

## Module 4 : Sri Aurobindo (1872 – 1950)

### Section 4 : Integral Yoga

Sri Aurobindo speculates a theory of evolution which is a fundamental assumption of his metaphysical system. Evolution is the reverse process of creation or involution. Involution is the immanent movement of the Divine from the higher conscious being to the lower conscious being and finally to the lowest conscious being, the conscient matter.

In involution there is the self-willed descent of the Divine to the world of multiplicities. So Sri Aurobindo thinks that in evolution there will be an ascent or progressive actualization of the latent consciousness till it reaches the original state of Divine consciousness. What is implicitly involved in involution becomes progressively explicit in evolution in a hierarchical march from matter to the higher levels of consciousness. This upward march of consciousness from matter to life and life to mind is being pursued unconsciously. Sri Aurobindo believes that beyond the mind there are other higher levels of consciousness which will be actualized in future. Nature is continuously pursuing the progress of conscious manifestation though this is going on in an unconscious way. Purpose of Yoga is to accelerate the process of evolution in a conscious way. Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga aims at the divinization of the human race by a conscious endeavour which nature has been stressing upon unconsciously.

In Indian philosophy as well as cultural tradition yoga has been a widely used term with varied shades of meaning. It is usually understood as the art of attaining a union with some God or a pursuit of self-transcendence. Usually in a theistic religious framework achievement of Godhood is considered to be ultimate goal of life. That is considered as liberation or *Moksha*. Yoga is the path through which a super mundane existence is supposed to be achieved. In Indian tradition various yogic paths stake for granted the presence of a soul and its disembodied existence. For the attainment of liberation different yogic practices are suggested. A yogi-whatever path he may follow to achieve liberation or Godhood must live a life of righteousness and must have detachment from material pursuits. A liberated state is imagined to be a state of freedom and bliss. The soul does not enter into the cycle of birth or death. By liberation one transcends the state of bondage and worldly attachment. As long as one lives a life of attachment, one cannot achieve the state of Godhead or liberation. Of course this should not mean that yoga is complete suppression of human propensities but some take it to mean moral refinement and spiritual sublimation despite an active life. One may follow any path, jnana, karma or bhakti, one can practice yoga if one lives a life of spiritual sublimation.

Understanding yoga in this traditional sense we shall now discuss Sri Aurobindo's concept of integral yoga which appears to be somewhat a departure from its conventional meaning. The purpose of integral yoga is the actualization of Divine life on earth. Its aim is to bring divine transformation of the humanity and establish a race of supramental beings on earth. Sri Aurobindo believes that man has a self, an *atma*, in him that guides and presides over his physical, vital and mental being. Sri Aurobindo calls the self psychic being, the integrating principle of the physical, vital and mental aspect of a person. He has discussed the different steps of integral yoga. Its first step is called by him psychicism. The psychic being becomes an active integrator by bringing transformation in the lower beings – the physical, vital and mental. Through psychicism the physical body develops right habit, the vital being acquires right impulse and the mind gets right vision. All the work, feeling and thought are turned towards the Divine. So through psychicism a harmonious integration is brought in all the aspects of a person's being that drive towards the Divine. It makes the mind quiet in all turbulence and feeling and act get spiritually transformed. The pattern of thinking and living is controlled by the soul and the person turns into a psychic personality. The second step of integral is spiritualization that follows psychicism. In spiritualization there is an upward opening by which the Divine spark within is heightened to the supreme consciousness. The occasional spiritual flasher or realizations in exalted moments might be there in the past. But the normal human nature would undergo self perfection and reach a state of permanent ascension of the One Divine and convey his living presence and message in all that we see, touch and listen. The third step in integral yoga is supermentalisation. It can raise the mind to the supermind and can establish a complete harmony. The effect of supermind will be realized in all parts of the being. The supermind will be a permanent constituent of the earth-consciousness. Humanity will be transformed to a Divine race. In this way the integral yoga can facilitate the manifestation of the Divine in all beings and in the physical universe.

The very purpose of the integral yoga is to bring a cosmic transformation and to take evolution to its ultimate goal of supramental consciousness. Sri Aurobindo thinks that integral yoga initiates the God-ward journey for spiritualization of all aspects of human existence. By this Man will undergo a spiritual metamorphosis. It will bring universalization and transcendentalization in human nature. As long as man is at the mental plane even if he develops philanthropic or altruistic impulses still he cannot be completely egoless. Clinging to some subtle values and expansion of his vision to cosmopolitan

attitude are no doubt good virtues but that does not bring perfection to human nature. Without the manifestation of the Divine, human nature cannot undergo a total transformation. Without a spiritual metamorphosis of the human race conflicts and discords will not be wiped out from the world? So Sri Aurobindo imagines that a spiritual transformation by integral yoga can bring abiding perfection. Human ego and mental or vital propensities will be replaced by the Divine spirit. His will bring a universal integration of all being. A spiritual unity will be established among all beings and this goal can be achieved by the path of integral yoga.

Further integral yoga aims at transcendentalization of the human personality. He feels his identity in all and all the existence in him. Through this he becomes one with the Divine and feels identical with the Absolute. This brings self perfection. That state will be achieved by supramental transformation.

Like a religious mystic Sri Aurobindo imagines that supramental transformation of human race can come by the union of human aspiration and Divine grace. In every mystical and metaphorical style Sri Aurobindo describes that by intense human aspiration the Divine would descend to the person's consciousness. The aspiration of the yogi makes a self-opening to the Divine grace and makes a total surrender to the Absolute. He gives added connotation to human aspiration and distinguishes it from ambition or self-longing liberation. Aspiration is the articulation of the psychic being to know and to be one with the Divine. It is not for a personal achievement but for the spiritualization of the humanity. Similarly his self-surrender must be voluntary and total. The yogi in his thought, feeling and action must be surrendered to Divine. Sri Aurobindo's notion of self-opening is that it should be inward and upward. The inner mind, vital and physical must be opened to the Divine consciousness so that it will be enlightened by the Divine speaker. By upward self-opening the yogi will be in active touch with the supreme consciousness. Thus aspiration, self-opening and self-surrender constitutes the path in integral yoga to get the Divine grace.

The yogi in his mission for supramental transformation will not cease to work. He will not live like an ascetic rejecting everything in a state of devotion. On the contrary he will do his duties having least attachment to their consequences. Like a philosophy of *niskama karma*, he is simply an agent of his work sacrificing the result of the Absolute. He has no personal craving for any mental gain or pleasure. Rather in his work he establishes an identity with the Divine. This identity is called identity-in-difference. As being a manifestation of the Divine, he is different; but essentially he and the Divine are identical. All the selfless and undetached works of the yogi are a self-offering to the Divine.

Here a point of distinction is noteworthy between the traditional idea of yoga and Sri Aurobindo's idea of integral yoga. Yoga in the traditional belief is considered as an art of achieving a union with God through any means suitable to the temperament of the yogi. Religious mystics and men of ecstatic faith speak of *moksa*, nirvana, Liberation, God realization, attachment of heaven etc. through the path of intense devotion or love of the Lord. But Sri Aurobindo's entire approach to yoga is not for an individual liberation or God-realization. He has a vision of a new race of supramental being on earth. He expects that by integral yoga the path for actualization of a new race is possible. So his purpose is for the Divine Life for the whole of humanity. In other words the very objective of integral yoga is to bring a spiritual or divine transformation of man's material life. His motto is to take the process of spiritual evolution to its ultimate goal. The evolutionary process starting from matter has come to the state of mental consciousness. Unless the higher states of the consciousness gets manifold in human nature social conflicts, discords – say all evils-will not be annihilated from the world. The practice of integral yoga would enhance the process of evolution and a new race of Gnostic beings would appear on earth. Integral yoga is the conscious cooperation of man with the natural process to facilitate the ideal of Divine Life on earth. The objective of integral yoga is not for any subjective achievement, but for a transformation of earth consciousness into cosmic consciousness so that a race of Gnostic being will evolve.

The whole idea of spiritual evolution and integral yoga is based on gross assumptions. They are metaphysical speculations and not based on factual evidence. Sri Aurobindo appears to be a visionary but his vision of future sounds somewhat utopian and impractical. It is the dream of a mystic that human race will undergo a spiritual metamorphosis in future. His notion of creation which is the descent of the infinite into the world of finites is also a gross speculation. The idea of integral yoga is imagined from a mystic's perspective. The speculation that intense human aspiration will be corroborated by Divine grace to bring a spiritual transformation is a matter of religious faith. A yogi or mystic lives in his own world and articulates a metaphysical view based on his faith. His world-view is grounded on some initial assumption or postulates. Once his postulated are taken for granted some claims follow which are rationally derived from the postulates. Of course a mystic or yogi's initial postulates or assumptions are supposed to be based on his experience, but the experience is not an objective phenomenon but somewhat a subjective belief which can appropriately be described as a 'blik' in the language of R.M. Hare. A blik is an unverifiable and unfalsifiable interpretation of one's experience. Blik becomes an emotional epistemic metaphysical doctrine to interpret the existence and human condition. It presents a

world view apparently seeming to be rational and intellectualized.

Similarly Sri Aurobindo's speculation that evolution is marching onward to reach supermind and that a new race or species will appear on earth is the prophecy of a mystic which can be taken as a blik. So too the idea that integral yoga will shorten the time for the emergency of supermind and supermentalization of the human race is another prophesy or a blik. His understanding of man as a transitional being, the dividing line between two hemispheres is fascinating. Or Sri Aurobindo and his admirers honestly believe that a new race of Gnostic beings will appear on earth by adhering to the path of integral yoga. But one important message of his thought and yoga is that he is not concerned for an individual fulfillment but of the humanity as a whole. A new society or race will be guided by a higher consciousness where all individuals who by living in all each one lives in his consciousness are no doubt a great ideal. Whether man will evolve into suprerman or not is not important, but a consciousness that concerns every man for the peace, harmony and well being of the humanity at large is no doubt a great ideal. Despite his speculation, mystical prophecy Sri Aurobindo's humanistic appeal for a better world and finer human beings is his important message to be sought as one the noblest ideal.

### **Possible questions**

1. Critically evaluate Sri Aurobindo's view on Evolution?
2. Explain and examine Sri Aurobindo's concept of Integral Yoga.
3. Examine Sri Aurobindo's philosophical views and bring out its significance in our life today.