

INTEGRAL YOGA
OF
SRI AUROBINDO AND
THE MOTHER
(A Brief Introduction)

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Sri Aurobindo: His Life and Work

(A Brief Outline)

Sri Aurobindo was born on the 15th August 1872 at Calcutta. At an early age of seven, he was taken along with his elder brothers to England for education, since his father wanted him to have no Indian influence in the shaping of his outlook and personality. And yet, even though Sri Aurobindo assimilated in himself richly the best of the European culture, he returned to India in 1893 with a burning aspiration to work for the liberation of India from foreign rule. While in England, Sri Aurobindo passed the I.C.S. Examination, and yet he felt no call for it; so he got himself disqualified by remaining absent from the riding test. The Gaekwar of Baroda happened to be there at that time, and Sri Aurobindo accepted the proposal to be his Personal Secretary, and returned to India.

Soon thereafter, however, Sri Aurobindo switched over to the Baroda College as

Professor of French and then of English, and when in 1906, he left for Bengal, he was the acting Principal of the College. It was during the Baroda period that Sri Aurobindo assimilated in himself the spirit and culture of India and prepared himself for his future political and spiritual work. Indeed, his political work had already begun in Baroda, but it was behind the scenes, largely of the nature of a preparation for an armed revolution for the liberation of India.

Sri Aurobindo was the first among the Indian leaders to declare and work for the aim of complete Independence of India. In 1905, Bengal was divided, and Sri Aurobindo left Baroda and, invited by the nationalistic leaders, he joined at Calcutta the newly started National College as its first Principal. It was here that Sri Aurobindo, while working secretly for the revolution, chalked out also a plan of outer action. This plan consisted of the programme of passive Resistance, Boycott and Swadeshi, which was later adopted as the policy of the struggle for freedom. It was here again that Sri Aurobindo wrote powerfully and boldly for *Bande Mataram*, and later for *Karma Yogin*; through his writings, he electrified the nation

and surcharged the people with a new energy which ultimately led the nation to her freedom. It was, therefore, significant that when India attained her liberation in 1947, it was on the 15th August, the birthday of Sri Aurobindo.

The pioneering work that Sri Aurobindo did for the liberation of India was evidently a part of his larger work for the entire humanity and for the whole earth. For him, the liberation of India was an indispensable part of the new world-order. Moreover, the practice of Yoga, which he had started in 1902, led him, even while in the thick of intense political and literary activity, to major realisations of the Brahmic Silence, Nirvana, and also of the universal dynamic Presence of the Divine. And, in 1908, when he was in Alipore jail during his trial under the charge of sedition, he received through numerous experiences and realisations the assurance of the liberation of the country and also the knowledge of the initial lines on which his own future work was to proceed. For he saw that even in the field of Yoga something was still lacking, something radical that alone would help resolve the problems of the world and would lead mankind to its next evolutionary stage. And so,

in 1910, soon after his acquittal from the jail, he withdrew to Pondicherry to concentrate upon this new research work, to hew a new path. It has been a most dynamic work with the entire earth as its central field. It was in the course of this work that Sri Aurobindo declared that the Supramental is the Truth and that its advent on the earth is inevitable. To bring down the supramental consciousness and power on the earth has been the central work of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo has explained the nature of this work, the nature of the Supermind, the necessity of its descent, the process of this descent and the dynamic consequences of this descent for the solutions of the problems of mankind, in his voluminous writings most of which were written serially in the philosophical monthly, *Arya*, which was started in 1914, immediately after the first arrival of The Mother from France to Pondicherry. Some of the most important of these and other writings are: *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *Essays on the Gita*, *On the Veda*, *The Upanishads*, *The Future Poetry*,

The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth, and the epic Savitri.

When Sri Aurobindo withdrew in 1926 into his room for concentrating in the required way on the 'Supramental Yoga', Mother organised and developed his Ashram. In 1943, a school for the education of children was founded, and after the passing of Sri Aurobindo in 1950, Mother developed that school into an International University Centre, where numerous original and bold experiments of education were carried out under her guidance. This educational work was a part of Supramental Yoga, and we have rare insights into education and yoga in the volumes entitled *Questions and Answers*, which contain conversations of the Mother that took place in her classes. In 1958, Mother withdrew to her room in order to come to terms with the research in the problems related to the supramental transformation of the physical consciousness at the cellular level. In 1968, Mother founded Auroville, an International city as a collective field for the material and spiritual researches required for realising human unity as a part of the supramental action on the earth.

Mother's exploration into the body-consciousness and her discovery of a 'cellular mind' capable of restructuring the nature of the body is contained in a document of more than 6000 pages, published in 13 volumes. This is *L'Agenda de Mère (Mother's Agenda)*, an account of her extraordinary exploration narrated by the Mother to Satprem¹ covering a period of more than twenty years, during which Mother slowly uncovered the 'Great Passage' to the next species by the supramental transformation of the physical consciousness and fulfilled the work that Sri Aurobindo had given to her.

¹ Satprem was born in Paris in 1923. After intense experiences in concentration camps and adventures in Guyana, Brazil and Africa, he came to India in 1953, became a Sanyasi and practised Tantrism. Then he left these paths to serve Mother and embarked upon the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. For 19 years, he lived near the Mother and became her confidant and her witness. He recorded innumerable personal conversations that form *Mother's Agenda*. He has written a biography of Sri Aurobindo under the title, *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*. He has also written a biography of the Mother in three volumes, under the titles: *Mother or the Divine Materialism*; *Mother or the New Species*; and, *Mother or the Mutation of Death*.

The Mother: Her Life and Work (A Brief Outline)

The Mother (Mirra Alfassa) was born in Paris on the 21st February, 1878. Her mother was Egyptian and her father was Turkish – both of them were perfect materialists. As a result, although she had inner experiences, including that of the divine presence, right from her childhood, she was in her external life an atheist until she entered into adulthood. In her early years, she had a good grounding in music (piano), painting and higher mathematics.

By the age of eighteen, she had begun to feel an intense need to KNOW, but all that she learnt and studied would explain nothing. Her need to know led here into two directions. The first was the world of painting. She mingled with the artists and widened her horizons. She married a pupil of Gustave Moreau, Henri Morisset, and she came to know Rodin and the great impressionists of that era. The second direction in which she turned was opened up

when she heard of Max Theon and his teachings.

At this stage, she had a series of visions, and in several of these visions she saw Sri Aurobindo just as he looked physically, but glorified. She was to meet Sri Aurobindo ten years later in 1914 when she came to India from France, and it was then that she came to identify Sri Aurobindo of the vision with Sri Aurobindo as she saw him then.

Around this time, she came into contact with Bhagavad Gita through an Indian who had come to Europe. He had told her, "Read it with THAT knowledge - with the knowledge that Lord Krishna represents the immanent God, the God within you." She not only studied the Gita, but within a month, she attained to the realization of the immanent Supreme.

Soon thereafter, she went to Tlemcen in Algeria to work with Max Theon and his wife Madame Theon. Theon was well versed in the Rigveda and he was the first to talk to the Mother of the idea that the earth is symbolic where universal action is concentrated allowing divine forces to incarnate and work concretely.

Madame Theon was an extraordinary occultist, having incredible faculties. She could leave one body and enter the consciousness of the next plane, fully experiencing the surroundings and all that was there, describe it... twelve times. The Mother learned to do the same thing and, with great dexterity. In one of her experiences, while entering into the last stage before the Formless, she experienced total Unity. And she found herself in the presence of the "Principle" of the human form. It did not resemble man as we are used to seeing him, but it was an upright form, standing just on the border between the world of forms and the Formless, like a kind of standard or archetype. Afterwards, when Mother met Sri Aurobindo and talked to him about it, he said, "It is surely the prototype of the supramental form."

Soon after her return from Tlemcen in Algeria, there was in 1908 divorce from Henri Morisset. From 1910 to 1920 – these ten years were a period of intensive mental study for the Mother. This mental development in all its comprehensiveness led her to the conclusion that while all ideas are true, a synthesis has to be made, and that there is something luminous and true beyond the synthesis. In her philosophic

studies, she was accompanied by Paul Richard who, in his visit to Pondicherry in 1910, had met Sri Aurobindo. In 1914, Mother accompanied Paul Richard to Pondicherry and met Sri Aurobindo on 29th March. In her very first meeting, both Sri Aurobindo and Mother, felt, at exactly the same moment, “now the Realisation will be accomplished.” In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo wrote on the Mother as follows:

“Mother was doing Yoga before she knew or met Sri Aurobindo, but their lines of Sadhana independently followed the same course. When they met, they helped each other in perfecting the sadhana. What is known as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother?”¹

After the outbreak of the World War I in August, 1914, the Mother had to return to France along with Paul Richard and then she spent four years in Japan; but she returned for good to Pondicherry in 1920 in order to work with Sri Aurobindo.

On 24th November 1926, Sri Aurobindo attained to a decisive stage and the Overmind was brought down into Matter, and an

overmental creation came into view. But the aim was to bring about the supramental creation. As Sri Aurobindo became too occupied with the descent of the supermind, he did not have the time to deal with people, and he put The Mother in charge of all the disciples and external activities of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. This was in 1926.

Sri Aurobindo has spoken of the four personalities of the Mother, namely, those of Wisdom (Maheshwari), Power (Mahakali), Harmony (Mahalakshmi) and Perfection in works (Mahasaraswati). In all her activities, these four personalities of the Mother could be seen at work. The work was microscopic; it was complex; it was both external and internal. It became clearer that the task of fixing the Supermind in the physical had to be done by opening up the physical cells. Just when the descent of the supermind reached a critical point, the Second World War broke out. This war was perceived by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as a fierce resistance to the task of the Supramental descent. Hence, they put all their yogic force against Nazism and the war ended in 1945, with the victory for the Allies as Sri Aurobindo had willed. In early 1950, Sri

Aurobindo told the Mother: "One of us must go. We cannot both remain upon earth." And when Mother said, "If one of us must go, I want that it should be me." "It cannot be you," he replied, "because you alone can do the material thing." He forbade the Mother to leave her body. "It is absolutely forbidden," he said, "you cannot, you must remain."

After Sri Aurobindo left his body on 5th December 1950, the Mother continued Sri Aurobindo's work. In 1951, she established the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre, which conducted extraordinary educational experiments to invent a new method of educating children from early childhood upwards so as to prepare them for the supramental work. On 29th February 1956, the Mother declared that the Supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow. She wrote: "The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality."

In 1958, the Mother entered into a new phase of Yoga, which aimed at fixing the supramental consciousness in the cells of the body so as to establish in the world, the

conditions of the emergence of the next species, the supramental species that would manifest the Supermind in the supramental body.

It was in the course of this “Yoga of the Cells” that the Mother discovered the “Mind of the Cells” which has the necessary capacity to reconstitute the physical body. This great yogic process has been described in thirteen volumes entitled “The Mother’s Agenda”, which consists of Mother’s conversations with Satprem, one of her disciples, who had become her confidant.

In 1968, Mother founded “Auroville”, an international township, a few kilometers away from Pondicherry, as a “laboratory of new evolution.”

On 14th March, 1970, Mother declared that the work that Sri Aurobindo had given to her was accomplished. She said, “The physical is capable of receiving the Superior Light, the Truth, the True Consciousness and to manifest it.”

Thereafter, she continued to accelerate the evolution of the new species, a task which is still continuing, even though she left her physical body on 17th November, 1973.

Notes :

- ¹ Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, Centenary Library, Volume 26, p. 459

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Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother

I

Sri Aurobindo has significantly been described as adventure of consciousness. Even in his quest of India's freedom, during the first decade of the last century, he departed courageously from the orthodox and conservative path of the Moderates and infused in the country a new electric force of Nationalism. He chalked out a new path of Swadeshi, boycott, passive resistance, and national education, – the path that ultimately came to be adopted as the national programme during the subsequent period of the struggle. He even ventured to search for a spiritual force that could be applied to the political struggle so as to liberate the country from slavery to the British rule and attain freedom in its totality. In his search for this force, he turned to Yoga and initiated momentous experiments, as a result of which he arrived at the conclusion that Yoga

was itself in need of breaking its boundaries so that whatever power it was capable of delivering to humanity would become irresistible in its impact and in the production of results which would secure, not only for India, but also for the entire earth, unshakeable foundations for a new world of freedom and unity.

The life and work of Sri Aurobindo are a living testimony of his victorious opening of the gates of a new power, and by means of summarising in himself the luminous results of all the best of the past systems of Yoga as also by developing a new Yoga, he came to build up new knowledge that humanity needs for its future development and fulfilment. It has, therefore, been rightly said that Sri Aurobindo does not belong to the past nor to history but to the future that is realising itself.

If we make a serious study of Sri Aurobindo, we shall find ourselves to be a participant of that adventure of consciousness which invites us to collaborate with that wide-ranging Yoga that can liberate us from the fetters of dogmas and preconceptions and inspire us to realise the highest and the best not only for ourselves but also for the entire humanity.

In 1908-9, Sri Aurobindo wrote a poem entitled 'Invitation', and it seems appropriate to read this poem and ask ourselves if we are ready to respond to it:

Invitation

With wind and the weather beating round me
Up to the hill and the moorland I go.
Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?
Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow?

Not in the petty circle of cities
Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell;
Over me God is blue in the welkin,
Against me the wind and the storm rebel.

I sport with solitude here in my regions,
Of misadventure have made me a friend.
Who would live largely? Who would live freely?
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

I am the lord of tempest and mountain,
I am the Spirit of freedom and pride.
Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side.¹

II

There are many ways of approaching Sri Aurobindo, but the light that we can gain from him will depend upon the height and breadth of our own quest. It is only when we cease to be occupied with our egoistic interests, which oblige us to keep ourselves in the centre of the world, and ask most comprehensive questions in their profundity relating to the world and its future possibilities and the role that we are required to play as also how we should prepare ourselves to fulfil that role that we shall find the relevance of Sri Aurobindo. It is only then that we shall find ourselves truly equipped to study Sri Aurobindo and the supramental consciousness that he has discovered and brought down on the earth.

The journey to which Sri Aurobindo invites us involves a most difficult endeavour. Even when the goal becomes clearer, the paths will still require to be traversed which will impel revolutionary processes of progression; this effort will turn us increasingly and decisively into a process of Yoga that is as comprehensive as life and as integral as the totality of existence. This Yoga rises to the highest but also brings

down the power of the highest into the lowest terms of consciousness. This Yoga aims at the conquest of the higher and higher pinnacles of consciousness and, crossing beyond mind and overmind, it lifts us to the supermind. But this Yoga is not merely of the ascent but also of the descent, and it aims at the manifestation of the supramental light and power right into matter and even in the inconscient so as to transform them for purposes of the creation of divine life on the earth.

This Yoga has rightly been called the supramental Yoga; it rests on the discovery of the supermind and of special methods by which the supermind can be made to permeate Matter and the human body so as to awaken and transform the cells of the body, which might result in the evolutionary mutation and in the generation of the new supramental species that would change the mode of life of struggling humanity and mould it into new forms of increasing luminosity and unity. This Yoga is new as compared to the old systems of Yoga and Sri Aurobindo has brought out this novelty in the following words:

It is new as compared with the old yogas:

1. Because it aims not at a departure out of world and life into Heaven or Nirvana, but at a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental, but as a distinct and central object. If there is a descent in other yogas, yet it is only an incident on the way or resulting from the ascent - the ascent is the real thing. Here the ascent is the first step, but it is a means for the descent. It is the descent of the new consciousness attained by the ascent that is the stamp and seal of the sadhana. Even the Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the divine fulfilment of life.
2. Because the object sought after is not an individual achievement of divine realisation for the sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth-consciousness here, a cosmic, not solely a supracosmic achievement. The thing to be gained also is the bringing in of a Power of Consciousness (the supramental) not yet organised or active directly in earth-nature, even in the spiritual life, but yet to be organised and made directly active.

3. Because a method has been precognised 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 a 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 realised in the old yogas. If I had, I should not have wasted my time in hewing out a road and in thirty years of search and inner creation when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamised, made secure and public. Our yoga is not a retreating of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.²

We must note, however, the contributions of the past systems of Yoga which have been assimilated in this new supramental or integral Yoga. The discovery of the supermind was already made by the Vedic Rishis, and even though Sri Aurobindo discovered the supermind without any previous knowledge of it, since he was at that time unacquainted with the Veda, he later found the confirmation of his

discovery in the hymns of the Rigveda. This confirmation has thrown a new light on the Veda, and the Yoga of the Veda, as we now discover it, can be regarded as a most momentous system of the loftiest realisations which were attained by our ancient forefathers. It is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo wrote two volumes entitled *The Secret of the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, and he declared that the recovery of the knowledge contained in the Veda is indispensable if the world has to find the solution to its present problems and arrive at the next step of its progress.

Sri Aurobindo points out that the Veda is not a closed book; for the Veda itself speaks of continuous development and declares that as one climbs from one peak to a higher peak, new fields of knowledge open before us. In elucidating this undogmatic and open attitude towards fresh experience and experimentation, Sri Aurobindo has provided us illuminating insights as to how Vedic Yoga has developed through the long history of India a number of systems of Yoga, as also how there have been periods of specialisation and also periods of synthesis. And his own synthesis of Yoga is an

integration of the past systems and the new methods that he himself has discovered and perfected.

This new synthesis embraces within its wide embrace the truth of the Vedic synthesis of the psychological being of man in its highest flights and widest ranging of divine knowledge, power, joy and glory which had its crowning experience of the transcendental and blissful reality in whose unity the increasing soul of man and the eternal divine fullness of the cosmic can be made perfect and fulfil themselves. It includes also the high and profound synthesis of the Upanishadic spiritual knowledge. It places the Bhagavad Gita's synthesis of the triple path of love, knowledge and works as something central in its processes. It also acknowledges the synthesis of the Tantra and utilises the methods of tantric Yoga for purposes of its new aims. It also acknowledges the Tantric idea of the divine perfectibility of man, which was possessed by the Vedic Rishis but was thrown into the background by the intermediate ages. It also includes the aims of the Hatha Yoga and the Raja Yoga although not their detailed

processes. But the Supramental Yoga does not limit itself within the limits of specialised systems of Yoga or even the previous systems of synthesis. Explaining the need to go beyond and to develop a new synthesis of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo states:

“We of the coming day stand at the head of a new age of development which must lead to such a new and larger synthesis. We are not called upon to be orthodox Vedantins of any of the three schools or Tantrics or to adhere to one of the theistic religions of the past or to entrench ourselves within the four corners of the teaching of the Gita. That would be to limit ourselves and to attempt to create our spiritual life out of the being, knowledge and nature of others, of the men of the past, instead of building it out of our own being and potentialities. We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future.”³

In developing the new synthesis, Sri Aurobindo had also in his view the challenges of the contemporary times and the insuperable difficulties which they present to the human mind at its present critical stage. Sri Aurobindo had made a detailed study of human history as

also of the evolutionary processes, and not only as we find them in the light of modern theories of Darwin, Bergson, Samuel Alexander, Whitehead, Teilhard de Chardin and others but more importantly in the light of Indian knowledge of spiritual forces working behind the external developments of forms that emerge through the evolutionary movement; and he had come to the conclusion that the present crisis of humanity is not an ordinary crisis, which can be explained in terms of social, political, economic or ideological developments. He pointed out that the present crisis is an *evolutionary* crisis and the human species cannot expect to be delivered except through radical means which can transmute the Mind, which is today the leader of human evolution, into the supermind which can thenceforth lead the future and develop divine life on the earth and can also solve the problems that humanity is struggling to solve but which it is incapable to do. The supramental Yoga has, therefore, been presented by Sri Aurobindo as a practical means by which humanity can be helped and lifted up on the path not only of its survival but also of its arrival and its fulfillment.

III

The central theme in Sri Aurobindo is that of the contemporary evolutionary crisis of humanity, of the perception that man is a transitional being and that he is a "thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she (Nature) wills to work out the superman, the god."⁴ His *magnum opus*, *The Life Divine*, which has been regarded as the greatest philosophical work of our times, is not a mere intellectual building of an edifice of thought, actuated by intellectual curiosity or intellectual grappling with epistemological, cosmological, ontological, or axiological questions. Although it is entirely philosophical in rigour and method, it is an unprecedented presentation to the contemporary intellectuality of all the essential psychological and physical facts of existence and their relations to a discovered ultimate reality in order to arrive at the profoundest solution that can be successfully applied to heal the maladies of the contemporary crisis. Philosophy, according to Sri Aurobindo, "can be conclusive only if the perception of things on which it rests is both a true and whole seeing."⁵ And the true and

whole seeing that we find in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy was a result of his attainment of the integral supramental knowledge which, in turn, was inspired by deepest concern to find remedy of the quintessential problems that have been arising in the course of human history and which have now reached the critical point of their acme.

The philosophy of *The Life Divine* is the philosophy of complete affirmation; it perceives the truth behind each system of philosophy but rejects its exclusiveness; it is thus a denial of all denials. It denies the materialist denial of the Spirit, even while it affirms the reality of Matter; it denies the denial of the ascetic even while it affirms the reality of the Spirit; it reconciles the insistent demands of Matter, Life, Mind and Supermind in an integral harmony. In the affirmation of the Reality of the One without a second, it finds the origin of the many and all. In the One Existent, *sat*, it finds the sound basis for Conscious-Force (*chit*) and also in their union the inalienable delight (*ananda*). If it finds the rational assurance that God exists not only on the basis of essential truths that lie behind the rationalistic, ontological, cosmological and teleological arguments, but also on

other grounds that explain even such difficult phenomena as those of the ignorance, error, falsehood and evil, it also provides rational assurance that "Life is neither an inexplicable dream nor an impossible evil that has yet become a dolorous fact, but a mighty pulsation of the divine All-Existence."⁶ And these assurances are again confirmed in direct spiritual and supramental experiences.

All comprehensive integrality is the basic characteristic of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. It is the philosophy of integral Monism that reconciles the supra-cosmic, supra-terrestrial and cosmic views of existence. In the history of Indian philosophy, the one system that comes closest to it is that of the Gita as expounded by Sri Aurobindo in his *Essays on the Gita*; and we must remember that the Gita is the digest of the Upanishads, which are themselves the culmination of the synthesis of knowledge contained in the Veda. The integral Monism of Sri Aurobindo is not pure Monism, although it sees in one unchanging, pure, eternal Self the foundation of all cosmic existence; nor is it qualified Monism although it places in the One his eternal supreme Prakriti manifested in the form of the Jiva and lays a great stress on

dwelling in God rather than dissolution as the supreme state of spiritual consciousness. It avoids every rigid determinism as would injure its universal comprehensiveness.⁷

Sri Aurobindo, in a brief summary statement, describes the ultimate Reality as follows:

“There is then a supreme Reality eternal, absolute and infinite. Because it is absolute and infinite, it is in its essence indeterminable. It is indefinable and inconceivable by finite and defining Mind; it is ineffable by a mind-created speech; it is describable neither by our negations, *neti neti*, – for we cannot limit it by saying it is not this, it is not that, – nor by our affirmations, for we cannot fix it by saying it is this, it is that, *iti iti*. And yet, though in this way unknowable to us, it is not altogether and in every way unknowable; it is self-evident to itself and, although inexpressible, yet self-evident to a knowledge by identity of which the spiritual being in us must be capable; for that spiritual being is in its essence and its original and intimate reality not other than this Supreme Existence.”⁸

Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy has been rightly described as a philosophy of the Real-

Idea. It is idealism that is realistic, and it is realism that is idealistic. As Sri Aurobindo explains, the creative force that generates the world and its forms is not the fictional Idea, having no essential relation in real Truth of existence. This philosophy “sees the creative Idea as Real-Idea, that is to say, a power of Conscious-Force expressive of real being, born out of real being and partaking of its nature and neither a child of the Void nor a weaver of fictions. It is conscious Reality throwing itself into mutable forms of its own imperishable and immutable substance. The world is therefore not a figment of conception in the universal Mind, but a conscious birth of that which is beyond Mind into forms of itself.”⁹

That which is beyond Mind is, according to Sri Aurobindo, Supermind, – a supreme Truth-Consciousness, an expressive term, which Sri Aurobindo has taken from the Rigveda, which describes the Supermind as *ṛta-chit*, the consciousness of essential truth of being (*satyam*), of ordered truth of active being (*ṛtam*) and the vast self-awareness (*brhad*) in which alone this consciousness is possible. According to Sri Aurobindo, because the supermind is the basis of the manifestation of the world, we have

rational assurance that supermind can manifest in the world and that the supramental whole seeing can come into the forefront and resolve the problems that the mind, the faculty of discursive reasoning and dividing consciousness, creates in the course of its development. For the world is not an illusion and a meaningless unreality but evolving manifestation of the self-existent and conscious being through the comprehensive determining supramental consciousness. This is the argument which Sri Aurobindo presents in the very first chapter of *The Life Divine*. Let us refer to this argument that he presents, since the rest of the book can, in a certain sense, be considered as an elucidation of this argument and its consequences for our life in the world at the present stage of evolution:

“For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. They arise from the perception of an unsolved discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity. To rest content with an unsolved discord is possible for the practical and more animal part of man, but impossible for his fully awakened mind, and usually even his practical parts only escape from the general necessity either by

shutting out the problem or by accepting a rough, utilitarian and unillumined compromise. For essentially, all Nature seeks a harmony, life and matter in their own sphere as much as mind in the arrangement of its perceptions. The greater the apparent disorder of the materials offered or the apparent disparateness, even to irreconcilable opposition, of the elements that have to be utilised, the stronger is the spur, and it drives towards a more subtle and puissant order than can normally be the result of a less difficult endeavour. The accordance of active Life with a material of form in which the condition of activity itself seems to be inertia, is one problem of opposites that Nature has solved and seeks always to solve better with greater complexities; for its perfect solution would be the material immortality of a fully organised mind-supporting animal body. The accordance of conscious mind and conscious will with a form and a life in themselves not overtly self-conscious and capable at best of a mechanical or subconscious will is another problem of opposites in which she has produced astonishing results and aims always at higher marvels; for there her ultimate miracle would be an animal consciousness no longer

seeking but possessed of Truth and Light, with the practical omnipotence which would result from the possession of a direct and perfected knowledge. Not only, then, is the upward impulse of man towards the accordance of yet higher opposites rational in itself, but it is the only logical completion of a rule and an effort that seem to be a fundamental method of Nature and the very sense of her universal strivings."¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo's *magnum opus*, *The Life Divine* is companioned by another *magnum opus*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*. If *The Life Divine* is primarily philosophical, *The Synthesis of Yoga* is primarily scientific. What is established in *The Life Divine* as philosophically conclusive is proposed to be realised in actual experience and realisation through the scientific methodology which is described in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. If the concern of *The Life Divine* is to prove to the intellect of modern humanity the possibility and inevitability of the supramental manifestation on the earth, *The Synthesis of Yoga* shows to the mind, heart and spirit of humanity those methods by which the individual and collectivity can arrive at that manifestation.

A significant message of *The Synthesis of Yoga* is that Yoga should be distinguished clearly from philosophy and religion with which it is likely to be confused. According to Sri Aurobindo, the age of philosophy and religion is over, and the new age will insist on the deepest, widest and highest realisations that can be attained by the methods of Yoga. For although philosophy aims at discovering the highest reality, its methods are those of critical rational thought, which can only conceive but not realise; and although religion aims at connecting the individual with the highest reality, its methods are predominantly those of credal belief, rituals, ceremonies and prescribed acts embodied in various routines of life and social institutions, – the methods that conflict with the modern insistence on undogmatic experiential demands of the search and realisation of realities. Both these, – philosophy and religion, – have now been found to be inadequate as means to the goal that contemporary humanity needs to arrive at. In contrast to these, Sri Aurobindo explains the meaning of Yoga in the following words:

“[Yoga is] a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the poten-

tialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos.”¹¹

According to Sri Aurobindo, what we need today is the practice of meticulous methods that can bring about radical change of consciousness by means of psychological transmutation of faculties and powers of our being.

The word Yoga is often confined merely to Hatha Yoga or Raja Yoga, but these are only two specialised systems, and what is proposed by Sri Aurobindo is to bring about synthesis not only of these two but all the other systems of Yoga. Since the crisis through which we are passing today is many-sided, the solution should be many-sided and nothing short of a synthesis of different systems of Yoga would give the needed remedy. As Sri Aurobindo explains, an indiscriminating combination *en bloc* would not be a synthesis, but a confusion; nor would successive practice of each of them in turn be easy in the short span of our human life. Sri Aurobindo, therefore, effects synthesis by neglecting the forms and outsides of the Yogic disciplines and seizes rather on some

central principle common to all which would include and utilise in the right place and proportion their particular principles. It also seizes on some central dynamic force, which is the common secret of their divergent methods and capable, therefore, of organising a natural selection and combination of their varied energies and different utilities. That one common principle and force is the principle and force of *concentration*, and Sri Aurobindo's *The Synthesis of Yoga* is based upon integral concentration of our entire conscious being on concentrated relation and contact with the Divine so that the Divine may transform our entire being into His. In psychological terms, this method translates itself into the progressive surrender of the ego with its whole field and all its apparatus to the Beyond-ego with its vast and incalculable but always inevitable workings.

Sri Aurobindo points out that there are three outstanding features of the action of the highest when it works integrally on the lower nature. In the first place, it does not act according to a fixed system and succession as in the specialised methods of Yoga, but with a sort of free, scattered and yet gradually intensive and purposeful working determined

in such a way that, in a sense, each individual in this path has his or her own method of Yoga. And yet, there are certain broad lines of working common to all which can be used to construct, not indeed a routine system, but yet some kind of scientific method of the synthetic Yoga. Secondly, the process being integral, it accepts all life in order that all life is transformed. In this process, our nature such as it stands organised by our past evolution and without rejecting anything essential is brought under the force of *tapasya* so that all undergoes a divine change. Thirdly, the divine Power in us uses all life as the means of this integral Yoga. In this process, all life is perceived as Yoga of Nature, seeking to manifest God within itself, but the distinguishing mark of the integral Yoga is the self-awareness with which the movements which are loosely combined in our ordinary nature are gathered up and concentrated for purposes of integral transformation.

The integral method of the synthesis of Yoga produces integral results. There is, first, an integral realisation of Divine Being; and there is also an integral liberation, *mukti*, not only *sayujya mukti* in which the individual being attains unbroken contact in all its parts

with the Divine, not only *salokya mukti* by which the whole conscious existence dwells in the state of *Sachchidananda*, but also *sadharmya mukti*, in which the divine nature is acquired by the transformation of the lower being.

Transformation is the keyword of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo explains this as follows:

“By transformation I do not mean some change of the nature – I do not mean, for instance, sainthood or ethical perfection or yogic siddhis (like the Tantric’s) or a transcendental (cinmaya) body. I use transformation in a special sense, a change of consciousness radical and complete and of a certain specific kind which is so conceived as to bring about a strong and assured step forward in the spiritual evolution of the being of a greater and higher kind and of a larger sweep and completeness than what took place when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world. If anything short of that takes place or at least if a real beginning is not made on that basis, a fundamental progress towards this fulfilment, then my object is not accomplished. A partial realisation, something mixed and inconclusive,

does not meet the demand I make on life and Yoga.”¹²

The complete process of transformation is described by Sri Aurobindo as triple, – psychic transformation, spiritual transformation, and supramental transformation. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“... there must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul-instrumentation; on that or along with that there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest recesses of life and body, even into the darkness of our subconsciousness; last, there must supervene the supramental transmutation, – there must take place as a crowning movement the ascent into the Supermind and the transforming descent of the Supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature.”¹³

For a fuller understanding of the synthesis of Yoga, we need to study three big volumes containing Sri Aurobindo’s letters on Yoga, which throw illumining light not only on the principles of the Integral Yoga but also on

multitudes of difficulties that are encountered during the process of Yoga, as also on experiences and realisations. But, above all, we need to study *Savitri*, that great epic of the adventure of the Spirit, which accomplishes great conquest of death by the power of the light of the supermind. For it is through *Savitri* that one gains a ready access to the concreteness of psychic, spiritual and supramental experiences as also their impact on all parts and planes of the being through the magic of the rhythmic word and vision in their highest intensities. To study *Savitri* is to enter into the realm of experiences and into a veritable process of Yogic transformation.

IV

It is not expected that this great and difficult task of supramental transformation can be effected by the whole of humanity, although, according to Sri Aurobindo, the time has come for the generalisation of Yoga in humanity. The necessity of spiritual change is imperative, and the future of humanity will depend, according to Sri Aurobindo, upon the response that humanity will give to this necessity. In his book

The Human Cycle, Sri Aurobindo has expounded the psychology of social development and shown how human society has not only crossed over the infra-rational age of human development but has also traversed a long path on the curve of the rational age and stands today at the end of the curve of the Reason. Speaking of the modern society, Sri Aurobindo points out that it has discovered a new principle of survival, the principle of progress, which aims at more knowledge, more equipment, convenience and comfort, more enjoyment, a greater complexity of the social economy, more and more clumsily opulent life. He further points out that these things must, however, lead in the end to the increasing failure to find the secret of constant self-renewal. He, therefore, concludes: "Only in its new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity now only beginning, is there a better hope; for by that turning it may discover that the real truth of man is to be found in his soul."¹⁴

Whether humanity will respond to the need of this new turn will depend upon its increasing perception of the necessity of spiritual transformation. Sri Aurobindo points

out that a change from the vital and mental to the spiritual order of life must necessarily be accomplished in the individual and in a greater number of individuals before it can come to have an effective hold upon community. What is necessary is that the common human mind begins to admit the ideas proper to the higher order that is in the end to be, and the heart of man begins to be stirred by aspirations born of these ideas. Sri Aurobindo concludes that if this condition is fulfilled then there is hope of some advance in the not distant future.

In his book *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sri Aurobindo refers to two important developments which indicate a prospect of the coming change in humanity. The first of these is internationalism, the idea of humanity as a single race of beings with a common life and a common general interest. Sri Aurobindo identifies those tendencies in human life at present which are favourable to the progress of the international idea. In his own words:

“The strongest of these favourable forces is the constant drawing closer of the knots of international life, the multiplication of points of contact and threads of communication and

an increasing community in thought, in science and in knowledge. Science especially has been a great force in its direction; for science is a thing common to all men in its conclusions, open to all in its methods, available to all in its results: it is international in its very nature; ... Science also has created that closer contact of every part of the world with every other part, out of which some sort of international mind is growing... The growth of knowledge is interesting the peoples in each other's art, culture, religion, ideas and is breaking down at many points the prejudice, arrogance and exclusiveness of the old nationalistic sentiment... Religion... is beginning to realise, a little dimly and ineffectively as yet, that spirituality is after all its own chief business and true aim and that it is also the common element and the common bond of all religions. As these influences grow and come more and more consciously to cooperate with each other, it might be hoped that the necessary psychological modification will quietly, gradually, but still irresistibly and at last with an increasing force of rapidity, take place which can prepare a real and fundamental change in the life of humanity."¹⁵

But internationalism, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not enough; there is a need of a religion of humanity or an equivalent sentiment which recognises a single soul in humanity of which each human being and each people is an incarnation and soul form. This religion has already expressed itself in the philosophy of humanitarianism, which itself is a most prominent emotional result of the Age of Reason. Philanthropy, social service and other kindred activities have been its outward expressions; and democracy, socialism and pacifism are to a great extent its by-products or at least owe much of their vigour to its inner presence. But Sri Aurobindo points out that the purely intellectual and sentimental religion of humanity is not sufficient to bring about the needed great change in human psychology. For at its highest, it can only erect three great ideals of progress, – liberty, equality and fraternity, but in application of these ideals, it would still be obliged to resort to the external machinery of society, and ego would act as the centre of this machinery. As a result, as Sri Aurobindo points out, when the ego attains liberty, it arrives at competitive individualism; when it asserts equality, it arrives first at strife and then

at an attempt to ignore the variations of nature, and it constructs an artificial and machine-made society; when the ego asserts fraternity, it speaks of something contrary to its nature; all that the ego knows is association for the pursuit of common egoistic ends and the utmost that it can arrive at is a closer organisation for the equal distribution of labour, production, consumption and enjoyment. If, therefore, the gospel of the idea of humanism is to be fulfilled, we have to realise that brotherhood is the real key and that the brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo concludes, the religion of humanity must be a spiritual religion of humanity, not an institutional religion, not an intellectual religion, not a sentimental religion. That humanity is pressing forward towards this spiritual religion of humanity is of great significance for all of us who are keen to find the solution to the contemporary crisis. And it is here that Sri Aurobindo's perception of the significance of the contemporary crisis and his philosophy and yoga of supramental transformation come to us as the needed light and guidance.

At the same time, we may note what Sri Aurobindo has stated about the first step towards the supramental manifestation. In this context, we may cite the following remarks that Sri Aurobindo had made in his *Letters on Yoga*:

“The whole of humanity cannot be changed at once. What has to be done is to bring the Higher Consciousness down into the earth-consciousness and establish it there as a constant realised force. Just as mind and life have been established and embodied in Matter, so to establish and embody the supramental Force.

It would not be possible to change all that in a moment – we have always said that the whole of humanity will not change the moment there is the Descent. But what can be done is to establish the higher principle in the earth-consciousness in such a way that it will remain and go on strengthening and spreading itself in the earth-life. That is how a new principle in the evolution must necessarily work.

It is first through the individuals that it [the supramental consciousness] becomes part of the earth-consciousness and afterwards it

spreads from the first centres and takes up more and more of the global consciousness till it becomes an established force there.”¹⁶

Notes

- ¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p.39
- ² Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp.100-101
- ³ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, p.8
- ⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p.4
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p.493
- ⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p.231
- ⁷ See *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, p.6
- ⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p.322
- ⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p.117
- ¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, pp.2-3
- ¹¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1970), p.2
- ¹² Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p.98
- ¹³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p.891

Notes

- ¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, SABCL, Vol. 15, p.210
- ¹⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, SABCL, Vol. 15, pp.527-28
- ¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp.13, 14, 15.

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In 1976, Government of India invited him to be Educational Advisor in the Ministry of Education. In 1983, he was appointed Special Secretary to the Government of India, and held this post until 1988. He was Member-Secretary of Indian Council of Philosophical Research from 1981 to 1990. He was also Member-Secretary of Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan from 1987 to 1993. He was the Vice-Chairman of the UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg, from 1987 to 1989.

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