

## SRI AUROBINDO'S INTEGRAL YOGA: THE PATH OF CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION AND DIVINE REALIZATION

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### Abstract:

Sri Aurobindo, through his various writings, has elaborated on the fundamental principles of Integral Yoga. He consistently emphasized that Integral Yoga is not a novel creation but rather an essential part of India's ancient spiritual tradition. He regarded yoga as a means of achieving self-realization and spiritual fulfilment.

In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo systematically explained how Integral Yoga brings together the crucial elements of different traditional yogic paths—Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, and certain aspects of Tantra. He believed that each of these disciplines holds a crucial role in the spiritual development of the seeker and that a comprehensive spiritual practice must integrate their diverse aspects.

Beyond outlining the philosophy and methodology of Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo also spoke extensively about the inner qualities required in a spiritual aspirant. He highlighted the need for sincerity, perseverance, modesty, and devotion in order to embark upon and sustain the yogic journey.

This paper aims to present a detailed study of the various aspects of Integral Yoga as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo, shedding light on its philosophical foundation and practical application.

**Key Words: Integral Yoga, Supermind, Overmind, Divine Grace, Gnostic Being**

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### **Introduction:**

Sri Aurobindo wrote extensively on Yoga, producing several remarkable works, including Letters on Yoga, Lights on Yoga, The Synthesis of Yoga, Bases of Yoga, and The Riddle of This World. A careful reading of his writings makes it evident that his idea of Integral Yoga is not a completely new concept. Sri Aurobindo himself acknowledged that this system of Yoga is deeply rooted in India's ancient spiritual traditions. Borrowing from the ancient wisdom and practices of traditional yogic systems, he developed the framework of Integral Yoga.

In Letters on Yoga, Sri Aurobindo explicitly stated: *'I have never said that my Yoga was something brand new in all its elements. I have called it Integral Yoga, and that means it takes up the*

*essence and many processes of the old Yogas – its newness is in its aim, standpoint and the totality of its method.'*<sup>1</sup> But we see while it is based on age-old yogic disciplines, Aurobindo's Integral Yoga introduces a fresh perspective in terms of its purpose, approach, and comprehensive method. Sri Aurobindo preferred the term Integral Yoga because it embodies the essence of various ancient yogic traditions, blending them into a unified system.

In his famous work, Lights on Yoga, however, he offered another explanation for why his path should be called Integral Yoga. He emphasized that the word 'integral' signifies completeness—either the completeness of the soul or the perfection of the divine. Human beings often perceive themselves as incomplete, but in reality, their true

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<sup>1</sup> Aurobindo Sri, Letters on Yoga II, The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol 29, Sri

Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry, 2013, p. 399.

goal is to attain wholeness or perfection. According to Sri Aurobindo, Yoga serves as the path through which an individual can achieve this completeness.

He elaborated on this idea, stating, 'This Yoga implies not only the realization of God, but an entire consecration and change of the inner and outer life till it fit to manifest a divine consciousness and become a part of divine work.'<sup>2</sup> Thus, for Sri Aurobindo, Integral Yoga is not just about spiritual realization; it is about transforming both inner consciousness and external life so that they align with the divine. In this vast universe, the ultimate purpose of Integral Yoga is to enable the seeker to experience divine consciousness and become a part of the greater cosmic order. Through disciplined practice and inner growth, an individual can ascend to higher states

of awareness and ultimately attain direct realization of the Absolute.

In his renowned work *The Riddle of This World*, Sri Aurobindo elaborated on the concept of Integral Yoga, stating, 'Our Yoga is a double movement of ascent and descent; one rises to higher and higher levels of consciousness, but at the same time one brings down their power not only into mind and life, but in the end even into body. And highest of these levels, the one at which it aims is the Supermind.'<sup>3</sup> From this, it is evident that Integral Yoga is not a one-sided journey but a twofold process involving both rising to higher states of consciousness and bringing that higher force down into one's entire being—mind, life, and body. Sri Aurobindo strongly emphasized that Yoga enables an individual to reach the super-conscious state, which is the ultimate goal of Integral Yoga.

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<sup>2</sup> Aurobindo, Sri, *Lights on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry, 1981, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Aurobindo, Sri, *The Riddle of the World*, Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1946, p. 2.

However, he also highlighted that the true purpose of this practice lies in utilizing the power drawn from that higher state to transform one's spiritual nature.

Sri Aurobindo's vision of Integral Yoga, as both an ascending and descending process, sets it apart from traditional yogic paths. Classical yogic traditions primarily focused on the ascent—helping the practitioner attain nirvana or mukti, where one rises to exalted states of consciousness and detaches from worldly existence. However, Sri Aurobindo proposed a more comprehensive approach, explaining that while ascent is necessary, it is only the first step. He remarked, "Here the ascent is the first step, but it is a means for the descent." This means that reaching higher states of consciousness is not the ultimate goal; rather, one must bring down the divine force into all aspects of life,

transforming not only the individual but also the world.

Another defining feature of Integral Yoga is that it is not solely focused on individual liberation; it also contributes to the collective evolution of consciousness. When an individual reaches the super-conscious state, they participate in fulfilling the divine plan, thereby elevating the consciousness of the world itself. From this perspective also, Integral Yoga distinguishes itself from traditional yogic practices. Sri Aurobindo further explained, 'Because a method has been preconized for achieving this purpose which is as total and integral as the aim set before it, viz., the total and integral change of the consciousness and nature, taking up old methods but only as part action and present aid to others that are distinctive. I have not found this method (as a whole) or

anything like it professed or realized in the old Yogas.’<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo repeatedly asserted that Integral Yoga brings about a complete transformation of human nature and consciousness. While ancient yogic traditions were undoubtedly valuable, they primarily focused on elevating the individual to the Over mind state but did not provide a path to the super-conscious state where one could experience continuous spiritual realization. He observed that traditional yogic paths often struggled to create a balance between spiritual attainment and day-to-day life. Many of these traditions prioritized spiritual truth alone, neglecting the reality of human emotions and worldly existence. Thus, while Sri Aurobindo acknowledged the significance of ancient yogic systems, he believed they were not entirely sufficient for

attaining divine life. Instead, he advocated for their integration and expansion to include new elements that would enable both personal and collective transformation.

In The Synthesis of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo sought to unify the diverse paths of ancient yogic traditions, which is why this approach is named Integral Yoga. According to him, the synthesis of Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Tantric Yoga is essential in the practice of Integral Yoga. However, by synthesis, he did not mean merely combining or accumulating all these yogic paths, nor did he suggest that a seeker must practice them simultaneously or in a fixed sequential order. Instead, his idea of synthesis involved setting aside the external forms and rituals of each system and embracing their core,

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<sup>4</sup> Aurobindo Sri, Letters on Yoga II, Op. cit. p. 401.

universal principles. He emphasized that at the heart of all yogic traditions lies a common fundamental truth, and by adhering to this central essence, one can connect with and incorporate aspects of all yogic paths.

In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo clarified this idea, stating: 'The synthesis we propose cannot, then, be arrived at either by combination in mass or by successive practice. It must, therefore, be effected by neglecting the forms and outsides of the yogic disciplines and seizing rather on some central principle common to all, which will include and utilize in the right place and proportion in their particular principles.'<sup>5</sup> This means that if the essential principles of each yogic path are applied in the right measure and at the appropriate stage, success in Integral Yoga is assured.

For instance, a practitioner of Integral Yoga benefits from Hatha Yoga, as it leads to bodily purification. However, unlike some forms of Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga, which may disregard the body, Sri Aurobindo did not advocate such an approach. Similarly, while Raja Yoga traditionally emphasizes the suppression of *Cittavṛtti* (mental modifications), Sri Aurobindo did not adopt this method in its entirety. Instead, he acknowledged the practice of awakening kundalini to invoke the divine, incorporating this principle into Integral Yoga. Furthermore, he synthesized the core aspects of Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Karma Yoga, ensuring that their fundamental truths became integral to his system. Even the concept of self-surrender, a key tenet of Tantric Yoga, found a place in Integral Yoga.

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<sup>5</sup> Aurobindo, Sri, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry, 1999, p. 42.

Professor Sunil Roy pointed out that Integral Yoga reflects certain aspects of Tantric sadhana. In both systems, invoking divine power (*śakti*) plays a crucial role. For an Integral Yogi, existence and shakti are inseparable—existence becomes dynamic through shakti, and conversely, shakti manifests existence in an infinite manner. This highlights the depth of integration within Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Pashupati Bhattacharya, in his well-known book *Divyajibaner Sandhane* (Search for a Divine Life), described Integral Yoga as a holistic system that includes physical discipline from Hatha Yoga, self-mastery from Raja Yoga, philosophical insight from Jnana Yoga, surrender from Bhakti Yoga, selfless service from Karma Yoga, and shakti-sadhana from

Tantra. He emphasized that none of these aspects can be ignored, as each plays a vital role in the yogic journey.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is a remarkable synthesis of ancient yogic traditions, preserving their essential truths while transcending their limitations. Rather than following rigid structures, he developed a dynamic and inclusive approach, ensuring that the deepest principles of traditional Yoga are harmoniously integrated into a unified path of spiritual evolution.

### **The Method of integral Yoga:**

Sri Aurobindo believed that for the practice of Integral Yoga, the entire being of the Sadhak (spiritual seeker) must undergo a complete transformation. The seeker's consciousness should be directed

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<sup>6</sup> Roy, Sunil, *Sri Aurobinder Darshan Manthane*, The University of Burdwan Press, 2007, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Bhattacharya, Pashupati, *Divya Jeebaner Sandhane*, Sri Aurobindo Pathamandira, Kolkata, 2008, p. 124.

toward the Divine or the Ultimate in such a way that it leads to true fulfilment. The inner conscious force that lies dormant within the seeker will itself bring about this transformation. Over time, the divine supramental force will gradually descend upon the Sadhak's consciousness. Therefore, Integral Yoga does not emphasize external rituals (kriya) or rigid practices. Instead, through the independent expansion of his latent conscious force, the Sadhak can manifest the Divine in his lived reality.

In Integral Yoga, the Sadhak utilizes his life energy, which is a fusion of his inherent divine power and the supramental force, while also receiving the support of divine grace. Sri Aurobindo described the path of Integral Yoga as being governed by two fundamental forces:

1. The conscious force that is naturally present within the individual, along with an aspiration for the realization of divine life.

2. The divine grace or supramental force, which responds to this relentless aspiration.

Sri Aurobindo further explained that, at an individual level, the seeker's effort in Integral Yoga can be categorized into three key aspects. The first among these is aspiration. This aspiration does not imply any attachment to worldly pleasures; rather, it is an intense longing to reach or realize the Divine. Nalinikanta Gupta, while interpreting Sri Aurobindo's teachings, stated that aspiration must be sudden, continuous, and firm.<sup>8</sup> It should involve a focused yearning of the mind, an emotional openness of the heart, a deep willingness of the soul,

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<sup>8</sup> Gupta, Nalini Kanta, *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, 1972, p. 232.

and a broad, unbiased vision of the world. Therefore, a Sadhak on the path of Integral Yoga must sustain an unceasing desire for the Divine; otherwise, failure is inevitable. Sri Aurobindo emphasized that once the fire of spiritual aspiration is ignited within a person, he must cultivate a state of inner stillness and peace. He should turn his mind away from worldly distractions and focus inward toward the deeper reality.

The second effort required in Integral Yoga is rejection. By this, Sri Aurobindo referred to the elimination of negative, tamasic tendencies from the body, mind, and emotions. The physical body is often influenced by inertia, laziness, doubt, narrow-mindedness, and ignorance. The emotional being is clouded by desires, greed, selfishness, jealousy, hatred, and pride. According to Sri Aurobindo, all these negative traits act as obstacles on the path of spiritual realization. He further

explained that removing these disturbances from the mind is one of the most challenging tasks. The key to overcoming these limitations is to dissolve the sense of ego—the attachment to the I. He suggested that one way to transcend this ego-consciousness is to surrender completely to the Divine Mother, keeping the thought central to one's life: "The Mother loves me, and I belong to the Mother."

According to Sri Aurobindo, the third and final effort required for Integral Yoga is complete surrender. This surrender means offering oneself entirely to the Divine, dedicating everything—body, mind, heart, soul, desires, energies, and aspirations—to the realization of the Divine Truth. To achieve this, one must become entirely God-oriented, allowing the Divine to take full control of one's being. There should be no hesitation, no deception, and no gaps in this surrender. A Sadhak must

firmly establish in his mind the thought: “I belong to the Divine Mother; all that I have is Hers.” Only when surrender is absolute can the false sense of ego be completely dissolved, and the individual self can merge into the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo also spoke about the qualities that are essential for spiritual progress in Integral Yoga. One of the most important among them is faith. He described faith as the ability to hold something as true, even in the absence of direct proof. In the context of Integral Yoga, this means having unwavering trust in the Divine’s existence, Divine Grace, the correctness of the spiritual path, and the guidance of the Guru. According to Sri Aurobindo, if a Sadhak has this deep faith, his spiritual journey will inevitably reach its destination.

Along with faith, Sri Aurobindo emphasized the importance of calmness, silence,

peace, and equality in Integral Yoga. A calm and undisturbed mind is essential for deep spiritual realization. He explained that true calmness does not mean the absence of thoughts but rather a state of inner awareness where thoughts may come and go, yet the seeker remains unaffected by them. A restless or unstable mind can never serve as the foundation for Integral Yoga. To progress on this path, the mind must be steady and silent. True silence means keeping the mind thought-free—only when the mind is completely still does a deep tranquillity descend upon it.

A crucial foundation of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga is the ability to establish peace in all situations and conditions. When the mind is silent and motionless, an inner happiness begins to emerge. As this happiness deepens, a profound sense of pleasantness spreads through the body, mind, and soul—

this is what Sri Aurobindo called peace or tranquillity. He explained that the first step in experiencing this peace is to feel a subtle presence of peace around and above one's head. A seeker must establish a connection with this peace, allow it to descend, and let it permeate his entire being. He stated that living in the presence of the Divine means living in a state of peace, for peace is the very sign of the Divine's presence. Once this peace is attained, everything else follows naturally.

Another key aspect of Integral Yoga is equality. By this, Sri Aurobindo meant that a Sadhak should remain unaffected by both joy and sorrow. He should engage in all actions but without personal attachment or egoistic involvement. He should see everything as an expression of the Divine. In addition, Sri Aurobindo emphasized the importance of steadiness and meditation in Integral Yoga.

Steadiness means focusing one's consciousness on a single point without distraction. He instructed that in this Yoga, one must focus the consciousness in the heart, meditate on the Divine Mother, pray for Her presence, invoke Her energies, and sincerely ask Her to transform all thoughts and actions. Through this process, the Divine Grace will descend, bringing about the ultimate transformation of one's being.

In the same way, meditation holds a significant place in Integral Yoga. If Yoga is to be internalized within an individual's being, then meditation is essential. Sri Aurobindo emphasized that each individual has a unique path of meditation. However, if someone wishes to make meditation an active process, then it must be accompanied by a deep and persistent aspiration. Through meditation, the Sadhak must also strive to accomplish this aspiration. He further explained that

as meditation deepens, there arises a natural pressure on the consciousness to delve even further inward. Consequently, external awareness fades away, giving rise to a deeper inner awareness. It is through this inner awareness that divine experiences gradually manifest.

Sri Aurobindo believed that, like all other Yogic paths, the spiritual journey of Integral Yoga is filled with obstacles. This path is not only difficult but also fraught with the possibility of losing one's way. That is why the presence of a Guru is essential in Yoga. A Guru alone can understand a disciple's thoughts and guide him with the necessary Yogic wisdom. Only by following the path shown by the Guru can a Sadhak fulfil his spiritual longing. For this reason, Sri Aurobindo clearly stated: "The Guru is the Guide in the Yoga."

### **The Goal of Integral Yoga:**

From the discussion so far, it is evident that the goal of Integral Yoga is to transform the individual into a super-conscious state. In his work *Letters on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo explicitly mentioned the purpose of Integral Yoga, stating: "The supermind is the vast Truth-consciousness of which the ancient seers spoke; there have been glimpses of it till now, sometimes an indirect influence or pressure, but it has not been brought down into the consciousness of the earth and fixed there. To so bring down is the aim of our Yoga."<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that by "our Yoga," he was referring to Integral Yoga.

Indian spiritual masters have spoken of the Supermind or super-conscious state, but it has not yet been established as a distinct, realized consciousness in this world. The primary objective of Integral

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<sup>9</sup> Aurobindo Sri, *Letters on Yoga II*, op. cit. p. 376.

Yoga is to bring down and establish this super-conscious state within worldly existence.

Regarding the aim of Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo further clarified in Letters on Yoga: "...the object of our Yoga is to establish direct contact with the divine Consciousness from above into all the centres." He also stated: 'This Yoga aims at the conscious union with the Divine in the Supermind and the transformation of nature.'<sup>10</sup> These statements make it abundantly clear that the purpose of Integral Yoga is to directly unite the individual with Divine Consciousness, and this union is made possible through the super-conscious state.

When an individual attains this super-conscious state, a profound spiritual transformation takes place within him. This transformation is not limited to a partial or temporary change but leads to a complete and

radical shift in his entire being. His thoughts, emotions, and actions undergo a deep purification, and gradually, his entire personality is uplifted to a divine level. Therefore, the transformation of an individual's personality and the expansion of his spiritual consciousness is another fundamental goal of Integral Yoga.

From the above discussion, it is evident that Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga has three fundamental objectives. First, the ascent to and fulfilment of the Supermind or the superconscious state. This is why Integral Yoga is often referred to as the Yoga of Super-consciousness. Second, to bridge the gap between human consciousness and divine consciousness. And third, to bring about a spiritual transformation within the human personality. However, Sri Aurobindo repeatedly emphasized that an individual can best attain the state of the Supermind

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 412.

through Integral Yoga. Yet, reaching this highest state is not solely dependent on human effort. It is absolutely necessary for the superconscious power or divine grace to descend from the Absolute. Without this divine blessing, no Sadhak can remain in the state of Supermind by his own endeavour alone.

#### Conclusion

Although the practice of Yoga has a long and revered history in the Indian subcontinent, Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of Yoga holds a unique and significant place. He named his system Integral Yoga, as it synthesizes the core principles of all existing Yogic traditions in India. Integral Yoga is not a new or discrete form of Yoga but rather a comprehensive system that unites the essential elements of Karma Yoga, Raja Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Tantra Yoga, and others. According to Sri Aurobindo,

all these paths are necessary for a Sadhak's spiritual transformation. Through Integral Yoga, a practitioner integrates the essence of traditional Yogic practices and ascends towards the Superconscious state.

Integral Yoga enables the manifestation of Divine Consciousness within the human body. When a person earnestly practices Integral Yoga, he can naturally elevate his consciousness towards the Supermind. However, Sri Aurobindo made it clear that access to the Supermind is not possible without divine grace. Through Integral Yoga, a Sadhak may, with his own effort, reach the Overmind, but the transition from Overmind to Supermind requires the descent of the Cosmic Force or Divine Blessing.

Therefore, while Integral Yoga is often perceived as a path leading directly to the Super-consciousness or Supermind, in reality, it primarily



helps the seeker reach the Overmind. Nonetheless, this does not diminish its significance. Integral Yoga plays a crucial role in spiritual transformation, as the Overmind is the gateway to the Supermind. Through the disciplined practice of Integral Yoga and the grace of the Divine, the Superconscious state can be brought down into the human body. At this stage, the Sadhak is transformed into a gnostic being—a being in whom the realization of universal oneness remains ever-present. Such a being begins to live in and for the Divine, to work in and for the Divine in the collective, and to see the Divine in all beings.