

The Educational Paradigm Envisioned by Sri Aurobindo: It's Implications of Present Education System

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Abstract

Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950), commonly known as Sri Aurobindo, was a philosopher, yogi, guru, poet and eminent educationist. His educational philosophy emerges from his integral philosophy, which envisions education as a dynamic process of self-realization and the manifestation of the divine potential inherent in every human being. For Aurobindo, education is not merely a means for intellectual cultivation or social efficiency but a sacred journey toward the evolution of consciousness. His idea of Integral Education harmonizes the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual dimensions of the learner, transcending the fragmented and utilitarian tendencies of modern pedagogical systems. Aurobindo's educational philosophy advocates for the transformation of both teacher and student through a process of inward awakening and conscious growth. He expressed his educational ideas in the 19th century, yet his vision remains highly applicable to present day's education system. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes holistic development and experiential learning, which closely align with his philosophy of integral education and the discipline of yoga.

Keywords: Integral philosophy, integral education, dynamic process, self-realization, manifestation, spiritual, utilitarian, consciousness, yoga, NEP- 2020.

1. Introduction

Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950), commonly known as Sri Aurobindo, was a philosopher, yogi, guru, poet and eminent educationist. His educational philosophy emerges from his integral philosophy, which envisions education as a dynamic process of self-realization and the manifestation of the divine potential inherent in every human being. The idea of Integral Education is rooted in his comprehensive spiritual and philosophical vision of holistic development of human being and societal transformation. This concept is built upon Sri Aurobindo's spiritual and philosophical ideas, which emphasize the significance of integrating the individual's inner and outer dimensions. He believed that education should facilitate the growth of the entire human being, including the physical, vital, mental, and spiritual aspects. This approach is distinct from conventional education systems, which often prioritize intellectual development over other aspects of human growth. His idea of Integral education is also informed by his critique of modern western concept of education, which he saw as overly focused on materialism and utilitarianism. He suggested that

this perspective misses the true depth of human life and is unable to provide individuals with meaningful guidance. By comparison, Integral Education aims to foster a more well-rounded and harmonious growth of the person by uniting the physical, emotional, and spiritual elements of human life.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy supports the unification of learning from various fields, aligning with the NEP's focus on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary methods. The NEP promotes the adoption of a flexible and inclusive curriculum in educational institutions, allowing students to discover links among diverse areas of study. Analyzing Sri Aurobindo's educational ideals within the framework of India's New National Education Policy helps reveal how his ideas can strengthen and guide the NEP's implementation. Such an inquiry supports the development of an education system that cultivates holistic individuals, encourages critical thought and creativity, and equips learners to face the demands and possibilities of the 21st century.

Sri Aurobindo's idea of Integral education

According to Sri Aurobindo, education should focus not only on the physical, psychological, and mental dimensions—which reflect matter and spirit—but also on several additional aspects. He emphasized the development of beauty, power, knowledge, and love, which together form the foundation of what he called integral education. Beauty is cultivated through physical discipline and refinement. Power involves gaining mastery over one's sensations and impulses. Knowledge strengthens the intellect and sharpens mental alertness. Love shapes positive emotions and sentiments, guiding them toward others and ultimately toward the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo stated that if education is to fully develop a child's inherent potential, it must first ensure the protection of everything unique within each individual. Nothing within the child should be harmed, distorted, or suppressed. Every person carries within them a divine element, a unique quality, and an opportunity for perfection and inner strength—however small the domain in which it may appear. This gift from God should neither be ignored nor diminished. He believed that the responsibility of a teacher is to help the child become aware of this inner divinity, discover their special qualities, nurture them, and apply them meaningfully. Education should assist the evolving soul in bringing out its finest possibilities and shaping them into perfection for a higher purpose.

Sri Aurobindo outlined three fundamental elements of true and dynamic education: the individual who must be understood in terms of both their common human nature and unique personality the nation or community, and universal humanity. According to him, true education is that which nourishes and develops the individual's innate potential and provides them with a clear purpose and direction in life. Such education enables the individual to establish a harmonious relationship between life, mind, and spirit. Through this process, the individual becomes an active participant in humanity and contributes to the unity of the nation and society. In this sense, true education acts as a medium through which the soul can express itself through the mind and body, leading to transformation in both individual life and national consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's emphasis on the individual is based on the belief that social progress begins with inner development. His philosophy of education prepares the individual and the nation intellectually and spiritually for service to humanity, resulting in meaningful social progress. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo's educational approach can be considered an effective and ideal instrument for social transformation through education.

Sri Aurobindo believed that man crosses the steps of 'dravya' and 'prana' to come to the condition of 'manas'; after his birth, he has to arrive at the stage of 'atimanas', from there to 'anand', from anand to 'chit' and from 'chit' to 'sat'. If we want to take him towards this development, we will have to give such education in which he comes to know of his forms of dravya, prana and manas, and to know the form and methods of attaining the stages onwards i.e. atimanas, anand, chit and sat. According to Sri Aurobindo, this task can be done by education alone, the education that brings about man's physical, mental, and spiritual development. He termed it as integral education. In his words, "Education is the building of the power of human mind and spirit. It is the evoking of knowledge, character and culture" (Sri Aurobindo, 1909-10).

The aim of education in society will be determined by the nature of society and man we cherish. "The educational system which we attempt to set up", says Cole, "must depend on the kind of society we mean to live in, on the qualities in men and women on which we set the highest value, and on the estimates which we make of the educability both of those who are endowed with the higher intellectual or aesthetic capacities and of ordinary people. Sri Aurobindo cherishes a divine society and a divine man. Hence his scheme of education aims at the achievement of the divine perfection of man as well as human society. In his philosophy of education, Sri Aurobindo has tried to arrive at an integral synthesis of the ideals of the East and the findings of the West. He maintains with ancient Indian seers that the ultimate aim of education is the fullest and most perfect realisation of the Divine in man. Education has always been regarded in India "as a source of illumination and power which transforms and enables our nature by the progressive and harmonious development of our physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual powers and faculties."⁵ In the tradition of ancient Indian system of education, Sri Aurobindo favours an integral education. Man aims at an integral self-realisation and education is useful to him to the extent it serves this purpose (Sharma, 1991).

According to Aurobindo, education is the holistic development of the physical, mental, vital, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of a person. Education is complete only through the integration of all these aspects. In his view, the presence of these five elements is essential for true or integral education. The main objective of Aurobindo's philosophy of education is to develop students to face the various challenges of life. His educational philosophy is not limited to mere physical or mental development; rather, he placed special emphasis on physical and mental purity. According to Him, spiritual development is crucial for achieving purity in physical and mental development. Therefore, the main goal of Aurobindo's philosophy of education is to attain mental and spiritual excellence in human life. He believed that spirituality establishes peace and harmony among people. To achieve this spiritual excellence, Aurobindo suggested two methods: Integral Yoga and Sadhana (spiritual practice). Both of these paths are an integral part of his integral education. According to Aurobindo, there is a divine essence within every human being, which can be realized only through the continuous practice of Yoga and Sadhana. Through Yoga and Sadhana, a person can gradually reach the level of a superhuman.

Fundamental principles of integral education

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education is based on certain principles. First, the child should learn and develop on his own; the teacher should only guide and assist. As Froebel said, "The fundamental principles of education, instruction and teaching should be passive and protective, not prescriptive and intrusive." This is true for every teacher, regardless of age or sex. Second, education should be tailored to

the specific qualities and other characteristics of the teacher. Following one's own religion is the principle of developing the qualities, abilities, ideas and potential of each person, everywhere, personal and national. Imitation is the imposition of an external rule. Every individual and every community should have an educational system suited to its own talents. This is essential for the perfect functioning of both society and the individual. According to him, the third principle is like that "to work from near to far, from what is to what will be." In fact, it is a direct consequence of the second. The curriculum of the educational institution, the medium of instruction, the environment - everything should be natural to the teacher. Not only the ideals, but also the methods of teaching should be indigenous. Diversity within the unit is a principle of spiritual development everywhere. Therefore, a national education system should be rooted in the national past and should work through a national language. However, this does not mean rejecting Western knowledge, Western science or the English language. As Sri Aurobindo clearly stated, "The aim and principle of a truly national education must not be to ignore modern truth and knowledge, but to base it on one's own faith, one's own mind, one's own soul." This principle was also emphasized by other educational philosophers of emerging India, such as Gandhi, Tagore, Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan.

Instrument of integral education

According to ancient Indian thinkers, the purpose of education was to control the tendencies of the chitta. Thus, the chitta is the instrument of education. Education is a process of controlling the mind so that it can realize its true self. Sri Aurobindo considers the mind or conscience to be the instrument of education. According to Him, conscience has four levels.

(1) Chitta—It is the storehouse of past memories and mental impressions. It has two aspects, passive and active, which represent passive and active memory respectively. Only the latter requires education and training.

(ii) Manas—It forms images of things through the sensations of the various sense organs. It forms mental images directly and forms mental impressions. These sensations and impressions provide the material for thought. Therefore, training the sense organs and the organs of action is the beginning of all good thinking and the first step in real education.

(iii) Intellect (Buddhi): This is the correct way of thinking. It organizes sensations, images and mental impressions into systems. Its functions are of two types: (a) Right-handed functions and powers: These include judgment, imagination, memory and observation. Its powers are comprehensive, creative and artificial. This part of the brain owns knowledge. It penetrates the soul. It grasps difficult and unresolved issues. Its powers act and operate automatically. (b) Left-handed functions and powers: These are critical and analytical and include comparison and reasoning. Critical powers are the components of logical reasoning. They perform the functions of differentiation, comparison, classification, generalization, decision, inference and conclusion. This part of the brain pursues the absolute truth. It touches only the body of knowledge. Both the above functions and powers are essential for the functioning of human reason. Therefore, both need proper training and development within a healthy educational system.

(iv) Supra-normal faculties - These include functions involved in the functioning of psi phenomena, such as ESP (Extra-sensory perception), which includes telepathy and clairvoyance, and PK (psychokinesis), and the phenomena of genius. However, these cannot be developed through instruction. The teacher can only remove the obstacles to their development. He has to ensure that they develop properly and without

hindrance. It is noteworthy here that Sri Aurobindo not only stressed the importance of these supernormal, or in modern parapsychological terminology, paranormal functions, but also gave indications for their control in his Yogic writings. Sri Aurobindo advocated special education for each person according to his personality. For Sri Aurobindo, as for Aldous Huxley, "a perfect education is that which trains each man to adapt himself to the place in the social hierarchy which he is destined to occupy, but does not destroy his personality in the process destroying his or her individuality.

Moral education

Sri Aurobindo firmly established a sound system of moral education. However, this is not done by instructions through a specific curriculum. These can improve intelligence but cannot lead to mental integration. The moral nature of man is composed of three things - passion, reformation and disposition. If man is to become moral, these must be transformed. Without this transformation, all external changes touch the extremities but not the centre. Strict discipline in educational institutions or at home leads to compulsion, suppression and violence. "Therefore, the essence of discipline is not forced subordination to the will of hated tyrants, but surrender to the ideals of admired superiors. Nothing survives if it does not become a part of nature. However, this indicates that formal moral and religious education should not be neglected. Complete mental education leads to the development of personality and character. The ancient Indian system of education where the Guru was the living ideal before the disciples was much better than the modern Indian or European system of education. But it is not impossible to establish an education system where teachers cannot be friends, guides and helpers. The only compulsion necessary for education is the compulsion of the internal conditions of its self-development.

According to Sri Aurobindo, moral training can be given through advice, not through command. He thinks that for younger students, examples of the past should be presented in an attractive style and for older students, the ideas and activities of great men should be presented in a way that can awaken deep emotions and high aspirations. What is needed for moral education is the teacher's own great example and the teacher's expression of his moral emotions. He presents the Indian tradition of moral qualities in a specific analysis for the right functioning of the different individuals in society. Which develops moral qualities when the youth are trained as leaders in the Aryan tradition and given the opportunity to consider bad qualities, habits and habits of mind and body as curable diseases. Thus, they should be removed by the practice of positive qualities and self-control. Sri Aurobindo showed deep insight into human nature when he noted, "The cruelty and recklessness of young nature are merely an excess of strength, greatness and nobility. They need not be discouraged, but purified."

Implications of integral education in present education system

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education in the 21st century emphasizes a holistic approach to education, focusing on intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual development. This approach challenges reductionist approaches to education, which often prioritize academic achievement over holistic development. Aurobindo's philosophy is relevant to the needs of the 21st century and emphasizes adaptability, creativity, and analytical thinking. This research examines various elements of education, such as goals, curriculum, teaching methods, school structure, the role of the teacher, and discipline, and offers practical insights for reimagining educational practices. The relevance of this philosophy extends beyond national boundaries, providing universal principles for educational reform worldwide.

Sri Aurobindo emphasized the holistic development of the individual, emphasizing his or her physical, vital, mental, and spiritual dimensions. He advocated for an education system that promotes holistic development and helps individuals realize their inner potential. This direction is fully aligned with the National Education Policy's (NEP-2020) goals of holistic development through a flexible, multidimensional, and learner-centered approach. Moreover, he emphasized the significance of self-identity and self-actualization. He believed that education should encourage individuals to explore within their own selves, develop their unique talents, and discover their goal in life. The New Education Policy (NEP-2020) also recognizes the significance of fostering creativity, analytical thinking, and problem-solving skills in learners, which is consistent with Sri Aurobindo's emphasis on self-identity and the development of individuals' potential. A further dimension of Sri Aurobindo's thought is the harmonization of spiritual ideals with education. He supported an educational model that cultivates ethical and moral principles, fostering harmony, empathy, and a universal outlook. The National Education Policy (NEP-2020) also recognized the significance of inculcating values, ethics, and cultural tolerance, with the aim of developing responsible and compassionate citizens. He also emphasized the importance of creating an education system that could meet the evolving needs of society. He believed that lifelong learning was essential, enabling individuals to adapt to constant development and rapid change.

Conclusion

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education is a student-oriented philosophy that advocates focusing on the integral development of students by developing all aspects of education, including mental, emotional, spiritual, physical, vital, beauty, strength, knowledge, and love. Sri Aurobindo desired that students have an open environment in which to showcase their hidden skills and innovations. According to Sri Aurobindo Ghosh's philosophy of education, every human being possesses a certain amount of divinity in the form of certain special powers, which teachers must recognize and allow to develop. Thus, Sri Aurobindo desired an educational system through which a student can fully develop their mind in their own way, ultimately transforming them into a healthy, knowledgeable, spiritually intelligent individual capable of transforming the Earth into a perfect heaven-like place, filled with divinity. This study is helpful in choosing the right teaching method and providing the motivation and facilities for the full development of students' minds.

As education systems worldwide are constantly evolving, incorporating Sri Aurobindo's ideas can help develop an approach that goes beyond merely imparting information and instead fosters wisdom, moral consciousness, and a deeper sense of purpose. His philosophy of education, by balancing intellectual achievement and inner development, offers valuable guidance for reform. Adopting this perspective can enable educators and policymakers to create an education system that prepares individuals not only for professional success but also for purposeful, conscious, and fulfilling lives.

The principles outlined in the NEP share many similarities with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education. Both emphasize the holistic development of individuals, the development of creativity and critical thinking, the integration of values and principles, and the need for a flexible and adaptable education system. By incorporating Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education in implementing the NEP, India can move towards an education system that fosters the all-round development of students, promotes self-knowledge and values, and prepares people to thrive in a dynamic and interconnected world.

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