

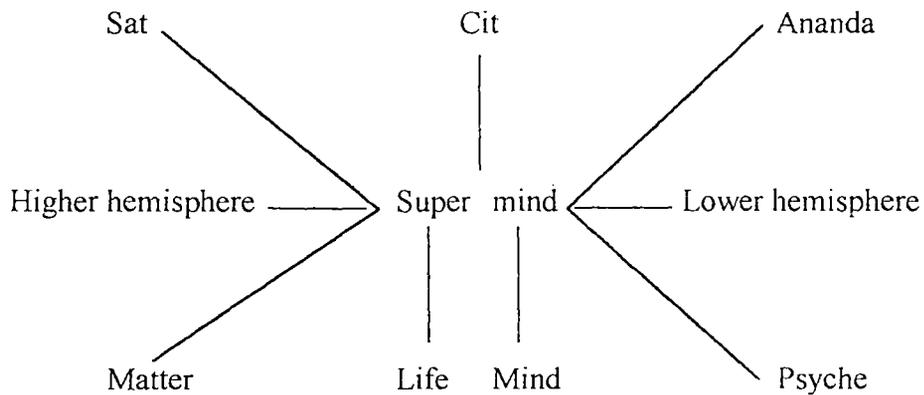
CHAPTER – 9

SRI AUROBINDO'S THEORY OF EDUCATION AS INTEGRATION

What strikes in Sri Aurobindo (hence forth SA) is the fact that not only does he give us a theory of education, but also a metaphysics of education. To make the point precise, SA's philosophy of education presupposes, his metaphysics. It should also be noted that SA's metaphysics is founded on his own interpretation of certain basic ideas from the Rig Veda and the Upanishads. In *The Life Divine* he has built an elaborate metaphysical system which is visionary, futuralistic and evolutionary. The term 'evolution' is used by SA for the possible opening up of the higher reaches of the mind, which is an emergent of Life and Matter. Life and Matter are the categories of existence in which the infinite reality is involved. Imolution and evolution are the movements, ascending and descending, forming a cycle. SA takes Sat, Cit and Ananda as the triune reality which projects itself through super-mind or the creative or executive aspect of the reality. In the projected world Sat is involved in matter, Cit in Life, Super-mind in mind, Ananda in psyche. Evolution begins with matter, through life and mind tending towards a wider consciousness and transformation of the empirical categories into the transcendent ones. Education is the process of evolving the involved reality. The ascending and the descending movement may be schematically represented as follows.

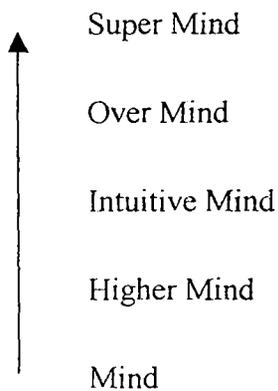
Involution :

(Descending movement)



Evolution :

(Ascending movement)



SRI AUROBINDO : EDUCATIONAL THEORY

SA explained his basic educational ideas when he addressed himself to the problem of national education. Education, he believed, must offer the tools whereby one can live for the divine, for country, for oneself and others, and this must be made the ideal in every school, which calls itself national. In The Human Cycle he identified the spiritual orientation of education and society. Both society and

education should provide the conditions for all men to “travel towards divine perfection” and to express the power, the harmony, the beauty and joy of self-realization that has been attained.*¹ Criticizing systems of education which being with an insufficient knowledge of man, SA called for the study of the instruments of knowledge in a way that was natural, effective and complete. Since the individual and society grow in and through each other, education must be the instrument for this real working of the spirit in the mind and body of the individual and the nation. The guiding principle and orientation of Aurobindo’s educational thought is the awakening of man a spiritual being.

Since the principal instrument of knowledge is the mind, education must study the mental powers and processes. SA pointed to the study of the mind as the goal of education: “The true basis of education is the study of the human mind, infant, adolescent and adult”. *² Education must take account not only of the mind of the individual and the people but also the mind of the nation and of the universe. Education involves man, nation and all humanity, because before the individual can grow there must be some change and reorientation on the collective level. Only that education which studies the mind can initiate this change in man and his society. In the Aurobindian School, the student is made aware that he was created to become a mental being. His goal is the growth of the human soul, the self, in all its powers and potentialities.

The principles of Aurobindo’s educational theory are similar and frequently the same as the principles of integral Yoga. The first is the discovery and knowledge of the powers, principles and process of self-realization; the second is a patient and persistent personal effort in growth and change; the example and influence of the

teacher is a further principle; and finally, the instrumentality of time under grads all the principles.

To know oneself is to observe and to develop the whole intellectual, moral and emotional complex of the personality. Self-development is an integral growth of the individual personality. For Aurobindo this is attempted through the development of the four austerities or works and the gradual growth in four liberation or gifts. The four austerities concentrate education upon the physical, the vital, the psychic and the mental stages of man. Integral development of the being of all these stages brings about ultimately the transformation of man into a spiritual being. New man, transformed and spiritualized is the final goal of Aurobindo's theory of education.

There is a stress in primary education on the physical and vital beings. Perhaps the vital being is the most important starting point for it consists in a through observation of the character to be developed and transformed. It requires, in particular, observation of impulses, energies and desires. In order that a student understands both the inner world and the world outside of himself, he must observe himself directly and all that happens to himself. To observe what one does and why one does it is the starting point of self-observation. In this way the individual becomes conscious of himself and can begin to exercise control, direction and, finally, mastery over himself. Another aspect of educating the vital being is the utilization of the sense organs. The first work of educationists, according to Aurobindo, is the development and right use of the six senses, the training of the senses in accuracy, sensitivity, width and breadth. Development of the senses and an increased physical consciousness give a wider scope and capacity to the individual. In the pragmatic task of teaching, the training of the aesthetic nature of the individual is part of vital education. Aurobindo considered vital education as the training of the

aesthetic personality. Such training consists in developing the emotions, human habits and the substitution of new ones. With observation and self-knowledge, there comes the need for concentration and, especially, the concentration of vital energies. To concentrate and to gather together one's vital energies, to concentrate and to gather together one's vital energy is not only necessary but a preliminary step in the growth and self-mastery of character. Thus education of the vital being involves the tapasya (discipline) of power, but with an increase in power there comes a liberation from ordinary desires lying the foundation of spiritual life.

In Aurobindo's thought, the body, as all matter, is the creating of the inconscient (ajnana), and thus man has to open physical life and fill it with power and higher consciousness. The body must be developed, according to Aurobindo, as an "entirely conscious frame and instrument, a conscious sign and seal and power of the spirit." *³ Two conditions in physical education are the awakening of body consciousness and evoking its possibilities as fully as one can. To awaken the body consciousness is to act upon the physical with psychic consciousness. He spoke of the divine body, man physically transformed, as a result of the evolution of consciousness, for transformation that he sought embraced all life, mind and body.

Physical education is completely governed by order, method and discipline. The procedure to be worked out are rigorous, highly detailed and methodical. Yet Aurobindo never insisted on a peculiar asset of exercises, for his own experiences indicated that one type of physical Sadhana need be followed for Yogic achievement. Physical education includes multiple goals; control and discipline over physical functions; a harmonious and full development of body and physical movements; the rectification of defects and overcoming physical limitation; and finally, the awakening of body consciousness. The first three goals are achieved through

physical exercise, but the last draws upon multiple faculties. There was great controversy in the Aurobindo Ashram in the beginning over the physical education programmes : sports, however, were never obligatory. Although Aurobindo saw no a priori reason why sports should not be present, he still considered spiritual disciplines, service, bhakti and yoga as the essentials. Education of the physical being is necessary for controlling sexual impulses, and Aurobindo considered sexual mastery necessary for the seeker of truth and a complete eradication of sexuality necessary for the committed ascetic. In some of his later writings, he speculated about the actual transformation of sexuality, its impulses and energies and even its organs. He considered the development of the sporting-spirit contributive toward tolerance, good humour, self-control, consideration of others, friendliness and fair play. In the ashram school following the period of evening sports, there would be a ten minutes period of concentration in order to recall and spiritualize. Play becomes an expression of inner consciousness.

The major task in education of the physical is to awaken the aspiration for the divine in the body. Education of the physical being involves the tapasya of beauty, and with the growth of beauty there comes a gradual liberation from the conditioning of matter. Physical mastery and spiritual mastery are what Aurobindo's education is fundamentally about.

Mental education gathers old knowledge, discovers new knowledge and builds the capacity to use and apply knowledge. It includes cognition, ideas, intelligence and mental perceptions. In the process man becomes the source of knowledge, the knower, the witness and master of his mind. SA distinguished four classical levels of the mind : chitta, the storehouse of memory, in which the active memory needs development in selecting and recalling, and the passive memory

containing all past experiences, which needs no developments; manas, the sixth sense, in which all the other senses are gathered as a faculty for development; buddhi, the actual instrument of thought disposing and ordering all knowledge, is the most important; and the final level of intuition, inspiration and vision in the extraordinary personality. On the various levels of mind, human effort tries to increase capacity through widening, expansion and complexity of cognition, ideas and perception. In his school, he was never concerned about the teaching of many subjects but urged students to find many approaches to the same subject, that is, many ideas and perceptions that could be organized around some original subject.

Knowledge belongs to a region higher than the mind. The mind has to be made silent and attentive in order to receive knowledge from above and manifest it. There is, consequently, emphasis on mental silence and concentration in the education of mental being. With concentration things can be done quickly and with improvement. With mental silence the complete observation of mind takes place for an effective direction and mastery of mind itself. Education of the mental being involves the tapasya of knowledge, and with growth in knowledge there is a gradual liberation from ignorance.

The education of the psychic being is Aurobindo's special contribution to educational theory. The key to an integral personality is the discovery and revitalization of man's psychic center. Man has the basic psychic need to uncover and to manifest the soul within himself. The necessity for the soul of man to grow in freedom, according to its inner nature, is a fundamental psychic need. For Aurobindo, the psychic being is that center in man independent of the body and circumstances of life; it is that center which has universality and limitless expansion in time and space. Psychic being is the psychological center of the individual. To be

consciousness of the psychological center of individual man is the function of education. The psychic being does not observe or watch like the mind, the mental being; instead, it is spontaneous, direct and luminous. The psychic being supports the vital, the physical and the mental beings. Through psychic consciousness or presence the individual comes into contact with life and with himself. The difference between psychic experience and spiritual experience is that the former is within the created universe and the latter takes one outside the universe of man. Spiritual education is a return to the unmanifest, beyond time and space, psychic education is higher realization in time and space. So one can say that the psychic life is life immortal, endless time, limitless space, ever progressive change, unbroken continuity in the world of forms. Close touch with one's psychic being leads to ultimate discovery and realization.

In *The Human Cycle*, SA places the weight of education on the psychic being. The objective is to give the psychic being the best opportunity for exercise, expression and growth. Strong will, the personal will to discover the psychic presence is requisite. The starting point is to discover within oneself that which is independent of external reality and the physical body, that is, the discovery of a sense of universality and limitlessness. Desire, purpose, direction and will are the crucial factors in discovery. The educative process is two fold. The first step is surrender to that which is beyond ego, and the second step is to will an identification with one's psychic being. In the thought of SA, the discovery depends upon Yogic effort. Education of the psychic being evokes the tapasya of love, and with its growth a gradual liberation from suffering.

The four vehicles of learning – the vital, the physical, the mental and the psychic – respectively, cultivate power, beauty, knowledge and love and hence liberate man from material conditioning, desire, ignorance and suffering. This fourfold approach to education is simultaneous, beginning at an early age and all organized homogeneously around the psychic center. The psychic movement inward which is complemented by opening outward to higher existence brings spiritual transformation. SA advocated a total spiritual education which gave more importance to the growth of the spirit than intellectual, moral or even religious knowledge. The logic of his theory is the logic of spiritual education. Aurobindo calls for spiritual education within the world and for the world but not determined by the external world. It is based upon the belief in and the necessity for the spiritual transformation of man. His theory advocates an end to suffering, ignorance, material and psychological needs. It is based upon the possibility and a conviction about the transformation and transfiguration of human species.

Supramental education begins with the transformation begun in the discovery of the psychic being. Once transformation takes place education is supramental, from the above downward. To bring into human life supramental power is the further horizon of SA's educational thought. Supramental education proceeds from above downward and affects not only human consciousness but also the very nature of man and his environment. Aurobindo approached education less from the perspective of existing pedagogy than from the quality of man envisioned in the future. Education in the evolution of consciousness and in the discovery and development of the psychic being is the prelude to a new man and a new age.

For the students Aurobindo's system of education is a way of living, growing and progressing. Aurobindo enunciated this new attitude in three basic principles of learning : first, nothing can be taught, Secondly, the mind has to be continually consulted; and thirdly, work from the near to the far. These general but normative principles reflect the comprehensiveness and flexibility of his basic yoga. Aurobindo's yoga is not fixed and rigid but acts freely and widely whereby the process accepts all that man is with the understanding that the total man undergoes change. Perceiving the vastness and complexity of the process, he believed that one never allies a method well unless it is discovered by oneself. There is a unity and balance between meditation and action, between the silent mind and practical learning. Just as in integral yoga there is a correlation between the ascending and descending movements of consciousness, so too in the learning process there is a correlation between the exteriorization and interiorization of knowledge.

Man is a transitional being for Aurobindo, and in education synthesis is transitional until the individual realizes his psychic being. In speaking of the education of the mind, he distinguished the intellectual faculties and functions of the right hand from those of the left hand. Science, criticism and observation depend upon faculties which function analytically, comparatively and rationally' this is the left hand of the intellect. But art, poetry, music and literature, depend upon those faculties which function comprehensively, creatively and synthetically; these are the faculties and functions of the right hand of the intellect. Man's intellect has a synthetic and integrative role. Through psychic awareness a whole new synthetic capacity is achieved. Just as psychic awareness is achieved through the combined effort of mind, heart and will, so too psychic integration is the combined effort of the total man. In education as in integral yoga, a global synthesis is sought.

Integration is a vital operation in education since it is the instrument for achieving integral selfhood. In the ashram school it is recommended that each student set apart of his time each day to review one's thoughts and bring order into one's synthesis. If it finds a right relationship, it will be admitted, to the broader synthesis, and if it cannot be related to the central idea, it will be rejected. *⁴ Synthesis in the learning process is an attempt to establish multiple relationships with what is known and to place these relationships against their ultimate relational unity. In mental development everything is considered from many points of view until a thesis and antithesis are formed. A synthetic organization of learning brings about a progressive and broad unification of all knowledge. The great synthesis is the work of the divine, for the transformative experience of integral yoga is the descent of divine power (sakti) as peace in the mind, heart and body of man, and this harmonizes with man's ascending aspiration and surrender to establish a new synthesis. Aurobindo's methodology aims at raising the personality of man qualitatively through synthesis.

Aurobindo believed that the best order in education is founded on the greatest liberty, for liberty is at once the condition of vigorous variation and the condition for self-finding. The child must grow freely as an organic person. Every child is a self-developing being, and the role of both parent and educator is to advance self-development. Free progress contributes to the new attitude SA introduced into the educational method. Transferring this attitude to education gave birth to the Free Progress system in the Aurobindo Ashram and its school.

The students choose their subjects of study, cultivate areas of interest and elect to take examinations or not. Aurobindo believed that only one or two subjects should be taken at one time, for study should not proceed by snippets from multiple

subjects. He did not think lectures were essential and recommended that they be kept at a minimum. Emphasis in the Aurobindo school placed upon work sheets, a set of instructions covering the study a student does himself, with the constant availability of the teacher. The Free Progress System naturally limits class size to four or five students. The school does not prepare the student for official examinations, scholarly competition, diplomas or titles. Tests, if requested, are individually adopted for each student and are only meant for the student to check his own progress. Knowing the student's progress requires, on the part of the teacher, intimate contact and a good psychological knowledge of the student. The Free Progress System can begin with ease at the age of ten if the vital and physical being have been developed at an earlier age. Without the development of the vital being, the system cannot succeed.

In the ashram school or in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education multiple methods were employed, but no one method was strictly adhered to. Free Progress, non-the-less, advances both a new attitudes to the student and to education as a whole, open classes, freely selected by the student, advance the principle of freedom and choice of education. Perpetual choice prompts the individual to discover knowledge within himself and to discover his own center. Free progress implies that education is merely an invitation to learning and is at the most suggestive.

Integral education not only accepts the general goals articulated by SA but also takes into account the vast complexity of man. A youth educates himself to the degree that he comes to a greater understanding of himself and his universe. Students should be challenges to work for personal and collective transformation. To place before the student the ideal and the challenge of transformation is the work and role of the teacher. Aurobindo considered the removal of the lethargic tendencies (tamas)

of the Indian student the initial problem for the teacher, which are eradicated by the challenge for transformation and by continually placing the ideal before the student. The transformation of lethargic proclivities is overcome by sustained interest. The teacher must first interest the child in life, work and knowledge. The teacher must first interest the child in life, work and knowledge. He awakens the child, without kneading or pressurizing him more than he instructs him. The first rule of moral education, for Aurobindo, was to invite the student to transformation and learning and not to impose the educative process on him.

Education in this context is not to impart knowledge but to show others how to learn by themselves. Aurobindo rejected the lecture method because it frequently imparts just information. Since the fundamental task of the teacher is to bring students to know themselves, the teacher basically creates the environment for self-discovery and remains present and available to the student. He informs the environment with things of interest which stimulate mind, emotions and body. The teacher organizes the students in order that they are led to responsibility and the discovery of inner guidance. An atmosphere of good will and good order helps to induce the psychic opening in the student. Aurobindo believed that it was never too soon to begin psychic education. The second role of the teacher, following upon the creating of an environment, is to be present and available to the needs of the student. In this role, the teacher begins to exert influence through his own example. SA spoke of the student – teacher relationship as a kind of good company or satsanga, which can seldom fail to have so long a sententious sermonizing is avoided, and becomes of the highest effect if the personal life of the teacher is itself moulded by the great things he places before his pupils. The life and example of the teacher are communicated, according to Aurobindo, not through verbal communication but

through the living enthusiasm, the non-verbal communication of the teacher. Education becomes most effective through example.

Education is sacredocry, teaching is a sacredocry, and to be at the head of a state is a sacredocry. This implied the high level personality expected of a teacher. The personality traits of the teacher consisted in complete self-control, a sense of the relativity of his importance, the absence of superiority, and a sense that all are equal spiritually. The ideal teacher is beyond egoism, one who has moved beyond intellectuality, one who finds his task and duty an ease. SA anticipated the quality of Guru in the teacher as a man helping his brothers, a child leading children, a light kindling other lights, an awakened soul awakening other souls at highest a Power of Presence of the Divine calling to him other powers of the Divine. Although Aurobindo believed the guru was truly as teaching, example and influence. He spoke of the influence of the guru in terms of presence. Commenting on some of the problems and their solutions in contemporary India, we may say that example is more important than instruction, and influence is more important than example. Influence is not the out-ward authority of the teacher, but the power of his contact, of his presence, of the nearness of his soul to the soul of another, infusing into it, even though in silence, that which he himself is and possesses.

If it is the good company or the satsanga that marks the successful teacher, it is the non-verbal communication through presence that marks the extraordinary teacher or the guru; because only then could an inner presence, an inner knowledge, love, power and beauty be experienced, communicated and assimilated by the student. The guru is a communicator of the gifts of the four great austerities: love, knowledge, power and beauty. These are the achievements of integral education and the results of the development of the integral personality. They are experienced at the

fact of an communicated through the presence of the great teacher, the guru. The guru communicates something of himself, namely, psychic being. SA spent several decades in silence. His role of guru did not diminish but continued to flourish during these periods. Silent example and influence were a major constituent in the teaching roles of his. They were effective with their disciples because of their capacity to be present with the full integrality of their personalities.

1. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondichery, 1949), p.353
2. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondichery, 1949), p.5
3. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, on Education (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondichery, 1956), p.46.
4. Sri Aurobindo, A System of National Education, (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1921), pp.5-6