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## **THE WOMAN AS SHAKTI: SRI AUROBINDO'S INTEGRAL APPROACH TO GENDER AND LIBERATION**

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**Abstract-** The philosophical and spiritual system proposed by Sri Aurobindo presents a very deep reframe of gender in the light of Shakti - creative, dynamic, transformative force of the Divine. In his experience of the Integral Yoga, he does not regard the woman as a social being but rather a representation of Shakti the force according to which the universe unfolds and consciousness changes. This article explores the sideline of the integrative attitudes towards gender and Liberation by Sri Aurobindo dealing on the centrality of Shakti in his thought, the possibilities of women spiritual empowerment referred to it and social and cultural transformations envisioned by him. The view of womanhood as a force of divine manifestation as opposed to something to be defined by the society makes all the three aspects of liberation (spiritual, psychological and social) congruent with Sri Aurobindo. The paper further examines the problems of being an embodiment of the Shakti ideal in the modern times and how it is relevant in the creation of more inclusive and spiritually aware society.

**Index Terms—** Sri Aurobindo, Shakti, Integral Yoga, Gender Equality, Women's Liberation, Spiritual Empowerment.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Womanhood has a separate and elevated status in the spiritual and philosophic outlook of Sri Aurobindo. He does not view the woman as simply an equal in the quest being human but rather as Shakti, the power of the Divine Mother that nurtures, generates and changes the universe. This insight is closely bound up with India apostolic and spiritual tradition, which gets a new rendition in Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

The role of women has been highly prescriptive in most past communities in the limits of patriarchal ideals and societal norms. Women were frequently pushed to the inside world, their voices and abilities were not heard in the street life, political, and spiritual life. Even in those cultures where femininity had been symbolically deified as the goddess, the status of goddess had seldom resulted in equality with men, or, literally, empowerment.

Sri Aurobindo criticizes such restrictive constructs by citing the old Indian spiritual traditions and blending them in a new and modern, evolutionary understanding of consciousness. His strategy goes beyond political or economic construction of equality and the idea of liberation is positioned in the sphere of spiritual change. This liberation and in this context, it is not only the release of social oppressions but also the absolute inner enlightenment and refashioning of nature to spread the divine consciousness on the planet.

## **2. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPT OF SHAKTI**

The Indian philosophy regarding the notion of Shakti is what wires the reality in a construct of energy and consciousness as an interaction of the two. Shakti is the cosmic force in which the universe is constantly being made, maintained and renewed. As opposed to a principle of stagnation or inertness, Shakti is dynamism, evolution, and advent; she is the dynamic force, which in other modes would leave the absolute, impersonal, principle in a state of quiescence. Therefore, the Divine in classical Indian philosophy is not simply a monolith, a unified whole but a combination of the a u0018staticu settlement a significant part of him can be said to be symbolized by Shiva, the unchanging Divine Being, and the dynamic, Shakti, the creative and responsive tendency. United they render the plenitude of life, as Shiva gives the immanent, motionless, transcendent position, and Shakti plays the dynamic part in the evolutionary existence. The force giving life to galaxies, life, mind and personality the inner energy or power which drive the presence of the consciousness of every being towards self-realization. She is also immanent in the depths of one person and transcendent beyond phenomenal limitation as the source of all becoming.

This conventional design is passed on and modified by Sri Aurobindo. He does not relegate Shakti to ritual and mythological symbolism; he makes her universal and vivifies our existence as the primeval energy of evolution. The universe in his vision is dynamic, motion rather than static creation and reflective of this is the progressive unfolding of consciousness by an internal process called Shakti. She is the agent of the bearing on the evolutions of the unconscious life-mind and then the mental consciousness to the further development by the next advance in the evolutionary sequence of the ascent of consciousness the supramental. Therefore, Shakti to Sri Aurobindo is the dynamic principle of elongation; she is the force that renders the inner practice of yoga, the purification and extension of nature and at the last, the descent of supplemental truth on the physical platform.

## **3. THE WOMAN AS SHAKTI IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA FRAMEWORK**

In Sri Aurobindo's spiritual psychology, the woman as Shakti is not a mere metaphor but a living reality. He envisions her as:

### ***3.1. The Source of Nurturing Power:***

Women are the keeper of the vital power that inspires them to grow, be compassionate, and harmonize with subtle strength. This supporting power in the vision of Sri Aurobindo of Shakti is not idle or simply subservient, it is, what we call, creative, preservative and regenerative. It binds the new life together, and gives the interior soil in which personal and social regeneration may germinate and grow. It is the source of more than physical life, of the emotional and psychic life as well-putting a mellowing influence in the place of strife, a promoting influence in place of misunderstanding, the gradual growth out of another form of consciousness in others under its influence.

### ***3.2. The Catalyst for Transformation:***

The existence of Shakti is a kind of a radiant pressure inside that brings repressed potentiality of people and societies to be inspired and utilized. Awakening is not one-dimensional: the psychic receptivity, aspiration, intuition and higher consciousness faculties work inwardly, breaking the inertia of the habitual, of self-doubt and inner dislocation. It brings about interior transformation of lower nature (mental, vital and physical tendencies) by converting them into vehicles of higher truth, harmony and purpose. and on the one who opens to this power there rests that broadening of the insight, that intensification of inner self-awareness, and that advance of affiliation of purpose to deed; on the sown seeds of creativeness, moral daring, self-giving affection, and spiritual intuition rests the germination and the unfolding starting up of life.

An example of this principle in practice is the Spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother (Mirra Alfassa). Her contributions to lead the Ashram and the disciples showed how Shakti can be said to work in an intervention, organizational, and translational sense.

In fact, Integral Yoga does not view women in the form of dependents but as the fellow makers of the spiritual future. This vision is not micro but rather macro as it takes into consideration the collective liberation.

## **4. GENDER, LIBERATION, AND INTEGRAL TRANSFORMATION**

Sri Aurobindo's approach to gender and liberation is rooted in the belief that true equality emerges from the realization of the soul's divinity, not from external social reforms alone. In the Integral Yoga, liberation (mukti) involves:

### ***4.1. Freedom from Ignorance:***

The desire to know the essence that is common to all the beings and to see through the external gender categories assigned by the society means ceasing to see the superficial appearance which

is divided into categories and roles. This divinity in the system of Sri Aurobindo is neither bound nor characterized by the terms of masculinity or femininity; it is the innermost consciousness of the soul--the overriding consciousness or you can say the identity of the spirit, which grasps and reconciles all the seeming opposites. Once a person wakes up to his or her inner divine by breaking the polarities of gender their coercive effect is loosened and the so-called opposite gendered qualities may be expressed, fused, and balanced in a higher centre.

#### ***4.2. Transformation of Nature:***

Elevating and making the corpus, the force of life and mind harmonious with this process of the inner purifying holistic life of the higher consciousness is a core movement of the whole Integral Yoga at the highest level, and such a state is an indispensable requirement to the truth of liberation. It is a triple metamorphosis of the human nature, and in every portion of the being the instrument of the divine presence is a transparent and responsive one. Purification at the mental level involves the release of thought and the release of thought of prejudice, rigidity as well as restless activity. The mind has to be stilled, made receptive to what is real and harmonized with an inner knowing as opposed to being dominated by the ego, fear or social programming. Balanced mind is a clear pathway towards the higher wisdom and is able to feel oneness behind various differences, even that between the genders.

#### ***4.3. Integration of Masculine and Feminine Principles:***

Striking the right equilibrium between the receptive and dynamic sides of existence is in the vision of Sri Aurobindo a necessary pre-condition to the wholesome development and harmonious self-realization. These two dimensions that are sometimes represented by the feminine and masculine principles are present within each person irrespective of biological sex and are complementary ways of consciousness and action. The receptive dimension is the ability to listen internally, to accept higher guidance, to take in knowledge and truth without deforming it, and to make space to grow in oneself and one another. In religion it is associated with being patient, intuitive, empathetic and stillness on the inside. This sensitivity is not one of passivity, but of active openness to permit one to become the object of the influence which the higher consciousness will then descend to form the nature of the subject. Action in the absence of receptivity gets out of touch with wisdom and lacks its significance.

Whereas the political campaigns of women rights are aimed at breaking social barriers, the paradigm of Sri Aurobindo is inner power awakening within woman, which will automatically lead to decay of the causes of inequality. That is why liberation is a spiritual process and a social transformation in this sense.

## **5. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF SRI AUROBINDO'S APPROACH**

At a time when gender politics can become polarizing as competing truths of identity politics, cultural relativism and functions reductively as a universalism, a more unifying and integrating vision of gender issues is needed. His perspective contrasts not so much with our thinking of gender in terms of a battle of rights, oppositions or a finite list of categories but with the focusing of the issue of equality within the larger context of spiritual realization where identity with the indispensable divinity of all beings is acknowledged and where the surface dualism of masculine/feminine qualities is dispelled and fulfilled and made one. This does not mean that differences will be eradicated; instead it will permit their complementary values to be made harmonious by means of which the energies of masculine and feminine energies can work together in the co-creation of a more elevated collective life. This sort of synthesis evades the snares of reductionism in the sense of either using identity as an instrument of exclusion or flattened sameness by basing transformation on the illumination of inner consciousness which will inevitably be manifested in more just, balanced and creative outer forms.

Currently, even with improved laws and awareness, women still struggle with structural and systemic inequalities like financial disparity, gender-based abuse, and cultural ostracization that curb a fully functioning life in the realms of the public and that of the personal. These struggles are not merely the result of injustices that exist outside of us, but of deeper in collective balances; in which the feminine principle of receptivity, intuitive wisdom as well as nurturance has been devalued or warped. Meanwhile, we have never been at a time when so many women become leaders, philosophers, teachers, and spiritual role models, who can be said to be living images of Shakti: not rigid but with enduring strength, not compromising but merciful, and powerful in the art of creation but never controlling. These women are walking curiosities on the effectiveness of how inner empowerment and outer agency can unite in the same way that leadership can be hard with a soft edge, visionary and down looking.

## **6. CHALLENGES IN REALIZING THE SHAKTI IDEAL**

Despite its inspirational nature, the Shakti ideal faces several obstacles:

**Cultural Misinterpretations:** In some contexts, reverence for Shakti remains symbolic, without translating into genuine empowerment.

**Patriarchal Resistance:** Deep-rooted biases hinder the acceptance of women as equal agents of transformation.

**Materialistic Tendencies:** A society driven by economic competition often overlooks the spiritual dimension of empowerment.

Addressing these challenges requires not only awareness but also a transformation of values at the individual and collective levels.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The application of gender equality to the framework of integral consciousness, the equivalent of a very deep level, not of social transformation, but rather social law, constitutes an activity that transcends all the boundaries of social transformation or the social juridical social law. As much as women need to have their political, economic, and educational rights in order to be empowered, he says this is not enough to achieve the kind of equality much needed by humanity as it needs to go much deeper and last long. His vision grounds equality among the genders in the spiritual law of Shakti, which is the creative, transformative and sustaining power of the Divine, which continues to play out at both cosmic and individual levels. The woman in this perspective is not just a beneficiary of reform, she is not just subject of societal benevolence, and she plays an active role in ensuring that the divine plan is taking place, she is a manifesting agent without whom evolutionary processes of humanity would be half-complete.

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