

Aurobindo on Integral Yoga, Divinity and Truth and Its Relevance in Life

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Abstract

The main discussion of this paper is to highlight how Sri Aurobindo's concept of integral yoga, divinity and truth are correlated concepts which jointly determine universal individuality, the objective of which is the realisation of the insights of the true meaning of life. The Life Divine of Sri Aurobindo itself manifests the divinity in life, and it states that divinity pervades everywhere, be in the mundane life or the spiritual life. Sri Aurobindo acknowledges the inner and outer life and then claims that divinity lies hidden in the inner life. All spiritual life is, in its principle, a growth into divine living. The inner life has a supreme spiritual importance, and the outer has a value only. A man thus dwells in the Divine, and he has realised the spiritual existence. The spiritual man living in the sense of spiritual self is in the realisation of the Divine within him and everywhere. The whole foundation of the gnostic life must be by its very nature inward and not outward. The main strategy of this paper is to envisage in what sense Sri Aurobindo's concept of Integral Yoga, Divinity and Truth has overcome the imperfect existence of a man and helped a man to become a universal individual transcendentally. One has to become a timeless, eternal being.

Keywords: *universal individuality, integral yoga, the life divine, spiritual existence, gnostic life*

Introduction:

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was a visionary philosopher, poet, and spiritual leader whose teachings have left a profound impact on modern Indian thought and global spirituality. He was educated in England, but later he returned to India. Thereafter, he engaged in the struggle for the independence of India from British colonial rule. However, his focus shifted towards spirituality, and he settled in Pondicherry and where he developed his philosophy of Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo's concept of the Integral Yoga system is described in his books, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*. Sri Aurobindo did not seek an escape from worldly life to attain spiritual enlightenment. Aurobindo suggests that the true purpose of human life is to manifest the Divine within *physical realism*. However, such a perspective does not dismiss the spiritual perspective, but rather reframes it

as an integral part of our everyday experiences. Aurobindo encourages looking beyond the surface and recognizing the spiritual essence in our daily activities. He reveals Divinity in every challenge, in every movement of joy. The key to integrating the Divine into life is the transformation of our consciousness and for this a shift from a mental to a supra-mental state of being, where our perception and understanding of the world are elevated to a higher plane. He calls for *jivan-mukta*, i.e., the liberated being, where an individual has attained a state of enlightenment while still living a human life. Aurobindo's philosophy invokes the collective evolution of humanity, where the collective consciousness of mankind is transformed, leading us toward a Divine life on Earth. Thus, in a sense, each individual's spiritual progress is intricately linked to the evolution of the whole. As more people awaken to their divine nature, the collective consciousness begins to shift, paving the way for a new era of human existence.

According to Aurobindo, divinity is the only truth in life. Divinity is indeed the first reason for seeking the spiritual Truth and spiritual life. Thus, in a sense, divinity is the locus, the uniqueness that can be comprehended through integral yoga. Divinity thus is indispensable because one can manifest him through divinity, i.e., "to transform one's limited consciousness into the Divine consciousness, to live in the infinite Peace, Light, Love, Strength, Bliss."¹ The spiritual Truth of the Divinity grows in us. However, at times, our limited mental conception hampers the growth of the spiritual Truth. The growth of the spiritual Truth makes us feel the Divine Light and Truth, the Divine Power and Force, the Divine Purity and Peace working within us. Only when the Divine presence in us and the consciousness is transformed then we get the sense to make ourselves ready to manifest the Divine on the material plane. Thus, Aurobindo argues that the realization of the Divine gets primacy over every other because Divinity is a must, and the rest is secondary and desirable. Divinity is needed for the realization of the whole life. Aurobindo says, "But the realisation is the first need that round which all the rest moves, for apart from it all the rest would have no meaning."²

¹ Aurobindo, *The Integral Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1993, p.7.

² *Ibid.*, p.9.

It is important to note here that the concept of Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo is directed to God, not to man. Accordingly, it can be argued that to bring down and establish divine supernatural consciousness in the material world, it will require an immense change in humanity and its life. In such a case, it could not be the object of *sadhana*. The object of *sadhana* cannot be an element of the material world; it can only be lived in the divine consciousness. What then is *sadhana*? According to Sri Aurobindo, *sadhana* essentially means purification of the nature, the consciousness of the being, the opening of the psychic, and the inner mind and vital, the contact and presence of the divine. It also means the realisation of the Divine, and the psychic and spiritual transformation of nature.

Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is sometimes called *Purna Yoga*, which translates to the Yoga of the Full or Complete Experience. Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is considered a comprehensive approach to spiritual practice, and the term '*purna*' reflects its inclusive nature. The goal of this yoga is to integrate and harmonise all aspects of life—mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual—into a single, transformative process that leads to spiritual evolution. In other words, Yoga is a process, and the object of yoga is to enter into the Divine presence and Consciousness in order to love the Divine for the sake of the Divine alone. Thus, in the sense that yoga as a process is tuned in our nature, and in turn entered into the Nature of the Divine. As a result, our life becomes an instrument of the Divine. Of course, the objective of yoga is not for attainment of Moksha, but liberation comes by it. Sri Aurobindo claims that attainment of Moksha is not the main objective of yoga; rather, the Divine alone is the main concern of yoga. This is how yoga and divinity are entwined with each other.

The integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo transforms *a man into a superman*. This indicates that Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga aims to elevate humanity spiritually to a higher condition of being rather than transforming someone into a superhero in the traditional sense. People who are divinely conscious, intellectually and spiritually developed, and able to change the world around them, in a way that is enlightened and harmonious, would result from this evolution. Therefore, it is a process of spiritual and divine transformation. A man can gain divine consciousness through yoga. Thus, the objective of yoga is to inculcate divine consciousness just

by merging into the separate selfish human individual ego and also to bring down the supra-mental consciousness on earth to transform mind, life, and body. According to Sri Aurobindo, “The only creation for which there is any place here in the supra-mental, the bringing of the divine Truth on the earth, not only into the mind and vital but into the body and into Matter.”³ This does not, however, make sense to say that the very objective of yoga of Sri Aurobindo is to get rid of all limitations on the expansion of the ego, or the desires of the ego-centric life-force, rather to do what the Divine wills and to create the world in which the Divine Will manifest its truth. The work that the yogi or *sadhak* of the supra-mental yoga has to do is not his own work, but the work of the Divine which he intends to do according to the conditions laid down by the Divine. Thus, in a sense, it can be argued after Sri Aurobindo that our yoga is not for our own sake but for *the sake of the Divine*. The objective of yoga is not for personal manifestation, or for the manifestation of the individual ego freed from all bounds and all bonds, but rather it is simply for the manifestation of the Divine. It is only for the manifestation of the Divine that the manifestation of our own spiritual liberation, perfection, and fullness is made possible. All these are not to be pursued for our own sake, but for the sake of the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo claims that his understanding of integral yoga makes room for a complete dedication to the spiritual life. This will elevate personal interests and attachments, all egoistic clinging to family, friends, and country. There is no personal choice or preference in spiritual life. The practice of yoga will always rise to the higher consciousness and help the yogi to live out of the higher consciousness. Thus, a change of life and a change of consciousness are prerequisites for yoga, and for that, self-training in the earlier stages of the sadhana is needed. In this regard, Sri Aurobindo makes the distinction between *ordinary life and spiritual life*. He then argues that it is not necessary to abandon ordinary life to lead a spiritual life. Sri Aurobindo says, “The best way to prepare oneself for the spiritual life... is to cultivate an entire equality and detachment and the *samata* of the Gita with the faith that the divine is there and the Divine Will at work in all

³ Ibid., p.11.

things even though at present under the conditions of a world of Ignorance.”⁴ To reveal the Light and Ananda beyond the world of ignorance is to grow in this *spiritual equality*. Thus, to gain the level of spiritual equality, i.e., the *samata* of the Gita, is the objective of yoga. Sri Aurobindo conceives two states of consciousness, namely, *normal consciousness and higher consciousness*. Normal consciousness is a sort of consciousness which is superficial and in which men live. On the contrary, a higher consciousness stands above the play of life, which is termed the Self, or the Spirit of the Divine. Normal consciousness is entirely governed by the common movements of the mind, and is naturally subject to the grief and joy, anxiety and desire. It is the mental stage where mental quiet and happiness though possible, but never permanent or secure. On the other hand, spiritual consciousness is all light, peace, power, and bliss. All these would become natural if one could live entirely in spiritual consciousness. Even one who can live partly, he even keeps himself constantly open to it, and he will receive enough spiritual light, peace, strength and happiness through all the shocks of life. Thus, opening the gate of spiritual consciousness will open the gate of one’s enjoyment depending on what one seeks from it. That means if it is peace, one gets peace, if it is strength or power, he gets a spiritual strength for the inner life to govern the outer work and action; if it is happiness, he enters into beatitude for greater than any joy. Here, Sri Aurobindo intends to say that there are many ways of opening or of entering the Divine Consciousness, and one needs to adopt a constant practice to go inward into oneself, to open the aspiration to the Divine. It thus ensures a constant contact or union with the Divine Consciousness. It is required for attaining peace, power, light, and felicity. Sri Aurobindo remarks, “If one can once open and feel the Divine Force, the Power of the Spirit working in the mind and heart and body, the rest is a matter of remaining faithful to it...”⁵

The Objective of Divine Life:

According to Sri Aurobindo, the objective of divine life is to manifest the Divine in the world that follows from spiritual transformation. He also intends to bring down the divine nature into the mental, vital, and physical aspects of

⁴ Ibid., p.13.

⁵ Ibid., p.14.

existence, ultimately leading to a divine existence. According to him, there are two possible inner ideals of every human life, namely, the highest ideal of ordinary human life and the divine ideal of yoga. The ideal of human life is to establish over the whole being the control of a clear, strong, and rational mind, and a right and rational will, to create a harmony of the whole, and also to develop the capacities good for life. However, the objective of the divine life differs from it. The objective of the divine life is to realise one's highest self or to realize God and to put the whole being into harmony with the Truth of the highest self. It is a reflection of Divine capacity that develops as a sacrifice to the highest or as a true instrument of the divine Shakti. Our journey of life begins from ordinary life; it then transforms into religious life, and eventually rests in spiritual life. Thus, to attain spiritual life, one has to attain religious life beforehand. All are different levels of the same life. The only notable issue is that as ordinary life belongs to the lower consciousness, it is full of ignorance. The religious life is a movement of the same ignorant human consciousness that moves away from the earth towards the Divine. Of course, the religious life may be treated as the first approach to the spiritual. According to Sri Aurobindo, spiritual life moves directly by a change of ordinary consciousness, via religious consciousness to a greater consciousness where one finds one's true being, and in turn gets living contact and union with the Divine. Aurobindo further contends that spiritual life goes beyond the mind, and in a process enters into the deeper consciousness of the Spirit, and according to it acts out of the Truth and Spirit.

Spirituality and Morality:

Sri Aurobindo argues that one should not be confuse morality with spirituality. Morality is a part of ordinary life, but spirituality is not. Spirituality goes beyond the mind, and it enters into the deeper consciousness. This is unlikely in the case of morality as unlike spirituality, morality attempts to govern the outward conduct by certain mental rules. Thus, according to Aurobindo, morality is a question of man's mind and vital. It belongs to a lower plane of consciousness. A spiritual life is detached from moral life, and it cannot be founded on moral account. Does it lead us to assume that a spiritual man must be immoral? Certainly, it is not the case. What we can claim here is that the law of action of the spiritual

consciousness is higher than moral consciousness, so one cannot dichotomise the other. Spiritual consciousness is founded in the union with the Divine; it is living in the Divine Consciousness, and its action is founded on reverence for the Divine Will.

Divine Life and Its Relevance to Modern Life:

It is observed that the object of yoga of Sri Aurobindo is to transform life by bringing down into it the Light, Power, and Bliss of the divine Truth and its dynamic certitudes. Thus, in one sense, it may be claimed that this yoga is not the Yoga of world-shunning asceticism, but of divine life. If it were the case, then how does the yoga of Sri Aurobindo seem relevant to modern life? To address this question, a specific answer may be given in the light of Sri Aurobindo. It can be argued by saying that the ascetic idea, which is pertinent for many, has its place in the spiritual order. Sri Aurobindo categorically stated that no man can be spiritually complete if he cannot live ascetically. Indeed, Sri Aurobindo did not regard the ascetic way of living as indispensable to spiritual perfection. In fact, he acknowledges a way of spiritual self-mastery and the way of spiritual self-giving and surrender to the divine by way of abandoning ego and desire in the midst of action. Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that his life and his yoga have always been both this-worldly and other-worldly without any snobbery on either side. All human interest is this-worldly, and most of them are deeply associated with the mental field. Even though Sri Aurobindo began to have spiritual experiences, all these belonging to this world were not divorced from this world, but carried an inner and infinite bearing on it.

Sri Aurobindo acknowledges two ends of existence, such as the *supra-mental plane* and the *material plane*, and in between them everything lies. For him, all is Brahman, and he finds the Divine everywhere. Everyone has the right to throw away this-worldliness and choose otherworldliness, and if he finds peace by that choice, he is greatly blessed. Sri Aurobindo says, "In my yoga also I found myself moved to include both worlds in my purview – the spiritual and the material – and

to try to establish the Divine Consciousness and the Divine Power in men's hearts and earthly life, not for the personal salvation only but for a life divine here."⁶

This clearly reflects that Sri Aurobindo's vision and mission of yoga, divine life, is extremely relevant to modern life as well. While talking about yoga and divinity, Sri Aurobindo did not suggest anything super-natural completely detached from this-worldly life. It has always been his view and experience of the reality and nature of the world and things and the divine. His concept of integral yoga and integral truth would be the by-product of physical, mental, and divine; otherwise, neither of these can be termed as integral. Aurobindo further remarked, "My yoga can include indeed a full experience of the other worlds, the plane of the Supreme Spirit and the other planes in between and their possible effects upon our life and the material world; but it will be quite possible to insist only on the realisation of the Supreme Being or Ishwara even in one aspect, Shiva, Krishna as Lord of the world and Master of ourselves and our works or else the Universal *Sachehidananda*...."⁷

Divine and the Need for Divine:

What then is Divine? Why is divine needed? What is the relevance of the Divine? According to Sri Aurobindo, the divine is more than a man or woman. A divine is an elasticity of land or a creed, opinion, discovery, or principle. A Divine is the Person beyond all persons, the Home and Country of all souls, the Truth of which truths are only imperfect figures. A Divine is not something to be explained by mental reasoning or vital motive. A Divine is a motive of the soul, not of vital desire; a Divine is a reason not of the mind, but of the self and spirit. It is the soul's inherent aspiration, not a vital longing. It comes up and reveals itself as a sheer self-giving. Sri Aurobindo says, Divine is just like "When I seek you for you.... It is not this, nor that, but Krishna."⁸ A Divine call is just like a Categorical Imperative Call, an unconditional call coming or drawing from within. The self in us is drawn to the Divine because of the imperative call of the greater Self. Here, the Soul is ineffably drawn towards the object of its adoration because it cannot be otherwise. It is it and

⁶ Ibid., p.17.

⁷ Ibid., p.18

⁸ Ibid., p.21.

He is He. That is all about Divine. Divine is thus totally mystical in nature where we speak of seeking the Divine for himself and not for anything else. Sri Aurobindo argues that the Divine as a mystical is one of the most dominant facts of spiritual experience. It is the will of self-giving, so ask for that by all means. The absolute inner call is a prerequisite, and in Sri Aurobindo's language, "it is the categorical spiritual imperative"⁹, the absolute need of the soul for the Divine.

What then is the need for the Divine? What are the motives for seeking the Divine? Divinity is the hallmark of a *sadhak*, as the *sadhak* can ask for the Divine Force to aid him in keeping his health as part of his sadhana so that his body may be able and fit for the spiritual life and become *a capable instrument for the Divine work*. Divinity is the source of Ananda. The Divine, according to Sri Aurobindo, is *Anandamaya*, and one can seek him for the *Ananda* he gives. One can get *Ananda* for any of them, such as for peace, for liberation, for knowledge, for power, for anything else of which one may feel the impulse. Accordingly, Sri Aurobindo remarks, "Let me have Power from the Divine and do His work or His Will and I am satisfied, even if the use of Power entails suffering also."¹⁰ Without Divinity, there would be no peace, and we need Divinity for liberation, for *Nirvana*. Sri Aurobindo argues that one may speak of self-fulfilment, the Supreme, not as a Divine but as one's highest Self. One may seek fulfilment of one's being in that highest self, but without the attachment of Divinity one need not or perhaps cannot envisage it as a self of bliss, ecstasy, *Ananda*. Instead, one may envisage it as a self of freedom, vastness, knowledge, tranquillity, strength, calm, and perfection. Divinity is a sort of union that has been set only for the sake of *Ananda*, and nothing else. Reason does not play any role in seeking Divinity, it throws all your reasoning out of gear.

Concluding Remarks:

The main contention of the paper is to show the relevance of Integral Yoga, Divinity, and Truth of Sri Aurobindo in our mundane life. Sri Aurobindo's concept of Integral Yoga and Divinity is a profound and expansive spiritual philosophy that

⁹ Ibid., p.22

¹⁰ Ibid., p.19.

seeks to integrate all aspects of human life—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual—into a harmonious and divine existence. It goes beyond the traditional paths of yoga (like Bhakti, Karma, Jnana, and Raja Yoga) by striving for a transformation of the entire being, not just the individual soul.

During my discussion, it reflects that Sri Aurobindo's concept of Divine Life is not something absolute, detached from human life. Aurobindo quotes Rig Veda, *I use the truth to purify heaven and earth....* This clearly reflects that his understanding of Truth is extracted from the purification of both earth and heaven. Again, from the Rig Veda, Aurobindo quotes, "His ecstasy... sets into motion the two births, the human self-expression and the divine, and moves between them."¹¹ Again, it reflects that the life Divine is not a one-way forward-looking journey; it is a process of transformation and re-transformation of earth and heaven and human self and divine self. Aurobindo did not deny the significance of our existence; rather, in his Life Divine, he remarked, "The significance of our existence here determines our destiny: that destiny is something that already exists in us as a necessity and a potentiality..."¹² The book *The Life Divine* itself carries the message of divinity in life, *human as well as mundane*. What is manifested is secretly located in us. The consciousness of the Reality, the Being, the Spirit that is secret in us and slowly manifests. Life is nothing but the reflective power of Being in Matter. Sri Aurobindo argues that matter is the ultimate aim of the evolving Being in its birth; life is the exterior and dynamic sign and index of that revelation and effectuation. Life evolves through the growth of consciousness, and accordingly, a greater consciousness means a greater life. The mental being possessed by a man is imperfect, as there would still be something yet to be realized. Thus, for Sri Aurobindo, what is involved and emergent is not a mind, but a Spirit. Thus, life has to be manifested by the Spirit, a manifestation of a spiritual being.

The other aspect is that, according to Aurobindo, everything is divine. Divinity is a sort of growth. In his *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that, in principle, *all spiritual life is an evolution toward divine existence*. So, it is hard to identify where the mental ceases and the divine life begins. Indeed, the

¹¹ Rig Veda, IX.86.42.

¹² Aurobindo, Sri., *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry, 1996, p.1016.

spiritual urge does not detach from the world altogether. Can there be a spiritual life within? Sri Aurobindo answers affirmatively. He says that there can be a spiritual life within; it is a kingdom of heaven. There lies integration between inner and outer life, as the inner life has a supreme spiritual importance, whereas the outer life has value only. Gita says, *he lives and moves in Me*. he dwells in the Divine and realises the spiritual existence. Sri Aurobindo attributes it to the gnostic change. A gnostic was of dynamic being that must fulfill divine life on earth. A divine life must be first and foremost an inner life. The Divinity in man dwells veiled in his spiritual centre; and more importantly, there can be no such thing as self-exceeding if there is not in him the reality of an external Self and Spirit.

Does it then lead us to say that one's inward looking is an imprisonment in personal self? The answer is no. We think it is the first step towards a true universality as it brings to us the truth of the internal as well as the external existence. According to Aurobindo, inner living extends itself and embraces the universal life as a dynamic force. Spiritual consciousness as the mark of divinity develops an inner sense and reality of oneness, i.e., a spiritual individual acts out of that sense of oneness which gives him direct perception of the demand of self on other self, the need of the life, the good, the work of love and sympathy that can truly be done. A realisation of spiritual unity, a dynamization of the ultimate consciousness of one-being of one-self in all beings, can alone be founded and governed by its truth, the action of the divine life. *The Life Divine* of Sri Aurobindo generates the will of the Divine Reality in him and also in others. Accordingly, the gnostic being finds himself not only his own fulfilment but the fulfilment of others. This draws the sense of Universal Individuality, where an individual sees a divine working everywhere, where the individual ego vanishes.

Integral Yoga and the Future of Humanity:

Sri Aurobindo's vision of Integral Yoga is also one of collective evolution. He believed that humanity is on the verge of a profound spiritual shift, a leap in consciousness that will take us from a purely mental, ego-driven existence to a divine, higher state of being. This is the essence of what he called *the Supramental manifestation*. The goal of this transformation is not only individual enlightenment

but a collective awakening where society, culture, politics, and the environment are all reshaped in the light of this higher consciousness. For Aurobindo, this was the ultimate aim of life and the key to lasting peace and progress in the world.

Therefore, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is a comprehensive and transformative path that seeks to align every aspect of human life with the Divine. His vision of Divinity is one of immanence, where the Divine is not just a distant or abstract entity but a living presence within every part of creation. The purpose of life, according to Aurobindo, is to become conscious of this Divine presence and allow it to manifest through one's entire being, transforming both the individual and the world at large.

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