

Reinterpreting Sri Aurobindo Ghosh from an Educational Perspective

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo ventured into numerous domains of human life during his lifetime. In each area-whether education, teaching, the national liberation movement, or spiritual practice-he immersed himself with complete dedication, maintaining a distinctive approach. While the various aspects of his life may appear contradictory or mutually exclusive, they are, in fact, coherent and unified. The core principles of his thoughts across different fields formed a consistent and individual vision in his mind, making Sri Aurobindo an epitome of Integral thought in the modern age. This integrative approach is also evident in his concept of education, known as Integral Education. Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy emerged from his profound spiritual consciousness and keen scientific analysis. He effectively synthesized Western and Eastern perspectives in his vision of Integral Education. His philosophy transcends any specific religious denomination and is founded on fundamental human values, making it applicable to individuals of any religion and in any country. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo's educational doctrine holds the potential to establish a universal education framework for the contemporary world.

Key words- *Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, educational perspective, integral education, philosophy of life, educational philosophy.*

Introduction

Sri Aurobindo Ghose was born on August 15, 1872, in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. He emerged as a significant philosopher and thinker whose contributions profoundly impacted Indian society. After a life of substantial influence, he passed away on December 5, 1950. Aurobindo's formal education took place in England, where he became well-versed in European thought. Upon returning to India after graduation, he self-taught Indian languages and philosophy while teaching at Baroda College. During this period, he also began practicing yoga.

Aurobindo was actively involved in the freedom movement for a time, which led to his imprisonment for a year in the 'Maniktala Bomb' case. During his imprisonment, he deeply studied texts such as the Gita and the Upanishads. After his release, he withdrew from political activities and moved to French-occupied Chandannagar, eventually settling in Pondicherry. In his later years, he dedicated himself to the spiritual pursuit of humanity's welfare through sadhana. Drawing from his experiences as the Principal of the National Education Council during the National Education Movement, he developed his educational philosophy.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of life is deeply rooted in Vedanta. He believed that every human being possesses an inherent divine presence, which he referred to as the Almighty Paramatma, the supreme soul, or Brahma. The ultimate goal of personal endeavors is to discover and nurture this divine power.

Aurobindo saw all objects in the universe as individual cells of a single Brahma consciousness. He asserted that through yoga, one can harmonize these parts and, in doing so, realize the universal consciousness or the Supreme Brahma. When this harmony is achieved, a person recognizes the presence of this Supreme Brahma in others as well.

Sri Aurobindo highlighted that humans are unique in the animal kingdom because they can perceive this harmonious form of the Supreme Brahma. He emphasized that the spiritual aspect of human life grants humans superiority over other animals, as non-human beings lack this feature.

Furthermore, Sri Aurobindo explained that the Almighty Universal Spirit manifests in two forms: the ultimate form of existence and the manifested evolving form. The former, being represents the fundamental reality, while the latter becoming, and is the dynamic power and the result of creative energy. Becoming is the mutable form that persistently evolves from the immutable, formless essence of Being.

This manifest aspect of the Almighty Universal Spirit becomes visible when a person properly perceives their existence. In essence, the ultimate truth is life, and its various subdivisions represent the ways of life. According to Sri Aurobindo, the purpose of human life is to achieve meaningful harmony between life and its practices, which is attainable through Yoga Sadhana.

Educational Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy is an integral part of his broader philosophy of life, which posits the realization of the Universal Spirit as the ultimate goal of human existence.

He saw education as a means to achieve this objective, believing that the developmental process aids individuals in realizing the omnipotent world consciousness. Sri Aurobindo elaborates on this fundamental concept of education, emphasizing that true education brings out an individual's full potential and prepares them for the complete purpose and scope of human life.

He stated that education should relate to the life, mind, and soul of individuals, connecting them to the broader life, mind, and soul of humanity. In essence, education is a process that enables individuals to fulfill their inherent potential and become aware of the universal, omnipotent world soul. This integrative process harmonizes the three aspects of individual life: the body, mind, and spirit. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo's concept of education is referred to as integral education.

Some educationists have noted that no contemporary concept of education so deeply embedded in the human psyche contemplates such integration. Thus, there is a subtle difference between Sri Aurobindo's idea of education and many ancient and modern educational philosophies. His harmonious educational concept attempts to bind the individual with society, the material world with the inner world, and the creator with creation in the same harmony. According to this concept, individual development reaches its culmination when one realizes the Supreme in their own heart.

Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy implicitly mentions the aims of education. He particularly emphasized the coordination of pedagogy and the philosophy of education, proposing that the basic aim of education is to reconcile various apparently contradictory tendencies. He believed that if these adjustments could be made in an individual's development, they would be able to reach the ultimate goal of life. By analyzing these areas of coordination, the aims of education outlined by Sri Aurobindo can be properly understood.

Integral Education

Sri Aurobindo's concept of Integral Education aims to integrate the material and spiritual dimensions of personality. One of the primary goals of education, according to him, is to reconcile the objectivity and spirituality of the individual. Similar to the ancient Indian sages, Sri Aurobindo did not differentiate between Paravidya and Aparavidya.

Paravidya refers to the knowledge of Brahma, which leads to enlightenment through self-realization. **Aparavidya**, on the other hand, pertains to knowledge of the material world, acquired through subjects like literature, science, etc. However, Sri Aurobindo believed that Aparavidya without Paravidya is meaningless in individual life. While the knowledge of the material world

provides temporary satisfaction, it ultimately leads to confusion and a lack of direction in life. Sri Aurobindo termed this material knowledge devoid of spiritual insight as **Avidya**. He asserted that this ignorance is the root cause of modern human calamities. Yet, he also acknowledged that superstition is not entirely excluded, as the religion of life is living.

Sri Aurobindo emphasized that materialism is also necessary for living a righteous life. Therefore, he proposed that if Aparavidya can be illuminated by the light of Paravidya, it would become beneficial. Real education should strive to achieve this goal by helping learners grasp material knowledge in the light of spiritual wisdom. Thus, one of the main aims of education, according to Sri Aurobindo, is to present material knowledge to the learner in a way that highlights its significance in both life and living.

Goals of Education

There has long been a debate among educational philosophers regarding the goals of education. Some argue that the primary aim of education should be the individual, focusing on facilitating the full development of the student's personality traits. Another group believes that the welfare and development of society should be the primary aim of education.

While theoretically, this conflict seems to have been resolved in modern education, in practice, it persists. Modern society is influenced by two social philosophies. In democratic societies, where democratic social philosophy prevails, there is an emphasis on developing individualism through education. Consequently, the goal of individualized education is pursued in democratic states.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that values and morals are crucial aspects of human life, and thus, they should be incorporated into educational goals. In contrast, in countries where socialist ideology prevails, the primary aim of education is the welfare and development of society as a whole (Kaur, 2013). Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy offers a unique perspective, as he did not view the individual and society as separate or in conflict. Instead, he saw them as complementary, both being manifestations of the universal human spirit. According to him, an individual is a small unit of the larger human consciousness, and thus, cannot be considered separately from society or the state. Consequently, Sri Aurobindo described the individual as both a distinct and inseparable member of the collective.

Aim of Sri Aurobindo's Education

Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy aims to awaken a sense of unity between the individual and society in people's minds. According to his concept, one of the primary goals of education is to establish this unity, not through logic, but through feelings. He believed that humans are divine incarnates with a mission to fulfill, which is to realize God. A person is a symbol of God or an incarnation of God, and their purpose is to perform good deeds and realize this divinity.

Traditional education divides human knowledge into various branches such as science, arts, commerce, and technology. Sri Aurobindo felt that this fragmentation of the universal knowledge narrows the mental development process of individuals. Viewing individuals merely as writers, scientists, or engineers divides their ego into smaller parts, restricting their holistic development.

Sri Aurobindo believed that education should cultivate the habit of thinking of oneself as a whole human being. The goal of education should be to open up all fields of knowledge to students, helping them to realize their complete unity. This comprehensive approach to education is designed to help individuals develop fully, both materially and spiritually.

Analyzing Modern Mentality and the Aim of Education

In analyzing the mentality of modern individuals, it becomes evident that there are contradictions within their desires, actions, and thoughts, leading to a lack of harmony. Sri Aurobindo observed that modern individuals are often fragmented at heart. He believed that education should work towards harmonizing a person's thoughts, actions, and desires. A mature individual, according to Sri Aurobindo, is one whose will, actions, and thoughts are in alignment.

Sri Aurobindo emphasized that true education aims to bridge the gap between the personality and the soul, removing the division between them. The objective of education is to awaken individuals to this consciousness. Initially, human consciousness is chaotic and unformed. As it develops, it transforms from material consciousness into inner consciousness, eventually merging with universal consciousness. A person who achieves unity with this universal consciousness attains complete harmony in their personality.

When individuals reach this stage of development, there are no contradictions in their behavior, thoughts, or desires. According to Sri Aurobindo, the goal of education should be to cultivate such a harmonious and integrated personality.

Sri Aurobindo's Perspective on the Goal of Education

Sri Aurobindo's philosophical intuition led him to perceive a form of harmony in the universe, which he incorporated into his educational philosophy. He identified the primary aim of education as the task of reconciling the seemingly conflicting ideas and trends within both knowledge and life. Rather than dismissing traditional educational goals, he acknowledged their significance and value. However, he argued that pursuing these goals in isolation can be detrimental, leading to disorder in one's life.

Instead, Sri Aurobindo sought to integrate these conventional goals by introducing a fundamental aim: to cultivate a sense of world consciousness in individuals. He believed that within this world consciousness, the traditional materialistic, spiritual, individualistic, and social aims of education would harmonize. The ultimate goal of education, according to Sri Aurobindo, is to realize universal consciousness. This vision aligns with the modern concept of international brotherhood, as it aims for complete unity and integration.

Sri Aurobindo's View on Education and Human Knowledge

Sri Aurobindo asserted that humanity is divine incarnate, each individual with a mission to fulfill. He viewed each person as a symbol or incarnation of God, with the ultimate task of realizing this divinity. In traditional education, knowledge is typically divided into various branches such as science, arts, commerce, and technology. Sri Aurobindo believed that this fragmentation of universal knowledge and focusing on these distinct areas could limit an individual's mental development.

He argued that seeing oneself merely as a writer, scientist, or engineer divides the self into smaller segments, confining one to narrow roles. Instead, education should cultivate a holistic perspective, encouraging students to think of themselves as complete human beings. According to Sri Aurobindo, education's primary goal is to help students develop the ability to see the unity in all fields of knowledge, ultimately leading to the realization of the One Absolute. Thus, one of the core aims of his educational philosophy is to expose students to all areas of knowledge, guiding them toward recognizing and integrating their complete unity.

The Goal of Education According to Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo observed that modern individuals often exhibit contradictions and a lack of harmony between their desires, actions, and thoughts, leading to a fragmented sense of self. He believed that education should aim to harmonize these aspects of a person's life. A truly mature individual, in his view, is one whose will, actions, and thoughts are in alignment.

Sri Aurobindo argued that education's primary goal is to bring individuals closer to their soul, thereby removing the separation between their personality and their inner essence. Initially, human consciousness is materialistic, but as it develops, it evolves into inner consciousness and eventually merges with world consciousness. A person who achieves this unity with world consciousness has attained complete harmony in their personality.

He referred to this elevated state as 'Super manhood' a level of development that transcends mere greatness, knowledge, or power. According to Sri Aurobindo, Super manhood represents a higher consciousness beyond the highest natural consciousness of human nature. The ultimate goal of education, therefore, should be to foster the development of such a unified and elevated personality.

Conclusion

In exploring the goal of education, Sri Aurobindo discerned a universal harmony through his philosophical insight. He proposed that the primary aim of education is to reconcile the seemingly contradictory ideas and tendencies in knowledge and life. Rather than dismissing conventional educational goals, he acknowledged their importance but argued that pursuing these goals in isolation could lead to chaos.

Sri Aurobindo sought to unify various conventional educational aims under a central objective: fostering world consciousness in individuals. He believed that within this world consciousness, the traditional materialistic, spiritual, individualistic, and social goals of education could be integrated. The ultimate aim of education, according to Sri Aurobindo, is to achieve the realization of universal consciousness, or Satchidananda Parambrahma. He asserted that if spirit is inherent in matter and nature is a manifestation of the divine, then recognizing the divine within and beyond oneself is the highest goal attainable on earth.

This vision of education aligns with the concept of modern international brotherhood, as it strives for complete unity. Sri Aurobindo's approach reflects a meaningful blend of Western

and Eastern perspectives, contributing to his concept of Integral Education. Additionally, the Indian literary figure Rabindranath Tagore made significant contributions to the field of education, further enriching the discourse.

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