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## YOGA & HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT: AN EXPLORATION THROUGH THE LENS OF SRI AUROBINDO

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### ABSTRACT

Yoga is a very popular word nowadays. People starts their days with the practice of yoga. Yoga improves physical structure, mental atmosphere and spiritual development of a person. Therefore it is admitted that yoga is a therapy for holistic development. According to Patanjali, the founder of the Yoga system, yoga is a spiritual effort to attain perfection through the control of sense organs, gross body, subtle mind, intellect and ego. It guides to achieve the highest wisdom through the spiritual realization. Yoga Philosophy discusses how to practice spiritual union of the individual soul with the supreme soul. This philosophy is considered as a mean of achieving freedom or mukti. Now today's world accepts the yoga as a way of living. Yoga refers to the goal, unity and harmony with oneself and others, but also to the methods by which that goal is achieved. In a broader sense, yoga is a lifestyle that involves practicing awareness and achieving harmony using a variety of methods. This is the connection between Yoga and holistic development. There are many other ways to prove this connection between Yoga and holistic development. This article will explore this connection through the lens of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga. Integral yoga is not altogether a new yoga, but a new interpretation of the elements of the traditional Yogas. The traditional Yoga systems are based on a vision which aims at the release of the soul from matter. The final goal is liberation, and this goal has to be gained by freeing the soul from matter, life and mind. In contrast to the traditional Yogas, Integral Yoga does not seek liberation, but to speak about the total transformation of a man into a divine life. Thus, with the practice of integral yoga holistic development can be occurred.

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## INTRODUCTION

Yoga is a very popular word nowadays. People starts their days with the practices of yoga. This proves that there is a deep connection between yoga and social wellbeing. As a social being people always emphasizes in the wellbeing of own. Everybody wants to live in a better way physically and mentally. Yoga improves physical structure and mental atmosphere of a person. To prove this claim we have to start our journey with the origin of the word yoga.

### Basic concept of Yoga

The Yoga philosophy speaks about the theory and practice for the realization of the ultimate truth concerning human being and the world. According to Patanjali, the founder of the Yoga system, yoga is a spiritual effort to attain perfection through the control of sense organs, gross body, subtle mind, intellect and ego. It guides to achieve the highest wisdom through the spiritual realization. Patanjali's 'Yoga-sutras' are the first and foremost systematic and authoritative presentation of yoga in both theoretical and practical aspects. The Yoga philosophy is closely associated with Samkhya philosophy.

The Yoga presents a practical path for the realization of the self-whereas Samkhya emphasizes the attainment of knowledge of self by means of concentration and meditation. Thus, the Gita says that Yoga and Samkhya are the practical and theoretical sides of the same system. What is same between the two? The similarities are; both the schools uphold that liberation can be attained through knowledge. And to attain this knowledge it requires the power to control body, mind, senses, intellect and ego. Yoga accepts three pramanas which are agreed by the Samkhya system. These three pramanas are: perception, inference and verbal testimony. There are twenty-five metaphysical principles as viewed by the Samkhya and it is agreed by the Yoga.

### Connection between Yoga and holistic development

Yoga is one of the most dynamic systems of Indian Philosophy. Yoga Philosophy discusses how to practice spiritual union of the individual soul with the supreme soul. This philosophy is considered as a mean of achieving freedom or mukti. Now today's world accepts the yoga as a way of living. Modern world defines yoga as postures, energy and breathe control, meditation, music, philosophy and other approaches. Yoga refers to the goal, unity and harmony with oneself and others, but also to the methods by which that goal is achieved. In a broader sense, yoga is a lifestyle that involves practicing awareness

and achieving harmony using a variety of methods. This is the connection between Yoga and holistic development. There are many other ways to prove this connection between Yoga and holistic development. This article is being discussed to explore this connection in the light of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga.

### Exploration through the lens of Sri Aurobindo

In the next part of the article, I have to discuss about the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Integral yoga is not altogether a new yoga, but a new interpretation of the elements of the traditional Yogas. Sri Aurobindo was asked once in what way his Yoga was 'new' and whether it had been tried in earlier times. He advised the disciples not to lay stress on the 'newness' or novelty of the Integral Yoga, but rather on its truth. However, he clarified: "I have never said that my Yoga was something brand new in all its elements. I have called it in the integral yoga and that means that 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>

The first and foremost feature that distinguishes Sri Aurobindo's yoga from the rest is its aim. The traditional Yoga systems are based on a vision which aims at the release of the soul from matter. The final goal is liberation, and this goal has to be gained by freeing the soul from matter, life and mind. In contrast to the traditional Yogas, Integral Yoga does not seek liberation, but transformation. The ultimate aim of traditional yogalike, the liberation, or the ascent of the soul to spiritual heights, is only the first stage in the process of bringing the spirit into matter, life and mind for a total transformation. One should aim at a total transformation of this earthly life into the Divine life. Therefore, a divine fulfilment even in the material is the real object of Sri Aurobindo's yoga.

Secondly, the integral yoga does not seek individual salvation, but works for a cosmic salvation which works from the divinization of the whole mankind and of the whole universe so that even the physical universe can "feel the thrill of a Divine Life". Against the individuals alvation of the traditional yoga systems, Sri Aurobindo declares that the Integral Yoga should be for all humanity: "A perfect and complete delight in the Divine, perfect because pure and self-existent, complete because all-embracing as well as all-absorbing, is the meaning of the way of Bhakti for these eker of the integral Yoga".<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, it is new and revolutionary in its methods as well. It does not emphasize just some part of the being for the divine realization, but strives to take up the entire being. Unlike the traditional Yogas, the Integral Yoga does not suppress the lower forms of consciousness. True yoga should be one that touches and transforms not only the higher forms, but also the whole of our being, spiritual, mental, vital and physical. In the absence of a total transformation yoga becomes incomplete. The ancient forms of Yoga stressed the renunciation of life to reach the Divine. Aurobindo's Integral Yoga grants positive value to the phenomenal world: it is "not as an invention of the devil or a self-delusion of the soul, but as a manifestation of the Divine." Aurobindo makes a closer relation between the phenomenal world and the Divine Absolute through this practice of Integral Yoga which is absent in traditional Yoga.<sup>3</sup>

The best achievement of the Integral Yoga is that one's goal is not only to reach the highest stage, rather one's aim is to bring down the highest divine into the terrestrial plane through the ascending and the descending movement of the Divine. There are many stages which are the parts of the ascending and the descending movement. In the ascending movement consciousness expands itself from matter to existence or we can say it as the lower stage to the higher stage through the stages of life, psyche, mind, supermind, bliss and consciousness force. In the opposite movement of descending order consciousness scales down itself from existence to matter or it can be said as higher stage to lower stage. Sri Aurobindo's specialty of integral yoga is to cross the limit of mind and to reach the supermind to meet the Divine as well as to bring down the power and the life of Divine into the material world. Thus, this integral yoga or purna

yoga transforms the material world into the divine world. Sri Aurobindo's dream is to establish the divine man and to form the divine world. As any kind of discriminations are the root cause of any challenges or the problems of the society as well as the world, Sri Aurobindo wished to transform the man into the divine man. He had believed that through the practice of integral yoga one can become a divine man so that the wellbeing of the society as well as the world might be possible.<sup>4</sup>

Now the question is how can the integral yoga transform a man into a divine man? How can be the holistic development feasible with the practice of integral yoga?

To address this question Sri Aurobindo may be argued that when one practices integral yoga one should surrender oneself to the Divine at first. If there is a surrender to the Divine one should remove all the desires, attachments, duties, responsibilities of life from the physical and vital world.

The Integral Yoga intends to bring human nature to the divine perfection. Human nature is transformed into the image and likeness or fundamental oneness of the divine nature. For the realization of this oneness, one has firstly, to open one self to the Absolute, and eliminate all that prevents one from opening oneself to the Absolute, and secondly, the Divine must enter into the human. These two aspects are closely related because, in the former the individual opens himself to the Absolute, and in the latter, the Divine enters union and makes itself the Master of his activity. In this union, man becomes an instrument of the divine, and it is in this union that he identifies his self with the Divine Self.<sup>5</sup>

In the course of practicing integral yoga, one develops some special characteristics in one's nature which helps one to transform to a divine being. What are these characteristics? These characteristics can be called as the bases of integral yoga. These are calm, peace, equality, faith, aspiration, and surrender. This yoga demands a total dedication of the life to the aspiration for the discovery and embodiment of the divine truth. Dedication makes one sincere in nature which is the first criteria for social wellbeing. Without sincerity nobody can achieve anything in life. During the practice of integral yoga all egoistic clinging to family, friends, Country must disappear if one wants to succeed in yoga. The knowledge that there is a supreme existence, Consciousness and bliss is important for the starting stage of integral yoga. That means the faith in divine consciousness is important to achieve the goal of supreme existence. If one admits the Divine at all, both true reason and bhakti seem to him to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender. Divine will supervise one in the journey of integral yoga. This can be called the true attitude of sadhana. In the practice of integral yoga faith, reliance upon God, surrender and self-giving to the Divine power are necessary and indispensable. Similarly, without faith, aspiration towards the goal and surrender one cannot achieve success to his mission. According to Sri Aurobindo, nobody can transform himself by his own unaided efforts; it is only the Divine force that can transform him. If anybody keep himself open, all the rest will be done for him. Sri Aurobindo wanted to say that will and aspiration are needed to bring down the aid of the Divine force and to keep the being on its side in its dealings with the lower powers. The Divine force fulfilling the spiritual will. Similarly, these are important for social wellbeing as because with the guidance of divine force and spiritual will one can lead others to reach the higher consciousness which is called as supramental consciousness. It is believed by Sri Aurobindo if one gets the habit of silent reliance on the divine power, the obstacle would diminish and eventually disappear. So, it can be said that a complete surrender is necessary to reach the supramental consciousness and similarly it is essential for social wellbeing to cut the knot of the ego in each part of the being. Thus, the mind, the vital, the physical consciousness have one after the other to surrender separately, to give up their own way and to accept the way of the Divine. In brief if one has the faith in Divine power working in him, he has an aspiration to it, therefore one should surrender to the higher consciousness to transform him to be a divine personality.

Similarly with the practice of integral yoga personal consciousness transforms to the cosmic consciousness and cosmic consciousness transforms to the supramental consciousness. Thus, a man transforms to be a divine man and with his divine force and will he will do everything for the benefit of the society 6. For the holistic development, it is required to have calm, peace and equality in nature. Sri Aurobindo had stated that "There can be no firm foundation in sadhana without equality, samata. Whatever the unpleasantness of circumstances, however disagreeable the conduct of others, you must learn to receive them with a perfect calm and without any disturbing reaction. These things are the test of equality. It is easy to be calm and equal when things go well and people and circumstances are pleasant; it is when they are the opposite that the completeness of the calm, peace, equality can be tested, reinforced, made perfect."Integral yoga cannot grow with the restless mind. So, the quiet mind is the first need to make a foundation in integral yoga. Calm is connected with the peace. Therefore, the first thing in sadhana is to get a settled peace and silence in the mind as because it is in the silent mind that the true consciousness can be built. A quite mind does not mean the stage without thoughts or mental movements at all. It is the stage where one can feel one's true being. According to Sri Aurobindo a quite mind without disturbance and trouble is able to open to the force that will change the nature. To be calm, steady, fixed in the spirit, this separation is very helpful for the discovery of the true individuality and building up of it in the nature. Sri Aurobindo had mentioned the difference regarding the concept of peace, calm, quiet and silence. Quiet is a condition in which there is no restlessness or disturbance. Calm is a still unmoved condition which no disturbance can affect. Peace is a still more positive condition; it carries with it a sense of settled and harmonious rest and deliverance. Silence is a state in which either there is no movement of the mind or vital.7 Equality is a very important part of this yoga. If one has to keep equality in nature one should not be troubled or despondent. It is the aim of the sadhana that the consciousness should rise out of the body and take its station above, - spreading in the wideness everywhere, not limited to the body. Thus, liberated one opens to all and observes the lower stages from the higher stages. According to Sri Aurobindo there are many planes or levels of consciousness between the human mind and supermind. The silence opens the mind and develops the consciousness to the supermind. In this integral yoga it is most favorable condition for the divine power to descend first upon and then into the individual consciousness to transform it into the divine man. Thus, the holistic development of individual grows up. A man will be free from all the misery of the world and transform himself to the divine personality. 8

## CONCLUSION

By practicing Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga one can reach into the divine world and do better for himself as well as the society. It can be said that calm, peace and silence of the mind are the prior condition of the integral yoga. After fulfilling all the prior conditions mind develops itself to the divine consciousness from the ordinary consciousness. In the preliminary stages the consciousness of the ordinary mind becomes the level of overmind and develops into the cosmic consciousness. After this development the overmind turns to the supermind and the cosmic consciousness turns to the supramental consciousness. This development can be possible through the practice of integral yoga which is called the transformation of the soul into the divine nature and without the faith, aspiration and the surrender to the divine will the transformation may not be possible. One who has the characteristics of calm, peace, aspiration, faith, aspiration and surrender can change the nature of human mind into the divine personality. Thus, the holistic development can be possible for the mankind.

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