Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Education

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo propounds the concept of Integral Education. According to him "True Education is Integral development of the child-Physically strong, healthy and supple - Emotionally, sensitive, refined and energetic - Mentally, wide, lively and with clear intelligence and Will - Spiritually, those deeper and subtler qualities that unify and harmonise the whole being through freedom and joy." An important characteristic of integral education is its insistence on simultaneous development of Knowledge, Will, Harmony, and Skill as also of all the parts of the being to the extent possible from the earliest stages of education. And 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 individualised. Again, for this very reason, the methods of education become increasingly dynamic, involving active participation of the child in its own growth.

Keywords:- *Integral Education, Psychic, Spiritual, Mental, Vital, Physical Education, Freedom, Discipline, Learning and Teaching.*

Concept of Education :-

Integral Education regards the child as a growing soul and helps it to bring out all that is best, most powerful, most innate and living in its nature. It helps the child develop all facets of its personality and awaken its latent possibilities so that it acquires:

- a strong, supple, healthy, beautiful body
- a sensitive, emotionally refined, energetic personality
- a wide-ranging, lively Intelligence and Will
- the subtler spiritual qualities that unify and harmonise the being around the child's inmost Truth or Soul

Sri Aurobindo points out that the question is not between modernism and antiquity but between an imported civilisation and greater possibilities of the Indian mind and nature, not between the present and the past but between the present and the future. He pointed out that 'the living spirit of the demand for national education no more requires a return to the astronomy and mathematics of Bhaskara or the forms of the system of Nalanda than the living spirit of Swadeshi, a return from railway and motor traction to the ancient chariot and the bullock cart'. He, therefore, spoke not of a return to the fifth century but an initiation to the centuries to come, not a reservation but a break forward away from the present artificial falsity to India's own greater innate potentialities which are demanded by the soul of India.

Considering that India has seen always in the human being a soul, a portion of the divinity enwrapped in the mind and body, a conscious manifestation in nature of the universal self and spirit, he concluded that the one central object of the national system of education should be the growth of the soul and its powers and possibilities as also the preservation, strengthening and

enrichment of the nation-soul and the normative needs of its ascending movements. Not limited to these two, Sri Aurobindo put forth in its aim also the raising of both the individual soul and the national soul into the powers of the life and the ascending mind and the soul of humanity. He added "and at no time will it lose sight of man's highest object, the awakening and development of the spiritual being"

Concept of Teaching :-

Sri Aurobindo speaks of three principles of teaching that provide a sound basis of a system of natural organisation of the highest processes and movements of which the human is capable. They also form the basis of the theory and practice of integral education, which has been propounded in detail in Sri Aurobindo's book, The Synthesis of Yoga, and the Mother's book, Education. In brief, the three principles of teaching in Sri Aurobindo's own words are:

"The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose.... The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature.... The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.... The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. . . . A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development."

Integral Education :-

The knowledge of the secrets of the process of integral education is largely contained in the Veda and Upanishads, and what we find missing there has been discovered and perfected by Sri Aurobindo. It is in the light of all this knowledge that we can speak today with great assurance of the concept and practice of integral education and of the synthesis of the ancient secrets of the reign of Spirit over mind, life and the body and the modern secrets of utilisation of the life in perfecting the instrumentality of the body, life and mind.

Integral education would not only aim at the integral development of personality, but it would also embrace all knowledge in its scope. It would pursue physical and psychical sciences not merely to know the world and Nature in her processes and to use them for material human needs, but to know through them the Spirit in the world and the ways of the Spirit in its appearances. It would study ethics not only to search for the good as the mind sees it, but also to perceive the supra-ethical Good. Similarly, it would pursue Art not merely to present images of the subjective and the objective world, but to see them with significant and creative vision that goes behind their appearances and to reveal the supra- rational Truth and Beauty. It would encourage the study of humanities, not in order to foster a society as a background for a few luminous spiritual figures so that the many necessarily remain for ever on the lower ranges of life, but to inspire the regeneration of the total life of the earth and to encourage voluntary optimism for that regeneration in spite of all previous failures. Finally, it would encourage unity of knowledge and harmony of knowledge, and it would strive to foster the spirit of universality and oneness.

Psychic and Spiritual Education :-

Principles and methods of education advocated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have a profound bearing on psychic and spiritual education. These two domains bring into the picture all that is central to value-oriented education and to higher and profounder elements of human psychology. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have advocated new methods that are free from those of dogmas, rituals, ceremonies, prescribed acts. Spirituality, according to them, is a vast domain of the inmost soul, of the immobile silence, of the higher objects of the higher psychological exploration. The justification for psychic and spiritual education rests upon three important considerations:

(a) education should provide to the individual a steady exploration of something that is inmost in the psychological complexity of human consciousness;

(b) the most important question of human life is to consider the aim of human life and the aim of one's own life and one's own position and role in the society; and this question can best be answered only when the psychic and spiritual domains are explored and when one is enabled to develop psychic and spiritual faculties of knowledge; and

(c) the contemporary crisis of humanity has arisen because of the disbalancement between the material advancement on the one hand and inadequate spiritual progression, on the other.

If this crisis has to be met, development of psychic and spiritual consciousness should be fostered. Unfortunately, spiritual consciousness is often conceived as a denial of material life and concerns of collective life. In Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's view, however, there is no fundamental opposition between Matter and Spirit. True integrality, according to them, implies rejection of no element in human personality and no denial of anything that can contribute to the full flowering of faculties of personality.

Domains of Integral Education :-

A constant insistence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has on detailed perfection of the human mind, life and body. We may, therefore, turn to the three domains of mental education, vital education, and physical education as expounded and experimented upon at Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry and Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research at Auroville.

1. Mental Education

Mind is concerned largely with the activities of understanding, and all understanding is discovery of a centre around which the ideas or things in question are held together. Mental education is a process of training the mind of students to arrive at such central conceptions around which the widest and most complex and subtle ideas can be assimilated and integrated. Even these central conceptions point still to a beyond, to their own essential meaning, which can be glimpsed and conceived by the mind, but which cannot be held and possessed fully in experience by the mind. This point marks the climax of the mental development as also a clear sign of the limitations of the mind. Having reached there it has to fall into contemplation of silence and to open to the higher realms of experience, to receive clearly and precisely the intuitions and inspirations from those higher realms, and to give creative expression to them.

- To train the mind on these lines, there are five phases of the programme;
- Development of the power of concentration, and attention;
- Development of the capacities of expansion, wideness, complexity and richness;
- Organisation of ideas round a central or a higher ideal of a supremely luminous idea that will serve as a guide in life;
- Thought control, rejection of undesirable thoughts so that one may, in the end, think only what one wants and when one wants;

2. Vital *Education*

Vital Education aims at training the life-force (that normally vibrates in emotions, desires and impulses) in three directions: to discover its real function and to replace its egoistic and ignorant tendency so as to become the master by a willingness and capacity to serve higher principles of the psychological constitution; subtilise and sublimate its sensitivity which expresses itself through sensuous and aesthetic activities; and to resolve and transcend the dualities and contradictions in the character constituted by the vital seekings and to achieve the transformation of the character. The effective methods of this last aspect are:

- to instill in the child, as soon as possible, the will towards progress and perfection;
- to insist on the idea that the will can be developed, and that no defeat should be taken as final;
- to demand from the will the maximum effort, for the will is strengthened by effort;
- the example of the educator shown constantly and sincerely.

3. Physical Education

On the subject of physical education, it must be mentioned that the physical is our base, and even the highest spiritual values are to be expressed through the life that is embodied here. Sariram adyam khalu dharmasadhanam, says the old Sanskrit adage, the body is the means of fulfilment of dharma, while dharma means every ideal which we can propose to ourselves and the law of its working out and its action.

Of all the domains of education, physical is the one most completely governed by method, order, discipline and procedure. All education of the body must be rigorous, detailed and methodical. The education of the body has three principal aspects:

i. control and discipline of functions of the body;
ii. a total methodical and harmonious development of all the parts and movements of the body;
iii. rectification of defects and deformities, if there are any.

Physical education must be based upon knowledge of the human its structure and its functions. And the formation of the habits of the body must be in consonance with that knowledge.

Concept of Discipline :-

A very important problem in respect of integral education arises from its insistence on proper synthesis between freedom and discipline. Since education is a creative process and since compulsion and creativity cannot go together, freedom has to be a very important instrument of education. The ideal condition is obtained when discipline becomes the child of freedom and discipline is transformed into self-discipline.

We have to recognise that different children react to various activities of education differently. There are children who feel a powerful attraction towards creative activities such as arts, music, dance, composition of poetry, drama, etc. They should, of course, be given freedom to pursue these valuable activities. But there are instances where children who do not have this natural inclination towards creative activities are also compelled to be engaged in these activities. This is entirely unacceptable.

Conclusion :-

If we make a deep study of the experiments in education guided and conducted under the inspiration of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, it may be said that there are three important features that come to the forefront and which may help us to define what may be called 'New Education':

1. Learning by practice;
2. Search for meaning and unity of knowledge; and
3. Unending education and perpetual youth.

New education insists on the development of the mind, life and body, it aims at development of these instruments for the discovery of the inner psychic being; it proposes to utilise mental, vital, physical perfection as instruments of the perfect manifestation of the inner and higher realities. The effort is to make the body supple, strong, agile and beautiful; the vital is to be trained to become dynamic, disciplined, obedient and effective; the mind has to be cultivated to be intelligent, observant, concentrated, free, rich and complex. But at every stage the paramount importance is to be given to the needs of the psychic and spiritual growth. As the mother writes: the will for the great discovery should be always there soaring over you, above what you do and what you are like a huge bird of life, dominating all the movements of her being.

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