



A STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT'S OF SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FIVE PRINCIPAL ASPECTS.

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ABSTRACT :

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), the great educationist of India, has set forth his philosophy in the life Divine. He bases his philosophy on the original Vedanta of the Upanishadas. Sri Aurobindo believes that earlier Vedanta represent and integral or balanced view of life. It implies healthy integration of God and the man or world, renunciation and enjoyment, freedom of the soul and action of nature, being and becoming, the one and many, Vidya and Avidya, knowledge and works, and birth and release.

This article reviews the five principal aspects of a "complete integral education" envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and Mother Mirra Alfassa and elucidated in their writings. This innovative, learner-centered pedagogy encourages holistic development through acknowledgment and cultivation of the five dimensions of a human being—the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic, and the spiritual. The article suggests that a complete integral education contributes a potentially corrective alternative to outmoded orthodox methods that privilege intellectual proficiency over the holistic knowledge potentially present, given authentic engagement of learning communities.

KEY WORDS : *Sri Aurobindo, Mirra Alfassa, Integral Education, Physical Education, Mental Education, Vital Education, Psychic Education, Spiritual Education.*

INTRODUCTION :

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh was an Idealistic to the core. His Idealistic philosophy of life was based upon Vedantic philosophy of Upanishad. 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 developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self creation, to her eternal spirit." Sri Aurobindo's (1956) concept of education is not only acquiring information, but the acquiring of various kinds of information. He points out, "...is only one and not the chief of the means and necessities of education: its central aim is the building of the powers of the human mind and spirit".

It implies healthy integration of God and the man or world, renunciation and enjoyment, freedom of the soul and action of nature, being and becoming, the one and many, Vidya and Avidya, knowledge and works, and birth and release. He says that fellowship between God and man generates in 'man' an idea of new birth and a new ideal of work. The fellowship with God can be achieved only by disinterested action in society, by never ending meditation, by self forgetting devotion and by feeling a kind of unity of all things in

God. Sri Aurobindo is not a fatalist. He believes that man is the maker of his own destiny. Even heredity and environment are determined by the present and past actions of man. Man reaps the consequences not of his actions alone, but sometimes he shares the results of the action, of others and vice versa, because all existence is continuous. There is continuity between deferent births. On the whole the doctrine of karma is valid. Even the thoughts and feelings have their corresponding results, though action has the greatest amount of result, as life consists more of actions. Moreover it is on actions that man exercises more control than on thoughts and feelings. To Aurobindo, Education of values was the most important. He believed that the best thing in man in his spirituality.

The guidance to the individual must begin from the birth and proceed for a long time flawlessly at various stages his life. "Education to be complete must have five principal aspects relating to the five principal activities of the human being: the physical, the mental, the vital, the psychic and the spiritual." Normally these stages of education and training succeed each other in a sequence following the growth and development of the individual; this does not imply that the one ought to displace the other yet all should proceed, complementary to one other from birth to death or even from womb to tomb.

GENERAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH :

Sri Aurobindo believed that the highest truths, the truth contained of science and religion were already contained in Vedas. The Gita and the Upanishads are nothing but a logical continuation of the Vedas. He believes in traditional concept of man and accepts the classical views about the union of individual soul with supreme soul. Integralism is possible through transformation, according to Sri Aurobindo. Yoga divides the whole man bringing down the super mind to transform the human mind, life and body. The moment this aims get fulfilled man becomes a superman. Sri Aurobindo aimed at gradual spiritualization of the society. He welcomed an age of super mind where the realization of good freedom and unity will predominate in all social groups. We can achieve the unity will predominate in all social groups. We can achieve the unity of human race through integral living and through development of integral personality. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is based on an experienced integralism. It is a synthesis of idealism, realism, pragmatism and spiritualism.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH:

The guiding principle of Sri Aurobindo's Educational Philosophy was the awakening of the individual as a spiritual being. It should be related to life truth and self mastery by the child. Sri Aurobindo made a five-fold classification of human nature i.e. the physical, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual, corresponding to five aspects of education – physical education, vital education, mental education, psychic education and spiritual or supermental education. Physical education includes control over physical functions, harmonious development of physical movements, over powering physical limitations and the awareness of body consciousness. Sri Aurobindo lays stress upon games and sports because he felt that these were essential for renewing energy. Vital education was the most important point in integral education. Sri Aurobindo called the vital being of man – the life nature made up of desires, sensations, feelings, passions, reaction of the desire – soul in man and of all that play a possessive and other related instincts, anger, fear, speed etc. that belong to this field of nature. Mental education included cognition, ideas and intelligence. The unique contribution of Sri Aurobindo regarding mental education was that ideas should be continually organized around a central thought. Psychic education was the special contribution of Sri Aurobindo to education systems. The key to an integral personal it was the discovery of man's psychic nature. The educational theory of Sri Aurobindo aimed at the development of the latent powers of the child, training of six senses, training of logical faculties, physical education, principle of freedom, moral and religious education and above all, training for the spiritualization of the individual.

CONCEPT OF INTEGRAL EDUCATION :

According to Sri Aurobindo, the education must emphasize the following aspects in addition to the physical, psychic and mental aspects as denoted by the matter and spirit respectively. The cultivation of these aspects (a) beauty, (b) power, (c) knowledge and (d) love is what he called as integral education. Beauty is the realization through physical culture. Power is to be related to the control of sensations. Knowledge helps in developing the mental make up of an alert mind. Love is the formation of desirable feelings and emotions, which should be directed towards others and the Commission with the Divine. Sri Aurobindo says "If education is to bring out to full advantage all that is in the individual child we should first guarantee a safe custody of all that is in individual. Nothing is to be lost or damaged, twisted or crushed. Everyone has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. That Divinity in man is not to be insulted, that chance of perfection is not to be lost that spark of strength is not to be extinguished. The task of a teacher is to help the child to feel that touch of divinity to find that 'something' to develop it, and use it. Education should help that growing soul to draw out the best that is within and make it perfect for a noble cause."

FIVE PRINCIPAL ASPECTS :

In *Education: General Principles* (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972 a), the Mother informs us that in order to be "complete", an integral education must possess "five principal aspects relating to the five principal activities of the human being: the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic, and the spiritual" (p. 8). These innate human attributes are acknowledged as being fundamentally holistic, humanistic, and divine and must all be addressed to achieve a *complete integral education*. Being interrelated, they require cultivation individually and collectively. The remainder of this section elaborates on and briefly discusses each of these principles in the order cited above.

Physical Education :

In traditional education, a near exclusive prominence has been attributed to the cognitive and intellectual models of acquiring knowledge; "essentially, an exclusively or eminently intellectual approach perpetuates the 'cognicentrism' of mainstream Western education in its assumption that the mind's cognitive capabilities are or should be the paramount masters and players of learning and inquiry" (Ferrer, Albareda, & Romero, 2005, p. 311). As such, recognition and inclusion of the physical body in the learning process, in higher education in particular, has been considered at best recreational and ancillary; playground recess and competitive sports are familiar activities disconnected from learning outcomes present in the classroom. There is a miscomprehension of the essential co-relationship between the mind and body as mutually important vehicles in both acquiring and generating valid knowledge. Thus, the cultivation of a mind-body interrelationship within a whole-person framework is often neglected.

Integral education honors and engages the learner's unique human body and its higher potentials. The Mother dismisses an embodied education as a secondary or recreational consideration for learning in her admission that the physical aspect of learning needs to be rigorous and methodical in its undertaking. She elaborates that an education of one's physical body is comprised of three principal aspects, "(1) control and discipline of functions, (2) a total, methodical and harmonious development of all parts and movements of the body and (3) rectification of defects and deformities..." (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972 a, p. 10). Implementing a consistent and individualized pedagogical approach in response to the recognition that the body is habit-forming in its nature is advocated. According to the Mother, these habits "should be controlled and disciplined yet...supple enough to adapt themselves to the circumstances and the needs of the growth and development of the being" (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972 a, p. 9). Sensitivity to circumstance and creative adaptation is thereby advised for proper development of the physical aspect.

The physical aspect is a necessary and foundational component of the integral model. Somatic, kinesthetic, expressive arts, martial arts, athletics, dance, and other embodied practices can aid in developing realms of knowledge informed by our unique physical intelligences. These intelligences play an essential role in student health, well-being, and creativity which ultimately influence self-efficacy.

Mental Education :

A range of cognitive faculties are detailed in regard to an education of the mind in integral education. These include our instruments for attaining knowledge (here being interpreted more broadly than mental, cognitive, or intellectual attainments), memory, progression from object-based to abstract-concept relations, gestalt, contemplation, inspiration, intuition, and imagination. Sri Aurobindo contributes a considerable and ordered series of insights on these faculties. He declares that the first consideration for the teacher should be to interest the learner in “life, work and knowledge”, instructing in such a way that will be simple and organic, while effectively examining our “instruments of knowledge” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 7). This study of instrumentation is undertaken to assist the student in his or her mental development, “to give him mastery of the medium” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972c, p. 4). As a component of this medium, Aurobindo advises that exceptional training be afforded to memory and that early developmental sharpening of the mental faculties should begin with the observation, comparison and classification of objects, before gradually transitioning to more abstract words, concepts and ideas. This transition toward abstraction naturally entails advancement of the imagination.

Sri Aurobindo is explicit in classifying the imagination as that aspect which is—in addition to self-generating mental imagery and thought-forms—able to acknowledge and admire those emotive and spiritual resonances of existence. He imparts that “Imagination...may be divided into three functions, the forming of mental images, the power of creating thoughts, images and imitations or new combinations of existing thoughts and images, [and] the appreciation of the soul in things...the emotion and spiritual life that pervades the world” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972c, p. 16). He affirms that honing imagination is as crucially important for mental development as guiding the physical senses and comparative analytical faculties. Overall, Sri Aurobindo provides a thorough introduction to how the student may skillfully perceive, classify, and recall the world around him or her, how this pertains to his or her personal understanding, how this comes to inform his or her internal mental generative processes, and finally, what it may reveal about his or her individual purpose, communal responsibility, and spiritual orientation.

Equally as thorough in her written comments on the mental aspect, the Mother lays out five principal phases detailing a comprehensive approach to refinement of the mind that impart a willful, yogic approach to its education. The five phases she identifies include:

1. Development of the power of concentration, the capacity of attention.
2. Development of the capacities of expansion, wideness, complexity and richness.
3. Organisation of ideas around a central idea or a higher ideal or a supremely luminous idea that will serve as a guide in life.
4. Thought control, rejection of undesirable thoughts so that one may, in the end, think only what one wants and when one wants.
5. Development of mental silence, perfect calm and a more and more total receptivity to inspirations coming from the higher regions of the being. (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 12).

Despite the above division of phases, the Mother advocates that the goal is a more fully realized overall comprehension. She states that students should endeavor to “understand instead of learning” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972b, p. 7) and discloses that “reason is not the supreme capacity of men, one has to go beyond it” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972b, p. 18) before offering some insights as to how to transcend our reasoning capacities. She submits that through ample development of concentration, the compulsion to think actively is not appropriate in all instances since mental “vibration” can be made to cease and an “almost total silence [is] secured. In this silence one can open gradually to the higher mental regions and learn to record the inspirations that come from there” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972b, p. 11). She further advises that gaining time for effectively completing tasks through developing concentration correlates to one’s will or volition; when this force is added to one’s concentration or focused attention, they possess the recipe for genius, which she determines is an irresistible agency.

In addition to gaining time via concentration and recording inspirations originating in mental stillness, the Mother advocated students learn about history—consequential events in time that have already occurred—as a way to frame the present and begin cultivating the intuitive faculty in preparation “to live for the future” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972c, p. 2); it is in and for the future that learners will

make their greatest contributions. The following aspect begins to deal even more directly, deeply, and personally with that future, and by what means the Integralists' educational model informs it.

Vital Education :

The following aspect is that of the vital, which seems to share some common characteristics with the emotional, instinctual, or libidinal operative processes. The Mother defines one's "vital being" as the "set of impulses and desires, of enthusiasm and violence, of dynamic energy and desperate depression, of passions and revolts" (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 10). It is divided into two distinctive yet equally important categories, varying in both goal and process. The first categorical distinction invites one "to develop and utilize the sense organs", while the second requests the learner "to become conscious and gradually become master of one's character and in the end to achieve its transformation" (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 11). These two categories—sense organs, through which one receives information from the environment, and reflective self-examination, whereby one considers one's reactions, thoughts, and experiences from an internal perspective—provide learners with a spectrum of sensorial, perceptual, and contemplative information. This allows for a more comprehensive, holistic ontology from which to engage in the lived experience. These categories will be revisited and further elaborated on when we discuss the education of the mind.

A vital education is intended to encourage consideration, self-reflection and an honest evaluation of one's internal, energetic, and emotional processes. To provide one example, Mother advises entering "into the heart of your grief: you will find there the light, the truth, the force and the joy which the pain hides" (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972b, p. 4). Prescriptions for how to engage with the vital aspect are meaningful, since she interprets that "with the collaboration of the vital, no realization seems impossible, no transformation impracticable" (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 10). This aspect is considered as that dimension most challenging to entrain, necessitating sincerity, patience, discipline, endurance, and volition. The requisite perseverance and intention are necessary to enter into one's personal vulnerabilities and encounter the transformative authenticity to which they are connected; this is the all-important practice of coming to truly know oneself.

Vital impulses in the form of desires are energies that greatly contribute to shaping and establishing behavior patterns which in turn may eventually solidify into bodily habits. Being so, the Mother advocates for beginning the training of this aspect in the learning process as soon as developmentally possible to best avoid the generation of lesser habits. She elaborates that one is to then "acquire control over one's movements so that one may achieve perfect mastery and transformation of all the elements that have to be transformed. Now, all will depend upon the ideal which the effort for mastery and transformation seeks to achieve" (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972 a, p. 11). Thus, in developing sufficient knowledge of the relationship between vital processes, bodily responses and behaviors, and mental reflectivity, one achieves a fuller capacity for alleviating deficiencies. This capacity is aided and enhanced by the observance or formulation of ideal ways of being.

As mentioned in the introduction, a concern with the development of the Psychic Being as the inner guide on one's path to realizing their personal ideal is a central component of an integral approach to educating, to drawing out learners' highest ideals. Having addressed that the vital dimension interrelates with and reinforces one's physical aspect, I will now consider how these two aspects become necessary for the training of the mind.

Psychic Education :

Albeit more concise than the other aspects outlined prior, the Mother's written comments on the psychic education provide novel and profound considerations for educators. Revealed in these comments are some insights into the Psychic Being and those related areas of Self and path. She presents a refreshing and progressive view in postulating that "with psychic education we come to the problem of the true motive of life, the reason of our existence on earth...the consecration of the individual to his eternal principle" (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 13). Integral education emphasizes comprehension of and concern with a personal and unique contribution that is inherent in each individual. This is an individual's *svadharma*, introduced earlier.

Accordingly, the Mother also refers to the *svabhāva* by clarifying that “it is through the psychic presence that the truth of an individual being comes into contact with him and the circumstances of his life” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 13). She determines that to presence the psychic in one’s life, it is contingent upon him or her to eradicate selfishness and beyond this, in progressing toward a spiritual way of life, one must become truly selfless. This focus on a spiritual way of being comprises the final principle of a complete integral education.

Spiritual Education:

The spiritual aspect in integral education is designated as being of the utmost importance. Sri Aurobindo states that one’s “highest object, [is] the awakening and development of his spiritual being” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 3). One way in which this awakening is nurtured is through the educational process, which aims to allow one’s spirit eventual full facilitation of his or her mature and multi-faceted self. In the literature, the Mother distinguishes the principal of spiritual education as “an education which gives more importance to the growth of the spirit than to any religious or moral teaching or to the material so-called knowledge” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 3). Furthermore, she determines the highest aim of education is “the manifestation of Truth...[to] make matter ready to manifest the Spirit” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 5).

The development and advancement of the learner’s material embodiment is a necessary component for inviting the spirit into full participation, which is the intended result and encouraged outcome for student learners as they proceed to enter into society-at-large. According to the Mother, a fully realized integral education should endeavor to position the “legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter fully developed and utilized” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 4). This level of participation and realization is deeply interrelated with each individual student’s conscience—that inner orientation that provides guidance and morally positions one in their life.

As an educator, assisting students with identifying and coming into relation with their true self-guidance is not a matter of conveying concepts to the mind alone. The Mother states that “there is only one true guide, the inner guide, who does not pass through the mental consciousness” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972c, p. 22). Aurobindo clarifies that at the outset, the approach to offering moral guidance should be to “suggest and invite, not command or impose. The best method of suggestion is by personal example, daily converse and the books read from day to day” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 20). The few instances provided begin to illuminate behaviors that are appropriate to influence and shape the character of the student so that they may find their own path in alignment with a personal inner truth arrived at in the course of their learning and development.

From Aurobindo’s perspective, each person is ultimately imbued with his or her own individual and unique path and purpose. For integral educators, placing impositions or mandates on the individual student is ineffective and potentially harmful. According to Sri Aurobindo, “to force the [individual] nature to abandon its own dharma is to do permanent harm...” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 18). The role of a complete integral education is bringing this purpose to light; as per Aurobindo, “the task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972a, p. 18). To be in alignment with an education complete in the five principles then, Mother states that teachers should assist students in coming to greater self-understanding by guiding them to “know themselves and choose their own destiny, the way they want to follow” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972c, p. 1). To know oneself essentially means, according to the Mother, “to know the motives of one’s actions and reactions...To master oneself means to do what one has decided to do, to do nothing but that, not to listen to or follow impulses, desires or fancies” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972c, p. 1). She advises on the appropriate approach to taking steps toward this self-mastery and states in regard to this determination that “if you decide to do something...in life, you must do it honestly, with discipline, regularity and method” (Ghose, A. & Alfassa, M., 1972b, p. 21).

The personal destiny which is to be undertaken by each student can be informed and inspired by a divine agency. This agency is acknowledged as one of the primary five principles of a complete integral education, correlating to the spiritual dimension of human life.

CONCLUSION :

Sri Aurobindo's Educational Philosophy is student oriented philosophy which recommends focusing on integral development of student covering the whole aspects of education such as psychic and mental, spiritual, physical, vital by cultivating the beauty, power, knowledge and love. Sri Aurobindo's desires free environment for student so that he can surface out his the hidden expertise and innovation. According to the Educational Philosophy of Sri Aurovindo Ghosh, everyman has divinity by some extent in the form of some special ability which should be identified and allowed to grow by the teacher. Thus Sri Aurobindo desires to have such an education system through which a student can be allowed to grow his mind completely in his own way and subsequently he can be converted into a healthy, knowledgeable, and spiritual as well as wise man that is capable to make the Earth a perfect place live like a heaven i.e. full of divine. This study is helpful to guide the teacher to choose the correct form of teaching and provide inspiration and facilities to students for the complete growth of mind.

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