



SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPT OF YOGA

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo was a great nationalist, poet, freedom fighter and journalist and mystic. He was worldly-wise, leading normal life, till the age of twenty-seven but his life had a turning point when he met Sri Vishnu Lele, a mystic on the bank of the river and initiated him in the practice of yoga. Then onwards he took his involvement in politics and yoga seriously. After 1910, soon after release from the prison, he went to Pondicherry where he established Ashrama with Mirrah Richards, a spiritual companion. There he made a sadhana by writing several books on culture, history, vedas, bhagavadgita education, yoga and poetry. He formed a new form of yoga named Integral yoga out of his experience of practicing the traditional methods of yoga and gave it as a solution to the problems of the humanity-its unity and peaceful living.

Key words: poet, mystic, politics, imprisonment, study of vedas and bhgavadgita, establishment of ashram, ide aof unity and peace of the humanity.

Sri Aurobindo was a great poet, philosophical prose writer, freedom fighter, mystic and journalist. He was one of the great personalities of modern India like, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, Veera Savarkar etc.

He was "born in Calcutta on 15th August, 1872"¹ in a rich family of feudal background in Hoogly district. His mother was Swarnalathadevi² and father, Krishnadhun Ghosh, a famous lawyer. After their short-period education in a school in Darjeeling, the ambitious father sent his three sons to Manchester, in England in care of Rev. W.H. Drewett for keeping in a Boarding School in 18769. Mr Drewett bored them with his teaching the principles of the Christianity. In 1884, the Drewetts migrated to Australia and Mr. Drewett kept the children in the care of his mother in London, admitting them in St Paul School, London. His father wanted Aurobindo to become a District Collector by passing ICS. Later he "studied in King's College, Cambridge"². As a young man, he studied English, French, Latin and thoroughly studied the great classics. He was moving between London and Paris, now and then. After completing his graduation, he appeared ICS and deliberately failed in horse-riding test so that he should avoid becoming an officer under the British rule. For fourteen years, Sri Aurobindo was in England.

After coming back to India in 1893, he went to Baroda for teaching assignment. In the years between 1893 and 1901 he served as a lecturer of English in some colleges in Calcutta and developed his involvement in revolutionary politics. His marriage was with mooted through the advertisement in the newspaper. He met Mrinalini, the daughter Bhupalchandra Bose, an officer in the British government. In 1901 by the help of his father's friend, he got married. By that year, she was fourteen and he, twenty-eight. As he was invited by Sri Sayajiroa, the Maharaja of Baroda for the teaching assignment in Baroda College whereto they went with Sarojini, his married sister and another relative and stayed on the campus. He taught French for for a time., and ultimately became the professor of English"³ He served there as the professor and principal. In the meantime, he met in 1905 one mystic named Vishnu Lele on the bank of the Narmada river who initiated him into the domain of yoga.

Thereby he began concentrating on the learning of yoga and its constant practice. This was a great turning point in his life.

In 1906, Mrinalinidevi, his wife, became unexpectedly sick and after months, they returned to Calcutta. His wife mostly stayed away from him with her family members. He, too, was busy with rigorous practice of yoga and politics. His involvement in the journalism and freedom movement increased as he began his weekly *Bande Mataram* and *Karmayogin*⁴. In 1908, as he was suspected of sedition he was arrested in Alipore bomb blast and was put in the prison by the British. He spent all his time in performing yoga and read some books as he was given. For, the imprisonment for one year or so. In the prison, he had the *darshan* of Lord Sri Krishna. Chittaranjan Das was his lawyer who argued on his behalf; he was freed as there were no evidences against him in 1909.

During this time, Mrinalini was living with her maternal uncle in Shillong. Sridhar, one of her friends took her to the Ashram of Paramahansa and Sharada Mata. By visiting them, gradually, she came under their spiritual influence and became their disciple. Sharada Mata consoled her troubled mind due to the 'separation' that was caused by 'the generation gap'. Mrinalini, was being unable, to cope with the dictum of Sri Aurobindo's concept of Indian wife. Through letters, they were in contact with each other. She had the possibility of meeting Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry but her health became worsened, being affected by the disease of Influenza and she passed away in 1918.

After the release from the prison, he left Calcutta in 1910 without informing his family members and not even his wife, Mrinalinidevi. He reached the shores of Pondicherry where his followers grew in a large number. In 1918 Mirrah Richards, a France-born woman came with her husband and children seeking him in Pondicherry from aboard and met him, stayed with him as his spiritual companion and established his Ashram in 1926.⁴ She became the ardent follower of Sri Aurobindo who called her 'The Mother'. After the demise of Sri Aurobindo on 5 December, 1950, she took over the charge of the Ashram for the next twenty-three years and died in 1973.

There, Sri Aurobindo had all his high philosophical and metaphysical ideas and vision of the humanity and its future. He foresaw about the freedom of our country in August, 1948. During this period, he wrote several books on history, education, culture, yoga philosophy-*The Life Divine*, *The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity and-War and Self-Determination*, - *The Renaissance in India*, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1955), *Letters on Yoga*, *Upanishads-I &II*, *The Secret of Veda*, *Essays on Gita*, *The Integral Yoga*, etc.

The Synthesis of Yoga (1955) was a compilation of several articles written earlier and revised thrice till 1950. He had touched upon many aspects of the traditional systems of yoga, like *Jnanayoga*, *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Raja Yoga* and *Hatayoga* and forms a synthesis of them in his concept of Integral Yoga. It is a collection of articles, written earlier and published in *Arya* between 1914 and 1921. In the very beginning he states- "All life is Yoga".⁵ The word Yoga is derived from the word the yuj. The word yuj means 'mingle and meet'. Yoga is the mingling of the body and mind. Bringing the wandering mind to the place where body is, is yoga. He also prescribes some suggestions to tread on the path of yoga for the beginner and how one should take up the path of yoga and go ahead and up to the higher levels of spiritual achievement. It is in four parts- Part I is about the yoga of divine works; II is on yoga of Integral knowledge; III is about the yoga of Divine Love and IV is on the yoga of self-Perfection. Of course, one feels that some of the ideas of repeated again; it is due to his revision of the articles already published. He wrote the incomplete chapter on 'time-consciousness' at last.

In his philosophical study of Human being, he clearly demarcates between the lower and the higher planes. He brings life, body, mind, heart and soul, intelligence and *buddhi* into discussion and classifies human knowledge into the Lower and Higher. The human soul is permanent but the body is perishable. Man, according

to Sri Aurobindo, lives the bestial life by his instincts, impulses, emotions, and desires. Throughout he struggles to fulfill them in his life time, forgetting the presence of God. His mind and soul is enveloped by the ignorance.(i.e., nescience). He should consciously elevate himself spiritually to the higher levels of *adhyathmic* achievement step by step and reaching the goal of going close to God. He divides the consciousness in several types, mind-consciousness, physical consciousness, soul consciousness, supra mental consciousness etc. One gets confused by his categorization of consciousness. He wrongly uses the heart -a biological part in human body and it has nothing to do with the spiritual development. In yoga *sadhana*, what matter there are- mind and soul. His emphasis is on "the spiritual development of man from animal hood to godhood though the phase of manhood. Man, the animal, should grow into a divine personality.

One becomes enlightened after reading all chapters about the Aurobindo's concept of Integral Yoga which combines all yoga systems. He also emphasizes on the attainment of divinity by the *sadhaka*. The *atma* should unite with the *Paramatma* at the end -that is the ultimate aim of yoga. He should become one with the Absolute, the *Parabramha*, the Ultimate Reality and the Transcendent⁸ etc. He never calls it with by any particular name like Krishna, Shiva or Brahma; he simply assures us of the existence of God within and without and the man's search for the God and his uniting with him with the mental and spiritual preparations at stages- purification of the mind and body, concentration of mind, identification with the God and liberation of *atma*. The *atma* should be freed from the clutches of the desires for the material world. The human soul caught in the body should be released from it to be united with the God.

What was most remarkable about Sri Aurobindo's life was his coming out of the influence of the western culture and plunging himself deeply into the depths of Hinduism and Hindu culture like Gandhi. Unlike Nehru, he identifies himself as a great Hindu, having studied all Vedas, *Bhagavad Gita* and Upanishads, etc. He thought seriously over the philosophical, religious, and spiritual history of our country. Also he comprehensively thought of the human problems of the contemporary world. Thus, in this great work *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo elaborately writes about the earlier traditional systems of yoga and emphasizes the importance and practice of his Integral Yoga for the self-perfection and brings out the benefits to the whole of the humanity.

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