

**SRI AUROBINDO’S PRAGMATIC APPROACH TOWARDS EDUCATION: AN
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ABSTRACT

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) was born in Kolkata, India and completed his education from England. He is regarded as one of the ambassadors of Indian educational and spiritual renaissance of the twentieth century. He built the prominent „Aurobindo Ashram“ which serves the purpose of educational, philanthropic, religious studies, spirituality and meditation. His educational values are chiefly based on Upanishads and Vedas. In 1910, he authored a series of essays titled *A System of National Education* which was first published in the journal Karmayogin. In these essays Sri Aurobindo introduced some general principles of a strong system of teaching and learning. Over the years he also emphasised on the importance of physical education and the flawlessness of the body as a crucial constituent for the ultimate divinisation of mundane life. He propounded that the system of teaching-learning has to be inclusive of the need of modern life. The present paper focuses on the Sri Aurobindo’s contribution to the field of education and lays emphasis on his educational perception, objectives of education, curriculum, teacher-student affiliation and methods of teaching. On the other hand, Integralism is also one of the principal characteristics of Sri Aurobindo’s educational philosophy. It is the confluence of naturalism, idealism, pragmatism and spiritualism. In the modern times, his philosophical doctrines of teaching have become even more coherent to attain peace and harmony in human life. His philosophy is not only relevant to achieve everlasting peace in the world but at the same time is useful to bring about requisite changes to better the Indian educational system.

Keywords: Spiritual Renaissance, Philanthropic, Integralism, Naturalism, Idealism, Spiritualism

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY:

1. To study the relevance of Aurobindo Ghosh educational thought in the Integral

education system.

2. To study the significance of Aurobindo Ghosh contribution of Education.

INTRODUCTION-

Aurobindo Krishna Dhun Ghosh or Sri Aurobindo, born on 15 August 1872 in Calcutta, West Bengal, 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. His literary works have enriched both Indian culture and Indian English Literature. His idealistic philosophy of life was based upon Vedantic philosophy of Upanishad. The thoughts he has given decades before seem to be extremely effective on today's education system. His educational ideas are in accordance to the present educational system. The potential of his educational doctrines lies deep in the fact that they can help strengthen the education system and prepare children for the challenging future.

Sri Aurobindo maintains that education is essential for growth and development. He opines that education is not merely gathering of information because according to him, information cannot be the foundation of knowledge. He says, "True knowledge is not attained by thinking. It is what you are, it is what you become." (Aurobindo, 1998, p. 27) In order to bring his philosophical teachings into practice by human beings, he felt the need of a unique kind of education. He was of the opinion that the contemporary system of education was not appropriate for the well-being of the nation and he proposed a national plan of education. He maintains that the kind of education, we need in our country, is an education, "proper to the Indian soul and need and temperament and culture that we are in quest of, not indeed something faithful merely to the past, but to the development soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming-self creation, to her eternal spirit."

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF A NEW EDUCATION SYSTEM

Aurobindo feels that only education nurtures our personality by improving all aspects of life as physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, social and cultural. It eliminates darkness and illuminates a person's life. It also helps him to exterminate penury and desolation. As soon as he becomes aloof of these predicaments, he becomes creative and contributes to the development of society as well as the country.

Sri Aurobindo measured a number of inherent problems in teachings being given to our schools and universities before independence. That education system was not innovative rather it was

impoverishing and somewhere responsible for moral and spiritual degradation. One has to lead towards the truth and knowledge to face day to day challenges and for this, it is indispensable to keep our education system updated and bring timely and required changes.

AUROBINDO'S CONCEPT OF EDUCATION:

Aurobindo conceptualised that man passes through the stages of „dravya“ and „prana“ to come face to face to „manas“; next is the stage of „atimanas“ which then proceeds towards „anand“, then to „chit“ and from „chit“ it leads to „sat“. For true development of mankind, it is essential to provide them such education which makes aware of the forms of dravya, prana and manas and how the other forms i.e. atimanas, anand, chit and sat are attained. Aurobindo firmly believes that education only can make this acknowledgement possible, an education which brings physical, mental and spiritual advancement to human beings.

INTEGRAL EDUCATION-

According to Sri Aurobindo, integral education is the best way to make human beings ready for the full purpose of life. At the same time it is helpful to better understand meaning of life, right use of mind and soul. An ideal and integral education system must open up ways for the best possible expansion of faculties of the student i.e. physical, vital, mental and psychic. Sri Aurobindo firmly believes that two fold basis of integrated education are:

1. Humanity is one.
2. Individuality is one whole.

The cardinal purpose of integral education would be to aim at the multidimensional development of personality and at the same time it would also hold close all knowledge in its scope. A distinctive feature of integral education is its emphasis on simultaneous progress of Knowledge, Will, Harmony, and Skill as varied parts of the human existence. Integral education is an inclusive system of education. It develops the cognitive mind and contributes to physical, vital, spiritual, and psyche aspects of personality growth also. The word „Integral“ here means „complete“. It nurtures a sense of veracity, magnificence and harmony in all facets of humanity. With the help of innovative techniques of imparting education and activity based learning, students are equipped with multi skills and abilities which can be applied and used in his life.

According to Aurobindo and the Mother, integral education is not merely an idea but it is a complete and perfect system of education:

The aim of education is not to prepare a man to succeed in life and society, but to increase his perfectibility to its utmost extent ... to work for your perfection, the first step is to become conscious of yourself, of the different parts of your being and their respective activities. You must learn to distinguish these different parts one from another, so that you may become clearly aware of the origin of the movements that occur in you, the many impulses, reactions and conflicting wills that drive you to action. (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1998, p. 13)

According to Sri Aurobindo right education is not only limited to divine aspect of education but it also includes realistic, corporal and imperative aspects of education and all these make it integral education. The Mother, further says that:

To be complete education it must be five principle aspects relating to five principle activities of human being: the physical, the mental, the psyche, the vital and the spiritual. This education is complete, complimentary to each other and continued till the end of life. (Alfassa, M., 1998, p. 18)

Sri Aurobindo used the sagacity of integral education in two proportions. In the first proportion, integral means corresponding five aspects (physical, mental, spiritual, vital and psyche) of individual being and secondly integral education is not for evolution of individual but for the nation and ultimately for humanity. In a wider way, integral means evolution of humanity and propelling the principle of harmony in miscellany.

THE PURPOSE OF INTEGRAL EDUCATION:

Academic knowledge assisted by practical skills for becoming an efficient human of a cultured society is the first purpose of integral education. To instill tangible worldly knowledge into students and to motivate introspective awareness in them is the approach of such education. Moral and ethical values such as kindness, sympathy, and sense of responsibility are the other vital purposes of integral education which are crucial to form a better world. Such education also inspires students to develop in them a sense of societal and ecological responsibility and at the same time to work for improving their communities. Sri Aurobindo has laid down three basic principles that serve the purpose of integral education. The first principal propounds that:

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not

actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. The distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child, is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine. Child or man, boy or girl, there is only one sound principle of good teaching. Difference of age only serves to diminish or increase the amount of help and guidance necessary; it does not change its nature. (Aurobindo, 2003, p. 384)

The second principle lays emphasis on the right use of mental capability of children that should be properly guided and navigated by the teachers and parents for his development and growth.

The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. (Aurobindo, 2003, p. 384)

The third Principle advocates that about working from close to far, from the present to the future. It talks that man's personality is nearly always his inheritance, his environment, his ethnicity, his nation, the land that nourishes him. Human beings should never be uprooted from the soil where he is born and brought up because they are the essential forces to make a person creative and experimenting:

The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly. From that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be

brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. (Aurobindo, 2003, p. 384)

Sri Aurobindo opines that to become acquainted with the spiritual development process and reaching the stage of „**Sat**“ are the two principal functions of education. According to him, the sequence of spiritual development process and their aims are as under: -

a. Education for Physical Development: The universe and human descend from **Dravya**. This material world is made of five elements including man’s physical form. The chief objective of this kind of education is to train human beings about the protection of human body. For the achieving „**sat + chit + anand**“ one needs a healthy body, hence the first and foremost goal of education should be the physical development of man because body is the chariot that helps procuring „**sat**“. Fundamental needs for human existence i.e. food, cloth and shelter protect the human body. Sri Aurobindo defines it as vocational growth. Social development is the other aspect of physical development therefore he has assimilated this aspect also in the aims for such development. **b. Education for Pranic Development:** **Prana** is the second stage of human development. Aurobindo defines *Prana* as energy which is capable and responsible for changes in the inner and outer world of man. *Prana* needs to be directed for character and moral development. This is possible only when *Prana* or *energy* is properly guided from **asat** to **sat** which further leads to physical and mental purification. Hence, training of senses must be one of the essential aims of education.

c. Education for Mental Development: The third stage of human development is **Manas**. Sri Aurobindo claims that **Manas** is the most active part of human existence. Unless education effects man’s mental development, it is worthless. One of the heirs of Sri Aurobindo, Sri Mataji opines that there are five components of education of mind i.e. arousing of the power of concentration, intensifying the depth and opulence of mind; organising all the thoughts towards the ultimate aim, restraining and renouncing evil thoughts and mental stability. In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo man’s imagination, thinking, memory, logical powers and decision making ability needs to be enhanced which is possible only through mental development.

d. Education for the Development of Inner-Self: The fourth stage of human development is **Atimanas**. Sri Aurobindo has theorised that Chit, intellect, mind and self-realisation are the four steps towards development of inner-self. At this level, man becomes capable of understanding everything without the use of senses. He further adds that **Sat** is realised through inner-self only.

Sri Aurobindo feels that there should be proper education for development of inner-self and suggests Yogic methods for the attainment of the same.

e. Education for Spiritual Development: **Anand**, **Chit** and **Sat** are the last three stages of human development. Sri Aurobindo states that Anand or delight is the situation in which man has no realisation of weal and woe; **chit** is the state which enables human beings to understand his real existence and pure life is called **Sat** which is further considered and assumed as God. The attainment of these levels is possible only through proper education for spiritual development for which Sri Aurobindo recommends Karma Yoga and Dhyana Yoga. Spiritual development has to be the ultimate aim of education.

CURRICULUM OF EDUCATION

Sri Aurobindo has suggested inclusion of western science and technology as necessary aspects of education but at the same time he stressed on the point that our own indigenous culture is still more important. He has proposed curriculum on all the levels of education that may be categorised as below:

Elementary Level: Mother tongue is the most important aspect of learning. Apart from it languages of national and international use and importance like English, French, Social Sciences, Drawing and Painting and games should be included in the syllabi. On the other hand, exercise, gardening and psalms should also be a part of it.

Secondary Level: Knowledge of English Literature, French Literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry along with agriculture, handicrafts, dhyana and yoga are important to learn.

Higher Level: Evolution of human civilisation, life science, psychology, sociology, Western and Orient philosophies, relations of nations, psalms and yoga have to be integral part of the syllabi on this level.

Sri Aurobindo was strongly opposed to learn by rote. He emphasised that while teaching, physical and mental potential of the students must be kept in mind. Group activities and self-experience are the best ways to learn and students have to be given as many as possible chances to prove his capacity. Self control, meditation and contemplation should be a part of training as well. He was of the opinion 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 ... Education is helping the growing soul to draw out that is in itself. (Aurobindo, 2003, p. 277)

Other aspects of teaching:

Sri Aurobindo lays stress on some other aspects of education i.e. teaching learning process such as discipline, role of teacher, student, school etc. He also talks of national education and religious and moral upliftment which is possible only by the agency of integral education. They may be understood as under: **Discipline:**

Sri Aurobindo is of the view that conversion of competence to performance is true discipline. In the learning process, students envision their teacher as their ideal; hence the teachers should be ideal in all respects such as conduct, character and compassion. Secondly, he opines that harshness cannot lead to true discipline; therefore punishment has to be avoided while teaching learning process as it is an inhuman activity.

Role of teacher:

Kakuli Dey (2021) in her research article states that:

As per Shri Aurobindo, teachers should be respected and they have a very responsible job. The different tasks of the learners should be Sincerely seen so that he could guide. He told that a teacher should show the learners the appropriate path, and show the ways to achieve .That and find out the self-guidance. And also told not to impose any knowledge instead he shows them how to get different skills. (p. 865)

Sri Aurobindo sees the teacher not as the one who develops knowledge in children but rather the one as a guide who works for the independent growth and development of students.

Role of School:

Sri Aurobindo does discard discrimination of all sorts on any basis i.e. caste, creed, ethnicity or religion. He is of the opinion that admission in school should be given on the basis of children's ability and schools must create atmosphere for physical and spiritual development of children. Dr. Hadibandhu Behera, in his monumental research work has explored the educational thoughts of Sri Aurobindo and states that:

The schools should have facilities for both types of physical and spiritual development, but there should not be any binding on the students. They should be free to select subjects, games and exercises and they should be allowed to do their work at their own rate. He called it free system

of education. According to Sri Aurobindo, schools should try to develop students physically and spiritually by providing benevolent and friendly atmosphere.

CONCLUSION:

Sri Aurobindo's concept of education aims at modifying the school curriculum and magnifying the learning methods. In his opinion, helping the pupil to attain his potentiality in his way and rate and to devote his time to discover himself should be the inseparable part of education system. As Chanda Rani (2017) states:

Sri Aurobindo's philosophical thoughts and principles of teaching are utmost important if a human being wants to live in peace and harmony. In the global era, his philosophy is very much relevant to achieve and maintain permanent peace in the world. It is very necessary to uplift the human being from the materiality to spirituality. (p. 50)

Sri Aurobindo strongly scorned the western materialistic education of education as it could not understand Indian ideals, values and cultures and simultaneously could not help to the attainment of true Indianness. Therefore, it is clear that the kind of formal education suggested by Sri Aurobindo is the need of the hour and it should be provided to children with ascertained aims, curriculum and teaching methods to produce desired results.

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