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CHAPTER VI

SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH

Aurobindo occupies a pre-eminent position among contemporary philosophers of education in India. His knowledge of eastern and western educational thought is immense. His approach to philosophy of education is mainly value based and he wanted to look at education from an integral point of view. His ashram at Pondicherry has grown in to an important place of learning. Even now, they are conducting experiments with scientific approach to evolve an ideal system of education which gives equal importance to all aspects of education. His philosophy may be called as integral philosophy of education.

Human Nature

Unless we know about human nature, it is difficult to evolve a proper educational philosophy. So Aurobindo tried to analyze human nature. He wanted to know man and the nature from all angles. This is an inter-disciplinary approach, to the problem of the analysis of human nature.

Man according to him, is a micro-cosm in macrocosm. He says “society is only an enlargement of the individual”182. He further elaborates and says, man’s personality has a triple perspective – individuality, universality and transcendence.

182 Sri Aurobindo. The Human cycle (New York: The Sri Aurobindo Library. Inc. 1950 p-105
Man and Animal

Aurobindo adds new dimensions to the distinction between man and animal. He observes “man, the mental being in nature, is specially distinguished from less developed creatures by a greater power of individuality, by the liberation of the mutual consciousness which enables finally to understand more and more self and his law of being and development, by the liberation of the universel which enables to understand the secret control of the universal will to manage more and more the materials and lines of development and by the capacity in the end to go beyond self, beyond the mentality and open consciousness into that from which mind, life and body proceed”\textsuperscript{183}.

Man as distinguished from the animal has not only superior capacities but also immense possibilities. It is so because man has in him a principle transcending the limited physical, vital and mental being. It is precisely on this principle that Aurobindo based system of education. The uniqueness of his approach to education lies in this philosophical position.

According to Aurobindo, “the individual is a center of the whole universal consciousness”\textsuperscript{184}. This universal field constantly acts and reacts upon man. The destiny of man is not only shaped by the universal cause. “The Master and mover of our works is the one, the universal and supreme, the eternal and the infinite …..All that is – is he, and he is more than all that is, and we ourselves, though we know it not are being, force of his force, consciousness with a consciousness, derived from his: even our mortal

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid p - 69
\textsuperscript{184} Aurobindo’s The life Divine (Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram) Vol. 1. 2nd Editon P- 45
existence is made out of his substance and there is an immortal within us that is a spark of the light and bliss forever\textsuperscript{185}.

Aurobindo, thus in analyzing human nature goes beyond man to point out the supramental forces working upon him, Man, according to him, is in a transitional phase in the evolution of nature which aims at Super-man.

According to Aurobindo, the aim of education is not only the all round development of man but also evolution towards super-man.

**Concept of Human Personality**

Auorbinod’s educational philosophy is based on his concept of man. It is unique and distinct from other thinkers. He goes deeper in to recesses of human-consciousness and unravels new facilities, progress and forces.

According to Aurobindo man is “a spirit using the mind, life and body for an individual and a communal experience and self manifestation in the universe”\textsuperscript{186}. The inner structure of man is made of the self or spirit, the soul and the psychic being, physical, vital, psychological and spiritual health’s or bodies which enclose the physical body and the ego. Expect the ego all these are the projeetions of the self for its manifestation on the Earth.

Aurobindo says, the mental being is concerned with ‘cognition and intelligence, with ideas. With mental or thought Perceptions, the reaction of thought to things, with

\textsuperscript{185} “The Synthesis of Yoga” (New york) Sri Aurobindo Library, Inc 1950 P. 231
\textsuperscript{186} Sri Aurobindo – The synthesis of Yoga PP – 717, 718
the truly mental movements and formations, mental vision and will etc…., that are part of intelligence\textsuperscript{187}.

Aurobindo further says the vital being is the life. Nature made up of desires, sensations feelings, passions, and energies of action, will of desire reactions of the desire - soul in man and of all that play of possessive and other related instincts, anger, fear, greed, lust etc… That belongs to the field of nature\textsuperscript{188}.

The soul according to Aurobindo is double. There is the surface desire soul and the subliminal Psychic entity. This Psychic entity is the real soul or caita purusha. This is the Jivatman, the self, the universal man.

\textbf{Five Sheaths of Soul :-}

According to Aurobindo the soul is enclosed in five sheathes-they are physical, vital, mental, psychical and spiritual all the five sheathes have two aspects, the surface and the inner. Thus there is a surface physical, vital, mental psychical and spiritual. Aurobindo says “The surface vital is narrow, ignorant limited, full of obscure desires, passions cravings, revolts, pleasures and pains, the transient joy’s and grief’s, exaltations and depressions. The true vital being, on the contrary, is wide, calm, strong, without, limitations, firm and immovable, capable of all power, all knowledge, all ananda. It is more over without ego, for it knows itself to be a projection and instrument of the divine. In the same way there is, a true mental and physical being. When these are

\textsuperscript{187} Sri Aurobindo – Lights on Yoga (Pondichery Sri Aurobindo Ashram 1953 ) PP 22-23.
\textsuperscript{188} Sri Aurobindo : Lights on Yoga (Pondichery Sri Aurobindo Ashram 1953) P - 23
manifest, then you are aware of a double existence in you: that behind is always calm and strong, that on the surface alone is troubled and obscure.  

**Levels of Consciousness**

There are different levels of consciousness according to Aurobindo. Besides the conscious level there is the inconsistent and sub-consistent, the super-conscious and the subliminal. The sub-conscious includes the unconscious as analyzed by Freud and Jung. It is a valuable level for the integration of human personality. It is indispensable for transformation of human nature. In the words of Aurobindo, “It sustains and reinforces all in us that clings most and refuses to change, our mechanical recurrences of unintelligent thought, our persistent obstinacies of feeling, sensation, impulse, propensity, our uncontrolled fixities of character.”

**Aims of Education**

Aurobindo’s philosophy of education is based on triple principles. They are first the child should know and develop and the teacher is merely a guide to help. This applies to every student without distinction of age and sex.

Secondly education must suit the student to the qualities, capacities, ideas and virtues. Aurobindo says that each individual and each community should have a system of education, suitable to its nature. The basic principle is to follow one’s own Swadharma Education should help the growing soul to draw out what is best in itself and make perfect. Aurobindo says, “The closer touch attempted with the psychical being behind the vital and physical mentality and an ever increasing reliance on its

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189 Sri Aurobindo – Lighted on Yoga P - 18
190 Sri Aurobindo:- The Life Divine Vol. II, P - 655
possibilities must lead to the ultimate discovery that man is inwardly a soul and a conscious power of the divine and that the evocation of the real man within is the right object of education and indeed of all human life, if it would find and live according to the hidden truth and deepest law of its own being.\(^{191}\)

The third principle of Education, according to Aurobindo, “is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be”\(^{192}\) this is a corollary of the second.

Everything should be natural. To the student, the national system of education should be rooted in the national language. This does not mean any antagonism to foreign languages. According to Aurobindo the aim and principle of a true national education is not certainly to ignore modern truth and knowledge but to take our foundation on our own belief, our own mind, and our own spirit.\(^{193}\)

**EDUCATION AND MEANS**

Education is not doing something new; its purpose is to manifest and develop the potentialities of the human being. Aurobindo says “Nothing can be taught to the mind which is not already concealed as potential knowledge in the in folding soul of the creature.”\(^{194}\)

Further he says “true basis of education is the study of the human mind, infant, adolescent and adult.”\(^{195}\) Thus means of education should be developed according to

\(^{191}\) The Human Cycle P- 35
\(^{192}\) A System of National Education P - 5
\(^{193}\) Aurobindo : Integral Education. Compiled by Dr. Indra Sen, (Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo international centre. 1952) P - 4
\(^{194}\) The System of Yoga – Sri Aurobindo P - 2
\(^{195}\) Sri Aurobindo – The Synthesis of National Education P - 1
human nature. The instrument of education, according to Aurobindo is the mind or Antahkarana, consists of four layers.

1. **Citta**

   This is the reservoir of past memories and mutual impressions. It has two aspects: passive memory and active memory. It is the latter which needs education and training.

2. **Manas**

   This receives images of things. Through sensations, by different sense organs. It receives mental images and forms mental impressions. These sensations and impressions supply material to thought. The training of sense organs and organs of activity is a prelude to all sound thinking and the first step in a proper education.

3. **Buddha**

   This is the instrument of thought. It systematizes sensations, images and mental impressions. Its functions are of two types.

   a. **Functions and faculties of Right hand:**

      These include judgment, imagination, memory and observation. Its abilities are comprehensive, creative and synthetic. “This part of the mind is the master of knowledge. It penetrates the soul. It grasps that which is elusive and unascertained. Its abilities act and manipulate are its own right”196.

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196 Indian Philosophy of Education P-60
b. Functions and faculties of left hand:

These are critical and analytic and include comparison and reasoning. The critical abilities are the component parts of the logical reason. They perform the functions of distinction, comparison, classification, generalization, dedication influence and conclusion. Both the above mentioned types of functions and abilities are essential for the working. Hence, both require proper training and development in sound system of education.197

4. Supra Normal Faculties

There are some supra normal faculties such as extra-sensory perception (ESP). Telepathy and Clair voyance and Psycho kinesis P K and the Phenomena of genius. These faculties cannot be developed by instruction. Aurobindo has not only emphasized the importance of these supra-normal or Para-normal functions, he has also given hints for their control in his yogic writings.198

Types of Education

Aurobindo scheme of education includes the education of the senses, education of body, education of the mind, moral and religious education. Aurobindo thinks that education to the child should start at the age of 7 or 8 years. When the child is capable of concentrating on the subject. The teacher has to “lead the child on step by step, interesting and absorbing in each as it comes, until mastered in the subject, is the true art of teaching.”199

197 Ibid p - 61
198 Ibid p – 61
The Education of the Senses

The most important type of early education of the child is the training of senses. The child gathers the materials for mental development through senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, etc. The training of the senses means the perfection of the senses in their functions. To remove the obstruction to the senses, Aurobindo in the tradition of yoga, suggests Nadi Suddhi in the regulation of breathing. This helps in questioning of the nervous system and minimising the emotional difficulties.

Besides the obstruction of the nerves, another source of disturbance in the functioning of the senses is the obstruction in the mind or Manas. Manes, according to Aurobindo is both a sense organ as well as a channel. "Its obstruction acts in both these forms. In the first form it can be impressed by sense training. In the second form the obstructions are mainly due to some obstacles" 200

These obstacles are of three types. They are as follows.

1. The nervous emotional obstructions

   These obstructions are partly nervous and partly emotional. By purification of the nervous system.

2. Emotions warping by impressions:

   This type of obstacles can be removed by the Purification of moral habits. Aurobindo gives importance to moral education in his system of education.

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R.N. Sharma Indian Philosophy of Education P - 62

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3. **Interference of Previous associations**:

These associations are formed in the chitta. Through chitta suddhi that is the purification of mental and moral habits, these can be removed. The chitta suddhi purifies the intellect and removes prejudices and preconceptions. When chitta is purified the intellect can adequately discriminate, choose, select and arrange.

**Education of Mind**

Aurobindo points out that while mastering a particular subject the appeal to the particular traits of the mind is more necessary than mere presentation of data concerning different fields of knowledge.

Thus for example History can be taught by appealing to interesting narratives hero worship and patriotism. The teaching of science can be improved by appealing to the child’s tendencies to inquire, investigate and analyze. Teaching of Philosophy is helped by the arousal of Child’s curiosity and by learning it to metaphysical enquiry. The teaching of art requires an appeal to the child’s gift of imitation and imagination. Similar is the case with other subjects. Every where the presentation of data should go along with arousal of mental tendencies

**Importance of Concentration**

Aurobindo lays emphasis upon concentration in the attainment of knowledge. The child should know a thing through all his senses, analyze it and observe it attentively, succinctly and systematically. This process should go on till he knows the object as a whole.

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201 Indian Philosophy of Education P - 64
Teacher should encourage for retention and judgment capacity through developing concentration among students on the concept. So that they can also compare and contrast the objects and sense. For example the comparison and contrast of the flowers, leaves, plants and trees is a sound foundation for the knowledge of Botany. Similarly in other subjects also learning takes place by the observation.

For examples, Astronomy may be learnt by the observation of stars. Geology may be learnt by the observation of earth and stones. Entomology may be studied by the observation of insects and zoology by the observation of animals.

Thus observation is the basis for the education of science. In the words of Sri Aurobindo “There is no scientific subject, the perfect and natural mastery of which cannot be prepared in early childhood by this training of the facilities to observe, compare, remember and judge various classes of objects”.

Judgment

Besides concentration and observation, the education of the mind, requires training of the Judgment. The child must have self confidence, so that he may trust Judgment. The child also should be able to compare his judgment with those of others, so that the mistakes-if there are any can be sought out. Aurobindo views with regard to judgment are in tune with many contemporary philosophers of education.

Moral Education

Aurobindo gives importance to moral education. It means the training of moral facility, which means the ability to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Study of moral test books led to a mechanical, artificial moral thinking while man’s
moral nature includes emotions, impressions and temperament. Unless these are transformed, the child cannot become moral.

Books can improve the intellect, but not integrate emotions. Discipline in the schools and repression and control cannot make a student moral. The student should understand the importance of discipline and how it can shape the individual as better citizen and as a better individual. Goodness should be comprehensive and all pervasive. The aim of education is not only good learning but also good living.

Aurobindo follows the ancient Indian system of education in which the guru was the living ideal before the disciples. The guru’s righteous behavior inspired the students. The guru is not merely a teacher, but he is also a mentor who cares for the all round development of the student.

Reading of good books, narration of the deeds of great men in an interesting and inspiring style always carries good impression upon the delicate minds of the young students.

For the elder students the ideals and activities of great men should be presented in a way which may arouse deeper emotions and higher aspirations. According to Aurobindo, “The wildness and recklessness of many young natures are only the overflowing of an excessive strength, greatness and nobility. They should be purified, not discouraged”.

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\[\text{Aurobindo’s  A system of National Education P -20}\]
**Physical Education**

Education, according to Aurobindo, is the integral evolution of man. This includes physical education. Aurobindo says “If use seek is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside for the body is the material basis the body is the instrument which we have to use”\(^{203}\).

The physical education aims at the perfection of the body, its health, strength and fitness. Man’s individual and collective life requires certain habits, capacities and qualities which may be developed through sports and games. Physical culture keeps the body fit and strong and helps in the development of such traits as high sense of discipline, morals and high character.

Physical education helps in the inculcation of sportsman spirit, sense of discipline obedience order and team work. All these traits are useful in individual and collective life. These traits are, however, only the external benefits of physical education. Aurobindo has deeper insight into the value of physical culture, when he says, “the development of the utmost value is the awakening of the essential and instinctive body consciousness which can see and do what is necessary without any indication from mental thought and which is equivalent in the body to swift insight in the mind and spontaneous and rapid decision in the will”\(^{204}\).

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\(^{203}\) Sri Aurobindo. The Supramental Manifestation, (Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Society) Part II, P – 19 – 21

Religious Education

The essence of education, according to Aurobindo, is “to live for humanity, for country, for others and for oneself in these”\textsuperscript{205} like moral teaching religious education should also be imparted not through religious books or religious sermons, but by the practice of religious life. Spiritual self training and exercise. Theoretical teaching of religion must be complemented with actual practice.

Education of Yoga

Aurobindo considered education, is insufficient without Yoga. In other words, education, like all other types of human endeavors, is a part of yoga i.e. man’s attempt to integral evolution. Yoga is the culmination of education, “both education and yoga seek the same ultimate ideal of individual and social development. When educational practices exhaust their best means for the purpose, Yoga takes up to lead man to perfection.”\textsuperscript{206}

Medium of instruction

All most all contemporary Indian thinkers of education, considered that the mother tongue is the best medium for instruction. Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Swami Dayananda – all felt that mother tongue is the best medium for education.

It is only through one’s own mother tongue the education should be given and it can continue up to high levels. Other languages can be mastered only after sound

\textsuperscript{205} A system of National Education PP 24 – 25
\textsuperscript{206} Indian philosophy of education p – 67
knowledge of one’s own mother tongue is attained. This policy is adapted in all most all the developed countries. Aurobindo also supported this policy.

**Critical Remarks**

Some thinkers consider that Aurobindo’s approach to education is to some extent elitist. Aurobindo they think has not given proper attention to the education of the backward, economic and social classes in society. Here Mahatma Gandhi was more integral. Social integration is the need of the day, and educational institution should give preference to these aspects of education.

**The Humanist problem**

According to Aurobindo, the ultimate goal is not man but superman” admitted that he has accepted the possibility of the evolution of man himself to super – man but in this process the human values, the human warmth and intimacy may be lost.

The very idea of divinization of man may appear to some as utopia. The supra mental knowledge, which has been accepted as the goal of human knowledge may not be acceptable to those according to whom man’s bliss lies not in the achievement of knowledge as such but in more and more progress towards it. It is undeniable that the infinite is valuable but the value of education lies in the finite element in man.

“Thus, Aurobindo’s philosophy of education cannot be called humanistic. This however does not mean that it stays lower than the human ideal. In fact it rises above it
by accepting the supra-mental life as fulfillment of body, life and mind Sri Aurobindo has pointed out to higher more harmonious and integral type of human life”\textsuperscript{207}

**Integral approach**

The most significant contribution made by Aurobindo to the world of education is his integral approach. Integral approach is the truth of our time and it is the most important single message. Education aims at perfection. This perfection according to Aurobindo requires a development of all the aspects of human personality, cognitive, curative and affective. As he said, man becomes perfect “when he combines in himself the idealist and pragmatist, the originative soul and the executive power”\textsuperscript{208}.

**Spiritual ideal of education**

Aurobindo aims at the evolution of a spiritual individual, community and humanity. In his philosophy of history he traces the evolution of human society through various stages and predicts the future spiritual evolution of man.

It does not only meet the present needs of individual and society but also aims at the descent of gnostic consciousness upon earth. It aims at fulfillment of body, life and mind and also a spiritual transformation of all these. It aims not only at change but also at total transformation.

Aurobindo philosophy of education is mainly based on spiritual approach. It is perfectionist in nature. The spiritual idea of the individual and society in an aim cherished by great thinkers from Plato to Aurobindo and let us hope their ideas and concepts bear fruit, for the betterment of human society in the centuries a head of us.

\textsuperscript{207} Indian Philosophy of Education P – 74
\textsuperscript{208} On women (1978) P – 58