

**SOCIAL REFORMATION THROUGH SPIRITUAL AWAKENING: A STUDY OF THE  
THOUGHTS OF SRI AUROBINDO****Dr Rajshree Naidu****rajshreenaidu71@gmail.com**

Associate Professor

SOS, Dept. of English

Bharati Vishwavidyalaya,

Chhattisgarh, India

**Pushpita Dasgupta****dasgupta.pushpita@gmail.com**

Research Scholar

Bharati Vishwavidyalaya

Durg (C.G.)

**ABSTRACT**

Sri Aurobindo was an Indian poet, a renowned metaphysician, a philosopher, a yogi, and nationalist. He was born on 15 August 1872 in Kolkata and completed his formal education from England. Later he participated in the freedom movement of India. He evolved his theory of spiritual awakening and advancement. The principal theme of Sri Aurobindo's writings is enrichment of human soul and existence. His writings represent the distillation of the new and growing soul of India and have a spiritual significance for humanity. He was one of the most creative and significant writers in the history of the Indian renaissance and spiritual awakening. He introduced the Indian youth to spiritual awakening as one of the ways to reform and reconstruct society. This article is an endeavour to explore and assess the coherence and relevance of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of social reformation through spiritual awakening. Sri Aurobindo believed that the general aim of all sorts of education is to make the man worthy of living. The specific aim of spiritual education is to assist a person to understand the divine perception and become a faultless instrument of its manifestation. Nowadays, spiritual education has become the most neglected part of life whereas it is essential for the mental development of human beings. Sri Aurobindo lays emphasis on spiritual education as the most important mean of education. A watchful assessment has been administered where Sri Aurobindo he lays emphasis on the significance of purity of the individual by means of nurturing inner oneness and not merely through peripheral imposition.

Keywords: spiritual awakening, social reformation, divine perception, mental development, manifestation

**OBJECTIVES:**

- (i) To critically examine the spiritual education of Sri Aurobindo.

- (ii) To understand the need and importance of Aurobindo's spiritual education in the present system of education

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Sri Aurobindo was born on 15 August 1872 in Calcutta, West Bengal. He was a great yogi as well as a guru and philosopher. On the other hand, he was a Nationalist, a freedom fighter and a poet. Krishna Dhun Ghosh was his father and Swarnalata Devi was his mother. He went to England for education when he was seven years old where he completed his schooling and later joined Cambridge University for higher education. He was very fond of reading and writing and his literary bent led him to study Romantic Idealism, Empirical Positivism and Rationalism. Charles Darwin's theory of Evolution and Henry Bergson's philosophy of Cognitive Evolution influenced him and made remarkable impression on his developing intellect. Apart from English, he had mastered Greek and Latin alongside Italian, German, Spanish and French. He passed the ICS examination when he was only eighteen years old but as resistance to British domination, he refused to sit for the practical examination. In 1893, he returned and began his teaching career at Baroda College as a French teacher. In 1905 he joined Bengal National College as the principal and in the same year he joined anti-partition movement against the English rule. In order to propel his revolutionary thoughts, he launched the journal

Bandemataram". Alipore Bomb case took place in 1908 and on the charges of setting up and supervising the attack Aurobindo was also arrested and imprisoned. A year later, he was acquitted from the charges and released from the jail. The time he spent in jail changed Aurobindo's life radically. He passed through varied spiritual experiences and realizations over all these months and consequently, his aim went far beyond the service and freedom of the country. In 1910, he moved to Pondicherry having renounced his political activism where with the help of Mirra Alfassa, a French lady, who later became known as The Mother, he established Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the international centre of education at Pondicherry

### **NEED OF SOCIAL REFORMATION:**

Sri Aurobindo's believes that the present age is the age of spiritual and moral decay and decline. Materialism is spreading all over the world and the present social and educational system proves inefficient to curtail it. Cultural and human values are at stake. The society needs a big

turnaround to be saved from extinction. He suggested that purification of the human mind and soul only can lead to social reformation. His theory of social reformation could be understood underscoring the fact that one has to achieve what is called supra-rationality because if a human being is controlled explicitly by his reasoning capability then he happens to avoid the voice of Viveka or the Super-Ego. According to Sri Aurobindo, human beings have to understand that the reasoning faculty of mind has some limitations and in order to identify one's truest self, he has to get rid of it. Aurobindo tries to go beyond the domain of reason while discussing the theory of social reformation.

### **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:**

Sri Aurobindo reckons that the development of social phase in children as an essential purpose of education. He imagines a divine society consisting divine human beings. He advises that the aim of education should be to develop such an inclusive human being, who develops not only as an individual but also as an associate of the society.

### **SOCIAL REFORMATION THROUGH SPIRITUAL AWAKENING:**

Aurobindo's idea of reformation passes through the well constructed arena of education which is broadly called „integral education“. He felt a distinctive kind of education for the whole world. Entering into correct affiliation with life, mind and soul such kind of education helps. Therefore, he suggests physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual education as five major stages for the development of human beings. The need of the present hour is that of providing spiritual education to children to save the society and the humanity at large. He opines that this is the most avoided part of curricula in most of the parts of the world. He further highlights that India is in need of such educational system that includes spiritual awakening and multidimensional development of the soul. He himself says that “Education to be true must not be a machine made fabric but a true building or living evocation of the powers of the mind and spirit of human being.”

According to Aurobindo, the principal aim of education should be social utility which is possible only by the agency of growing soul and to use it for the cause of the society and nation. Another important aim of education is to prepare human beings for sacred life. Spiritual education enlightens the inner soul of the man and drives him on the path of social awareness and

reconstruction. Unless the man is useful for the society, the education he has received is useless and insignificant. Hence, the educational system must assure that it is producing useful and contributing citizens for the society. For this purpose, Sri Aurobindo has proposed that apart from formal education, spiritual education should also be started from the elementary level of learning. He further says that every child has his own potential and is meant to evolve and develop through experiences. The innate aptitude and aspiration of the child has to be given priority whereas preoccupation of the parents should not be either forced or imposed on him. Aurobindo Ghosh was a devout follower of humanism. He is also acknowledged as a spiritualist by world community. His major idea was to convert the individual life into a divine life. Hence, he supported spiritual education. According to Aurobindo Ghosh “one’s highest object is the awakening and development of his spiritual being”. (Zulaski, 2017, p.13) Aurobindo Ghosh sought to extend the spiritual authority of human beings other than ethical or logical. His philosophy of spiritual education has the following aims:

1. Spiritual Education Tries To Elevate The Lower Consciousness Into Supramental Consciousness.
2. To bring down from the spiritual consciousness spiritual knowledge to the lower being.

### **THE RELEVANCE OF AUROBINDO’S THOUGHTS IN TODAY’S WORLD:-**

In his article *A Study on Aurobindo’s Spiritual and Philosophical Vision*, Dr. Anant Sharma has presented the view that:

The 20th century saw the birth of a new social phenomenon termed as „globalization“. The idea is that the world is evolving into an interconnected social system producing a corresponding higher level of collective consciousness on a planetary scale. Therefore, humankind now has a communal responsibility to facilitate evolutionary movement toward global social integration, the construction of a new social reality and to cultivate planetary collective consciousness. Due to the severity of present day international problems, the grand idea of globalization now holds minimal concern for the majority of educators. (p. 2)

He further adds that:

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh strived to philosophically reconcile Western scientific rationalism with Eastern transcendent metaphysics into a holistic narrative of reality. His academic interest was

interdisciplinary in scope: political science, education, sociology, psychology and philosophy. He was deeply influenced by Western thought, most significantly, Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory and French intellectual Henri Bergson's philosophy of cognitive evolution. The ideas of impending human evolution and global futurism became the foundation of his spiritual philosophy, sociological theories, political ideology and educational thought. (pp. 2-3)

Man lives unenlightened life thinking always about his past grieves and hopes of better tomorrow. Finding it difficult, he is satisfied with his common average kind. Aurobindo's thoughts on spiritual awakening and illumination are of utter importance in the present context as the human civilization is living in the age of globalisation. Science and technology have brought mammoth changes in human life and the way of human living has become much different from what it was just a generation or two ago. National, social, cultural, and life values are degrading in this fast moving world. Hence, to maintain the permanent peace, Aurobindo's thoughts must be practiced. To promote social integration not only on indigenous or national level but on international level also, the spiritual ideology of Sri Aurobindo seem to be exceptionally relevant.

#### **PASSAGE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING:**

Sri Aurobindo holds a very firm view that the special objective of spiritual education has direct coherence with awakening which help human beings realise the divine consciousness and further helps to become a perfect instrument to its revelation. Moreover, spiritual awakening leads to self-discovery which is essential to make one an aware and sensible human being. He advises that the process of obtaining self-discovery passes through the three stages i.e. stages of psychic, spiritual and supra mental transformation. He asserted that mind consists of four parts i.e. Chitta, Manas, Intellect and Intuition. The first part Chitta is passive memory. Manas receives and handles images and process them towards perceptions. The third part is intellect which analyses and higher knowledge is brought by the fourth part intuition. He further says that in spiritual education, Yoga plays a crucial role and another way is Sadhana.

Another view of Aurobindo is that „Brahma“ is present in everyone therefore, self- recognition or self-discovery is essential. After this only one can know the world in better sense. There has been a suspicion among spiritual thinkers that those who achieve this self-realisation, they detach

themselves from the world but Aurobindo does away with this notion by saying that his Yoga is not that of a hermit or Sanyasi rather it is of an ordinary man who is practicing Yoga seeking spiritual illumination and simultaneously discharging his worldly obligations. He puts his own example and articulates that he continues to work for the better development of the society while practicing yoga.

### **THE LIFE DIVINE (1919):**

*The Life Divine* (1919) is his philosophical work which synthesises the western mind and the eastern spirituality improved by Sri Aurobindo's original insights. It is not only a treatise on philosophy, but rather a work on life. The knowledge procured from this book may be practiced to refine and elevate the mundane life on earth. All human beings are born with the potential to swivel the spiritual clout for a higher aim in life. The concepts like the divine, the origin of the creation, the evolution of realisation, the universe and the evolutionary spiritual providence of the human race are explained in detail in this work. He also illustrates that the revelation of the universe and human beings' spiritual vocation concludes in a divine life on earth. The reason of life on earth is to ascertain the realisation of the divine in all the things. This can be obtained by overpowering the intrinsic lack of knowledge through an affinity with the divine by voyaging into the soul. Book I of *The Life Divine* analyses the manifestation of the omnipresent truth in the dualities of the creation in the universe. Part I of Book II talks of the causes of unawareness and the ways to find out the divine within. Part II of book II presents a blue print to a higher spiritual achievement for the human kind. The chief aim of the book is the spiritual excellence of life on the earth. In this book, Sri Aurobindo summarises a theory of spiritual advancement and suggests that the present human catastrophe would give rise to a spiritual revolution of the human being and the dawn of a celestial life on the earth. In his opinion:

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation,—for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment,—is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. (Aurobindo, 1919, p. 74)

**SAVITRI (1947):**

Aurobindo's magnum opus, *Savitri*, is a standalone high octane mantric poem. The mantra consists of words of power that find their source deep within. Its aim is to create vibrations in the internal perception that promote the realisation of what the mantra symbolises. In other words, Savitri is not only a prophetic poem, but its mantric quality bears a supreme strength for the transformation of consciousness and for a life organised around the Self. Although it is not correct to say that there is no immersive truth or universal fact that leads to a focused life today, but, if there is, then it is a thin one revolving around consumerism, materialistic science, technology, and the profit purpose, which is further modified by humanistic concerns up to a certain extent. Furthermore, as the industrial age paves the path for the age of information and the modern mind further proceeds towards postmodernism, a quivering, obscure and mundane world is developing without reference to any power, where even this focus is being ever more subjected to narcissistic individualism. This comes along with the quantification of life, social isolation and alienation.

C.G. Jung, in his research has observed that "Everywhere one hears the cry for a Weltanschauung that is a meaningful worldview or philosophy of life." (p. 337) It is perhaps more relevant today everywhere in the world. The chaotic condition of the present post-modern world is raging with a deep-rooted craving for direction and purpose, united around a spiritual centre and unity. There is a cry for a guiding myth and an integral Weltanschauung that is founded on harmony with the most modern view of realism, and that does not suppress life but fulfils it in all its diversity. Sri Aurobindo's epic is a notable response to all these aspirations.

Keyur Gondalia in his research article, *Sri Aurobindo's Views on Individual and Society*, has examined the precious thoughts of Sri Aurobindo on the role of society in the development of an individual and concluded that:

As per Sri Aurobindo, society is a means for the individual's development. Hence it is the responsibility of the society or social institutions to provide a necessary environment through rules and regulations. In the present times however, so called social institutions often have become roadblock for human upliftment and spiritual development. Rather than clearing the people's mind, social institutions are creating more of them and thus taking away the individual far from the intellectual clarity. (p. 3)

**CONCLUSION:**

Aurobindo is a socialist, and a nationalist visionary. His ideas on society and education are extracted from national education which was proposed in the year 1907. He proposed that learning is nothing but bringing out and fostering the underlying potentialities; combine oneself with self, delightful living of individual with society, country and humanity to make oneself a comprehensive being or integrated human being. He believes that the true function of education is not merely accumulation of facts or information because this will curtail the achievement of goals in life but, in fact, education is formation of character, personality and values. He gives high importance to the native education and language as it help the children to understand their history, culture and paves the path to get connected to the present so that progress can be made. He prefers Indian way of education over western education. He asserts that western education has made significant advancement in knowledge that should be learnt. He also believes that principal aim of education is spiritual awakening of the individual. For this, he has suggested that ways such as yoga and meditation. He has also proposed secondary aims of education i.e. physical, moral, mental, spiritual and psychological development which he later defined as Integral Education. Sri Aurobindo opines that society is an essential source for the development of an individual. Therefore, it is the obligatory on the part of the society and allied social institutions to prepare a necessary milieu bound with rules and regulations for the purpose. Upliftment and spiritual development of mankind is possible through the ways suggested by him. Time has changed drastically in last a few decades because of advancement in the field of science, technology, information etc. Up to a large extent, they are responsible for moral and spiritual decline of human beings, hence revision and practice of the thoughts of Sri Aurobindo has become compulsory for our social wellbeing and spiritual awakening as it will lead to social integration of the human race.

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