A Discourse of Spiritual Ecosophy in Sri Aurobindo's Poetry

Amandeep Kour

Research Scholar, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University Chandigarh

Abstract: Sri Aurobindo was a prominent philosopher, thinker, yogi, and sage who significantly

contributed to India's spiritual renaissance. According to Sri Aurobindo, humans are conscious beings

capable of inner evolution through a supra-rational mind. In the contemporary era, "ecosophy" is an

ecological philosophy that emphasizes the relationship between literature and the environment and is

one of the components of ecocriticism theory. A Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, coined the

term "Deep Ecology" or "ecosophy," defining it as an environmental philosophy based on eight

principles that oppose anthropocentric models of existence. Deep ecology emphasizes that humans

must recognize the inherent value of nature over its exclusive usefulness and exploitation. The paper

aims to explore a discourse of spiritual ecosophy in Sri Aurobindo's poetry, affirming the recognition

of the interrelatedness of life forms through the evolution of self. Sri Aurobindo extensively wrote

about the spiritual evolution of humankind. It is a novel worldview that holds the power to mitigate

the current ecological degeneration through consciousness evolution. Humanity ought to arrive at a

realization of self, as the self is a supra-rational mind with special power to realize the infinite in the

finite. This realization fosters an appreciation for the intrinsic value of the diversity of life forms and

a new perspective on the relationship between humanity and the natural world. By reconnecting the

lower self with the higher self, fostering peaceful co-existence, and cherishing the essence of life

forms, Sri Aurobindo's spiritual insights guide by navigating contemporary ecological challenges

through the power of supermind.

Keywords: Ecosophy, Spiritual Renaissance, Inner Evolution, Self-Realisation, and Inter-

Connectedness

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Deep Ecology: An Overview

Deep ecology is an environmental philosophy that advocates a new perspective on the relationship between humanity and the natural world. It calls for a transformation of human thought concerning the environment by recognizing the inherent value of nature over its exclusive authority by humans. Also known as an ecosophy of environment, it was articulated and presented by a Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, and an American environmentalist, George Sessions, in 1984. The philosophy was a protest against the anthropocentric models of existence in European and American continents, implying that humans have disturbed the natural equilibrium of the world around us. Naess defined 'deep ecology' as an amalgamation of religious ideals and many environmental movements that cornerstones the role of humans in the environment through the development of deep ecological consciousness. This consciousness is crucial to counteract shallow environmentalism and to stress the moral obligation of humans to care for nature. In 1972, Naess and Sessions formulated eight principles that urged the need for a conscious social change in humans. They emphasised the transformation of anthropocentric societies into biocentric ones to maintain diversity and ensure the holistic well-being of ecology.

Deep ecology offers a broader perspective on the metaphysics of the natural world. It emphasises self-realisation that leads to an experience of the interrelatedness of life forms. In this regard, Naess asserts the need for a profound transformation in human attitude to realise the interdependence of life forms. Therefore, self-realisation is a means to become a conscious member of the ecosphere and recognise and realise the beauty and existence of biodiversity. Emphasising the importance of self-realisation, in *The Dragonfly Will Be the Messiah* (2021), Masanobu Fukuoka, a Japanese farmer and philosopher, writes, "No God or Buddha will rescue the human race, and the destruction of nature will lead to the destruction of the human race" (14). Self-realisation is an enterprise from the ego-eco consciousness through identifying oneself with life forms and realising their innate value. Therefore, self-realisation aims to delve into oneself to broaden the perspective of self, recognising the self as a part of the environment that must contribute to the harmony of existence.

Spiritual Ecosophy: Sri Aurobindo's Idea of Nature

Poetry is an ocean to plunge into, while spiritual poetry is a creek, decoding a profound reality of the world around us to enlighten our way by explaining higher truths. Sri Aurobindo, a spiritual revolutionary of the modern age in India, made a far-reaching contribution to human thought by broadening the perspectives of one's knowledge and opening up new vistas of vision through his profound yogic experience. Defining the objective of spirituality as a quest for evolved consciousness, Sri Aurobindo emerged as a poet of consciousness who envisions the manifestation of divine consciousness on earth with a new man, empowering a new civilization through the power of supermind. Sri Aurobindo held a bold view: "The evolution began with the big bang and will bloom into a perfect humanity on earth" (Ganguli x).

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ecosophy is his spiritual concept of nature based on his yogic experience. The substance of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga is consciousness, the primary impulse that creates the universe. Explaining consciousness as the only truth and an eternal self of all things, underlying the appearances of animate and inanimate things in the phenomenal world, Sri Aurobindo, in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, states:

all things are originally one being, but a one who insists on his own infinite diversity, even a suggestion that there is in this eternal unity, an eternal pluralism; the Infinite Being self-repeated in an infinite multiplicity of beings each unique and yet each the One. (279-80)

The law of energy is the immutable sameness at the base with a free, unaccountable variation on the surface. Sri Aurobindo refers to the impulse that produces different things in the world as nature. He also explains that nature's horizontal and vertical movements are nature's yoga. The horizontal movement of nature is the working of consciousness in inanimate matter. The vertical movement of nature implies the release of consciousness from its lower plane to the higher plane. It means that the creation has descended all the degrees of being from the Supermind to matter, and in each degree, it has created a world, a plane, or an order proper to that degree. Sri Aurobindo says, "Creation leaped straight from the hands of God; / Marvel and rapture wandered in the ways" (Savitri 124). Fritjof

Capra, in *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, remarked: "Eastern view of the world is organic, for the Eastern Mystic, all things and events perceived by the senses are interrelated, connected, and are but different aspects or manifestation of the same ultimate reality" (29). Sri Aurobindo's concept of nature is evolutionary, establishing the higher consciousness as a manifestation on earth. His integral yoga promotes a vision of reality called "satyadarshan" (Tyagi 24), which shapes man's earthly existence through the spiritual evolution of the inner self. Therefore, according to Sri Aurobindo, "All is Sachchidananda" (Ganguli 388).

The primary cause of the environmental crisis is the lack of environmental sensitivity and reverence, leading to a misunderstanding of nature as without essence. Also, humans consider the existence of natural resources for their exclusive use, further contributing to degradation. Deep ecology emphasises the development of an eco-centric perspective, asserting the inclusiveness of ecosystems, watersheds, and landscapes. It highlights the inherent value of life forms, humans and non-humans, essentially with the right to live. The ecosophy of environment stresses the intrinsic worth through the interconnectedness of life forms. It states there is no hierarchy in the web of life, implying the infinite relationship is due to the reliance of everything upon everything else. Deep ecology alludes to the richness and diversity of life, instructing humans to be conscious of their moral obligation towards the environment by acknowledging the right to life and the flourishing of every living entity.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of nature is spiritually oriented, promoting a profound connection with the environment by awakening our conscience to be more sensitive and mindful of its inner worth. Sri Aurobindo's ecosophy of nature assists in removing the constitutional self-ignorance through self-knowledge, asserting the innate value of all life forms with the power of supermind. Admitting living intelligence within the environment through the notion of consciousness in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo says, "All things are in Nature, and all things are in God" (44). Also, through the ecosophy of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo explains human life as an essential part

of the ecosphere and insists on developing a holistic view of the world by responding positively to it. Naess's tenets of deep ecology resonate with the spiritual ecosophy of nature as defined by Sri Aurobindo, emphasizing the unity of life forms through recognition of its essence. He promotes critical thinking about the environment's future by asserting the supermind's power behind the matrix of all matter. The paper attempts to untangle Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ecosophy that inspires nature sensitivity through poetry, which prepares the way for moulding earthly life into divine life by integrating material life with the life of the spirit.

Asserting the reality of the eternal self as the essence of all life forms, Sri Aurobindo states: "Life is a legitimate field, an expression of divine in its multiple forms" (Tyagi 126). Savitri, the magnum opus of Sri Aurobindo, explicates his heightened consciousness of the philosophy of nature. Additionally, his poems, The Divine Hearing, The Kingdom Within, The Hidden Plan, A Tree, Surrender, Rose of God, Transformation to name a few, are his poetic expressions of appreciation of the marvel of nature, which goes beyond the externalities of life, earning him the title of "the greatest intellectual of our age," as said by Dr. Radhakrishnan (Ganguli ix). Spiritual evolution is attaining a unified nature sensibility by recognising life forms 'interrelatedness. Thus, Sri Aurobindo's poetry expresses his innate yogic experience, attempting to bring out the myriad expressions of truth which form the basis of different objects in nature.

A Discourse of Spiritual Ecosophy in Sri Aurobindo's Poetry

Integral yoga is the basis of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ecosophy, as illustrated by his poetry. He calls for a primary change in human nature through a reversal of consciousness that would assist humans to rise above their shallow perception of ecology. Shallow ecology is an anthropocentric mode of life based on the premise that the sole purpose of nature is to serve human needs. It attaches no importance to the right to live and flourish and the intrinsic value of life forms, asserting the usage of nature as an exclusive right of humans. Today, the world has seen unprecedented changes that continue to occur at an ever-increasing pace, emphasising the need for a critical look at the purpose and future of humanity. Science plays a pivotal role in the progress and betterment of human life, culture, and

civilisation. However, regardless of its immense scientific achievements, it fails to provide the integral truth, the inner life and spirit, as "it studies surface laws by surface thought" (Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* 160). Scientific reasoning has rationalised everything; therefore, untangling the truth behind the apparent phenomena is complex. Sri Aurobindo claims that the scientific inventions declared evolution a spontaneous process, rejecting its spiritual connection. He ironically presents the man's joy in pursuing his lower nature by disregarding his significance in the cosmic order and focusing entirely on material success. Insisting on developing spiritual consciousness, Sri Aurobindo, in the sonnet, *Science and the Unknowable*, rejects the limited scientific approach, as it cannot fathom the concrete truth and states:

Man's science builds abstractions cold and bare

And carves to formulas the living whole;

It is a brain and hand without a soul,

A piercing eye behind our outward stare.

The objects that we see are not in their form,

A mass of forces is the apparent shape;

Pursued and seized, their inner lines escape

In a vast consciousness beyond our norm. (Collected Poems 598)

Sri Aurobindo values the scientific efforts to unfold the secrets of nature. However, he asserts that it limited itself to the matter by ignoring the truth behind the surface of matter. Highlighting the significance of material life designed for evolutionary purposes, Sri Aurobindo in the epic, *Savitri* writes, "There is the truth of which the world's truths are shreds, / The Light of which the world's ignorance is the shade" (661). Criticising the contemporary world, Sri Aurobindo graphically presents the rational man who is dominated by ego-principle, asserting his hollow power and achievements:

I am the heir of the forces of the earth,

Slowly I make good my right to my estate;

A growing godhead in her divinised mud,

I climb, a claimant to the throne of heaven.

The last-born of the earth I stand the first; (Savitri 511)

One of the principles of deep ecology stresses the cause of environmental crisis by pointing out excessive human interference, as humans believe the entire cosmos is for their use: "For me and my use the universe was made" (*Savitri* 511). The principle states that human interference has harmed the planet more than contributed to its goodness. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo states:

Air was invented for my lungs to breathe,

Conditioned as a wide and wall-less space

For my winged chariot's wheels to cleave a road,

The sea was made for me to swim and sail

And bear my golden commerce on its back: (512)

Moreover, the modern man is a servant of his blundering ego and rising appetites. The verse underlies the tone of an egoistic man who declares that his achievements make him think they are more significant than nature. Commenting on the boastful approach of modern man in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo states, "I have grown greater than Nature, wiser than God. / I have made real what she never dreamed, / I have seized her powers and harnessed for my work" (512).

Furthermore, due to ignorance, modern man is obsessed with outer reality and neglects life's spiritual dimension, which is essential for understanding the self and nature. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo presents the ego-consciousness that drives the modern man and says:

No magic can surpass my magic's skill.

There is no miracle I shall not achieve.

What God imperfect left, I will complete,

• • •

His sin and error I will eliminate; (512)

Due to scientific advancements, humanity is fractured by the happenings worldwide, as spiritual connections are severed and snapped. Spiritual paralysis has affected the traditional pillars of moral,

social, and ethical values, thus evading the value of relationships. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo states, "... these formulae of Science may be pragmatically correct and infallible, they may govern the practical how of Nature's processes, but they do not disclose the intrinsic how and why..." (299). The scientific disciplines reject the spiritual dimension of existence; therefore, commenting on the touchstone of the logic of sciences, Sri Aurobindo, in *War and Determinism*, writes, "The destiny of the race in this age of crisis and revolution will depend much more on the spirit which we are than on the machinery we shall use..." (1). He proposes to implement the discoveries and inventions of physical science into the opportunity to pursue the discovery of higher truth, diviner spirit, using life for a higher perfection of being over multiplication and expanding collective ego. The objective of physical science is the mechanised unity of material life; however, according to Sri Aurobindo, the aim ought to be "a greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power to weld all into greater unity of whole-life" (*The Life Divine* 1055).

Addressing the well-being of everything in its own right, the philosophy of deep ecology asserts the right of nature to exist for its beauty and value. The principle is a call for new strategies with a purpose to be implemented by humans, insisting on a complete transformation in the lives of humans. New ideas emphasise how humans should treat the environment, asserting the need to recognise the quality of life over higher living standards, as a good quality of life promotes happiness. Therefore, deep ecology calls for sincere human efforts to implement its principles. In this regard, through his poetical insight, Sri Aurobindo affirms the evolution of consciousness to add potential meaning into existence by connecting humans with nature at a large scale. Sri Aurobindo asserts the need to connect to the root of the matter that sustains life forms, insisting there is more to phenomenal life.

Through self-realisation, Sri Aurobindo's poetry aims to divinise human nature and the world in the transcendental self, the universal spirit of oneness. Self-realisation is to enlarge the realm of knowledge about the world and the inner self, leading to an awareness of mutual inclusiveness and oneness, as "the true knowledge can be made subjectively real by spiritual reflection" (*The Life Divine*

691). Self-realisation promotes a collective vision towards a sustainable and inclusive ecosystem, affirming a shared space with other life forms. It cultivates an ecological self-sensitive to experience nature's joy by tapping the supermind's potential. Ecological self-promotes transformation from anthropocentric living to a state of selflessness, alluding to better individuals who overcome lower possessive self and their greed using natural resources and landscapes. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo calls for a profound transformation at the level of consciousness that goes beyond daily concerns to fulfil our duty towards the environment. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ecosophy of evolved life coincides with the substance of deep ecology.

Nature is the abode of heavenly essence. It is the creative force of life, which reflects the infinite and inexhaustible. Perceiving divinity in every aspect of nature, Sri Aurobindo gives symbolic expression to the progressive and evolutionary power of nature and states:

All Nature was a conscious front of God:

A wisdom worked in all, self-moved, self-sure,

A plenitude of illimitable Light,

An authenticity of intuitive Truth,

A glory and passion of creative Force. (Savitri 324)

Sri Aurobindo glorified nature and its manifestation by recognizing the spiritual significance behind every inanimate and animate life form. The inanimate objects belong to the realm of matter, which expresses hidden divinity, presenting beautiful forms. While appreciating the divine essence permeating the inanimate objects and affirming the interrelatedness between the humans and inanimate objects, in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo states, "Yet are they instruments of a Will supreme, / Watched by a still all-seeing Eye above" (378). In addition, referring to the all-embracing presence of divinity as a connective force behind all life forms, Sri Aurobindo says:

Thus shall the earth open to divinity

And common natures feel the wide uplift,

Illumine common acts with the Spirit's ray

And meet the deity in common things. (Savitri 710)

Sri Aurobindo's poetry expresses eco-consciousness, implying the interrelatedness of life forms. Therefore, the essence of life forms can help a man connect with his inner self. He asserts that raising and extending our insights about the inanimate objects and the inner workings of the spirit means that "a greater power of spirit brings a greater power of life" (*Future Poetry* 205). In this regard, Sri Aurobindo insists on the need for poise and calmness of inner self to comprehend the profound nature's musing through the lines taken from *Savitri*, "The rhythm of the intenser wordless Thought / That gathers in silence behind life, / And the low sweet inarticulate voice of earth / In the great passion of her sun-kissed trance" (380). Sri Aurobindo sensitises humanity to recognise the inner self, which contains the subtle links ignored by science and modern thought. Realising inherent value means refining our conduct to gain insight into consciousness, which gives us an inclusive concept of the beauty of life forms in its widest sense.

Each was a symbol power, a vivid flash

In the circuit of infinities half-known;

Nothing was alien or inanimate,

Nothing without its meaning or its call. (*Savitri* 357)

Sri Aurobindo envisions the inanimate objects manifested in nature possessing life. In *Rose of God*, the rose symbolizes the essence of God through bliss, light, power, life, and love, as integral perfection of God. Bliss is for the human heart; light symbolizes knowledge of the truth that nourishes the human mind with power that sustains the human will and life, and finally, the love to make the earth an excellent dwelling to live. Calling *Rose of God* a revelation of spiritual reality, Sri Aurobindo says:

Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,

Rose of love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!

Arise from the heart of yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss:

Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude's kiss. (Collected Poems 564)

Sri Aurobindo's notion of nature is integral as he moves from external to internal appreciation of the value of life forms. He affirms spiritual experience for those who strive to move from the outwardness of life forms and identify with nature profoundly. Recognition and appreciation of all life forms leads to an experience of spiritual oneness developed through love. Sri Aurobindo says:

All time-made difference they overcame;

The world was fibred with their own heart-strings;

Close drawn to the heart that beats in every breast,

They reached the one self in all through boundless love. (Savitri 381)

In addition, discussing the role of nature in quenching the spiritual thirst of seekers on the spiritual path, Sri Aurobindo affirms nature, too, follows the dictate of the Supreme will, "... the epic climb / of the human soul from its flat earthly state / to the discovery of a greater self / And the far gleam of an eternal light" (*Savitri* 46). He affirms the feeling of harmony in life and oneness among all creatures accompanies the treasure of the silent hour:

And spent the treasure of a silent hour

Bathed in the purity of the mild gaze

That, uninsistent, ruled them from its peace,

And by its influence found the ways of calm. (Savitri 382)

Man has gained knowledge of the laws of nature but has snapped the connection with the essence of existence. In the absence of spirituality, humanity stifles as it neither progresses nor gains knowledge. Therefore, the essence of Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga is realising the wideness of cosmic consciousness. In words of Sri Aurobindo:

Makes all creation deeply intimate:

A fourth dimension of aesthetic sense

Where all is in ourselves, ourselves in all,

To the cosmic wideness re-aligns our souls. (Savitri 112)

Sri Aurobindo strives to prepare the path for super-humanity, aiming to transform earthly life into divine life. He insists that man is an evolutionary being with unrealised potential opening up in him. An evolved man can have inclusive experience gained through his raised level of consciousness, the power of supermind. The supermind is the state of consciousness that sees the universe by transforming all the limited and particular, experiencing universal beauty, love, and delight. His poetry expresses the truth of the inner spirit, working in life with a comprehensive vision. Each life form has a value because all are Consciousness-force, which devolves during manifestation, creating many variables of itself, which are spiritual and supra-physical by nature. Asserting the significance of harmony among life forms, in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo brings out the integration of all aspects of material life with the immaterial life, "United the within and the without / To make of life a cosmic harmony, / An empire of the immanent Divine" (318). Also, he discusses the wisdom formula of consciousness that lasts till eternity as "The thousand-fold expression of the One" (*Savitri* 96).

Thus, deep ecology principles emphasise living a conscious life by developing an awareness of the interrelatedness of life forms through their intrinsic value. Recognition of the oneness of life forms will assist in a better dwelling on earth, promoting a healthy environment for all life forms. Sri Aurobindo's ecosophy aligns with the deep ecology of Arne Naess, who advocated environmental philosophy as a social movement promoting an egalitarian outlook towards life forms by realising the inherent value of all life. Henceforth, Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ecosophy of integral yoga guides the modern man in developing the integral vision aimed at the integral progress of man's being who embraces all life forms. Through the evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo asserts the actualisation of a holistic change of the ecosystem that positively impacts the entire planet.

Conclusion

Today, the entire human civilisation is grappling with the greatest menace of self-destruction caused by the boom of scientific advancements, industrialisation, and deforestation arising out of human greed that majorly contribute to ecological setbacks such as disasters, pollution, and global warming, to name a few. Also, they are the primary reasons prompting the study of deep ecology. Deep ecology

argues for the rightful living of all life forms by recognising the inherent essence, termed the value of life forms. In this regard, the spiritual ecosophy of Sri Aurobindo's poetry is a reformative way to save the world from the environmental crisis, emphasising the need for the evolution of human consciousness. Self-realisation is the contemplation of self, resonating with ego at a lower level that has done more harm to the planet than preserving it; therefore, Sri Aurobindo advises self-evolution for establishing a habitable place for all life forms. Self-realisation aims at uniting humanity by unveiling the power of the super-mind. His poetry sensitises humanity to the wisdom of nature to establish a balance between nature and human actions for a sustainable future.

"All life is yoga" (Ganguli 333), as said by Sri Aurobindo, prepares the ground for spiritual evolution by implanting a vision of integral life. He believed in all life as essentially one in essence and insisted on humans to serve and preserve the biosphere, which will serve humanity in the long run. Sri Aurobindo has left for posterity a philosophy of living a meaningful life through individual morality with a profound commitment towards the environment through the realisation of the potential of the supermind. Henceforth, the evolution of human consciousness can bring optimism for our tomorrow.

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