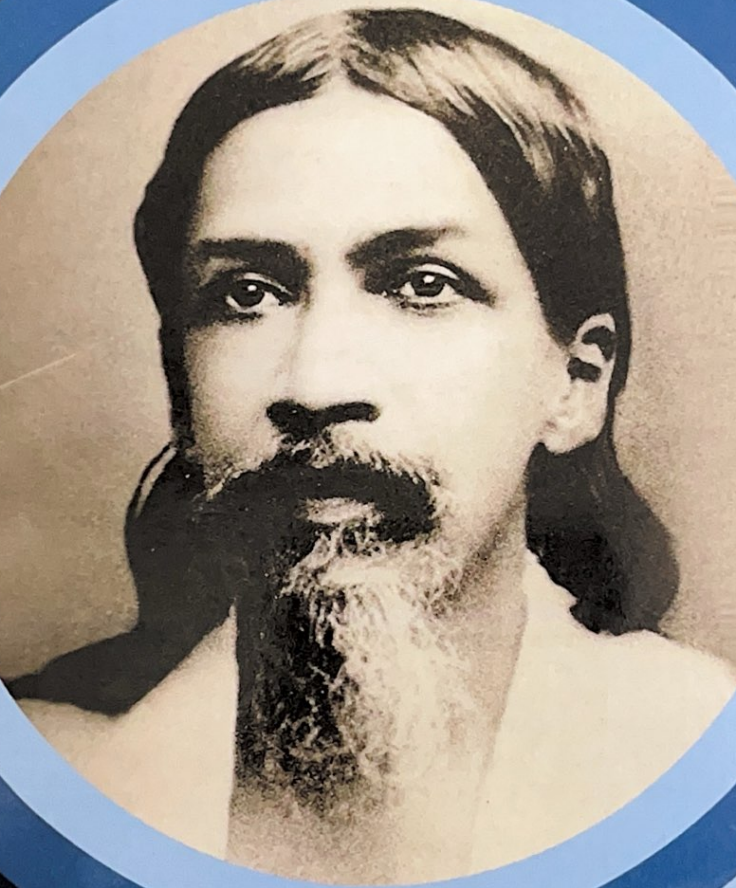


Educational and
Philosophical Thoughts of
SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH



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**SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION ON
SPIRITUAL EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with spiritual education with special reference to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. It projects Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experience as the result of his self-exploration and spiritual teachings. This has resulted in the theory of integral yoga (and later integral education), the thorough practice of which leads to development of a higher plane of consciousness. Aurobindo's methods of spiritual education help in the development of spiritual and cosmic forms. The transformation as a practice in spirituality could filter the consciousness out of ignorance of self towards the knowledge of divine reality. The advantages of spiritual education is seen not only in individual manifestations into divinity but also in collective development of consciousness of beings.

Keywords: Spiritual education, Integral yoga, Integral education, Transformation, Consciousness

Introduction

Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose; August 15, 1872 – December 5, 1950) was an Indian nationalist, philosopher, yogi, poet, writer and spiritual practitioner. Sri Aurobindo began practising spiritual meditation and yoga in 1905 in Baroda. In 1908, Sri Aurobindo experienced the first form of spiritual awakenings. He left politics in 1910 and moved to Pondicherry to devote himself totally to his inner spiritual life and developmental activities. During his forty years in Pondicherry, he developed a new spiritual practice known as 'Integral Yoga'. This integral yoga is the result of his thorough

understanding of ancient Indian traditions and western philosophical influences. The goal of integral yoga is spiritual realisation, which not only liberates one but also transforms individual nature. In this way, the primary objective of integral yoga practice is the transformation of the human psyche. In 1926, he established Sri Aurobindo Ashram with the support of his spiritual collaborator, the Mother. Some of the books of Sri Aurobindo include, "The Life Divine", "The Synthesis of Yoga", and "Savitri". Sri Aurobindo's writings aided in the development of standards and methodologies for spiritual education. His spiritual practice and realisation are widely studied and practised today in order to gain spiritual progress. By following the ethical principles and standards, spiritual development aids in the formation of a healthy relationship with the world. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual practices and its revelations in his major work have given us hope that spiritual experiences and morality do not lead to a dead end, but rather connect us to significant areas of life such as politics, science, education, psychology, environment, agriculture, arts and other fields. Overall, Aurobindo's spiritual education in terms of integral yoga and divine reunion is interdisciplinary and brings a huge scope for its practice.

Sri Aurobindo's Development of spirituality

Sri Aurobindo gained spiritual education by both guidance and self-exploration. A guided meditation practice with Maharashtrian yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele is part of his first meditation experience. In his first spiritual encounter, Aurobindo experienced silence, spacelessness, and the feelings of timelessness. The realisation of universal consciousness that Aurobindo has when imprisoned in Alipore is his second spiritual encounter. The concept of the supreme truth, awareness of the static and dynamic forms of Brahman, and the concepts of ascent and descent—where one either exerts personal effort to draw divinity or the divinity expresses itself through the individual or through nature—have all been acquired by him through this realisation. The third encounter of spiritual experience of Sri Aurobindo is the knowledge of higher consciousness planes leading to supermind via his diligent practice. In addition to this, Sri Aurobindo applied the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishadic sources as spiritual literature. The idea of supermind further reflected on the higher form of Aurobindo's spiritual

vision. Further, the final six chapters of Sri Aurobindo's seminal work "The Life Divine" included overarching spiritual philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. Aurobindo's spirituality is the gaining of spiritual experiences via the practice of meditation and self-realization. Aurobindo's spiritual practices included both serving others and inner-self-reflection. Spiritual education includes both knowledge dissemination and integral practice for both individual and collective transformation. There are several ways to awaken one's inner self and direct the other's self.

Following are the ways to educate one's inner self:

1. Understanding (seeking objective, logical information)
2. Behaviour (fostering subjective, humanistic mental models)
3. Contemplation (reflection to the absolute evolutionary energy).

For educating others- self, Aurobindo advised that nothing "can be taught". He argues that this is because the knowledge is already dormant within us. The teacher is a helper and a guide, not an instructor or a taskmaster. The educator's duty is to identify the potentiality in a being and help to transform it to actuality. This is educators' very first lesson in how to promote spiritual education. As Aurobindo mentioned, "The role of the instructor is to recommend and not to impose."

Overall, the relevance of Aurobindo's practice of integral yoga is self-perfection. It involves the transformation of lower and elevation to the higher nature of consciousness. The meaning of transformation, in terms of Aurobindo is to identify the dormant energy source within, conversion of it into potential outcome and establishing divinity on earth. This kind of transformation includes both Tantric and Vedantic elements. In the tantric concepts, the energy or shakti is the sole effective force for the attainment of spirituality. In vedantic terms, the energy is analysed as Maya, by understanding of which one can attain spirituality. This practice of integral yoga is strengthened by increased non-attachment, concentration and liberation. In a way, Aurobindo promoted the life of Brahmacharya and yogi for gaining a proper position in spiritual education.

Elements of spiritual education

In his Ashram in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh gave an address on Integral Practice of Education. The practice and knowledge of East and West countries, as well as ancient and contemporary educational philosophies, are all included in integral education. He has carried out numerous studies on the application of spirituality, and this has led to an honest examination of awareness. Sri Aurobindo expanded his understanding of Indian traditions and languages like Sanskrit, Bengali, Marathi, and Gujarati as a result of not restricting himself to learning solely western notions and languages like English, Greek, and Latin. He also believed that language and culture were crucial components of integral education. His publications, including "Vande Matram", "Karma Yogi", "Dharm", and the Bengali Daily "Yugantar", not only spread his groundbreaking nationalism ideology but also raised awareness of the importance of exposure to many cultures and languages. Sri Aurobindo educated himself in acquiring the knowledge of Bhagavad Gita, yoga, meditation, and other spiritual texts when he was imprisoned in the Alipore jail. After self-education, he spread the knowledge through different sources of direct as well as indirect approach. His teachings have been disseminated by the International Ashram and Pondicherry Education Center. In his journal, Arya, where he wrote about his integralism and psychic experiences, Aurobindo reflected his main philosophical ideas such as pragmatism, rationalism, idealism, and realism.

According to Aurobindo, the transformation of the psychic being allows for the development of individual personality. It ought to represent the culmination of creativity, intellect, and spirituality. The education, according to Sri Aurobindo has included all-encompassing approach to Indian philosophy, synthesis and comprehension of life- the cosmos, realisation of the fundamentals of Upanishadic Brahmana, or consciousness as Sat (Truth), Chit (Self), and Ananda (Bliss), attainment of superman by upholding social ideals, and Purna yoga practise (and the realisation of Purushottam in man). The Purna yoga practice is fulfilled by the Bhakti yoga (the yoga of devotion), Raja yoga (derived from Patanjali's Raja Yoga), Jnana yoga (the yoga of knowledge), Karma yoga (the yoga of effort

and selfless behaviour), and Dhyana yoga (the yoga of meditation). This ancient practice delivers the right technique for the overall understanding and practice of spirituality.

Aurobindo began his life as a political activist, but he quickly found his true calling as a spiritual practitioner. In addition to following the higher path of spirituality, Aurobindo has also outlined the rules for following it. He has established “matter” and “form” as the two crucial components, their interplay providing the most accurate definition of substance. Aurobindo believed that true education encompassed the evolution of the mind and body. The Mother, an acquaintance of Aurobindo, promoted and took forward this practice of integral education by encouraging her followers to engage in regular physical activity in order to develop their spiritual awareness and intuitive sense. Thus, Aurobindo’s spiritual education revolves around the practices of learning new languages, expanding one’s worldview, receiving a religious wisdom, purifying one’s ideas, embracing the virtues of Brahmacharya, and meeting one’s physical and mental requirements. In other words, Sri Aurobindo saw education as the transformation of potentiality in-to actuality.

Methods of Spiritual Education

Studies of Sri Aurobindo’s methods of spiritual education could bring upgradation of educational curriculum. The objective of education is not only physical and social development, but an all-round development of spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth and maturity. This is possible by analysing Aurobindo’s vision of spirituality. Aurobindo has not expected an individual to undergo deep rigorous practice, his only advice is to embrace change and be the part of collective movement towards the development of universal consciousness. In this way, Aurobindo has projected the idea of ‘becoming’ that leads the major transformation from mental to spiritual life, and from spiritual to divine life. Sri Aurobindo was not satisfied with Darwin theory as Darwinism describes the phenomenon of evolution of matter into life and does not explain the reason behind it. Sri Aurobindo has put reason for evolution and that is the evolution of nature out of matter and then mind out of life. He has mentioned that evolution are of two kinds-

- ❖ Cosmic evolution- from matter to mind
- ❖ Spiritual evolution- from mind to supermind

For embracing spiritual education, one needs to be aware of the Spiritual evolution by the practice of spiritual path or sadhana. The truest and purest form of the practice of Aurobindo spirituality is embracing the path of yoga, as Sri Aurobindo mentioned "All life is Yoga".

Sri Aurobindo believes that behind the appearances of the universe, there is the Reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. Aurobindo also considered that all beings are united in that one self and spirit but divided by a certain separateness of consciousness. This is the individual consciousness that develops differently and uniquely in all individuals. For merging into divine consciousness (from individual consciousness), one has to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true self- that is the divinity. This kind of practice is spiritual evolution, that is the method of liberation. So, to define spiritual evolution, it is the development of supermind and spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. This method is to be found through the practice of psychic exploration and integral yoga. The psychological discipline of yoga is possible by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation. This opening of the mind leads to a greater wideness and emergence into what has been called the cosmic consciousness.

The method and practice of spirituality should lead to awakening and inner self-development. In other words, when Aurobindo spoke of a transformational world and a big change, he intended to talk of the inner self-development and acceptance of the divine awareness path through spiritual education.

"The world is preparing for a big change. Will you help?" - Sri Aurobindo
The collaboration of the mind by the supermind is what constitutes transformation in the true sense. Many problems can be resolved by raising one's consciousness to a higher self. Through spiritual practice and spiritual education, traumatic past-life events can be healed and personal growth is accelerated. The spiritual training of Aurobindo may also aid in eradicating political corruption and stagnation. In the same way that Aurobindo merged yoga and politics, the fusion of western and eastern principles aided India's struggle for independence.

To put in brief, Sri Aurobindo's method of spiritual education helps in-

- I. Removing the veil of insensibility of matter that hides universal consciousness.
- II. Evolution in ignorance into evolution in knowledge.
- III. Increasing spiritualization of consciousness.
- IV. Attainment of perfect consciousness (not only in individual but collective social life)

Effects of Spiritual Education

Understanding of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experience and its practice in spiritual education could result in unity, morality and freedom.

I. Sri Aurobindo's view on unity

Sri Aurobindo's efforts were directed towards bringing harmony and unity among mankind on the basis of spiritualism. Aurobindo has explored the idea of unity in two of his major works- "The Idea of Human Unity" and "The Life Divine."

According to Aurobindo, the evolution of human unity can only be accomplished via yogic experience rather than through reasoning. Integral yoga is the path that leads to the life of the divine.

II. Sri Aurobindo's views on freedom

Sri Aurobindo's whole concept of freedom is based on the premise that there is in mankind an evolving soul requiring freedom for its evolution, just as there is in nature a secret urge towards unity. Nations, like individual men, cannot evolve to their fullest potential as long as the swadharma is not able to express itself freely in the collective life.

III. Sri Aurobindo's view on morality

The evolution of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy shows how a person develops on the social and moral planes. A transition from the ordinary consciousness to a higher awareness where one discovers true being may result via spiritual education. Morality is established as a result of divine fulfilment because the spiritual man carries out the will of God.

Conclusion

The big changes Sri Aurobindo envisioned in his talks might be realised through the use of all these spiritual education techniques and practices.

This significant change can only be achieved via total surrender to higher forces, persistent denial of ignorance, and development of individuality. The practice of integral yoga plays a greater role in the achievement of Sri Aurobindo's vision of unity, morality and freedom. Thus, knowledge acquisition, the purity of the senses and thoughts, the recognition of the senses, the development of logic, the development of morality and conscience (Chitta, manas, intelligence, and knowledge), as well as self-realisation and the development of moralities, should all be goals of spiritual education.

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