CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
"The consent of all the beings is necessary for the divine change, and it is the completeness and fullness of the consent that constitutes the integral surrender."

*Sri Aurobindo*
1.0 Introduction

Sri Aurobindo has been one of the most important pivotal personalities in twentieth century India. His role in the context of the country’s history has been as varied as it is important. Though his reputation in the context of India’s history rests on his activities against the British rule, it cannot be denied that he played equally significant role as a poet, philosopher and a visionary for mankind in general. It is because of his ability as a philosopher to amalgamate diverse schools of Indian philosophy into a coherent system of belief, that he is considered as one of the fathers of modern Indian philosophy. It is because of this reason that his philosophy is often termed ‘Integral’ philosophy – a philosophy that integrates diversity of thought systems, both Indian and Western, into one functional view of mankind and the world.

Sri Aurobindo’s view of education is, effectively, an extension of his philosophical vision for mankind. As a seer who believed that humanity is destined to progress spiritually in stages towards the ultimate ‘supermind’ status, Sri Aurobindo approached education as a means to hasten that evolution of the mind of man so that the ultimate status can arrive faster than it would otherwise have.

It is perhaps significant that Sri Aurobindo was nurtured in the British system of education from the age of seven and he was familiar with the European systems of education. It was only after his return to India that he developed his idea of education that was markedly different from the inherently material and empirical slant of European education. His approach to education was not materially different or separate from his approach to the idea of the spiritually evolving man. Clearly, according to Sri Aurobindo’s system of ‘Integral’ education, an educated man would be different from an uneducated man not in the context of the gap between his knowledge and that of the other, but in the extent of his spiritual progression. The divorce of empirical knowledge from education proper has been one of the common approaches to education in the works of many India philosophers, visionaries and educators,
including Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda. For Tagore the goal of education was to promote the fullest development of a person’s soul. For Swami Vivekananda, education had the chief aim of making a true man. Sri Aurobindo explains his idea of education eloquently thus:

“...that alone will be a true and living education which helps to bring out to the full advantage, makes ready for the full purpose and scope of human life all that is in the individual man, and which at the same time helps him to enter into his right relation with the life, mind and soul of the people to which he belongs, and with that great total life, mind and soul of humanity of which he himself is a unit and his people or nation a living, a separate and yet inseparable member.”

(Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 17, p. 198.)

True education would thus be an instrument for the actual working of the spirit in the body and mind of the individual. In turn this would extend to the entire nation and make a collective improvement to our lives. In this context, Sri Aurobindo’s system of education can also be said to be a mode of effecting social change with spiritual evolution as the basis. It is appropriate to quote The Mother’s communication to Dr. K. G. Sayiddin, a member of the Education Commission (Kothari Commission, 1964-66). She says:

“India has or rather had the knowledge of the Spirit but neglected matter and suffered for it. The west has the knowledge of matter but rejected the spirit and suffers badly for it. An integral education which could, with some variations, be adopted by all the nations of the world must bring back the legitimate authority of the spirit over a matter fully developed and utilized.”

It was The Mother who for the first time used the phrase ‘Integral education’ to refer to the approach of Sri Aurobindo to the concept of education. It is commonly known that classical Indian system of education never sanctioned the idea of accreting knowledge as the basis of education.
Education in the classical Indian context invariably meant an exercise to bring out the inherent spiritual qualities and enable man to act with the dictate of his spiritual inner self. In fact, one of the fundamental tenets of Integral education is that 'nothing can be taught'. What this apparently paradoxical statement means is that true education goes much beyond the transmitting of facts. A teacher's task is not to give his pupils mere knowledge, but to help him in the realization of his inner potential which lies dormant in every child.

The precepts and practices of Integral education can negate many of the drawbacks which have crept into our present day system of education. With the stress on the manipulation of all round faculties of pupils, including the most important faculty of spiritual development, Integral education promises to make education a different experience altogether for all the stake holders, including, parents, pupils and teachers. This work shall provide avenues in the educational sphere where Integral education can be effectively used to educate a child in the comprehensive sense of the term, while catering to his material as well as spiritual requirements. The greatest challenge, as this investigator has found, lies in the actual application of the principles of Integral education into the classrooms. While this task is difficult, it is never impossible, as the activities of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE) and similar other institutions, prove.

It is in this context that a study of Sri Aurobindo’s system of ‘Integral’ education is imperative. No study on ‘Integral’ education can be complete without an exposition of his philosophy. Ideally, an approach to ‘Integral’ education has to bring together Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the evolutionary nature of the human mind and spirituality and the applied, practical aspects of his educational thoughts in the context of modern education. Accordingly, this study takes forward other works on ‘Integral’ education and attempts to establish the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo in the educational scenario.
1.1 Review of related literature

Several studies have been made with respect to Sri Aurobindo’s Integral education. The studies have covered various aspects of Integral education, with reference to Integral philosophy; its relevance to the classroom and beyond; and its innate potential to ensure all round development of all vital aspects of personality. Such studies can be broadly divided into two categories. The first category may include elaborate commentaries on Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and its relevance to human life, including education. The second category would consist of works directly focusing on Integral education in its theoretical and practical aspects. It would be pertinent to mention that examination of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy has brought within its ambit aspects of Indian and Western philosophy, art, literature, aesthetics, and education. In most cases such studies have fused all such branches of learning into an inseparable whole.

*The Life Divine* (2001) forms one of the mouthpieces of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of man. Articles forming the work appeared serially in the *Arya* from August 1914 to January 1919. A single volume edition of all the articles appeared for the first time in 1955. Written over a period of over five years during a critical time of Sri Aurobindo’s practice in yoga, the work is divided into two Books, namely, Book-1-‘Omnipresent Reality and the Universe’; Book-II, Part I- ‘The Infinite Consciousness and the Ignorance’; and Book-II, Part-II-’Knowledge and the Spiritual Evolution’. The work examines most problems of human existence including reality, destiny of the individual, nature of existence, soul, truth consciousness, mind and supermind, individual and divine, knowledge and ignorance, problem of evil, evolution of man, rebirth, nature of gnostic being and divine life. Though the scope of the work is primarily philosophical, discussions on various aspects and issues have branched out into most issues concerning modern man including education.

Commentaries on *The Life Divine* has generally been of the nature of an elucidation of the concepts above mentioned. Important studies on *The Life Divine* include, *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo* by Amal Kiran (K D Sethna)(2003),

The works stated above have all approached Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and yoga from the viewpoint of his approach to human spiritual evolution. Among the works dealing specifically with education, mention must be made at the outset, of P. B. Saint-Hilaire’s(2006) work Education and the Aim of Human Life. The work is important because it related Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s vision of education and the practical implications of the vision at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE). The work begins with a lucid introduction followed by an enunciation of the purpose of education. It then goes on to situate the concept of Integral education in the context of the contemporary world crisis. The work has liberal illustrative quotes from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Since the author was one of the early disciples of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and he was the first Director
of SAICE, we can safely presume that his work is a close and authentic
documentation of the applied aspects of Integral education.

Another important work with a marked practical slant is Jugal Kishore
Mukherjee’s (2005) *Principles and Goals of Integral Education as propounded
by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and the experiment at Sri Aurobindo
International Centre of Education, Pondicherry*. The work is a first-hand
account of the application of the principles of Integral education at SAICE. It
details the courses of study followed at SAICE, with special references to the
aims and purposes behind the Centre. There is a chapter exclusively dedicated
to The Mother’s views on the method of teaching. Interestingly, the work also
has a chapter in the nature of a caution to all concerned with Integral education.
In the chapter, appropriately titled ‘Two Potent Sources of Dilution’, the author
highlights two critical factors which can harm or undo progress made by the
pupils. Both the factors revolve around extraneous influences the pupils are
subjected to when they are out of the precincts of the Centre.

*Integral Education: A Foundation for the Future (2007)* by Partho
explores various components of Integral education, including the teacher, the
child, the school and the education environment. The work also stresses the
importance of proper physical, vital and psychic education in the larger sphere
of Integral education. The final chapter of the work, ‘Postscript: Towards the
Future’ establishes the argument that Integral education labours to awaken the
soul in the child, labours too to awaken the child in her integrality to herself,
and in doing so, it attempts to awaken life itself to its higher heights or deeper
depths. The author places grave responsibility on those involved in the process
of educating the child. He says, “It will perhaps be the most important work
for those of us engaged in Integral education to be sensitive to the evolving
spirit in our children and encourage and facilitate in them the workings of the
new consciousness, to create an environment, a learning community, in
harmony with the earth’s evolving future”. (p-305)
Chhalamayi Reddy’s (2005) article ‘Integral Education: An Approach’, published in Essentials of Sri Aurobindo’s Thought, Institute of Human Study, Hyderabad, examines the present day curriculum in our educational institutions and shows how incomplete such curriculum is. The author then argues about the need of establishing the system of Integral education, including physical education, vital education and mental education. The article also argues about the psychological validity of Integral education and shows that the ‘free progress system’ of education is the only possible way of ensuring the evolution of the human spirit towards higher levels of consciousness.

By far the most important publications on Integral education in its practical aspects is Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (2007-2010), published at Pondicherry. The Bulletin, published quarterly, elaborately details minute aspects of the routine of activities and programmes at SAICE and also has illustrative photographs of various activities undertaken by the children and the educators. Each issue of the Bulletin is divided into two sections. The first consists of extracts from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, including questions and answers. The second section details all academic and co-academic activities undertaken at the SAICE, Pondicherry during the last quarter. Importantly, most of the accounts of such activities are accompanied by photographs. Till date, it remains the most authentic account of the application of the vision of Integral education of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The Golden Jubilee Special Number, 2003, of Srivantu, published on the 125th Birth Anniversary of the Mother, contains a number of papers directly relevant to the concept of Integral education. Dr. Ananda Reddy’s ‘The Right Way for Human Unity’ explores the concept of the universal man according to Integralism and highlights the role education plays in ensuring spiritual progress of man. Dr. Jitendra Nath Mohanty’s ‘The Significance of Sri Aurobindo’s Thought in Modern Times’ establishes the relevance of
integralism and Integral education in the increasingly mechanical modern age. The contemporary importance of the article is immense.

*Consciousness and its Transformation (2003)*, a collection of papers presented at the Second International Conference on Integral Psychology, SAICE, Pondicherry, has several papers relevant to Integral education. One such paper is Jane Henry's ‘Developing Creativity’. In the paper, Henry traces the changing concept of creativity development in the Western world and there is an implicit validation of Integral education principles in the context of promoting creativity among pupils. C N Sharma’s paper ‘Consciousness and its Transformation’ stresses the importance of the three-fold steps of aspiration for something higher, rejection of all things base and surrender to the spiritual soul. It goes without saying that Integral education can ensure successful completion of all the three steps so that the evolution of the human soul can become a possibility earlier.

Since education occupies one aspect of the total vision of humanity of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, most works on Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy has chapters dedicated to education. Some of such works include K R Srinivasa Iyengar’s (1972) *On The Mother: The Chronicle of a Manifestation and Ministry*, issues of Sri Aurobindo Ashram monthly publication *Mother India*, research annual *Gavesana, Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual, New Race: A Journal of Integral Studies*, published by Institute of Human Study, Hyderabad. Some issues of the publications stated above can be mentioned because of their study on Integral education. For example, *Volume VIII, Issue I of New Race* was exclusively dedicated to the theme of Integral Education. It has some brilliantly written articles, including one by Anjum Sibia, titled ‘Life at Mirambika: A Free Progress School’. The article details activities pursued at the School dedicated to Integral education, including the curriculum and teachers’ training activities.
Some issues of the Ashram monthly, *Mother India* can also be mentioned specifically because of their elaboration of important aspects of Integral education. The December 2005 issue has an article by C.C. Dutt, titled ‘Sri Aurobindo and Man’s Socio-political Development’. The article comments on the role of education in the context of such a development. Also, Chunilal Chowdhury’s ‘The Role of Education’, *Mother India*, 24 November, 2007, Special Issue, explores the role of Integral education in the man-making process in the context of complex global changes affecting us. Mangesh Nadkarni’s ‘Sri Aurobindo on Higher Education in India’, *Mother India*, June 2006, makes a comparative study of the higher education scenario in India and the West and establishes the relevance of the principles of Integral education even in the sphere of higher education across the globe. Many more such publications on Integral education is seeing the light of day, not only in India but in other parts of the world.

Srinivasa Iyengar’s (1972) work *On The Mother* has a chapter dedicated to ‘The Mother on Education’. In the chapter he provides a critical exploration of Mother’s *On Education*, a series of six brief essays written by the Mother on various aspects of education including physical, vital, mental and psychic education.

Marguerite Smithwhite’s *A New Education with a Soul: Education for a Higher Consciousness Based on the Works of Sri Aurobindo*(2007), is a brilliantly illustrated work detailing both the theoretical and practical aspects of the Integral education system. Interestingly, the book is divided into ‘Education material Nos.’ Instead of conventional ‘Chapters’ and every important philosophical aspect of Integral education has been explained through detailed practical arguments. The author has successfully established the importance of Integral education in the backdrop of vices threatening the psyche of the modern child, including stress, anger, smoking and drugs. In the arguments, elaborate supporting quotations have been taken from the works of Sri
Aurobindo and The Mother. The work is an important document in the context of the complexities and challenges facing today's education scenario.

Prabhat Kumar Dhal's (2007) work *Implementation of Integral Education*, explores the application of Sri Aurobindo's principles on education in Orissa. The work is significant since it highlights the progress made as well as the problems faced in the course of implementation of Integral education in environment outside the direct influence of the Ashram. The author systematically explores the chaotic education scenario in a particular state and recommends avenues which can help in bringing in a streamlined, value based education. The inherent implication of the work is that what can be applicable to one state can, with equal validity, be applied to other parts of the country, since there is very little qualitative difference in standards in the mass education set up across the country.

Centre of Sri Aurobindo Studies, Jadavpur University, has been actively involved in research on various issues of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, including, integralism, evolution, yoga, psychology, literature, politics, aesthetics and education. An important publication of the Centre, titled *Understanding Thoughts of Sri Aurobindo* (2007), edited by Indrani Sanyal and Krishna Roy, contains three papers relating to Integral education. In the work, Indrani Sanyal explores the issue of ‘What it is to be Educated? In the Light of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy’, Priya Vaidya writes on ‘Relevance of Sri Aurobindo’s Thoughts on Education to Teachers’ and Rashmi Sethi attempts to explore the concept of education enunciated by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. The article also attempts to look at how education can become a faithful transcription of the experience of reality in totality.

Kireet Joshi’s (2000) *A National Agenda for Education*, a collection of seminar papers, is an important research work involving the application of the principles of Integral education to primary education, secondary education, higher education and also to teacher education. The papers use elaborate
references and quotations from several education reports, both national and international and establish the primacy of a uniform national agenda of education.


It is interesting to note that the application of the principles of Integral education at SAICE, Pondicherry and elsewhere, is described by those involved as an ‘experiment’. Needless to say, the study of the concept of Integral education is an extremely important and emerging concept in the contemporary education scenario. As such there remain vast areas that need exploration and examination in the sphere of Integral education and it is only natural that many more such works would be written in due course.

1.2 Need of the study

Evolving educational strategies to cater to well defined goals of human life, have been a challenge to educators since the dawn of the history of
education. This challenge has been further compounded by the rapid evolution of human thought and achievement in the post-industrial age. With knowledge assuming a great significance vis-a-vis wisdom in the education scenario, our education has generally changed its thrust from wisdom-based instruction to knowledge-based instruction and has relegated affective and spiritual faculties to the background.

This has brought in a number of problems to man. Education without a spiritual basis is a veritable frankenstein that would subvert the very aims of education. Educators are realizing the dangers of misplaced priorities in education and the phenomena of radical overhaul in all processes of instruction is common before us. In these circumstances, this study assumes a significance.

Accordingly, the purposes of this study can be summed up as under:

1. Estimation of the scope of conventionally followed curriculum implementation, highlighting their drawbacks;
2. Elucidating the philosophical basis of Sri Aurobindo's view of man and his evolution;
3. Examining the theoretical implications of Sri Aurobindo's view of man and extending the basis to the sphere of education;
4. Examining the applicability of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of man in education, appropriately termed 'Integral' education;
5. Study of the curriculum administration in some educational institutions following the principles of Integral education;
6. Reviewing the curriculum administration in Integral education in India by way of suggestions and comments;
7. Highlighting the importance of further studies and research with regard to the application of the principles of Integral education in schools.
1.3 Type of research

The present study follows in general the methods of Philosophical studies in education. Philosophical studies in education aim at assessment of the status of knowledge through analysis of meaning and relationships of different concepts and exposition of underlying assumptions and a fruitful synthesis of ideas from different fields concerning educational theories and practices. In other words, a researcher in the area of educational philosophy aims at analysis of meaning and nature of different educational concepts and the relevance of different kinds of educational practice. The researcher identifies appropriate norms and standards for educational practices through cross examination of ideas reflected by different thinkers in the field of education.

The major thrust of research in educational philosophy is as follows:

i. Study of the contributions made by a philosopher or groups of philosophers: Ideas about education are expressed philosophically and are practiced through educational processes. There is a direct impact of philosophy on education from the viewpoint of identifying aims and objectives, relevant contents, disciplines, methods and evaluation processes. A philosopher or a group of philosophers who follow similar lines of thought may express their ideas about the previous mentioned aspects at occasions in different forms: speeches, discourses, writings and institutional practices. An educational researcher may be interested in making an analytical and critical appraisal of the educational philosophy of a thinker or a group of thinkers in order to present their ideas on education in a consolidated, formal, and systematized form.

ii. Study of the educational philosophy propounded by a particular school of thought: Every school of thought projects its educational philosophy based on its own ideology regarding the attainment of the basic goals of education. Abstractions and formal statements
governing principles and ideas of a school of thought on educational systems can also be considered as one of the areas of philosophical inquiry.

iii. Study and philosophical analysis of social theories which influence education: There can be several issues of education related to imbibing certain social ideals into the system. Issues like freedom in the classroom setup, autonomy in the higher educational institutions etc require philosophical analysis from time to time in order to accommodate the changes which improve or develop societies.

Philosophical inquiry comprises a few well defined steps which need to be considered in order to make the inquiry successful. The process starts with the identification of appropriate themes for study. Keeping in view the theme identified and the preliminary questioned rose therein, the researcher must collect all possible data relevant to the theme from the available literature. This stage is very crucial since the researcher will have to decide the relevance of the data and the way to collect it. The researcher must be vigilant about the genuineness of the sources of the data and examine whether the data collected through the authentic sources are reliable and meaningful for the study. Then comes the step of classification and interpretation of data. Interpretation of data in a philosophical research is a scholarly job which rests on the analytical insight and the synthesizing ability of the researcher. The last stage of the work may be identified with the reporting of the study. At this stage, care is to be taken for clarity and precision of presentation. Moreover appropriate references with quotations as well as emphasis on necessary points of presentation are to be cited carefully.

This is a non-experimental research and as such, there is no possibility of control or manipulation of variables in the experimental sense. The sources of historical information in the work is therefore classified as Primary and Secondary.
The data which has been considered trustworthy and authentic are historical evidences. A historical evidence is adduced from historical data by a process of criticism which is of two types – *External* and *Internal*. *External criticism* is one which establishes the genuineness of the historical data. In the present study, the data used are mostly in the nature of written materials, the status of the author in question is ascertained. Questions and issues like – ‘Does the language and style conform to the period or context in question?’; ‘Is there evidence that the author exhibits ignorance of things or events that he/she should have known?’; ‘Was the author an on the spot observer?’ - are dealt with.

*Internal criticism*, on the other hand, establishes the trustworthiness and accuracy of the contents of the evidences. In the study, the researcher has tried to ascertain whether the authors were honest, unbiased or acquainted with facts.

The work shall base itself on materials, both primary and secondary. The primary materials would include the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, especially their observations on education. The Secondary source would include works of criticism, comments, observations on the Integral education system. After observation of the application, a functional review of the principles and concept of Integral Education would be made.

1.4 Conclusion

It is apparent therefore that this study is important not merely in the context of our educational institutions, but also in the larger and perhaps, more important contexts of our society as a whole. The aim of all education is man-making, and nothing can be more important in the context of man-making education than an integration and balance between all relevant aspects of human life and society. Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and its application in education can go a long way in eradicating many ills of the present day education system, not merely in India but across the globe.