and harmony in our lives lies within man himself, the way out of this crisis lies in a complete change of his inner being. We know that according to Sri Aurobindo the spiritual discipline of integral yoga is the means to such inner transformation and the gradual evolution of consciousness. According to him, through a spiritual and supramental transformation of the entire human race, there would emerge a completely new set of values that would lead humanity towards a harmonious and peaceful existence, overcoming evil and conflicting forces. However, it may be argued that Sri Aurobindo did not provide us with an immediate solution; he only promised us something which might be attained in the distant future. Further, we find that at present people have become quite aware of the good effects of yoga and are practicing it for acquiring physical fitness as well as for attaining mental peace. But, the present life of man is fraught with difficult and complex enigmas, and to deal with them, the mere attainment of good health or mental strength is not enough. What is needed is a total development of mind, life and body that together constitute the entire being of man. It is in this connection that the practice of the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo becomes

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very relevant and necessary. Unlike the other forms of yoga, the effects of integral yoga is not limited only to the external physical being of man, or to the cure of some physical or mental illness.

From this explanation, a special aspect of Sri Aurobindo's yoga can be brought to light. According to him, yoga is the realization of divinity within the bodily state itself. It does not lead to a supernatural existence. Its modifications are important for the mental processes. Therefore, the goal of yoga or Integral yoga is the Divine transformation of the complete embodied existence. It also includes *sarvamukti* or the collective freedom of the humankind. Integral Yoga is not a primary yoga but a synthesis that integrates the divine and the mundane together.

According to common interpretation and also according to *Patañjali*, the author of *Yoga Sūtra*, yoga is the act of association, the act of becoming one and the act of being united. It suggests a strategy or set of technique that culminates in the union of the soul with the Universal. It is also understood as concentration and communion with the Supreme, for in the sense of spiritual union lies the true meaning of yoga. This understanding is distinct from *Rajayoga*, *Karmayoga*, *Bhaktiyoga* and *Jñānayoga*. From the earliest times, yoga has been spoken of as a way of achieving a spiritual goal and in later literature it is frequently mentioned. The *Yoga Upaniṣad*, certain portions of '*Mahābhārata*' and the '*Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*' discuss this subject at length. However, the '*Yoga Sūtra*' of Patañjali which is regarded as authoritative is most widely recognized. One of the vital features of Patañjali's work is that it sets out the complete method for the conquest of self. His system is predicated on the study of the nature of the human mind and consciousness, showing the path to complete mastery by stilling the modifications of the mind.

One of the important features of *Patañjali's* treatise is that it sets out the full technique of the conquest of self without reference to, or insistence on, any theological, philosophical or metaphysical theories. His method is based on the study of the nature of human mind and consciousness. Yoga is jointly a science and an art. It is a science in so far as it probes into the nature of the human apparatus of thinking, feeling, willing and other activities of the consciousness. It is an art because it teaches practical methods of fully controlling the mind by detaching it from the self and the ego, and by promoting communion with *Saccidānanda*. An enormous amount of literature may have existed previously, but the skilled and delightful summation and synthesis of the entire subject in the form of *Sūtras* or aphorisms was undertaken in the second century B.C by *Patañjali*. Heinrich Robert Zimmer, in writing about the *Yoga Sutra*, characterizes them as one of the most astounding works of philosophical prose in the literature of the world.

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The conception of Yoga in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is different from *aṣṭāṅga* yoga or the eightfold system of yoga. The '*Yoga Sūtra*' is considered to be the fundamental text of this system. The eightfold path of yoga is referred to as the eight limbs by *Patañjali*. These limbs are "yama-niyama-āsana-prāṇāyāma-pratyāhāra-dhāraṇā-dhyāna-samādhayaḥ aṣṭau aṅgāni"⁴ These are not rigid laws or hard-and-fast rules: rather, they are *Patañjali*'s proposal for living a more meaningful life through yoga. The eight limbs work together. The first five steps: *yama* (restraint), *niyama* (discipline), *āsana* (posture), *prāṇāyāma* (breath control), and *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses) - are the preliminaries of yoga, forming the foundation of spiritual life. They deal with both the body and the mind. The last three: *Dhāraṇā* (concentration) *dhyāna* (meditation) and *Samādhi* (absorption)-follow proper practice of the earlier steps. They help the *yogī* attain, enlightenment, which is the realization of identity with spirit. Unlike temporary physical results, such as a flat stomach that may disappear after a week of indulgence, enlightenment lasts forever.

While the notion and historical evolution of Yoga lay the initial understanding, the *Gītā* and the *Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra* uplift it beyond mere idea, firmly establishing Yoga as a profound philosophy. *Patañjali* treats Yoga as a powerful instrument for attaining true knowledge of both the material and spiritual realms, eventually leading to *Kaivalya* (Ultimate Union). Rooted in *Sāṅkhya* philosophy, it suggests a clear way to transcendence. In contrast, the *Gītā* unifies diverse philosophies, resolving conflicts and bridging gaps between them. It highlights that every path—whether *Bhakti* (devotion), *Jñāna* (knowledge), or *Niṣkāma Karma* (selfless deed)—finally leads to salvation. Each chapter is named 'Yoga,' suggesting that every part of life, when followed in the spirit of Yoga, becomes a means to freedom. By integrating different philosophies into a combined vision, the *Gītā* expressly stated that any sincere and disciplined effort leads to the Ultimate Union (*Mokṣa*). Building on this comprehensive viewpoint, the *Gītā*, also known as *Brahmavidyā* (the science of the Absolute) and *Yogā śāstra* (the scripture of Yoga), stands as one of the most valued texts on Yoga.

From a modern point of view, science is regarded as a systematic order that arranges knowledge through testable hypotheses and predictive models about the universe. The Oxford English Dictionary defines science as the systematic study of the natural world through observation and experimentation, while the National Academy of Sciences describes it as a means of understanding reality based on empirical inquiry. In Yogic phrasing, knowledge is categorized into theoretical knowledge (*Jñāna*) and experiential knowledge (*Vijñāna*), constructing an integrated philosophy of life. In contrast to

⁴ *Yogasutra*--2.29

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modern science, which often disconnects physics from metaphysics, the Yogic tradition embraces a holistic approach.

This study reaffirms that Yoga is far more than just an art and science of healthy living—it is a comprehensive system of knowledge that integrates philosophy, science, and liberation (*mokṣa*). It presents a structured and holistic approach to understanding reality by associating intellectual inquiry, empirical exploration, and experiential knowledge. Contrasting conventional scientific methodologies that rely exclusively on observation and reasoning, Yoga transcends these restrictions through direct internal experience and expanded states of consciousness. By bridging the gross (*Aparā*) and subtle (*Parā*) aspects of existence, Yoga unites external observation with inner realization, offering profound insights into consciousness, reality, and the human experience. The *Pātañjala* philosophy exemplifies a methodical approach to acquiring knowledge beyond sensory perception and logical inference. Besides the Yoga epistemological structure—integrating Perception (*Pratyakṣa*), Inference (*Anumāna*), and Testimony (*Śabda*)—presents a more comprehensive model of understanding compared to Western epistemologies, which often limit knowledge to Justified True Belief (JTB). The *Gītā* and the *Pātañjala Yoga* highlight that the ultimate aim of Yoga is *Kaivalya* or *Mokṣa*—a state of absolute liberty where individual consciousness merges with the universal. This is realized through *Sādhana* (disciplined practice), *Samyama* (integration of *Dhāraṇā*, *Dhyāna*, and *Samādhi*), and *ṚtambharāPrajñā* (truth-bearing knowledge). Yoga not only aligns with contemporary scientific patterns but also expands them by integrating metaphysical depth. While modern science seeks knowledge through external observation and evolving theories, Yoga offers timeless wisdom through direct inner experience. Its amalgamation with modern methodologies can foster new improvements in holistic healing, consciousness studies, and well-being. This investigation affirms that Yoga is not merely a practice or an instrument for well-being, but an enduring wisdom tradition that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries, guiding humanity toward self-realization and cosmic unity.

Conclusion:

Thus, in the above discussion it can be claimed that, the yogic view of life can give a new orientation to the development of human civilization. It brings about a total transformation of the mind, life and body, binding them together into a harmonious whole. The harmony that has been achieved within would find its expression in the external nature and life of man. Helping individuals to develop their inner being would actually provide them with the inner strength to fight against narrow, selfish, egoistic tendencies that lie behind acts of violence, disunity, hatred, exploitation and injustice. In this way, yoga can become a useful means to foster peace, unity, brotherhood, equality and justice. In other

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words, the practice of such inner discipline would serve as an instrument to bring about social change. Philosophers like *Patañjali* and Sri Aurobindo have highlighted the spiritual value of yoga among the masses and used it as a helpful tool to fight against social evils and to promote communal harmony in society.

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