From *Āsurī* Nature to *Daivī* Nature:
Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the *Gītā* in Light of Classical Exegesis

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Abstract: This paper presents a comparative analysis of the *Daivī* and *Āsurī Sampad* (divine and demoniac qualities) as delineated in the sixteenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* (1936), drawing primarily on Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gītā* (1997a). By examining twenty-six virtues attributed to the *Daivī* nature and contrasting them with classical Sanskrit commentaries, the study identifies both convergences and omissions in Sri Aurobindo's interpretations. The paper further explores his psychological interpretation of the *Guṇas*, the transformative role of *Sattva*, and the soul's ascent toward divine consciousness. In doing so, it situates his readings within a broader Indian philosophical and spiritual framework, highlighting how the transition from *Rājasika* and *Tāmasika* tendencies to *Triguṇātīta* (beyond the *Guṇas*) aligns with inner evolution. The paper also contextualizes *Dharma* and *Satya* as foundational values through *Purāṇic* sources, offering a nuanced perspective on Sri Aurobindo's integrative vision of spiritual development.

Keywords: Daivī and *Āsurī* nature, *Bhagavadgītā*, Sri Aurobindo, *Guṇas*, spiritual evolution

1. Introduction

The *Bhagavadgītā* (1936) is the epitome of all Indian thought and achievements. It synthesizes diverse strands of Indian philosophy, including *Vedānta, Sāṅkhya*, and *Yoga*, and addresses enduring spiritual and ethical dilemmas. The fourteenth chapter shows us that all actions of a man or a creature are the only actions of the three qualities, *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*, in which one predominates and the other two modify its results (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, pp. 586–608). The sixteenth chapter contains twenty-four verses, which give us three major thoughts for performing enlightened actions leading us towards the heights of divine transformation (pp. 633–651). This paper is an analysis of the divine and undivine qualities known as *Daivī* and Ā*surī Sampad* as represented in the original text of the *Bhagavadgītā* and as developed by Sri Aurobindo in his work, *Essays on the Gītā* (1997a).

Based on the comparative readings of the above-mentioned texts, the following main themes have emerged. The transcendental nature and its attendant qualities and the demoniac nature and its qualities are explained. The advantages and disadvantages of these two qualities are also elaborated. Three elements, namely passion, anger and greed, should be avoided. Once avoided, the practitioner begins walking the path of inner development. This analysis reveals how the *Gītā* presents not just an ethical binary but a dynamic spectrum of human tendencies that can evolve through conscious spiritual effort.

Therefore, this research will focus on two major aspects of Sri Aurobindo's writing on the sixteenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* called *Devāsura-sampad-vibhāga-yoga*. The paper's analysis

will be based on how the content and concept of this chapter have been expressed in Sri Aurobindo's translations, with a focus on the psychological interpretation of the text.

In *Essays on the Gītā*, Sri Aurobindo talks about the *Sāttvika* qualities or *Daivī Sampad*. His interpretation offers both a literal and psychological rendering, linking these qualities with inner evolution and spiritual readiness for divine consciousness. The paper contributes to ongoing scholarly engagement with the *Gītā* by reevaluating the spiritual typologies of *Deva* and *Asura* as part of an inner transformational journey in Sri Aurobindo's vision.

2. The *Daivī Sampad* in the *Bhagavadgītā* and Sri Aurobindo

The term *Sāttvika* refers to qualities rooted in clarity, harmony, and illumination, as shaped by the *Guṇa* of *Sattva* (Aurobindo 1997a, p. 481). *Daivī Sampad*, or divine wealth, represents the manifestation of these qualities in a being whose nature is oriented toward spiritual truth, ethical living, and self-transcendence. These traits are not merely moral virtues, but psychological markers of readiness for the supramental evolution Sri Aurobindo envisions. According to him, the *Daivī* nature is the spiritual scaffolding required for liberation from the binding forces of ego, desire, and ignorance.

Regarding the *S*āttvika qualities, Sri Aurobindo says 'The *Deva* nature is distinguished by an acme of the *Sāttvika* habits and qualities; self-control, sacrifice, the religious habit, cleanliness and purity, candour and straightforwardness, truth, calm and self-denial, compassion to all beings, modesty, gentleness, forgivingness, patience, steadfastness, a deep sweet and serious freedom from all restlessness, levity and inconstancy are its native attributes' (Aurobindo, 1997a, p. 471). He further explains that this gentleness, self-denial, and self-control in a person are not signs of weakness; rather, they are accompanied by inner strength and vital energy, firm determination, and the fearless spirit of one who lives righteously and truthfully, embodying qualities like spiritual energy (*Teja*), fearlessness (*Abhaya*), perseverance (*Dhṛti*), non-violence (*Ahiṃsā*), and truthfulness (*Satya*) (p. 472).

This detailed exposition by Sri Aurobindo closely parallels the list of twenty-six divine qualities enumerated in the opening verses of the sixteenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*. To understand the scriptural foundation of his interpretation, we now turn to these Sanskrit verses, which present the canonical framework of *Daivī Sampad*.

> *abhayaṃ sattvasaṃśuddhirjñānayogavyavasthitiḥ |*
> *dānaṃ damaśca yajñaśca svādhyāyastapa ārjavam ||* (16.1)
> *ahiṃsā satyamakrodhastyāgaḥ śāntirapaiśunam |*
> *dayā bhūteṣvaloluptvaṃ mārdavaṃ hrīracāpalam ||* (16.2)
> *tejaḥ kṣamā dhṛtiḥ śaucamadroho nātimānitā |*
> *bhavanti sampadaṃ daivīmabhijātasya bhārata ||* (16.3)
>
> (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, pp. 633–636)

Abhaya is the fearless state where the soul walks unshaken, while *Sattvasaṃśuddhi* is the inner clarity born from the refinement of one's nature. Rooted in steadfast inquiry, *Jñānayogavyavasthiti* marks unwavering dedication to the path of knowledge. The spirit of *Dāna* opens the hand in generous giving, and *Dama* commands the senses with quiet strength. Through *Yajña*, one offers self and action as sacred sacrifice, while *Svādhyāya* kindles truth through scriptural introspection. *Tapa* embodies the fire of disciplined effort, and *Ārjava* reflects straightness of conduct and sincerity of heart.

In a life aligned with *Dharma*, *Ahiṃsā* ensures no harm in thought or deed, and *Satya* anchors truth in word and being. *Akrodha* manifests as stillness amid provocation, while *Tyāga* releases attachment not as loss but as liberation. *Śānti* rests as a foundation of calm power, and *Apaiśuna* withholds divisive speech. With *Dayā* toward all *Bhūta*, compassion extends beyond self. *Aloluptva* frees the mind from restless longing; *Mārdava* nurtures strength through gentleness. *Hrī* protects modesty, and *Acāpala* holds the body and mind free from fickleness.

Tejas blazes forth as spiritual radiance and courageous purpose, while *Kṣamā* dissolves resentment through deep forgiveness. *Dhṛti* endures with purposeful resolve, and *Śauca* keeps the body, mind, and intentions pure. The absence of hostility is *Adroha*, and *Na Atimānitā* reflects a humility untouched by pride. These virtues, O Bhārata, are the divine endowments—*Daivī Sampad*—inherent in those born to live by the light of the higher nature.[1]

3. Comparative Overview of the Twenty-Six *Daivī* Qualities

The following section presents a comparative perspective on the twenty-six *Daivī* qualities listed in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Each quality is described individually with reference to Sri Aurobindo's interpretation from *Essays on the Gītā*, and explanatory insights drawn from Sanskrit commentators including Śaṅkarācārya, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, Nīlakaṇṭha, Śrīdhara, Dhanapati, and Abhinavagupta. This comparative mapping sets the foundation for the exegetical analysis that follows.

1. Abhaya: Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 472) interprets this as the 'fearlessness of the soul,' using the term *Abhayam* to underscore its inner spiritual significance. Among classical commentators, Śaṅkarācārya explains *Abhaya* as *abhīrutā*, describing it as the absence of cowardice and shyness (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 634). Madhusūdana Sarasvatī elaborates with the phrase *sarvabhūtebhyaḥ abhayadāna-saṃkalpagrahaṇam* (p. 634), which signifies a vow or commitment to give assurance of safety to all creatures. Śrīdhara succinctly defines it as *bhayābhāvaḥ* (p. 634), meaning a state of fearlessness.

2. Sattvasaṃśuddhi: Sattvasaṃśuddhi has been described by Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 472) as 'the whole temperament [which] is integrally pure.' Among classical commentators, Śaṅkarācārya explained it as *sattvasya antaḥkaraṇasya saṃvyavahāreṣu paravañcana-māyā-anṛta-ādi-parivarjanam śuddhabhāvena vyavahāraḥ* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 634), which meant that one should avoid cheating, magical power or illusion, untruth, etc., in one's mental disposition during conduct, and instead act with a pure temperament. Nīlakaṇṭha defined the term as *cittanairmalyam*, which he interpreted as purity of mind or temperament (p. 634).

3. Jñānayogavyavasthiti: Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 472) refers to it as 'seeking for knowledge and a calm and fixed abiding in knowledge.' Among classical commentators, Śaṅkarācārya explains *Jñāna* as *jñānaṃ śāstrataḥ ācāryataḥ ātmādipadārthānāṃ avagamaḥ*, which means studying knowledge from the scriptures and teachers. *Yogaḥ avagatānām indriyādi-upasaṃhāreṇa ekāgratayā svātmasaṃvedyatā āpādanam* describes concentrating on that learned knowledge with a focused mind, after withdrawing the senses. He concludes that *tayoḥ jñānayogayoḥ vyavasthitiḥ vyavasthānaṃ tanniṣṭhatā* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 634) — to remain established in that state is *jñānayogavyavasthitiḥ*. Nīlakaṇṭha further describes *Jñāna* as that which arises through *śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana* (hearing, reflection, and contemplation), and *yoga* as *jñātārthe cittapraṇidhānam*, or focused contemplation on the learned knowledge. The phrase *tayoḥ vyavasthitiḥ* (p. 634) denotes steadfastness in both.

4. Dāna: With respect to *Dāna*, Sri Aurobindo does not provide any explanation for this quality. Among classical commentators, Śaṅkarācārya defines it as *yathāśakti saṃvibhāgaḥ annādīnām* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 634), meaning the distribution of food, wealth, and other essentials according to one's capacity. It refers to giving generously and proportionately, and is thus comparable to the notion of charity.

5. Dama: Dama has been translated as 'self-control' by Sri Aurobindo (1997a, pp. 471–472). Śaṅkarācārya defined it as *bāhya-karaṇānām indriyānām upaśamaḥ* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 634), meaning the control or restraint of the ten the ten external organs—the five sense organs (*jñānendriyas*) and the five organs of action (*karmendriyas*).

6. Yajña: Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471) also describes it as 'sacrifice.' According to Dhanapati, *śrautaḥ agnihotrādi-devayajñaḥ smārtaḥ bhūta-pitṛ-nṛ-yajñatrayam* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 634) — it means a twofold sacrifice. One is *śrautaḥ*, meaning the sacrifice for the Gods and Goddesses, and another is *smārta*, meaning sacrifice for our forefathers or ancestors, guests, and creatures.

7. Svādhyāya: With respect to *Svādhyāya*, Sri Aurobindo does not elaborate on it in this section. Śaṅkarācārya explains it as *ṛgvedādi-adhyayanam*, meaning the study of scriptures such as the Ṛgveda (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 634). Dhanapati expands on this, stating *ṛgvedādi-adhyayanaṃ tadadhyāpanaṃ ca brahmayajñaḥ japayajñaḥ vā* (p. 634) — indicating that the act of studying and teaching sacred texts like the *Ṛgveda* constitutes a form of *Brahmayajña* (sacrifice of knowledge) or *Japayajña* (sacrifice through recitation).

8. Tapa: Sri Aurobindo does not provide any explanation for this quality. Śaṅkarācārya describes it as *tapaḥ trividhaṃ śārīraṃ vāṅmayaṃ mānasaṃ ca* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635), indicating that austerity is threefold — physical, verbal, and mental. These forms of *Tapa* are elaborated in the seventeenth chapter of the *Gītā* and will be discussed in detail later in this article.

9. Ārjava: *Ārjava* has been described by Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471) as 'candour and straightforwardness.' Śaṅkarācārya defined the term as *ṛjutvaṃ sarvadā* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635), meaning simplicity at all times. Śrīdhara added that *ārjavam avakratā* (p. 635) implies candour, straightforwardness, or the absence of crookedness.

10. Ahiṃsā: With respect to *Ahiṃsā*, Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 472) directly uses this term, interpreting it as 'harmlessness'. Śaṅkarācārya defines it as *prāṇiṇāṃ pīḍāvarjanam* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635), meaning the avoidance of harm to living beings. Śrīdhara similarly explains it as *parapīḍāvarjanam* (p. 635), which refers to refraining from causing harm to others.

11. Satya: *Satya* has been translated by Sri Aurobindo (1997a, pp. 471–472) as 'truth'. He also used the Sanskrit term *Satya* itself. Śaṅkarācārya defined it as *satyam apriya-anṛta-varjanaṃ yathābhūta-arthavacanam* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635), which means not speaking what is unpleasant or untrue, but only what accords with reality. Śrīdhara added *yathārthabhāṣaṇam*, which he interprets as accuracy in speech or truthfulness (p. 635).

12. Akrodha: With respect to *Akrodha*, Sri Aurobindo does not provide a gloss for this quality. Śaṅkarācārya explains it as *paraiḥ ākrośe tāḍane vā kṛte prāpte yaḥ krodhaḥ tasya upaśamaḥ* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635), meaning the absence of anger even in situations where one is insulted or beaten by others. Śrīdhara elaborates further with *tāḍitasya citte kṣobhasya anupattiḥ*, referring to a state in which the mind remains undisturbed even when struck (p. 635).

13. Tyāga: Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471) interprets it as 'self-denial.' Śaṅkarācārya offers two interpretations: *tyāgaḥ sannyāsaḥ*, meaning renunciation; and *tyāgaḥ audāryam*, meaning generosity or large-heartedness (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635).

14. Śānti: *Śānti* has been translated as 'calm' by Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471). Śaṅkarācārya defined it as *antakaraṇasya upaśamaḥ*, referring to the peace or calmness of the mind (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635).

15. Apaiśuna: Sri Aurobindo does not provide any interpretation for this term. Śaṅkarācārya explains it as *pararandhra-prakaṭīkaraṇaṃ paiśunam tadabhāvaḥ apaiśunam* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635), which means the absence of fault-finding or backbiting — specifically, the avoidance of exposing others' weaknesses.

16. Bhūteṣu dayā: With respect to *Bhūteṣu dayā*, Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471) translates it as 'compassion to all beings.' Śaṅkarācārya explains it as *dayā kṛpā bhūteṣu duḥkhiteṣu* (*Bhagavadgītā*,

1936, p. 635), meaning compassion or kindness extended to all beings, especially to those who are suffering.

17. Aloluptva: Sri Aurobindo does not mention this term. Dhanapati explains it as *viṣaya-san-nidhāne api indriyāṇām avikriyatvam* (p. 635), meaning that even in the presence of sense objects, the senses remain undisturbed. This indicates an absence of greed or freedom from desire.

18. Mārdava: With respect to *Mārdava*, Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471) translates it as 'gentleness.' Śaṅkarācārya defines it as *mṛdutā akruratvam* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635), meaning gentleness or softness, and the absence of cruelty.

19. Hrī: Hrī has been interpreted by Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471) as 'modesty.' Śaṅkarācārya defined it simply as *hrīḥ lajjā* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635), meaning shame or modesty.

20. Acāpala: Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471) describes it as 'a deep sweet and serious freedom from all restlessness, levity and inconstancy.' Śaṅkarācārya defines it as *asati prayojane vāk-pāṇi-pādānām avyāpārayitṛtvam* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 635), meaning the non-engagement of speech, hands, and feet when there is no real purpose. Śrīdhara elaborates with *vyartha-kriyā-rāhityam* (p. 635), which means the absence of unnecessary activity — in other words, freedom from restlessness or unsteadiness.

21. Teja: With respect to *Teja*, Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 472) describes it as 'energy and soul force' along with the Sanskrit term *Teja*. Śaṅkarācārya defines it as *prāgalbhyaṃ na tvaggatā dīptiḥ* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 636), meaning a manifestation of power — not bodily brightness. Abhinavagupta elaborates with *ātmani utsāhagrahaṇena mitatva-apakaraṇam* (p. 636), referring to self-confidence attained by summoning inner courage and overcoming limitations. Nīlakaṇṭha interprets *Teja* as *prāgalbhyaṃ na tu ugratā* (p. 636), indicating energy, spirit, or prestige — but not aggression or violence.

22. Kṣamā: Kṣamā has been interpreted by Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471) as 'forgivingness.' Śaṅkarācārya explains it as *akruṣṭhasya tāḍitasya vā āntarvikriyān anutpattiḥ; utpannānāṃ vikriyāyāṃ praśamanam* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 636), meaning the absence of emotional disturbance in the mind of one who has been verbally abused or physically struck. It also refers to the reduction of negative emotions if they have already arisen — thus aligning with the spirit of forgiveness.

23. Dhṛti: Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471) refers to it as 'patience' but says also the Sanskrit term *Dhṛti* (p. 472). Śaṅkarācārya defines it as *dehendriyeṣu avasādaṃ prāpteṣu tasya pratiṣedhakaḥ antakaraṇavṛtti-viśeṣaḥ prayatnaviśeṣaḥ vā* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 636), meaning a special mental disposition that prevents the exhaustion or breakdown of the body and senses. Nīlakaṇṭha simply defines *Dhṛti* as *Dhairya* (p. 636), meaning patience. Śrīdhara adds *duḥkhādibhiḥ avasidataḥ cittasya sthirīkaraṇam*, (p. 636) referring to the firm stabilizing of the mind when it begins to falter due to sorrow.

24. Śauca: Śauca has been translated as 'cleanness and purity by Sri Aurobindo (1997a, p. 471).' Śaṅkarācārya distinguished between two aspects of purity: *mṛd-jala-kṛtaṃ bāhyam* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 636), which refers to external purification of the body using water and soil, and *ābhyantaraṃ manobuddhyoḥ nairmalyaṃ māyārāgādikāluṣyābhāvam* (p. 636), meaning internal purification of the mind and intellect by removing illusion, attachment, and desire.

25. Adroha: Regarding *Adroha*, Sri Aurobindo does not provide any explanation for this term. Śaṅkarācārya explains it as *parijighāṃsābhāvaḥ ahiṃsanam* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 636), meaning the absence of any intention to harm others, whether physically or mentally. Madhusūdana adds that *parajighāṃsayā śastragrahaṇamādiḥ drohaḥ tadabhāvaḥ adrohaḥ* (p. 636) — the use of weapons

with the intent to harm is *Droha*, and its absence is *Adroha*. Śrīdhara further clarifies *adroha* as *jighāṃsārāhityam* (p. 636), meaning the absence of envy, malice, or treachery.

26. Nātimānitā: With respect to *Nātimānitā*, Sri Aurobindo does not provide any interpretation for this term. Śaṅkarācārya defines it as *atimānaṃ yasya vidyate saḥ atimānī tasya bhāvaḥ atimānatā tasya abhāvaḥ nātimānatā* (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 636), meaning the absence of great haughtiness. Madhusūdana explains it as *ātmanaḥ pūjyatātiśayabhāvanā atimānitā tadabhāvaḥ nātimānatā pūjyeṣu namratā* (p. 636) — humility before those worthy of respect. Nīlakaṇṭha describes it as *atyantaṃ mānarāhityam* (p. 636), the complete absence of excessive pride.

The foregoing comparison illustrates both the overlaps and the distinctive interpretative emphases found in Sri Aurobindo's rendering of the *Daivī Sampad*. This naturally leads to a closer examination of the points where his interpretation aligns with or diverges from the *Bhaga-vadgītā*'s original enumeration.

Interestingly, eight of the twenty-six qualities enlisted in the *Bhagavadgītā* were not mentioned in Sri Aurobindo's interpretation (Aurobindo, 1997a, pp. 471-472). They are *Dāna* or giving, *Svādhyāya,* or the study of scripture, *Tapa* or askesis, *Akrodha* or absence of wrath, *Apaiśunam* or absence of fault-finding, *Aloluptva* or absence of greed, *Adroha* or absence of envy, *Nātimānitā* or absence of pride (pp. 471-472). One possible reason for this omission is that Sri Aurobindo prioritizes the psychological and transformational essence of the qualities over their literal enumeration. As such, several of these traits may be implicitly absorbed into a core value like *Tapa*, which encapsulates twelve values (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1936, pp. 662–663). Moreover, his focus remains on those qualities that serve as active levers in spiritual ascent, rather than preparatory virtues that are already well-integrated into ethical tradition.

Furthermore, three extra qualities were incorporated such as religious habit, freedom from all weakness, and strong resolution. These additions reflect Sri Aurobindo's emphasis on the inner psychological strength required for spiritual transformation, beyond the literal traits listed in the text (Aurobindo 1997a, p. 560). Among these three, the religious habit has enough property to express the connotation of *Tapa* or askesis. It can be pointed out that many ancient Indian concepts of human qualities carry rich and layered meanings that cannot be fully captured by single-word translations in English (Rai & Prakash 2012, p. 201). These qualities often reflect multi-qualities that require deeper contextual understanding. The following section will focus on an elaborate interpretation of *Tapa* (askesis).

To illustrate the depth of this concept, it is important to examine the comprehensive understanding of *Tapa* or askesis as presented in the seventeenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Although *Tapa* is often translated as 'askesis,' meaning "the practice of severe self-discipline, typically for religious reasons" (Online Oxford Dictionary, 2020), but in the seventeenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa talks of three kinds of *Tapa* which include twelve values such as *Deva-dvija-guru-prājña-pūjana* (worship given to the *Deva*s, to the twice-born, to the teachers and the wise), *Śauca* (purity), *Ārjava* (straightforwardness), *Brahmacarya* (continence), *Ahiṃsā* (harmlessness), *Anudvegakaraṃ satyaṃ priyahitaṃ ca vākyam* (speech causing no annoyance, truthful and beneficial), *Svādhyāyābhyasana* (the practice of the study of the scriptures), *Manaḥ Prasādaḥ* (mental happiness), *Saumyatva* (equilibrium), *Mauna* (silence), *Ātmavinigraha* (self-control), *and Bhāvasaṃśuddhi* (purity of nature) which is a combination of values that form part of the list given above and include some others (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, pp. 662–663). Here, *Tapa* has been classified into three categories as *Śārīra*, *Vāṅmaya* and *Mānasa Tapa* as following:

> *devadvijaguruprājñapūjanaṃ śaucamārjavam |*
> *brahmacaryamahiṃsā ca śārīraṃ tapa ucyate ||* (17.14)
> *anudvegakaraṃ vākyaṃ satyaṃ priyahitaṃ ca yat |*
> *svādhyāyābhyasanaṃ caiva vāṅmayaṃ tapa ucyate ||* (17.15)

manaḥ prasādaḥ saumyatvaṃ maunamātmavinigrahaḥ |
bhāvasaṃśuddhirityetattapo mānasamucyate || (17.16)

(*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, pp. 662–663)

Reverence offered to the Divine, to the twice-born, to one's teacher, and to the enlightened—along with purity, straightforward conduct, celibacy, and non-violence—constitute the discipline of the body (*Śārīra Tapa*).
Words that neither agitate nor offend, that are truthful, pleasing, and spoken for the welfare of others, together with the devoted study of sacred texts, are known as the discipline of speech (*Vāṅmaya Tapa*).
Inner serenity, softness of temperament, reflective silence, mastery over the self, and a deep purification of one's inner being—these are regarded as the discipline of the mind (*Mānasa Tapa*).[2]

This integrated view of *Tapa* highlights how outer discipline supports inner transformation. Building on this, the following section examines Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of *Āsurī Sampad*, exploring its alignment and divergence from the *Gītā's* portrayal of the *Rājasika* nature.

4. Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of *Rājasika* or *Āsurī Sampad*: The Demoniac Nature

The sixteenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* offers a precise delineation of the qualities that constitute the *Āsurī Sampad*, which are closely associated with the predominance of *Rājasika* tendencies. The fourth verse enumerates six core attributes of the demoniac nature:

dambho darpo'bhimānaśca krodhaḥ pāruṣyameva ca |
ajñānaṃ cābhijātasya pārtha sampadamāsurīm || (16.4)

(*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 637)

This verse identifies *Dambha* (hypocrisy or pride), *Darpa* (arrogance), *Abhimāna* (excessive self-regard), *Krodha* (anger), *Pāruṣya* (harshness), and *Ajñāna* (ignorance) as the defining characteristics of one born into the *Āsurika* disposition (Roy 1938, p. 224).

In *Essays on the Gītā*, Sri Aurobindo engages with the concept of the *Āsurī Sampad* yet introduces a slightly reconfigured set of attributes. He describes the *Āsurika* nature in terms of 'wrath, greed, cunning, treachery, wilful doing of injury to others, pride and arrogance and excessive self-esteem,' thereby adding *Lobha* (greed), *Chalatā* or *Dhūrtatā* (cunning), and *Droha* (treachery or betrayal), while omitting *Pāruṣya* and *Ajñāna*, though *Krodha* (wrath) does appear in both lists (Aurobindo, 1997, p. 472).

This divergence reveals Sri Aurobindo's interpretative emphasis on the psychological roots of demoniac traits rather than strict textual enumeration. Notably, *Lobha* (greed), which he includes, is the source from which *Krodha* (wrath) often arises, and *Droha* (treachery) can be seen as a behavioral consequence of *Ajñāna* (ignorance) (p. 472). Furthermore, *Pāruṣya*—a form of verbal or behavioural harshness—may be considered a subset or symptom of more encompassing dispositions like *wrath* or *treachery*. Thus, while the specific terms may differ, the underlying moral psychology remains aligned.

This interpretative flexibility suggests that Sri Aurobindo sought to distill the dynamic energies behind the *Āsurika* disposition, focusing on inner movements such as egoism, desire, and aggression (p. 477). His additions enrich the typology by foregrounding those tendencies which actively obstruct spiritual growth and inner illumination, consistent with his larger philosophical aim of charting a path from the lower nature to the divine.

Having examined the conceptual alignment and divergence between Sri Aurobindo's interpretation and the canonical list of *Āsurī Sampad*, it is now important to delve into his direct engagement with the *Bhagavadgītā's* verses. The following section evaluates Sri Aurobindo's translation of verses (seventh to twentieth) from the chapter sixteenth, with a particular focus

on his interpretative choices and the implications they carry for understanding the demoniac nature in his spiritual framework.

Building on the foundational distinction between the *Deva* and *Asura* natures, this section examines Sri Aurobindo's interpretive rendering of verses seventh to twentieth from the chapter sixteenth of the *Bhagavadgītā*. These verses offer a detailed character sketch of the *Āsurī Sampad* (demoniac nature), and Sri Aurobindo's translation, found in *Essays on the Gītā*, reflects both fidelity to the text and an interpretive approach informed by his broader psychological-spiritual philosophy.

Moreover, Sri Aurobindo characterizes the *Āsurika* being as dominated by the rajasic impulse—rooted in desire, egoism, and a wilful departure from *Dharmic* living. His translation of seventh verse[3] emphasizes this lack of moral and spiritual grounding: "*Āsurika* men have no true knowledge of the way of action or the way of abstention, the fulfilling or the holding in of the nature. Truth is not in them, nor clean doing, nor faithful observance (Aurobindo, 1997a, p. 472)." The addition of "the fulfilling or the holding in of the nature" reveals his effort to emphasize the psychological misalignment at the heart of the demoniac disposition (p. 472).

In eighth verse[4], Aurobindo writes, "They see naturally in the world nothing but a huge play of the satisfaction of self... a world with Desire for its cause and seed... a world without God, not true, not founded in Truth (p. 472)." This vivid interpretation portrays the *Āsurika* outlook as not merely atheistic, but as fundamentally nihilistic and governed by arbitrary material impulses. While grounded in the original text, the expansive rendering also reveals an underlying critique of modern materialist ideologies. Verses ninth to eleventh[5] are treated with similar psychological intensity. He describes the *Āsurika* individual as 'the centre or instrument of a fierce, Titanic, violent action... a fount of injury and evil (p. 472),' adding that such individuals are "the prey of a devouring, a measurelessly unceasing care and thought and endeavour and anxiety till the moment of their death (p. 472)." This psychological language illustrates the restless interiority of the *Āsurika* being. In verses twelfth to fifteenth[6], which depict the unending ambition, greed, and egotism of the *Āsurika* soul, Aurobindo offers an extensive paraphrase, narrating his thoughts: "Today I have gained this object of desire, tomorrow I shall have that other; today I have so much wealth, more I will get tomorrow. I have killed this my enemy, the rest too I will kill. I am a lord and king of men, I am perfect, accomplished, strong, happy, fortunate, a privileged enjoyer of the world; I am wealthy, I am of high birth; who is there like unto me? I will sacrifice, I will give, I will enjoy (pp. 472-273)." The rhetorical momentum in this passage highlights both the emptiness and delusion of *Āsurika* pursuits. Verse sixteenth[7] is rendered with interpretive depth: "Occupied by many egoistic ideas... they fall into the unclean hell of their own evil (p. 473)." Here, Aurobindo emphasizes internal corruption over external punishment, locating hell within the psyche rather than as a supernatural realm. In verse seventeenth[8], he writes: "They sacrifice and give, but from a self-regarding ostentation, from vanity and with a stiff and foolish pride (p. 473)." Though largely literal, his omission of the term *a-vidhipūrvaka* (not according to proper method) is notable, as it bypasses the scriptural emphasis on orthopraxy (p. 473). Verse eighteenth[9] continues this psychological approach, stating that in their egoism and wrath, "they hate, despise and belittle the God hidden in themselves and the God in man (p. 473)." This dual focus on self and other reinforces the *Āsurika* inability to perceive the Divine either within or outside. In verses nineteenth and twentieth[10], Aurobindo offers a sobering conclusion: "The Divine casts them down continually into more and more Asuric births... losing the way to him altogether, sink down into the lowest status of soul-nature (p. 473)." This reincarnational fall is not portrayed as punitive but as the karmic consequence of wilful denial of divine truth.

Thereby, it can be inferred that Sri Aurobindo's overall approach to these verses blends literal translation with interpretive commentary, guided by his experiential understanding of spiritual

evolution. He sees the *Āsurika* nature not as a permanent metaphysical category, but as a psychological condition that can—if uncorrected—solidify into a self-perpetuating pattern of descent. However, consistent with his integral philosophy, redemption remains possible: even the worst sinner, once turned toward the Divine, can ascend toward liberation. This reading thus frames the *Āsurī Sampad* as both an ethical and ontological obstacle—one that must be recognized and overcome through the cultivation of *Sattva* and the progressive awakening to the divine Self. In Sri Aurobindo's integral vision, these demoniac traits are not eternal destinies but conditions of being that can either deepen into darkness or be transformed through spiritual effort. The *Gītā*, in continuation, outlines the further consequence of persisting in the *Āsurika* path by introducing the idea of a psychological and spiritual descent symbolized by *Naraka*, or hell. This descent is governed by three key forces—*Kāma* (desire), *Krodha* (anger), and *Lobha* (greed)—which form what the text calls the threefold gateway to 'hell' (Aurobindo, 1997a, p. 474).

5. Sri Aurobindo's Concept of Hell and the Threefold Gateways

With respect to the reconfigurations of Sri Aurobindo concept of threefold gateway of 'hell', he primarily presents a profound psychological and spiritual insight into the condition of the soul that persistently follows the *Āsurika* path. When one refuses to turn away from this lower nature, the tendencies of the *Asura* become fully developed within. The momentum of this descent becomes irreversible due to the misuse of the soul's divine energy, leading to an eventual collapse into its lowest state—what he symbolically identifies as hell. This hell is not an external realm, but the soul's own fall into spiritual darkness and bondage (Aurobindo, 1997, p. 474). According to Sri Aurobindo, the culmination of *Āsurikī Prakṛti* reflects the intensification of *Rājasika* impulses, where the soul becomes enslaved by the compulsions of its lower nature. The *Gītā* identifies desire (*Kāma*), anger (*Krodha*), and greed (*Lobha*) as the threefold gateway to this spiritual downfall. These forces, when left unchecked, propel the being into a deepening ignorance and restlessness, which ultimately degenerates into the inertia and incapacity associated with *Tāmasika* nature. Sri Aurobindo views this as a regression of consciousness—when the aggressive force of *rajas*, having exhausted itself, collapses into the darkness of *Tamas* (p. 474).

However, this condition is not irreversible. Liberation, according to both the *Gītā* and Sri Aurobindo, lies in the rejection of these three destructive impulses and in the cultivation of *Sāttvika* qualities. This inward shift realigns the soul with truth (*Satya*) and *Dharma*, enabling the ascent toward higher consciousness and ultimate self-realization (p. 474). Sri Aurobindo's psychological rendering of hell departs from a punitive religious interpretation and instead presents it as a symbolic condition of spiritual devolution. The compelling insight here is the recognition that the soul's fall is not an externally imposed damnation, but the outcome of its own choices and internal forces. What stands out in his view is the dynamic interplay between the *Guṇas*, where excessive rajas inevitably collapse into *Tamas* without the mediating presence of *Sattva*. The emphasis on self-conquest through *Sāttvika* development as the only viable path of redemption reinforces the *Gītā*'s core ethical framework. This understanding of spiritual descent, driven by unchecked desire, anger, and greed, raises the question of how to realign with higher principles and regain the path of evolution. In this context, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the transition from inferior *Dharma* to immortal *Dharma*, which guides the soul's ascent from lower qualities to divine realization. The next section will explore how this transition unfolds through the development of *Sattvaguṇa*, leading to spiritual liberation.

6. Transition from Inferior Nature to Immortal *Dharma*

While talking about the process of divine manifestation, Sri Aurobindo presents the highest forms of spiritual and supramental action, which correspond to the *Guṇas* through his own

profound spiritual experience. He notes that the *Bhagavadgītā* itself does not delve deeply into the nature of the highest form of divine action but points to the necessity of transcending the *Guṇas* to reach this supreme state (p. 467). Sri Aurobindo refers to the highest secret disclosed by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the third verse of the fourth chapter, where Kṛṣṇa explains that the knowledge of this ancient yoga is revealed only to a devoted and true friend:

> *sa evāyaṃ mayā te'dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ |*
> *bhakto'si me sakhā cheti rahasyaṃ hyetaduttamam ||* (4.3)
>
> (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 184)

> This same ancient and original Yoga has been today declared to thee by Me, for thou art My dev-
> otee and My friend; this is the highest secret (Roy, 1938, p. 66).

Sri Aurobindo emphasizes that the *Bhagavadgītā* focuses on developing a high *Sāttvika* temperament, which is essential to attaining this higher truth. He adds that beyond the *Sāttvika* qualities lies the need for transcending the three *Guṇas*—an act that brings the individual closer to the divine essence (p. 467 [footnote]). Sri Aurobindo's perspective is that the *Sāttvika* nature is merely a stepping stone toward the highest state of spiritual freedom. The *Bhagavadgītā* provides guidance on cultivating this higher nature, yet it is clear that the final liberation involves moving beyond even the purest qualities of *Sattva*. This dynamic transition from the *Sāttvika* state to a higher divine consciousness underscores the importance of self-transformation, spiritual awakening, and ultimately, transcending the limitations of the material world. With the development of the *Sāttvika* qualities, the soul begins its ascent toward higher consciousness, but this path involves a deeper evolution from the inferior *Dharma* to the immortal *Dharma*. Sri Aurobindo sees this transition as essential for the realization of the highest spiritual state. The question of this transformation leads to the next stage of evolution, which is rooted in the *spirit* itself, transcending all conventional forms of action dictated by the *Guṇas*.

As individuals progress spiritually, their inferior nature—dictated by the *Rājasika* and *Tāmasika* qualities—gives way to the higher, immortal *Dharma* rooted in the divine spirit. Sri Aurobindo clarifies that the ultimate aim is not merely to perfect *Sāttvika* nature, but to transcend all *Dharmas* and act according to the Divine will (p. 468). This shift marks the soul's final liberation, wherein it moves beyond the laws of nature and lives in the eternal freedom of the divine essence (p. 468). Sri Aurobindo stresses that this transition is not instantaneous but a gradual process. The route map of this transition follows the pattern of *Rājasika* to *Sāttvika* and then to *Triguṇarahita* (beyond the three *Guṇas*) (p. 468). He elaborates that all spiritual teachings (*Śāstras*) act as preparatory steps toward this higher truth, serving as means for the soul's elevation, not its end. The supreme spiritual goal is not found in adherence to *Dharmas*, but in a complete surrender to the Divine, where the soul becomes free to act from divine wisdom and will (p. 471). To facilitate this transformation, Sri Aurobindo highlights the practice of *Sāttvika* qualities as the initial method of evolving from the inferior state of nature. This involves a conscious effort to conquer the lower tendencies and cultivate a higher, divine nature through discipline, self-control, and spiritual practices. Additionally, this inner transformation must be accompanied by the descent of divine light and power into the being, which further accelerates the spiritual evolution (p. 468). As the *Sāttvika* nature reaches its fullest expression, the individual eventually transcends the three *Guṇas*. Sri Aurobindo suggests that once one achieves the full development of *Sāttvika* qualities, the next step is to allow this power to merge into its divine origin, leading to a transformation that transcends even the *Sāttvika* nature itself, culminating in liberation from the material forces (p. 471).

Having explored the nature of the transition from the inferior to the immortal *dharma*, it is now essential to delve into the specific role of *Sattvaguṇa* in this transformative process. The

next section will focus on the concept of *Sattvaguṇa*, as Sri Aurobindo frames it, showing how it serves as both a catalyst and a foundation for spiritual evolution toward the divine. Sri Aurobindo, in his *Essays on the Gītā*, articulates a profound distinction between two kinds of *Dharma*: one grounded in the mutable laws of nature and the other rooted in the immortal essence of the spirit. He identifies the former as an inferior *Dharma*, founded on the operations of *Sattva*, while the latter corresponds to the eternal *Dharma* of the soul or *Ātman* (p. 466). *Sattva*, in this view, represents the most refined quality within nature (*Prakṛti*), acting as a preparatory stage in the soul's transition toward a supramental or divine consciousness. Although *Sattva* is associated with light, clarity, equilibrium, and mental satisfaction, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes its limitations. He acknowledges it as "the purest quality of Nature," which fosters "assimilation and equivalence, right knowledge and right dealing, fine harmony, firm balance, right law of action, and right possession" (p. 466). However, even this elevated condition remains "precarious," as it is "secured by limitation" and "dependent on rule and condition." The ultimate spiritual goal lies not in the maintenance of *Sattva*, but in transcending it to access "a greater light and bliss free in the free spirit" (p. 466).

The individual who has achieved a predominance of *Sattva*—termed the *Sattvaguṇin*—is portrayed as a liberated soul. Such a person participates increasingly in the higher states of light and bliss, progressing toward unity with the divine. This ascent is described as an inward expansion wherein the soul, by integrating itself more perfectly with the divine essence, evolves toward spiritual freedom (p. 467).

Sri Aurobindo positions *Sattva* as the indispensable intermediary among the three *Guṇas*. While *Rajas* and *Tamas* are incapable of undergoing transformation independently, it is through the agency of *Sattva* that these lower qualities can be sublimated—*Rajas* into a divine kinetic will and *Tamas* into divine stillness and repose (p. 468). He writes that *Sattva* "is a power of light and happiness," which, at its highest refinement, can attain "a certain reflection, almost a mental identity with the spiritual light and bliss" (p. 468). As a "first mediator between the higher and the lower nature," *Sattva* is essential for elevating consciousness beyond the confines of ego, desire, and ignorance (p. 469).

A substantial increase in *Sāttvika* power, Sri Aurobindo argues, gradually neutralizes the disqualifying tendencies of *Rājasa* agitation and *Tāmasa* inertia. Once these impediments are sufficiently subdued, the practitioner finds it easier to transcend even *Sattva* itself (p. 469). This view underscores his emphasis on transformation, not through mere suppression of qualities, but through their evolutionary elevation toward spiritual unity. The developmental process of *Sattva* is particularly evident in Sri Aurobindo's reading of the final chapters of the *Bhagavadgītā* (chapters sixteenth to eighteenth). These chapters collectively form, in his analysis, a spiritual roadmap for the soul's passage from the limitations of the lower nature to the fulfillment of the immortal *Dharma* of the spirit. The chapter sixteenth, titled *Devāsura-Sampad-Vibhāga-Yoga*, sets the stage by delineating two archetypal natures—the *Deva* and the *Asura*—representing the upward and downward tendencies of human evolution, respectively (p. 469).

Sri Aurobindo's exposition of *Sattva* enriches our understanding of the *Guṇa* framework, not merely as a psychological or moral typology, but as an evolutionary principle integral to spiritual transformation. His insistence that even the purest of natural qualities must ultimately be transcended provides a compelling model of progressive spirituality. In this vision, *Sattva* is not the culmination but the threshold—it prepares the aspirant for the supramental leap into the domain of *Triguṇātīta*, or that which is beyond the *Guṇas*. In my assessment, this framework challenges a simplistic valorization of *Sattva* and reframes it within a dynamic process of inner evolution. Sri Aurobindo's interpretation compels us to recognize that ethical cultivation, while indispensable, must be guided by a higher telos: the soul's realization of its divine origin and destiny.

7. Symbolic Distinction Between *Deva* and *Asura*: Ethical and Spiritual Archetypes

The previous section emphasized the central role of *Sattva* as the mediating *Guṇa* that enables the transcendence of the lower nature and facilitates the soul's ascent toward the *Triguṇātīta* state. Building upon this foundation, Sri Aurobindo further deepens his exposition through a symbolic distinction between two archetypal categories—*Deva* and *Asura*. This dichotomy, deeply rooted in Vedic and epic traditions, is not merely mythological but represents the ethical and psychological configurations of human nature as it evolves through spiritual development.

Although all human beings are composed of the three *Guṇas*, Sri Aurobindo affirms that each individual holds the potential to cultivate and elevate the *Sāttvika* element within (p. 469). The predominance of either *Rajas*, *Tamas*, or *Sattva* determines one's orientation toward divine or undivine tendencies. According to him, the prevailing condition in human life is the subordination of reason and will to the demands of the *Rājasika* or *Tāmasika* ego—either the compulsive dynamism of desire or the inertia of indulgence and ignorance. However, such a state is not final; rather, it is a provisional stage in the soul's imperfect evolution that is destined to be outgrown as consciousness ascends the spiritual scale (p. 469).

In this symbolic typology, the *Deva* is aligned with a self-transformative *Sāttvika* action. Those categorized as *Deva*-like are characterized by attributes such as self-control, aspiration for knowledge, beneficence, and the pursuit of perfection. These are individuals in whom the *Sāttvika* nature predominates and is oriented upward toward higher consciousness. As such, they are metaphorically referred to as human representatives of the *Devas*—the divine forces or gods (p. 468).

Conversely, the *Asura* is predominantly *Rājasika*, defined by the pursuit of egoistic greatness, satisfaction of desire, and the assertion of personal will. Rather than serving a higher cosmic or spiritual purpose, the *Asura* seeks dominion for the sake of pride, ambition, and indulgence. These individuals are seen as the human counterparts of the *Dānavas* or *Asuras*—the titanic forces opposing divine order (Aurobindo, 1997a, p. 470).

The *Bhagavadgītā* takes up this ancient distinction to illuminate its ethical and spiritual implications. It contrasts the *Āsurika* and *Rājasika* natures—which obstruct God-realization, liberation, and spiritual perfection—with the *Daivika* nature, which is aligned with those very goals (p. 470). According to Sri Aurobindo, this symbolic binary is a deeply embedded feature of Indian religious imagination. The ancient seers discerned behind human conduct the workings of universal *Śakti* in various modalities—divine, titanic, and demonic—and accordingly identified individuals as *Devas*, *Asuras*, *Rākṣasas*, or *Piśācas* (p. 470).

To substantiate this symbolic cosmology, Sri Aurobindo refers to three pivotal texts of Indian tradition:

> In the *Ṛgveda*, the primary spiritual drama unfolds as a struggle between the divine *Deva*-s—"Masters of Light, sons of Infinity"—and their adversaries, the children of division and darkness (p. 470).

> In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, this struggle is mythologized as a conflict between the *Deva* incarnated in human form (Rāma) and the *Rākṣasa* (Rāvaṇa)—a parable representing the clash between ethical culture and the unbridled ego (p. 470).

> In the *Mahābhārata*, and by extension the *Bhagavadgītā*, the cosmic struggle is enacted through a lifelong confrontation between *Deva*-like individuals governed by *Dharma*, and *Asura*-like individuals driven by egoistic intellect, desire, and power (p. 470).

Through these examples, Sri Aurobindo reinterprets the mythic and symbolic language of Indian literature as a spiritual anthropology. The *Deva-Asura* distinction becomes a lens through which one can discern the ethical and psychological forces that govern human conduct and determine the direction of spiritual evolution.

Further extending the symbolic dimension of this typology, Sri Aurobindo introduces a profound metaphorical linkage between the *Deva*, *Dharma*, and *Satya*. He asserts that the battle Arjuna must fight, under the guidance of Kṛṣṇa—the divine charioteer and manifestation of the Time-Spirit—is essentially a spiritual struggle to establish the "kingdom of the *Dharma*", an "empire of Truth, Right and Justice" (pp. 470–471). Arjuna, as a representative of the *Deva* nature, embodies the qualities necessary for the realization of this divine order.

The *Deva* principle, as previously discussed, is rooted in *Sattva*, and it naturally tends toward the realization of higher ethical and spiritual values. When this nature is aligned with *Dharma*—the cosmic and moral order—and *Satya*—truth as the principle of being—it forms a triadic foundation for what Sri Aurobindo calls the divine life. This metaphor of establishing a *kingdom of Dharma* is not merely poetic; it encapsulates the essence of spiritual action (*Karma Yoga*) when it is divinely guided, *Sāttvika* in temperament, and directed toward universal harmony.

The symbolic differentiation between *Deva* and *Asura* in Sri Aurobindo's work moves beyond metaphysical abstraction to provide a psychological and ethical framework for spiritual transformation. It echoes his integral vision wherein mythic symbolism, ethical striving, and ontological reality intersect. By identifying *Sattva* as the substratum of *Deva*-hood and linking it to *Dharma* and *Satya*, Sri Aurobindo offers a coherent model of self-evolution that resonates with both ancient wisdom and modern spiritual psychology. This framework not only illuminates the inner mechanics of the *Guṇas* but also affirms the necessity of ethical discernment in spiritual practice. The struggle between *Deva* and *Asura* is not external alone; it is enacted within the heart of every seeker, where the forces of light and shadow contend for supremacy. The spiritual aspirant, like Arjuna, must align with the *Deva* nature to become a conscious agent of *Dharma* and an embodiment of *Satya*.

8. The Core Concept of *Dharma*: Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the *Gītā* in Light of Classical Exegesis

The term *Dharma*, central to Indian philosophical and ethical discourse, encompasses a multifaceted connotation that extends across spiritual, moral, social, and cosmic dimensions. An examination of classical Sanskrit sources, especially encyclopedic compilations such as the *Śabdakalpadruma*, alongside Sri Aurobindo's interpretation in *Essays on the Gītā*, reveals both the depth and evolution of the concept in traditional and modern perspectives. The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* delineates *Dharma* as a composite of virtues, including *Kṣamā* (forgiveness), *Satya* (truth), *Dama* (self-control), *Śauca* (purity), *Dāna* (charity), and *Ahiṃsā* (non-violence), among others (*Vācaspatyam*, Vol. 5, p. 3852). These qualities represent a holistic ethical and spiritual ideal encompassing personal restraint, social responsibility, and reverence toward divine and social hierarchies. Similarly, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* reinforce this ideal by emphasizing internal virtues like *Akrodha* (absence of anger), *Jitendriyatva* (mastery over senses), and *Lajjā* (modesty) (p. 3852), along with outward practices such as *Tapas* (austerity), *Asteya* (non-stealing), and *Brahmacarya* (chastity or spiritual discipline) (*Śabdakalpadruma*, 1967a, Vol. 2, p. 784). The *Matsya Purāṇa* adds dimensions of compassion towards all beings (*Bhūtadayā*), *Adroha* (non-maliciousness), and *Dhṛti* (patience), marking *Dharma* not just as personal righteousness but as an active commitment to cosmic harmony (p. 784). The *Bṛhaspatismṛti* complements this framework by highlighting *Dayā* (compassion), *Anasūyā* (absence of envy), and *Aspṛhatva* (detachment from desire) as foundational to righteous living (*Vācaspatyam*, Vol. 5, p.3852). These scriptural attestations present *Dharma* as both *Sāmānya Dharma* (universal values applicable to all) and *Viśeṣa Dharma* (duty contingent upon context, role, or nature), indicating its nuanced and layered application in classical Hindu thought.

Sri Aurobindo, in his *Essays on the Gītā* (1997a) and *The Renaissance in India* (1997b), approaches *dharma* from an integrative and evolutionary standpoint. He notes that *dharma* is not a

static or singular concept but one that spans ethical, philosophical, and spiritual domains. It can be understood variously depending on context—as ethical duty, social justice, or the spiritual law of being. Ethically, Sri Aurobindo equates *Dharma* with righteousness and moral order, asserting that when injustice and oppression dominate, the Divine manifests to reestablish balance:

> "If used in this sense, we shall have to understand that when unrighteousness, injustice and oppression prevail, the Avatar descends to deliver the good and destroy the wicked, to break down injustice and oppression and restore the ethical balance of mankind" (Aurobindo 1997b, p. 169).

In *The Renaissance in India*, he further describes *dharma* as a central motif in Indian thought:

> "The idea of the dharma is, next to the idea of the Infinite, its major chord; dharma, next to spirit, is its foundation of life. There is no ethical idea that it has not stressed... Truth, honour, loyalty, fidelity, courage, chastity, love, long-suffering, self-sacrifice, harmlessness, forgiveness, compassion, benevolence, beneficence are its common themes—in its view the very stuff of a right human life, the essence of man's dharma" (Aurobindo 1997b [The Renaissance], p. 148).

Sri Aurobindo outlines three distinct yet interconnected dimensions of *Dharma*:

> **The Innate Law of Being:** *Dharma* as the intrinsic law that governs the activities of each being, type, and individual (Aurobindo 1997b, p. 172).

> **The Law of Inner Growth:** *Dharma* as the guiding force for the development of the divine nature within the human being (p. 172).

> **The Law of Social and Ethical Order:** *Dharma* as the principle that structures human interactions and contributes to the collective evolution of the race toward its divine potential (p. 172).

These aspects show Sri Aurobindo's redefinition of *Dharma* not merely as an external code but as an inward movement toward divine realization. He aligns *Dharma* with the process of ascending from the play of the *Guṇas* (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas) to a transcendent consciousness beyond them—*Triguṇātīta*—a vision he integrates into his broader spiritual framework of self-transformation. The classical sources present *Dharma* as a fixed set of moral, ritual, and social duties aimed at maintaining cosmic order. These duties, though varied across texts, converge in their emphasis on ethical conduct, purity, and social responsibility. This vision reflects a worldview rooted in harmony through hierarchical structure and personal discipline.

In contrast, Sri Aurobindo's conceptualization marks a shift from outer conformity to inner realization. While acknowledging the ethical base of classical *Dharma*, he refines the idea into an instrument of spiritual evolution. For Aurobindo, *Dharma* is not only about maintaining order but about transcending limitations. It is a dynamic expression of the divine nature within, tailored to each individual's soul-trajectory and culminating in the conscious participation of humanity in a supramental future. This comparative lens reveals an enriching dialogue between tradition and reinterpretation—where the stable universals of the past meet the unfolding spiritual possibilities of the present.

9. The Concept of *Satya* (Truth): Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the *Gītā* in Light of Classical Exegesis

If *Dharma* forms the operative principle guiding right action in the world, then *Satya* (truth) serves as its ontological foundation—both anchoring and illuminating it. In the Indian philosophical tradition, *Satya* is not merely an ethical prescription but a profound metaphysical reality. This section engages with two distinct textual traditions: classical Sanskrit sources—such as the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* (with Śaṅkara's commentary) and the encyclopedic *Śabdakalpadruma*—and the modern reformulation of *Satya* by Sri Aurobindo, primarily through his works *Essays on the Gītā* (1997a) and *The Renaissance in India* (1997b). Together, these texts reveal both the continuity and evolution of the Indian understanding of truth.

The notion of *Satya* in classical Sanskrit literature is expansive and precise. Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* (10.4) defines *Satya* as:

Yathādṛṣṭasya yathāśrutasya ca ātmānubhavasya parabuddhisaṁkrāntaye tathā eva uccāryamāṇā vāk satyam

S*atyam* is the spoken expression (*vāk*) meant for another's understanding (*parabuddhisaṁkrāntaye*), conveying exactly (*tathā eva*) what one has personally experienced (*ātmānubhavasya*) through seeing (*yathādṛṣṭasya*) and hearing (*yathāśrutasya*). In this framing, *satya* involves not only correspondence to perceived reality but also a moral obligation to faithfully transmit one's inner experience to others—truth as experienced, articulated, and shared with ethical clarity.

Furthermore, the *Śabdakalpadruma* (1967b), a significant Sanskrit lexicon and encyclopedic source, expands the concept by listing thirteen embodied forms (*satyākārāḥ*). These are not merely attributes but integral virtues that comprise the essence of *satya*:

satyastu samatā caiva damaścaiva na saṁśayaḥ |
amātsaryaṁ kṣamā caiva hrīstitikṣānasūyatā ||
tyāgo dhyānamathāryatvaṁ dhṛtiśca satataṁ dayā |
ahiṁsā caiva rājendra satyākārāstrayodaśa ||

<div align="right">(Śabdakalpadruma, 1967b, Vol. 5, p. 225)</div>

These include: *Samatā* (equality), *Dama* (self-restraint), *Amāntarya* (Absence of jealousy) *Kṣamā* (forgiveness), *Hrī* (modesty), *Titikṣā* (endurance), *Anasūyā* (absence of envy), *Tyāga* (renunciation), *Dhyāna* (meditation), *Āryatva* (nobility), *Dhṛti* (fortitude), *Dayā* (compassion), and *Ahiṁsā* (non-violence).

This classical depiction emphasizes *Satya* as an all-encompassing moral and spiritual practice—a synthesis of ethical conduct and inner purity. It also highlights the *Kāryānuyoga* or functional expression of truth in daily living, not merely as doctrine but as *Sādhanā* (discipline). Sri Aurobindo, building upon this foundation, interprets *satya* through the lens of spiritual evolution and psychological integration. In *Essays on the Gītā* and *The Renaissance in India*, *satya* is not limited to verbal or behavioral accuracy but refers to the inner truth of being—the essential nature (*Svarūpa*) of the self that must be realized and actualized. He writes, "Life is to find our own truth" (*The Renaissance in India*, 1997b, p. 163), affirming the dynamic, inward-seeking journey central to Indian spirituality. The truth, he argues, is not a construct of logic or belief but "the fruit of the soul's inner experience" (Aurobindo, 1997b, p. 181). He elaborates that India, as a civilization, sought the "inner truth and law of each human or cosmic activity—its *Dharma*," and then articulated that truth in organized spiritual knowledge (*śāstra*) and culture (p. 4). For Aurobindo, this deeper *Satya* is the very force behind spiritual and moral growth: "The ultimate truths are truths of the spirit… powerfully creative of the inner, salutary reformative of the outer life" (Aurobindo, 1997b, p. 113).

Aurobindo thus builds a bridge between *Satya* as articulated in the classical texts and its realization in the inner consciousness. He culminates this metaphysical hierarchy in a powerful image: "*Deva* (divine nature) is the King, *Dharma* is the kingdom, and *Satya* is the Emperor" (Aurobindo, 1997a, p. 470). In this schema, *Satya* surpasses even *Dharma* in its ontological and spiritual primacy, serving as the supreme organizing principle of existence. A comparative analysis of *Dharma* between classical Sanskrit exegesis and Aurobindo's modern reinterpretation reveals both continuity and transformation. In classical sources, *Dharma* and *Satya* are often aligned with fixed ethical categories, roles, and metaphysical laws grounded in cosmic order (*ṛta*). The *Gītā* and texts like *Śabdakalpadruma* present *Dharma* and *Satya* as interwoven yet hierarchically ordered values—truth must serve the ethical good and social stability.

In contrast, Sri Aurobindo reorients the emphasis toward spiritual interiority. For him, *Dharma* is dynamic and evolutionary, rooted in discovering one's *Svabhāva* and realizing the divine within. *Satya*, then, is not merely fidelity to what is seen or heard, but alignment with the truth

of one's soul. This vision grants greater agency to the individual in discerning and living truth, emphasizing transformation over conformity. This shift reflects the transition from a predominantly ritual-ethical paradigm to a yogic-psychological one. Thus, from the structural laws of right conduct to the inner realization of spirit, the journey from *Dharma* to *Satya* outlines the core trajectory of the Indian spiritual worldview. The synthesis of these concepts—as seen in both ancient texts and modern reinterpretation—prepares the ground for a holistic vision of life that integrates ethics, psychology, and metaphysics.

10. Conclusion

This paper has offered a comprehensive exploration of the sixteenth chapter of the *Bhaga-vadgītā*, *Devāsura-sampad-vibhāga-yoga*, with a focused comparative study between classical Sanskrit exegesis and Sri Aurobindo's psychological-spiritual interpretation in *Essays on the Gītā* (Aurobindo, 1997a). Across its ten sections, the study elucidated the philosophical, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of *Daivī* and *Āsurī Sampad*, interpreting them not only as categories of moral behaviour but also as evolving states of consciousness. In second section, the twenty-six divine qualities (*Daivī Sampad*) were analyzed both in their literal meanings and as archetypes of inner growth. Third section presented a comparative analysis of these qualities across various classical commentaries and Sri Aurobindo's renderings, highlighting convergences and nuances. Fourth section explored the nature of the *Āsurī Sampad*, which, while representing egoistic, rajasic, and tamasic tendencies, is not deemed irredeemable in Aurobindo's vision. Fifth section focused on Sri Aurobindo's treatment of hell and the threefold gateways—lust, anger, and greed—not as physical realities but psychological traps from which the soul must liberate itself. Sixth section emphasized the transition from inferior nature toward immortal *Dharma*, where one sheds the limitations of the *Guṇas* and progresses toward *Triguṇātīta*—the state beyond the three *Guṇas*. This sets the stage for self-exceeding and transformation into the divine being (Aurobindo, 1997a, p. 472). Seventh and eighth sections discussed the symbolic opposition between *Deva* and *Asura*, identifying them as ethical and spiritual archetypes rather than fixed ontological categories. *Dharma*, in this context, was explored as both an inner law and a cosmic principle. Ninth section introduced the concept of *Satya*, referencing classical Sanskrit sources such as *Śabdakalpadruma* and *Śaṅkarabhāṣya*, alongside Sri Aurobindo's articulation of *truth* as an expression of the spirit — *Satya as inner alignment with the divine law* (Aurobindo, 1997b, p. 163; p. 181).

The significance of this study lies in its multidimensional interpretation of *Daivī* and *Āsurī Sampad*. While traditional commentators like Śaṅkara provide a theologically structured moral reading, Sri Aurobindo transforms these concepts into flexible psychological categories reflective of the soul's journey toward perfection. As he writes, "All souls are eternal portions of the Divine... even the greatest sinner can turn to the Divine" (Aurobindo, 1997a, p. 473). This universality and optimism define his integrative spiritual philosophy. Furthermore, by examining Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of *Satya* and *Dharma*, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of his vision as not merely exegetical but transformational. In contrast to the classical exegesis that places emphasis on scriptural compliance and moral discipline, Aurobindo's perspective privileges conscious evolution, spiritual aspiration, and the soul's inner realisation of truth and law.

In sum, the contribution of this paper lies in recontextualizing the *Gītā's* moral-ethical discourse through the lens of spiritual psychology and demonstrating how *Daivī* and *Āsurī Sampad* reflect deeper states of being rather than rigid ethical binaries. Highlighting the importance of *Dharma* and *Satya* as both classical and experiential values. Offering a comparative hermeneutics that bridges traditional interpretations and modern spiritual insight. Ultimately, the sixteenth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* is not merely an ethical treatise but a manual of inner transforma-

tion. As Sri Aurobindo affirms, "The distinction of *Deva* and *Asura* formulates a rule of the self-transcendence of the *Sāttvika* nature and develops the discipline which leads to spiritual transmutation" (Aurobindo, 1997a, p. 475). This paper thus affirms the enduring relevance of the *Gītā's* wisdom for both personal evolution and collective spiritual progress.

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Notes

[1] Author's own translation based on the Sanskrit text in *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* (1936, pp. 633–636).

[2] This is the author's own translation of *Bhagavadgītā* 17.14–16

[3] *pravṛttiṃ ca nivṛttiṃ ca janā na vidurāsurāḥ |*
na śaucaṃ nāpi cācāro na satyaṃ teṣu vidyate || 16.7 || (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 639)

[4] *asatyamapratiṣṭhaṃ te jagadāhuranīśvaram |*
aparasparasambhūtaṃ kimanyatkāmahaitukam || 16.8 || (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 640)

[5] *etāṃ dṛṣṭimavaṣṭabhya naṣṭātmāno'lpabuddhayaḥ |*
prabhavantyugrakarmāṇaḥ kṣayāya jagato'hitāḥ || 16.9 ||
kāmamāśritya duṣpūraṃ dambhamānamadānvitāḥ |
mohādgṛhītvāsadgrāhānpravartante'śucivratāḥ || 16.10 ||
cintāmaparimeyāṃ ca pralayāntāmupāśritāḥ |
kāmopabhogaparamā etāvaditi niścitāḥ || 16.11 || (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, pp. 641-642)

[6] *āśāpāśaśatairbaddhāḥ kāmakrodhaparāyaṇāḥ |*
īhante kāmabhogārthamanyāyenārthasañcayān || 16.12 ||
idamadya mayā labdhamimaṃ prāpsye manoratham |
idamastīdamapi me bhaviṣyati punardhanam || 16.13 ||
asau mayā hataḥ śatrurhaniṣye cāparānapi |
īśvaro'hamahaṃ bhogī siddho'haṃ balavānsukhī || 16.14 ||
āḍhyo'bhijanavānasmi ko'nyo'sti sadṛśo mayā |
yakṣye dāsyāmi modiṣya ityajñānavimohitāḥ || 16.15 || (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 643-644)

[7] *anekacittavibhrāntā mohajālasamāvṛtāḥ |*
prasaktāḥ kāmabhogeṣu patanti narake'śucau || 16.16 || (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 644)

[8] *ātmasambhāvitāḥ stabdhā dhanamānamadānvitāḥ |*
yajante nāmayajñaiste dambhenāvidhipūrvakam || 16.17 || (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 645)

[9] *ahaṅkāraṃ balaṃ darpaṃ kāmaṃ krodhaṃ ca saṃśritāḥ |*
māmātmaparadeheṣu pradviṣanto'bhyasūyakāḥ || 16.18 || (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 646)

[10] *tānahaṃ dviṣataḥ krūrānsaṃsāreṣu narādhamān |*
kṣipāmyajasramaśubhānāsurīṣveva yoniṣu || 16.19 ||
āsurīṃ yonimāpannā mūḍhā janmani janmani |
māmaprāpyaiva kaunteya tato yāntyadhamāṃ gatim || 16.20 || (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 1936, p. 647)

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