

# One Step Towards Sri Aurobindo's Vision of Education

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**Abstract:** *The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, engineered to design an 'India-centric' education ecosystem proficiently equipped to disseminate education of the highest calibre to all in a tenable manner, seeks to transform India into a 'vibrant knowledge-driven society'. In this pursuit, it intends to restore and revive the country's long-lost stand which, once, was recognised as the seat of knowledge of the world. With a vision to promulgate and reintroduce India on the world map as a 'global knowledge' powerhouse, the architects of the new education policy have drawn inspiration from the greatest Indian minds, the likes of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda. In this vein, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi during his monthly radio broadcast on Mann ki Baat 2.0, on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020, apprised his countrymen of Sri Aurobindo's vision of national education on which was based the NEP 2020. From this perspective, the subsequent work shall explore, examine, and explicate Sri Aurobindo's fundamental theory on education while also presenting the readers, his rationale for the subscription of an integral educational structure.*

**Key Words:** *Education, Integral Education, Learning, Knowledge, National Educational Policy, Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Sri Aurobindo's novel outlook towards education breaks away from the conventional mould of acquainted practices, pioneering a new template inspired by spiritual transformation of the individual on both fronts: the external as well as the internal. In view of this, one comes to better appreciate and comprehend the importance of the underpinning principles and objectives of the current proposed education policy which strives to emulate Sri Aurobindo's template of a 'genuine education'.

The educational outlook draws its inspiration from Sri Aurobindo's integral theory of reality that is synthetic in nature (Mukherjee, Sri Aurobindo's Seven Principles of Education, 2005). What is this theory of reality and what does it have to do with education at all? Well, it is everything. To fathom Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy in its entirety, one must learn the cogent intrinsic correlation and interplay between man, nature and the world-process, for, his complete body of work, whether metaphysical, scholarly or spiritual in nature, is perceived from the scope of world-vision (Mukherjee, Sri Aurobindo's Seven Principles of Education, 2005). His conception and vision of education is shaped and crafted from this very organic theory of reality.

## 2. INTEGRAL-SYNTHETIC THEORY OF REALITY:

Sri Aurobindo views the world creation as a becoming with the Divine Being through a sustained evolutionary process, seeking to reunify with the eternal Supra-cosmic source. The supra-cosmic reality is the ultimate Truth of every individual being. To realise it, is the highest reach of our consciousness and having realised it, subsequently leads to perfection in man. In other words, perfection cannot be found on the outside but rather begins within each one and from each one. The supra-cosmic reality is composed of the cosmic being, the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic will, and the cosmic life is not disconnected from the physical material world. The action and play of the self-expression of the Spirit, unfold here, on earth within the contours of space and time (Aurobindo, The Human Aspiration, 2005). An absolute self-expression of the Spirit is the very purpose of our existence. However, in order to arrive at that self-expression, one must first become aware of the Supreme Truth and realise it. This perfect self-expression cannot be, cannot exist, has no meaning, without the cosmic reality.

One has to grow from the individual to the universal, from the universal to the transcendent: this is the journey. This progressive evolution of consciousness is the secret of existence. It is through life that one attains the Divine, and not out of it. That is what the earth nature has been seeking all along. The physical evolutionary development - from amoeba to insect, from insect to animal, from animal to man - is also indicative of the evolution of consciousness. Although man is, at this moment in time, at the top of the echelon, evolution's work still remains incomplete. Man is too imperfect a creature to be considered the final step in evolution. His limitations whether emotional, mental, physical to name a few, only go to prove that man needs to evolve and exceed himself, to grow out of his limitations and littleness,

to step out of the darkness into the light, transcending into the following state of divine manhood (Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 1972). The following citation from Sri Aurobindo, cogently encapsulates the theory of reality revealing the reason for man's existence on earth, elucidating his role in evolution and laying out Nature's and the Divine's proposition for him.

"Man is there to affirm himself in the universe, that is his first business, but also to evolve and finally to exceed himself: he has to change his partial being into a complete being, his partial consciousness into an integral consciousness; he has to achieve mastery of his environment but also world-union and world-harmony; he has to realise his individuality but also to enlarge it into a cosmic self and a universal and spiritual delight of existence.

A transformation, a chastening and correction of all that is obscure, erroneous and ignorant in his mentality, an ultimate arrival at a free and wide harmony and luminousness of knowledge and will and feeling and action and character, is the evident intention of his nature and purpose of his existence. But this can only be accomplished by his growing into a larger being and a larger consciousness: self-enlargement, self-fulfilment, self-evolution from what he partially and temporarily is in his actual and apparent nature to what he completely is in his secret self and spirit and therefore can become even in his manifest existence, is the object of his creation." (Aurobindo, *The Progress to Knowledge- God, Man and Nature*, 2005)

It is within this context that Sri Aurobindo enunciated and developed the foundational tenets of integral education, paving the way for man as an individual and as a collective being, to attain his ultimate destiny. Ever since man emerged on earth, he strove to infuse a fourfold harmony (Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo's Seven Principles of Education*, 2005):

- a) A harmony within his own individual self.
- b) A harmony between one individual and another.
- c) A harmony between an individual and the group or groups he is associated with.
- d) A harmony between various groups.

Man's persistent endeavour to establish the four forms of harmony, has been to no avail. There exists, beyond a shadow of doubt, a fundamental point at issue which has gone undiagnosed somewhere during man's formative years and education that has established a constant state volatility and conflict, driving him on the verge of annihilation. Instead of scrutinising and resolving the issue at hand, the traditional educationists have made cosmetic changes that have temporarily bandaged the crisis while allowing it to fester amid the superficial changes. The only permanent solution to man's problems is to understand his complex nature and allow for a harmonious development of his entire being through the process of education.

### **3. SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION:**

A true and living education can only be achieved if the following aspects are taken into account. Man as an individual, man's nature, and finally the universality of man (Aurobindo, *The Hour of God and Other Writings*, 1972). While bringing out the potential of each and every individual, it is prerequisite that he maintains a balance between himself and the life, mind, and soul of others of whom, he is very much a part of. While being a separate entity, man is at the same time an inseparable member of mankind.

If one were to assume that man is merely a product of the evolutionary work of an unconscious Nature in whom She has invested a mind and a few vital potentialities that need to be fulfilled, then it is safe to say that education is nothing other than a tool and a means of training a child in such a manner that enables him to function correctly and adequately in society. For Sri Aurobindo, man is not merely a creature with a body and mind but rather an individual with a soul, a representative spark of the divine, a conscious manifestation of the Universal Spirit in Nature. Man must rise out of the physical, mental, and vital entities to eventually become the spiritual being that he essentially is. And that is the fate of the soul of man, the goal to ultimately reach divine manhood.

Humanity is a representation of the Universal Spirit which evolving from the body and mind ultimately attains its spiritual end. Education in its truest sense is meant to act as an instrument for the work of the Spirit through the workings of the body and mind.

A vital point to keep in mind as an educationist is, to approach things from a subjective viewpoint. And this stands in dire contrast to the traditional objective perception on which most education is structured. Taking the subjective stance into account and understanding profoundly the psychology of the growing child, be it parents or teachers, all have to bear in mind this inner reality of the child. The aim of education should be to help every child develop all facets of his being: intellectual, aesthetic, moral and spiritual. The upbringing should be moulded according to each individual's psychology and *svabhava* (intrinsic nature) (Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo's Seven Principles of Education*, 2005). Understanding that each human being is a developing soul, the entire focus of the educationist ought to allow the person to educate himself, grow freely as an organic entity without being coerced to fit in a framework set by society. A child is not meant to follow the steps or the path set out for him by his elders. And unfortunately for the child, this is exactly what has been taking place in the name of education. The child has been forced to cram his brain with a load of

information, to act in a manner that maybe contrary to his nature, and finally wear ready-made garments which neither fit him nor suit him. This 'teaching' process only clips his wings preventing him to take flight and seek the truth out for himself.

Sri Aurobindo reasons that "There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own dharma is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common." (Aurobindo, *The Hour of God and Other Writings*, 1972)

There is an arising need to alter the prevailing notion of education, that believes in learning of facts and information as the very purpose of 'education'. Knowledge cannot be sought on the outside, but rather has to be evoked from within. The central aim should be to train the individual's many powers, to enhance his moral construct and to evoke the true knowledge that lies within him so that he may use it, for character-building entailing towards an all-round development of his personality. The teacher is not a task master whose duty is to impose and transfer knowledge but that of a facilitator and a guide. His job is not to train but to help the child perfect his 'instruments of knowledge'. His work is to show where lie the potential and the knowledge and how to effectively draw them out (Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, 1972). Information alone cannot serve as the basis of intelligence, but rather acts as a constituent element of the knowledge he acquires. Hence, Sri Aurobindo states, "An education that confines itself to imparting knowledge, is no education." (Sri Aurobindo, *The Harmony of Virtue: Early cultural writings*, 1972) One must inculcate the practice of encouraging a student to freely exercise and explore his 'instruments of knowledge', by enabling him to freely engage his intelligence in the subject of his study. To effectuate this, a teacher must acquire the knowledge on how to train the various facets of mental faculties, namely the analytical skills, creativity, memory, perception, judgment, concentration, perseverance among other attributes, which form the cornerstone of the edifice of the superstructure of 'knowledge' in an individual.

Above all, an individual's education does not confine and limit itself to the mental and intellectual training, but also involves the training of his ethical and aesthetic being. Ethical training does not feature in the conventional perception of 'moral training', but in fact, it is inspiring the individual to become a balanced, benevolent, courageous, noble, pure, self-disciplined, strong-willed individual, who is a seeker of knowledge. To inspire these qualities into an individual, a teacher must be a living example for his student. In doing so, a teacher can help guide the individual towards the right path of development by a silent and yet a potent method of suggestion. Sri Aurobindo says: "The children should be helped to grow up into straightforward, frank upright and honourable human beings ready to develop into divine nature." (Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo's Seven Principles of Education*, 2005)

He does not stop at merely the individual's level when speaking about education. He goes on to explain the necessity of an educational outlook as a call for the institution of a national education programme, that is typically configured in the Indian psyche and spirit. Having said that, an Indian 'national education' programme should not be conservative, parochial or regressive, bound by its past cultural practices which fails to serve its purpose in the country's future advancement, nor should it ape other foreign educational efforts. It should be a system that is flexible enough to draught and incorporate every sort of positive and valuable element from other national educational designs. It should be able to absorb all the best practices, thereby giving it a distinctive Indian twist. A well-conceived national education blueprint will be one that is aligned with India's future needs and one that represents her true eternal spirit. So, when Sri Aurobindo discusses an Indian National education template "it is not a question between modernism and antiquity but between an imported civilisation and the greater possibilities of the Indian mind and nature, not between the present and the past but between the present and the future, not a return to the fifth century but an initiation for the centuries to come, not a reversion but a break forward away from the present artificial falsity to her own greater innate potentialities." (Mukherjee, 2005)

#### 4. CONCLUSION:

In this light, the architects of the current education policy have proposed to reform and restructure the Indian education system within the purview of Sri Aurobindo's vision of education. The objectives and principles of the NEP 2020 coherently capture Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education. Conforming to his ideas, the principles of the national education policy strive to 'recognise, identify and foster' unique capabilities and nurture strengths of each student, by 'sensitising' teachers and parents on the importance of a holistic education and development in both academic and non-academic domains (htt). Additionally, the policy offers freedom and flexibility for the students to select courses and programmes of their choice based on their interests and talents. It has broken the rigid distinctions between arts and sciences, curricular and extra-curricular activities, thereby abolishing the hierarchies prevailing between vocational and academic streams, and treating them with equal importance (India, 2020).

The educational policy has mitigated the curriculum content to its core essentials, encouraging enhanced essential learning and advancing critical and creative thinking in students. The focus will be to promote interactive sessions between teachers and students and to improve both the teaching and learning experience (India, 2020).

The policy also extends more autonomy to the teachers to freely choose from the various methods of instruction, with the intent to find the most effective pedagogy for teaching and learning experience. More importantly, teachers are required to focus on socio-emotional learning in order to cater to the learner's holistic development.

Lastly, the policy aims to design a system of education that is entrenched in Indian ethos contributing to the transformation of India, sustainably into an equitable and 'vibrant knowledge' society. It seeks to instil a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect and in deeds (India, 2020). This new policy, with a spiritual underline is a reveille to the Indian people to wake up from their slumberous torpor and march forward towards the light, the destiny and the victory that awaits them.

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