

Research Paper

Illumination from the Past and Awareness of the Present: Sri Aurobindo's Psycho-philosophical Integration of Phenomenal and Noumenal

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ABSTRACT

The statements offer a profound and insightful exploration of Aurobindo and his interaction with the world of experience. Remarkably, even after more than a century, their core meaning and interconnectedness remain significant for the future of India. A mindful futurist recognises the spiritual and yogic value of ancient intellectual heritage, maintaining an awareness of the non-empirical self while preserving the empirical self, all within the context of ongoing scientific advancements in the phenomenal world. Aurobindo wrote essays, poetry, political writings, dramas, literary criticism articles, and other writings. However, the paper examines the philosophical expositions like essays on the Bhagvad Gita (BG), the importance of Upanishads, and writings on the Veda, making an impeccable case for the interiorisation of rituals. The writings on Upanishads offer a philosophical foundation of his envisioned future of India, acclimating to the problems in nature exteriorisation and integration of non-embodied self with the empirical world, sought to rekindle the belief and path for the future of India.

Keywords: *Integral Yoga, Education, Freedom Movement, India, Bhagvad Gita (BG)*

"We are naturally spiritual in our temperament because the work which we have to do for humanity is a work which no other nation can accomplish, the spiritualisation of the race..."- March 28, 1908, (Navajata, 1972).

"We cannot be ourselves alone in any narrow formal sense, because we must necessarily take account of the modern world around us, and get free knowledge of it, otherwise we cannot live." (Paranjape, 2003).

Sri Aurobindo, a nationalist of a different order and league in the era of the Indian independence struggle. The leaders of the freedom movement had veracity in their methods and modes to achieve the independence of the motherland. The young Aurobindo, immersed in western education at Cambridge and not a status quoist, made speeches as the secretary of the 'Indian Majlis', a society at Cambridge, which did not go unnoticed by the authorities. He, along with his fellow students, later founded 'Lotus and Dagger,' a secret society, to take a pledge to overthrow foreign rule. The society could not sustain itself long, but Aurobindo never drifted from the pledge (Das, 1972).

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Aurobindo shared the dream to see the motherland liberated from the British Raj. After finishing his studies, he cleared the first stage of the ICS exam in England. He returned to India after he could not qualify for the final stage of the exam. He returned to India in 1893 and joined the Baroda state service, and in due course of time, he moved into political work and remained active politically for almost ten years, before, in 1908, moving out of Baroda to Pondicherry (L. M. Dallape & Verma K.D, 1989; 'Sri Aurobindo: A Chronology', 1989). The Indian independence struggle had leaders with varying philosophies of response and action against the British, coupled with their respective political, social acumen, and their respective Idea of India, the past, the present, and the future. It must not have overwhelmed or surprised the young Aurobindo like any other Indian then, nor even in contemporary India. The Indian ethos offers, there can be various paths leading to the same goal, i.e., the 'ultimate goal' or 'aim.' Indian intellectual tradition of the past makes us aware in the present and offers the path for the future, which appeared to have arisen in his mind when he says-

"A rebirth of the soul of India into a new body of energy, a new form of its innate and ancient spirit, ... must insist much more finally and integrally than it has as yet done on its spiritual turn, on the greater and greater action of the spiritual motive in every sphere of our living." [Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, 20:32]

Aurobindo harnessed the spiritual preparedness to contribute to India; after he remained politically active for almost ten years, he eventually refused to engage in political activities on the ground. Foundation of his psycho-spiritual path, an amalgamation of conscious experiments of concurrent economy, the socio-cultural aspects for the spiritual awakening, and the integration of mundane goals in life to the higher echelons of consciousness (Coward, 1989). Aurobindo wrote, in reply to a letter declining a political role –

"As I have already wired you, I find myself unable to accept your offer of the presidency of the Nagpur Congress. I have commenced another kind of work with a spiritual basis, a work of spiritual, social, cultural, and economic reconstruction of an almost revolutionary kind, and am ever making or at least supervising a sort of practical or laboratory experiment in that sense, which needs all the attention and energy that I have. I have taken it up as my mission for the rest of my life..." (Navajata, pp 43,1972).

For leading other young members in the society to the path of sadhana and spiritual awakening, and later during discussion with his early disciple to join the path of sadhana, not only for their personal development, rather the spiritual awakening of India. The firm believer in the renaissance of the spiritual awakening of India, for humanity, cautioned the disciples of, do not to be caught infallibly in the glory of the past, keeping the pace with the ever-changing spheres of the phenomenal world, he mentions–

"We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future."
[Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, 19:10]

Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita: Psycho-philosophical Elucidations

Sri Aurobindo took the integration approach, based on the questions raised in our mind, while interacting with minimal self or when loosely knotted to the immediate society, and the more profound sense may rise in the mind, intertwined with the outside world. The whole Idea of his renaissance doctrine revolves around the assimilation of a theoretical framework of knowledge and praxis (karma). The making of his philosophy of integral education, transpersonal psychology (Srivastava, 2017), and integral yoga psychology (IYP) began to be shaped by the Upanishads and the BG (Sri Aurobindo, 1997). In his writings

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and his quotes, the startling effect of the BG and the Upanishads, he made it clear that his philosophy was formed first by the study of the Upanishads (Das,1972). Vedic literature exposure came later in his life. Upanishads formed the foundation of IYP (Dalal, 1989). Aurobindo revered the BG and Upanishads and elucidated that the Upanishad epoch laid the foundation of the intellectual prowess of the Indian mind on the praxis and philosophy of mind. The Upanishads are the reflection of the highest intellect of self-expression (Aurobindo, 1953). The journey of spiritual awakening through Bhakti (devotion), Jnana (knowledge), and Karma (action), and the harmonious integration of all three, as presented in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad BG. The didactic relevance of textual tradition and the concurrent dynamics of the phenomenal world. Aurobindo says-

"The individual frequently enough, the community at any moment of its life, is seen to turn away from the shastra, becomes impatient of it, loses that form of its will and faith and goes in search of another law which it is now more disposed to accept as the right rule of living and regard as a more vital or higher truth of existence. This may happen when the established shastra ceases to be a living thing and degenerates or stiffens into a mass of customs and conventions." (Sri Aurobindo, pp 426, 1950).

Aurobindo envisions that the repositories of past knowledge, including the later Brahmanas, Aryanakas, Upanishads, and BG, do not necessarily need to be accepted in terms of their historical timelines. They are independent, interdependent, and distinct simultaneously, yet a continuous flow of illumination originates from the Veda. Rather, it represents a process of evolution in a multidimensional way, embodying the approach of sages and seers in realizing the self. The vitality of the textual tradition is not only immortal in its offerings of supreme knowledge and ultimate reality, but importantly, it also presents expositions of the ultimate reality through the interiorisation of its immortality. Textual traditions are living, breathing, and eternal in their relevance and importance toward awakening the spiritual being. The interiorisation of the BG and Upanishads has remained constant in the recent past, immediate past, distant past, and ancient times. Aurobindo posits that customs and conventions are integral to Vedic heritage, and interiorisation must maintain continuity. A situation may arise when customs and conventions drift from philosophical texts, with the root cause lying in the understanding of the immortality of these knowledge scriptures. Scriptural knowledge remains true during changing times, serving the sacred and profane goals of individuals and communities. Individuals and communities ensure that customs and conventions do not become impediments on the path to the interiorisation of textual tradition.

DISCUSSION

Aurobindo studied Greek and Latin during his school days in England, which led him to explore Western literature (Chatterjee, 1989). Later, the influence of Greek and Latin appears in his writings on the Veda (Coward, 1989). Aurobindo also studied classical Western philosophy, including Plato, and read the works of Hegel and Whitehead, particularly regarding God and Evil (L.S. Ford, 1981; Padiyath, 2010). The major philosophical influences of the Vitalist Bergson during his formative years can be seen in his early writings (Lal, 1978). Max Muller's writings were the only source introducing Indian philosophy to Aurobindo during his formative years in England. In his early years in England, before he embarked on the quest for the 'self,' Aurobindo stated, "I made no study of Indian Philosophy, but knew the general ideas of the Vedanta philosophies. I knew practically nothing of the other except what I had read in Max Muller and other general accounts." The strong intellectual influence of the teachings of Ramakrishna and

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Vivekananda, which Aurobindo accepted as his first Indian spiritual experience, later propelled him into a philosophical pursuit of understanding the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and the practice of yoga. Vedanta psychology influences the foundation of Integral Yoga Philosophy (IYP). Consciousness is the reality, constituting both the ontological Brahman and the individual psychological self or Atman (Murali, 1997). The cosmic model of reality encompasses consciousness and matter, ranging from the subtlest level at the transcendental plane at the top to the gross level at the ephemeral plane at the bottom (Bolle, 1962). The phenomenal and noumenal are both real; samsara and nirvana exist tacitly within the realms of mind and matter. Aurobindo and his philosophy manifest as Tantric and Tantrified teachings from ancient India. Aurobindo refers to one of his disciples discussing a biography of him, to which he replied, "No one can write my life because it has not been on the surface for men to see." He reflected, "Who was this unseen, and where does it come from?" Such contemplation of the unseen explicitly highlights his philosophy of the noumenal and phenomenal realms. Sri Aurobindo reportedly experienced the Advaitic state of the impersonal Atman under the guidance of his early teacher Lele. A year later, while in Alipore jail, he had the mystical experience of Lord Krishna permeating the entire universe. The revelation of spirit leading to the realization of Sat-Cit-Ananda and the descent of mind form the core theme of his theory of mind and his mystical experiences. He posited that both matter and spirit represent a spiritual reality, offering an integrated theory of evolution and involution (Rao, 1989). This involution and evolution occur as a collocation of the gross and the subtle to the subtlest: Existence (divine existence, pure existent, ultimate reality, absolute spirit, sat-cit-ananda-unmanifest), Consciousness (cosmic force, conscious force, shakti), Bliss (sat-cit-ananda-manifest), Gnosis (super-mind) (gnosis), Mind, Soul (psyche), Life, and Matter. The emerging states of consciousness mark the first essential stage in spiritual experience, Atmajnana, representing the divine impersonal experience of existence. The second stage involves rising above the blur of identity represented by names and forms, leading to a perception of Brahman. The third and final stage of spiritual realization entails perceiving all things as the ontological entity Brahman as God Krishna. The influence of Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Vivekananda also forms the early foundation of Aurobindo's philosophical evolution from jnana to Vijnana. Ramakrishna Paramhansa elucidates that Vijnana encompasses the attainment of the three stages of spiritual experience, with the first being the knowledge of the impersonal Atman (Maharaj, 2015). A Vijnani first attains the knowledge of the impersonal Atman, followed by a deeper insight into the realization of Atman as the supreme impersonal-personal, ontological reality, Isvara. In his exploration of the integrated self of being, Aurobindo identifies the roles of empirical conscious being, innermost being, and inmost being (Miovic, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The foundation of Indian culture is in the message of the BG; action is perennial in the phenomenal world. BG offers a timeless appeal and a reverence that is hardly diminished over time. BG has an unwavering flame of the consistent spiritual enigma of immense value to the human mind. The essence of the teaching of the BG stands to affirm through the ages and never fades in its vitality and significance for life. BG became one of his missions of spiritual awakening, which he consciously chose over the on-ground political involvement in the Indian independence struggle. Aurobindo writes in one of the essays of the BG- "*Its influence is not merely philosophic or academic but immediate and living, an influence both for thought and action, and its ideas are actually at work as a powerful shaping factor in the revival and renewal of a nation and a culture.*" (Sri Aurobindo, 1950).

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The statement depicts the psycho-philosophical integration of the Samsaric and Para-vidya, the integration of praxis of yoga, the integration of psychology and philosophy, i.e., the transpersonal psychology of Aurobindo. It may not be an overstatement that Aurobindo finds not only the BG and Upanishads, spiritual texts of immortal value to the human mind, but also remains a mystical mystery of knowable–unknowable significance to him. It remains to evolve into a continual source of emitting knowledge, action, and bhakti in the shaping and revival, and renewal of a nation and a culture in the past. It will continue to offer the path of spiritual awakening, a reckoning self for the phenomenal world, and a tacit and subtle touch with the edge of the noumenal world. Aurobindo was convinced that the psycho-philosophical integration of these two realities of profane and sacred is not a conjecture of utopian thoughts but rather a visible, actionable notion of the path to a spiritual awakening of a nation deeply rooted in its culture.

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