

Review

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh: Pioneer of integral education

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The main objective of this study was to analyze the integral education as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo Ghosh. For conducting this study, philosophical and historical methods were employed. The primary and secondary sources related to Sri Aurobindo Ghosh's educational philosophy were evaluated after detailed analysis. The general philosophical tools used for the study was induction, deduction, dialectical analysis and synthesis. The study revealed that a learner educated under the principles of integral education would be found to be useful not only to himself and to his family but also to the society in which he lives and the humanity to which he belongs. Such individuals are not only great assets to humanity but also the fore-runners of the new race towards which humanity is evolving, though slowly but certainly.

Key words: Aurobindo Ghosh, humanity, integral education, harmony, transformation.

INTRODUCTION

An explorer and adventurer in consciousness, a visionary of evolution (Raina, 2005: 17), Sri Aurobindo who had disclosed: "*No one can write about my life because it has not been on the surface for man to see*" (Aurobindo, 1972), finds echo in Rabindranath Tagore, the fellow Bengali poet-artist and a Nobel laureate with whom Aurobindo felt a deep mutuality, who too had warned that one should not look for the poet in his biography. In fact, McDermott felt that "Interpreting the life of great spiritual personality is always a treacherous enterprise and the life of Sri Aurobindo is peculiarly inscrutable" (Raina, 1997).

Born in Calcutta, then the capital of British India on 15 August 1872, Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose - the Western middle name was given to him by his father at birth - was the third son of his parents - Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose and Swarnalata Devi. The honorific 'Sri' was traditionally used as a mark of respect or worship forming an integral part of his name. In Sanskrit, the word Aurobindo means 'lotus'. Lotus grows on the swampy soil, but the mud or dirt does not stick to it. Aurobindo's father chose this name for him, thinking that it was unique, but he little suspected that in the language of occultism, the lotus is the symbol of divine consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo engaged himself for forty-five years out of his seventy-eight years in the practice of Yoga, and developed a philosophy of complete affirmation, affirming the reality of the world from the ultimate standpoint and the meaningfulness of socio-political action from the

spiritual standpoint. He was sovereignly aware of the significance of variations in the concept of man, his life and destiny, of the nation and of humanity and the life of human race, which get reflected in the respective philosophies of education, and developed his scheme of integral education rooted in "The developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self creation, to her eternal spirit" (Mapping Tagorean networks of enterprise). India, according to Sri Aurobindo, has seen always in man, the individual a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body, a conscious manifestation in Nature of the universal self and spirit (Sen, 1952). In his educational philosophy, Sri Aurobindo upheld the basic but commonly forgotten principle that it is the spirit, the living and vital issue that we have to do with, and there the question is not between modernism and antiquity, but between an imported civilization and the greater possibilities of the Indian mind and nature, not between the present and the past, but between the present and the future (Aurobindo, 1990: 15). In devising a true and living education, three things according to Sri Aurobindo - the man, the individual in his commonness and his uniqueness, the nation or people and universal humanity - should be taken into account. Accordingly, Aurobindo conceived of education as an instrument for the real working of the spirit in the mind and body of the individual and the nation. His thought of education for the individual will make its one central object the growth of

the soul and its powers and possibilities, for the nation will keep first in view the preservation, strengthening and enrichment of the nation - soul and its Dharma (virtue), and raise both into powers of the life and ascending mind and soul of humanity. And at no time will it lose sight of man's highest object, the awakening and development of his spiritual being (Aurobinda, 1990: 9), which is a concept underlying the true and living integral education.

Internality of education is conceived as a process of organic growth, and the way in which various faculties could be developed and integrated is dependent upon each child's inclination, rhythm of progression and law of development, *Swabhava* (inherent disposition) and *Swadharna* (inner nature). Integral education is not conceived as a juxtaposition of a number of subjects and even juxtaposition of varieties of faculties, the idea is to provide facilities for varieties of faculties, varieties of subjects and various combinations of pursuits of knowledge, power, harmony and skill in works. These facilities are so provided that they could be made use of by each student and the teacher so that a natural process of harmonious development could be encouraged.

Objectives of the study

This paper aims to study the integral education as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo Ghosh.

DATA PROCEDURE

Philosophical and historical methods have been used and apart from that both primary as well as secondary sources related to existentialism have been employed for the collection of data. Accordingly, the data have been collected, scrutinized and critically analyzed for interpretation and for drawing conclusions.

Educational thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh believes only that education is true which not only equips the various faculties of the mind with the relevant tools and materials but trains them also. *"To bring fresh material and use more skillfully those which are in possession. And the foundation of the structure they have to build, can only be the provision of a fund of force and energy sufficient to bear the demands of a continuously growing activity of the memory, judgment and creative power"* (Aurobinda, 1990: 16).

Only that education is true which helps the child to develop his intellectual and moral capacities to their highest limit, education must be based on the psychology of child-nature. The child should not be regarded as an object to be handled and transformed by the teacher as per his own whims. It must be noted that each human being is a self-developing soul. The parents and the teacher must enable the child to educate himself, to develop his own practical, intellectual, moral and aesthetic capacities and to grow independently as an

organic being. The education which helps the child in this supreme task is true.

Integral or true education, according to Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, is not only spiritual but also rational, mental and physical. To quote Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, *"That alone will be true and living education which helps to bring out 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 the right relation with the life, mind and soul of the people to which he belongs and with the great total life, mind and soul of the humanity of which he himself is a unit and his people or nation a living, a separate and yet inseparable member"* (Chaube, 1993: 103). Sri Aurobindo Ghosh's scheme of education is integral in two senses. Firstly, it is integral in the sense of including all the aspects of the individual being physical, vital, mental, social, spiritual. Secondly, it is integral in the sense of being an education not for the evolution of the individual alone but also of the nation and finally of the humanity. In his *'Essays on Gita'* Sri Aurobindo Ghosh initially presented the concept of integral education as out bringing all the facets of an individual's personality. The ultimate aim of education is the evolution of the humanity which includes the evolution of the nation which in turn depends upon the evolution of the individual. In this scheme of evolution, the principle of growth is unity in diversity. This unity again maintains and helps the evolution of diversity. Thus, each individual in nation and each nation in humanity has to develop a system of education according to its own *Swabhav* (inner disposition) and fulfilling its *Swadharna* (inner nature) (Pani, 1997: 22).

An important characteristic of integral education is its insistence on simultaneous development of knowledge, will, harmony, skill and also of all parts of the being to the extent and possible limit from the earliest stages of education. Since each individual child is unique in the composition of its qualities and characteristics, its capacities and propensities, integral education in its practice tends to become increasingly individualized. Again, for this very reason, the methods of education become increasingly dynamic involving active participation of the child in its own growth.

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh aspired for the perfection as the aim of education. This perfection requires not only the development of all aspect of personality - physical, mental, social, spiritual and religious but also Yoga. He emphasized character-building, cultivation of moral values and evolution of individual, nation and humanity through education. It is here that Sri Aurobindo Ghosh aims at "nothing less than supra mental education". Evolution involves not only growth but also transformation, not only adjustment but a more intimate harmony. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh aspired for the transformation of mind into supermind, man into superman. Therefore he believed, only that education is true which develops the consciousness of the supermind

and the utilization of this supermind for the development of an integrated human personality.

Another element of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh's scheme of education is Yoga. Yoga is the culmination of education. Both education and Yoga seeks the same ultimate ideal of individual and social development. Whenever educational practices exhaust their best means, Yoga leads man to perfection. According to Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, education does not end at the physical and mental training, or on literacy or the gathering of information, it should lead to the highest end, namely: integral development of the individual and society. And in this process, when it reaches the highest physical, mental and spiritual levels, it should bow its head to Yoga and acquiesce.

Sri Aurobindo aims at development of a total or integrated personality – physical, vital or emotional, mental, social, spiritual, rational, moral, art education. Therefore, he prescribed an integrated curriculum. The integrated curriculum cannot be confined to a fixed syllabus, a few text books and work books and some practical skills. Integrated curriculum is as wide as itself and all the life-experience should contribute to form the curriculum. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh is critical of the practice of teaching by snippets which is in practice in the existing system of education. Teaching by snippets, says Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, must be neglected to the lumber-room of dead sorrows. He stated:

“A subject is taught a little at a time, in conjunction with a host of others, with the result that what might be well learnt in a single year is badly learned in seven years and the boy goes out ill equipped, served with imperfect parcels of knowledge master of one of the great departments of human knowledge (Rukhsana, 2009: 107)”.

However, Sri Aurobindo is cleared that in the future education, we need not bind ourselves either by the ancient or the modern system but select only the most perfect and rapid means of mastering knowledge. For him, every child is an enquirer, an investigator, analyzer and a merciless anatomist. Appeal to these qualities in him and let him acquire without knowing it is the right temper and the necessary fundamental knowledge of the scientists. Every child has an insatiable intellectual curiosity and turn for metaphysical enquiring. It helps him to draw the understanding of the world and himself. Every child has the gift of imitation and a touch of imaginative power of using it gives him the ground work of the faculty of the artist. It is by allowing nature to work that we get the benefit of the gifts she has bestowed on us. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh is particular that the first attention of the teacher must be given to the medium and the instruments and until these are perfected, to multiple subjects of regular instruction is to waste time and energy. The 'mother tongue', he says "is the proper medium of education and therefore, the first energies of

the child should be directed to the thorough mastering of the medium" (Raina, 2005: 22).

In Sri Aurobindo Ghosh's educational thought, there are three instruments of the teacher; instruction, example and influence. The good teacher will seek to awaken much more than to instruct, he will aim at the growth of the faculties and the experience by natural process and free expansion. He will not impose his opinions on the passive acceptance of the receptive mind; he will throw in only what is productive and sow it as a seed, which will grow under the benign fostering within. He will know that the example is more powerful than instruction. Actually the example is not, that of the outward acts but of the inner motivation of life, the inner status and inner activities. Finally, he will also acknowledge that influence is more important than example. For influence proceeds from the power or contact of the teacher with his pupil, from the nearness of his soul to the soul of another, infusing into the pupil, even through in silence, all that which the teacher himself is or possesses. The good teacher is himself a constant student. He is a Child leading children and a Light kindling other lights, a Vessel and a Cannel (Raina, 2005: 22).

Now-a-days, students are seen mentally depressed, uninterested to learn, confused and undisciplined. They lack in realizing their selves; lack of concentration, confidence and attainment of the physical and spiritual perfection is commonly seen or observed in them. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh's educational thought can intervene to solve the above problems. With the help of integral Yoga, they can also elevate their hearts and minds to the spiritual plane.

CONCLUSION

The educational thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh exhibits a positive impact on the relevance of the contemporary education system as Sri Aurobindo supported a nationalist scheme of education, syntheses of individual and society, a multisided curriculum, a spiritual interpretation of human nature, synthesis of spiritualism and pragmatism, integral approach in Psychology, Philosophy and Education, Integral Yoga and an all round growth of the educand together with his spiritual evolution. Sri Aurobindo maintained a close relationship of education with philosophy, psychology, socio-political issues, ethics, religion and yoga. Thus, a learner educated under the principles of integral education would be found to be useful not only to himself and to his family but also to the society in which he lives and the humanity to which he belongs. Such individuals are not only great assets to humanity but also the fore-runners of the new race towards which humanity is evolving, though slowly but certainly.

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