

Sri Aurobindo and His Integral Education: from Formulation to Manifestation

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Abstract

The human race is destined to reach the ultimate goal of human unity. But, to march towards it without any deviation and delay we must follow the true path. Sri Aurobindo alongside his closest collaborator, the Mother has envisioned such a path which surely will lead us to our destiny of peace and prosperity. Based on their philosophy of Integral Evolution, they proposed a scheme of education which will train all the five faculties of man to make him realize the Divine Consciousness by becoming Integral man. Their educational philosophy talks about the integration of west and east, past with present and is inspired by the national education as proposed by Sri Aurobindo himself. But, in order to have a comprehensive understanding about the formulation of integral educational philosophy one must study thoroughly the life experiences of Sri Aurobindo which shaped not only the philosophical foundation behind his proposed education system but also has laid down the measures to implement his integral educational philosophy.

Keywords: Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, Integral Education, Divine Consciousness, Evolution.

Introduction

Humanity as a whole is experiencing a continuous degradation in every aspect today. While we take pride in modern technological advancements, these have led us primarily to a materialistic way of life. True progress cannot be superficial. All the issues we've created in the name of technological advancements such as environmental degradation, social disintegration, and the rise in crime and violence serve as evidence that we have not truly progressed, but rather regressed. The root cause lies in the way we are managing our education system. The current educational framework is producing generations that lack a clear vision for life.

In this context, various educational systems have been proposed, particularly for the Indian setting, either with a traditional philosophical approach or a strong emphasis on practical implementation. However, it is rare to find an educational model that achieves a balance between these two elements. Sri Aurobindo, the esteemed Indian philosopher, has introduced an educational model that harmonizes theoretical knowledge with practical application. His integral approach defines the objectives of education as the development of the integral man through his integral education system.

A Brief Overview on the Life Events of Sri Aurobindo

To grasp his philosophy of integral education, it is essential to first understand his life. In this regard, we can divide his life into two distinct sections. First, Early or Preparatory phase (1872-1893) and second, Later or Synthesis phase (1893- 1973). The early part of his life is of paramount importance for a researcher who wants to systematically explain his philosophy of Integral Education.

Sri Aurobindo was born on 15th August, 1872 in Konnagar, Hoogly district. His father was Krishnadhan Ghosh, who was physician by profession and his mother was Swarnalata Devi. He had five siblings and was the third child in a family with four boys and one girl. Sri Aurobindo stayed at Rangpur for about first five years of his life. After that when he was only five years old, he along with his two elder brothers, was sent to Loretto Convent School, Darjeeling. It was in this period, a rare incident occurred which he explained later as '*tamas*' rushing into him. For the very first time, he experienced psychic being. He witnessed a 'sudden darkness' rushing toward him in a manner that covers him and the entire universe at the same period. This '*tamas*' accompanied him for fifteen long years. It was only after he returned to India that it left him. In the year 1879, Sri Aurobindo at age of seven years, along with his mother and two elder brothers, was sent to England. They were staying at no. 84 Shakespeare Street. There, Sri Aurobindo received private tutoring from Mr. and Mrs. Drewett. He learnt almost all the subjects like geography, history, arithmetic, French and Greek. He read Bible and the books of Shakespeare and Shelley etc. After some time, Sri Aurobindo's father was unable to support them financially. It was this period that made Sri Aurobindo stronger. In the year 1890, Sri Aurobindo cleared the I. C. S exam but he purposefully avoided the riding test and excluded himself from becoming a Civil Servant.

From his early life Sri Aurobindo was leaning towards the roots of Indian spirit and engaged himself in various revolutionary activities. He joined the '*Indian Majlis*' and became its Secretary. He established a revolutionary confidential organisation "Lotus and Dagger". The aim of this organisation was to liberate India at any cost.

It was in the year 1893, at the age of twenty-one years, he was headed for India. His returned to India provided him the spiritual experience culminated in vanishing the darkness that had haunted him for past fourteen long years. During the event of Bengal partition (1905), he actively joined politics. '*Bande Mataram*', a newspaper, which was started in 1906, he wrote a famous booklet '*Bhawani Mandir*'. There he formulated a scheme where political workers are to be prepared. In 1908, Sri Aurobindo was arrested by British government for a bombing incident which was originally done by Khudiram Bose. He was taken to Alipore jail, where he experienced a divine sense of Sri Krishna and heard the voice of Vivekananda. In this regard he says,

"I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me..." (Sri Aurobindo, 1972)

Sri Aurobindo transformed the jail-cell into the "cave of *tapasya*". The awareness that "all life is *Yoga*" manifested to him during his time in jail. He turned his focus on *Yoga Sadhana* and decided to take retired from active politics. After retiring, he decided to move to Pondicherry. Once one of his disciple asked him why he choose Pondicherry as his *Sadhana* place, he replied,

"It was by an *adesh*. I was asked to come here." (Purani, 1966)

Sri Aurobindo met the Mother (Mirra Alfassa), his spiritual collaborator, at Pondicherry. She conveyed her meeting with Sri Aurobindo:

"As soon as I saw Sri Aurobindo I recognised in him the well-known being whom I used to call Krishna." (Purani, 2013)

Soon after meeting with Sri Aurobindo, the Mother wished to join the mission of Sri Aurobindo. They regularly organised evening talks and meditation in groups. Subsequently, the Mother took the charge of the Ashram. The ashram began to expand bit by bit. Sri Aurobindo left this world on 6th December, 1950. This background on the life experiences of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother help us to understand the following concepts comprehensively, ultimately serving as the foundational basis for the Integral Educational Philosophy.

Genesis of His Integral Philosophy

The life experiences of Sri Aurobindo helped him in synthesising his Integral philosophy. His integral philosophy helps to find the ultimate aim of human life that is liberation through transformation and many such other aspects which are necessary in order to develop the true essence of his integral education. As Sri Aurobindo said,

“All evolution is in essence a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest Being, so that It may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from the mind into the spirit.” (Sri Aurobindo, 1970)

According to Sri Aurobindo, the evolutionary process proceeds with the descent (Involution) of Super Consciousness, the *Sacchidananda* into mind, life and matter, afterwards this consciousness elevates (Evolution) itself through the higher faculty of higher mind, illumined mind, overmind and supermind and then move forwarded to Divine Consciousness in this way, creating Divine manifestation in the world through the development of the 'integral man' from an ordinary man. (4. Pg59). In this way creating integral life on earth.

Integral Education

Integral education refers to the integration of various aspects of a being aimed at achieving divineness through liberation and to achieve human unity through spiritual consciousness. The integral educational concept acknowledges five fundamental principles. They are physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. They advance in a hierarchical manner without interfering with or excluding one another. This is integral education emphasises inclusion rather than seclusion.

Physical education means the perfection of the body through cultivating habits by adhering strict technique, self-control, and order. Mental aspects address the intelligence, notions and other mental processes. Mental education is essential as it governs people's thoughts, rejects the unwanted thoughts and allow the individual what he needs and when he needs. Vital aspect concerns the vital aspect of beings. It signifies the aspiration, affection, passion in a people. Through vital education one can mastery over these sensory organs. By referring 'Psychic', Sri Aurobindo meant that aspects which are related to our soul or psyche psychic education teach us to realise the actual purpose of our entity. Psychic consciousness is greater than mental consciousness. Psychic consciousness recognizes what is unrecognized to mental consciousness. Once one gains the mastery over the psychic domain, he begins to step into the spiritual consciousness. The primary motto of spiritual education is to achieve the highest conscious that is Divine consciousness. Regarding these five principle aspects, the Mother said,

“Some say that the psychic life is immortal, endless time, limitless space, ever – progressive change, unbroken continuity in the world of forms. The spiritual consciousness, on the other hand, means live the infinite, and eternal, to throw oneself outside all creation beyond time and space. To become fully aware of your psychic being and to live a psychic life you must abolish in you all selfishness; but to live spiritual life you must be selfless” (Dowsett et.al., 1996)

Aims of Integral Education

The aim of integral education is to trained man integrally so as to make him realise the ultimate aim of human unity through realizing the Divine consciousness. Its aim is to revelation the Supreme Reality in the earth transforming common man into 'integral man' by achieving awaken minds, the supramental stage so creating integral life on earth. (60 pg). Integral education focuses on achieving a feeling of

togetherness in mankind and international association. It will ensure the elimination of rivalry, hatred, jealousy and to achieve greater peace and prosperity. He opposed the existing education system, advocating for an approach that aligns with the needs of contemporary life. He believed education should be dynamic and relevant.

Curriculum

Sri Aurobindo advocated for a free and creative environment for children, emphasising an integrated curriculum that combines various activities, subjects, and real life experiences into a cohesive whole. He emphasised that education should nurture the whole person, integrating physical growth, mental clarity, and spiritual awakening, rather than merely serving as a mechanical process. It should promote creativity and constructive skills while including essential subjects relevant to society, such as the mother tongue, English, history, social sciences etc. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of incorporating yoga, arts, crafts, and music into the regular curriculum.

Pre- natal Education

The impact of early life is long lasting for which Sri Aurobindo in his educational philosophy advocated Pre- natal education i. e. even before the birth of a child adequate care should be taken. This concept was later developed by the Mother, drawing on his integral educational philosophy. We must acknowledge that the Supreme Being has bestowed upon women the unique ability to bear children in their wombs. However, the ability to create alone is not sufficient for bringing forth a child of consciousness. The would be mother must be nurtured and trained holistically that will surely bring about a revolution for the betterment of humankind.

In today's world, discrimination and atrocities against women is increasing day by day. Pre- natal educational concept in a sense puts a greater emphasis on Women empowerment. Women take up the centre stage in our society but despite this we often hear about the heinous crimes such as domestic abuse, acid attack, rapes etc. that are committed against women on a daily basis. The essential factor for achieving holistic development is the proper care of the women in our society, and the most effective solution to this is "education". Educating women is the key to lifting the mankind out of the challenges of today's world.

Institutions Based on Integral Education

The theoretical framework of integral educational philosophy proposed by Sri Aurobindo was later implemented in practice by the Mother. Institutions like Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE), The Future Foundation School (TFFS), Mirambika and Auroville probing the practicality of Integral Education in real- world scenario is proven. The primary aim of these institutions is to incorporate education rooted in authentic spiritual and nationalistic philosophy. He believed in the philosophy he proposed, asserting that it could truly be a game changer for the Indian education system. Among them, Auroville was the most important one.

Auroville was founded in February, 1968. It was an experiment conceived and designed by the Mother. She described it as living laboratory for society. it is an all-encompassing Utopian community. The city of Auroville has the Matrimandir at its centre, which is reconized as the soul of Auroville. The mandir functions as the area for spiritual concentration. Educational model followed at Auroville is not rigid but dynamic in nature evolving continuously. It is more of an environment than that of a system.

The Relevancy of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy in Present Global Context

The fault lines in our society based on caste- creed and religion etc. are threatened the togetherness of our diverse culture. Apart from this, the present day conflicts such as war between Ukraine and Russia and the unrest in Middle East etc. are continuously challenging our existence. An integrally trained man living in an integral society can resolve these issues and bring peace, harmony and unity in true sense.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of Integral Education and its implementation are purpose-driven. Each smaller goal contributes to a larger objective, which aims to foster harmony and unity among humanity based on spiritual principles. The ultimate goal of his 'Spiritual Philosophy' is to manifest Divine Life on earth and realize the concept of 'World Union.' He proposed that through the integral philosophy of education, individuals can be trained and uplifted in their spiritual consciousness, becoming valuable citizens of their society and nation.

His thoughts on human existence was both idealistic and pragmatic, because he not only advocated for unity but also put forwarded practical approaches to attain it. In the collection of essays 'The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination', Sri Aurobindo wrote about the Human unity in detail. His educational philosophy is aimed at fostering social change. Its dynamic approach remains relevant even today. He was a true pragmatic visionary, and his philosophy of education and its manifestation through classroom interactions is designed to help us achieve the ultimate human goal of unifying humanity through Divine realization.

Conclusion

To develop his integral educational philosophy, he established spirituality as its foundation while integrating materialistic European knowledge. This approach aims to create an integrally educated individual capable of engaging with modern advancements while simultaneously focusing on the spiritual dimension to realize the Life Divine. This, in turn, supports the greater goal of human unification, ultimately fulfilling the objectives of brotherhood, peace, harmony, and prosperity.

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