

EDUCATIONAL THOUGHTS OF SHRI AUROBINDO AND ITS RELEVANCE TODAY

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Abstract

In modern India, there have been many original thinkers on education, who have felt the need for a review of the educational system introduced by the British Raj, creating loyal servants of the government. There was a search for a better system of education in the country among the reformers and intellectuals. In this process, a good deal of thinking, combined with actual experimentation on various alternative models of education had taken place. Unfortunately, their contributions have not been adequately reflected in the educational decisions during recent times. Among others, we can remember the contribution of Vivekananda, Tagore, Aurobindo, Tilak, Zakir Husain, Radhakrishnan and above all, Mahatma Gandhi. It is high time to review the principles of education explained by them and to examine their validity in the present context.

Key words: *Shri Aurobindo, India, Education, Educational Reformers*

Introduction

In India, there was a search for a better system of education in the country among the reformers and intellectuals. Many reformers contributed to this but their contributions have not been adequately reflected in the educational decisions during recent times. It is necessary to

review the principles of education explained by them and to examine their validity in the present context.

Sri Aurobindo has been widely acclaimed as a modern prophet and a Vedic scholar. His approach to 'Integral education' is in itself is a unique concept. Education of the body, mind and spirit are each explained in his writings on education, but their integration is even more significant. He has also dwelt on the social and psychological aspects of education. His thought has been put to practice at Sri Aurobindo Ashram's educational programmes, The Auroville and several other schools of the country. The first principle of teaching is that 'nothing can be taught'. This statement of Sri Aurobindo condenses a whole lot of theories of education and a new form of pedagogy closer to integral approach to education. It puts learning above teaching. It makes learning a self-starting, self propelling process. It redefines the role of the teacher from a mere possessor of information to a facilitator and a guide for the learner.

Concept of Integral Education

The primary purpose of education had remained ignored for long. Sri Aurobindo wrote that the first necessity for the building up of a great intellectual superstructure is to provide a foundation strong enough to bear it. Those systems of education which start from an insufficient knowledge of man, think that they have provided a satisfactory foundation when they have supplied the student with a large mass of information on the various subjects. The school gives the materials. It is for the students to use them. But the error here is fundamental. Information cannot be the foundation of intelligence; it can only be part of the material out of which the knower builds knowledge. The starting-point, the nucleus of fresh discovery and enlarged creation is through knowledge. An education that confines itself to imparting knowledge is not education. The various faculties of memory, judgment, imagination, perception, reasoning, which build the structure of the thought and knowledge for the knower, must be equipped with sufficient tools and materials. There should be provision of a fund of force and energy sufficient to bear the demands of a continually growing activity of the memory, judgment and creative power. And that is education in true sense.

The child in the ancient patriarchal idea was the live property of the father; he was his creation, his production. The father, rather than God stood as the author of the child's being. The

creator had every right over his creation. He had the right to make of him what he willed, and not what the being of the child really was within. He had right to train and shape and cut him according to the parental ideas and not rear him accordance to his own nature's deepest needs even after he had reached maturity. In education the child was regarded not as a soul meant to grow, but as brute psychological stuff to be shaped into a fixed mould by the teacher. We have travelled to another conception if the child as a soul with a being, a nature and capacities of his own who must be helped to find them, to find himself, to grow into their maturity, into a fullness of physical and vital energy and the utmost breadth, depth, and height of his emotional, his intellectual and his spiritual being.

Between the twenties and the thirties of the 20th century, Sri Aurobindo's vision encompassed the entire range of human life-with all its activities, social, political, cultural, educational, etc., so much so that we do not know of any other thinker in recorded history to have tackled so many subjects at so very lofty planes. His return to the issue of education again and again was unavoidable and again and again, in different contexts, he highlighted the unique role of the soul. Reflecting on the possible contribution of education to a divine life on earth.

Experiments in Integral Education

One of the most recent forms under which Sri Aurobindo conceived of the development of his work was to establish at Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education open to students from all over the world.

The Centre of Education consists of sections from Kindergarten till the Higher Course which approximates to the graduation level in other colleges. But the system of learning and teaching here being very flexible, in principle a student can qualify himself much more than a graduate, if he is sincere and of the right aptitude. Flexibility is one of the cardinal virtues of this institution. There are no mechanical promotions taking into consideration a certain average performance of the student. If a student is observed to be better in a particular subject than expected at his level, he can very well be in a higher class in that particular subject.

The Centre of Education has faculties such as Humanities, Languages, Science and Engineering Technology. There are well-organized provisions for learning painting, music and dance (both Indian and Western), dramatics, crafts, practical ecology etc. Libraries and laboratories are well-equipped.

Physical education is given great importance. Facilities are there for athletics, gymnastics, exercises, aquatics and field games. A daily routine of activities is formulated for all the students. Contests and tournaments continue throughout the year, but in a spirit of progress and not in the conventional sense of competition. Playground, sports ground, swimming pool etc. are maintained with great care.

Objectives of the Centre of Education

- To evolve and realize a system of integral education and to make it a dynamic ideal for society
- To organize an environment and an atmosphere affording inspiration and facilities for the exercise and development of the five essential aspects of personality: the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual.
- To emphasize the unity of all knowledge and to attempt to bring Humanities and Science closer together into a real sense of unity for the benefit of both.
- To develop the sense of the oneness of mankind and international collaboration.
- To prepare for the role that India has to play in the formation of the new international harmony.

The Centre of Education does not award degrees. According to the philosophy of centre, the education should not be for money. At an age when children should be dreaming of beauty, greatness and perfection, dreams that may be too sublime for ordinary common sense, but which are nevertheless far superior to this dull good sense. Now a days children dream of money and worry about how to earn it. While studying, they are more worried about money they will earn. When they grow up they want to become rich and earn lots of money. And the thing that becomes most important for them is to prepare them to pass examinations with success, with diplomas, certificates

and titles so that they will be able to find good position and earn a lot of money. For them study has no other purpose, no other interest.

According to Aurobindo philosophy, education is to learn for the sake of knowledge, to study in order to know the secrets of Nature and life, to educate oneself in order to grow in consciousness. The purpose of education is not to earn money. Children who are infected with this disease are out of place at the Centre of Education of the Ashram and it is made quite clear to them that The Centre for Education does not prepare them for any official examination or competition and does not give them any diplomas or titles which they can use in the outside world. The centre want only those who aspire for a higher and better life, who has thirst for knowledge and perfection, who look forward eagerly to a future that will be totally true.

Conclusion

The salient feature of the educational methods followed at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education is known as the Free Progress. Free Progress is progress guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions and preconceived ideas. Experiments and adventures in education in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts are carried out at several other places, within their limitations. They give everyone, and especially children, the possibility of living in an environment which constantly helps them to evolve and to become that which they can become when there is no difference between school and home or between study and play.

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