

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Education

Saman Zaki

Department of Educational Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India
E-mail: saman.zaki@gmail.com

KEYWORDS Consciousness. Educational Philosophy. Integral Education. Human Soul Development. Spirituality. Mental Health. National Education Policy 2020

ABSTRACT Sri Aurobindo was a renowned philosopher, yogi, poet, nationalist, and educationist. He explored many problems in the teaching-learning process faced by schools and universities before independence. This paper aims to explore Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy in the light of spiritual development and mental health. Descriptive analysis is done. It is found that Aurobindo emphasised physical development and physical purification, which are the two main bases of spiritual development. Mental development is also one of the main aims of Aurobindo's educational philosophy, which ultimately makes the way for the improvement of mental health, though he does not use the term mental health directly. Sri Aurobindo suggests means of attaining spirituality and keeping mental health good by practicing yoga and *sadhana* for integrating Supreme consciousness in all of one's thoughts, emotions, actions, and feelings. Integral education in a way contributes to humanity, which is a boon to the nation.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the key to improving all aspects of life including mental, physical, spiritual, social, economic, and cultural. Education is the training of both physical and mental development of the children, which enables them to expose internal capabilities for utilising knowledge gained in a vast world. It nourishes the personality with all-round development. It brings out many changes in human life. Hence, education helps in enlightening the person, which ultimately contributes to improving societal development.

Aurobindo's Life

Sri Aurobindo was born on 15th August 1872 in Calcutta. He was an idealist, revolutionist, poet, philosopher, writer, and spiritual teacher. His idealistic philosophy was based on the Vedanta Philosophy of Upanishad. The idea of his thought and practices revolved around the integration of all aspects of life founded on the evolution of consciousness. He laid more focus on the spiritual development, practices of yoga, and development of the human mind and soul.

In one of his compiled works, *The Hour of God and Other Writings* (1972), which was published after his death, Aurobindo pointed out that the country needs a kind of education that is suitable for the Indian soul, need, temperament and culture. Sri Aurobindo put great ef-

forts into improving the Indian education system. He has made a marvellous contribution to the education sector. The main aim of Aurobindo's philosophy reflects in the all round development of the individual. Through the different techniques and methods, Aurobindo taught one how to achieve spirituality and how to live in harmony by improving mental health. Being spiritual and having good mental health, an individual can live peacefully and be able to handle any situation in life.

The Concept of Spirituality

From very early human civilisation, sensing spirituality has been a part of human life. Evelyn Underhill (1990) described in her book, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Human Consciousness* that human beings have bent toward vision creation ability. They are driven by their goals and actions, which are beyond any physical perfection and mental supremacy.

The term 'spirituality' has been defined in many ways. 'Spirituality' is a word that has been used in a holistic term, an integrated approach to life. It means the word 'spiritual' is connected to another word known as 'the holy', which makes life as a whole. Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) emphasised that spirituality is an integral part of the lives and experiences of people across societies and has remained a robust force throughout the history of humanity. Another meaning of

spirituality is related to 'sacred', which is connected to the belief about God or boundless mysteries of the universe or cosmos. Thirdly, spirituality is often associated with involvement in a quest for meaning, goal, and purpose of life, the direction of life, and many more. This association with the quest for the meaning of life enhances the understanding of identity and personality development of a person (Underhill 1990).

From the way of life of a simple and ordinary man to the larger community, spirituality is the best way to connect higher with reality, which is the ultimate reality. The most famous psychologist, Victor Frankl (1985) opined that being part of human nature, spirituality is a sense of connection to something beyond oneself, which is the greatest source of spiritual meaning in life. The notion of spiritual development not only considers spirituality as the universal domain of capacity but also recognises it as a fundamental development task for the human being as a whole (Yogeshchandra 2016).

According to Sri Aurobindo, spirituality is the realisation of the inner reality of one's being (self or soul), which is more than one's mind, life, or body. It is an awakening or inner inspiration to know, sense, or feel and to connect to the greater reality, which is eternal, omniscient, transcendental, and beyond the universe. In the glossary of terms in Sri Aurobindo's writing, he defined spirituality as it has not only a connection with the absolute rather the experience of the absolute is spiritual. In other words, the contacts, which are made with the self, higher consciousness and the divine refer to as spiritual.

Sri Aurobindo opined that the focus of spirituality is on the consciousness in the present state and it evolves to realise the divine within. It stresses the significance of the heightening of the consciousness for the spiritual transformation of the world and helps the spiritual development of human beings (Jayanthi and Arasi 2016).

Spirituality, by its very nature, seeks to identify the source of man's power and to eliminate all forms of ignorance that confuse the intellect. Its goal is to realise the divine within by utilising all of one's current faculties. All humans have an inherent quest for spiritual quest. It builds towards a condition of conscious elevation that occurs once the ego and dualism in existence vanish. As a result, the term alludes to one's

natural yearning to understand the greatest power as well as their desire to enhance their current state of existence. It is quite important in fostering self-confidence. It offers purpose to a life that appears to be meaningless and ends in death.

Sri Aurobindo evolved a new method for practicing spirituality after spending forty years in Pondicherry, which he called Integral Yoga. Through integral yoga, he wanted to teach how spiritual realisation helps in liberating human consciousness and transforming human nature.

The Concept of Mental Health

Mental health is very important to the overall well being of individuals as well as the physical health of the individuals. Mental health is also necessary for the development of society and country. It is one of the biggest casualties of the modern, fast-paced world. Mental health is a term that describes how well a person can adjust to the complexities of life. Mental health is a broad and complicated concept. A person is said to be physically fit when his body is functioning well and he is free from pains and troubles. Similarly, a person is in good mental health when their mind and personality are functioning effectively and they are free from emotional disturbances. Therefore, low mental health is associated with ineffective problem solvers, maladjusted and emotionally disturbed persons (Girdhar 2016).

In 1958 Marie Jahoda, who was a Professor of Social Psychology at New York University and Director of N.Y.U Research Centre for Human Relations, did extensive work on positive mental health. Jahoda's book entitled *Current Concepts of Positive Mental Health* published in 1958 reflects on different defining characteristics of mental health. According to Jahoda (1958), mental health is a very personal issue for each person. It concerns a living being along with the state of its mind.

Mental health refers to a dynamic state of equilibrium. A mentally healthy individual can ease with himself, and as a result, with those around him. Mental health keeps oneself integrated with the stress and strain through integrative adjustment. A mentally healthy individual is artistic, creative and dynamic, driven by

the principles of love and truth, with a balance of reason and faith, efforts and resignation, and self and social needs.

Rich psychological insights into processes and constructs such as mental health, cognition, emotion, perception, self, and personality have been found in Indian philosophy. Charaka focused on having positive mental health while articulating the task of medicine to treat not only disease but also enable a person to live an ideal life (Dasgupta 1941). The self as an ultimate entity and the self as empirical ego were distinguished in the Upanishads. The ego, on one hand, is preoccupied with worldly affairs and experiences (pleasure and pain) whereas the 'atman' or ultimate entity is being devoid of pain or pleasure. It experiences devoid of senses and surpasses time, space, and causality. It is known as the true self and ultimate reality, which is unknown to the mind and can only be realised by practicing meditation. To terminate pain and suffering, the person has to awaken the higher self for conquering the lower one (Radhakrishnan 1953).

Based on Indian philosophy, Sri Aurobindo constructed an evolutionary map of consciousness. For him, the fundamental thing in the cosmos is consciousness, which manifests itself in the different matters (Sharma et al. 2009). It would be wrong to identify consciousness with the mind because it has a range above and below the human range. The aim and purpose of life are to uncover ignorance and pervade the inner recesses of the spiritual kingdom, which results in exposing one's external being, mind, or ego. Aurobindo introduced the term 'truth-consciousness' by which he meant consciousness is always free from ignorance, which bases the foundation stone for one's evolutionary existence, which is ultimately trying to reach self-knowledge and the right use of one's existence in the universe. For him, consciousness is the force of being and awareness for seeking integration of soul of mind and body to universal mind and physical existence, respectively. Grinde in his book, *The Evolution of Consciousness: Implications for Mental Health and Quality of Life* (2016), explains consciousness surely matters for having good mental health. In his educational philosophy, Sri Aurobindo emphasised mental development, which can be achieved

through various techniques that are in some way helpful in improving mental health.

The Concept of Integral Education

Sri Aurobindo was known as one of the fathers of modern Indian philosophy because he had amalgamated a diverse school of Indian philosophy into a coherent system of belief. Due to this reason, his philosophy is often considered a Integral philosophy, that is, a philosophy that integrates different schools of thought (Indian as well as Western thought) into one functional view of humanity as well as the world.

Sri Aurobindo was a very visionary philosopher. His educational philosophy is, in fact, an extension of his philosophical vision for humanity. Humanity is indeed destined to move spiritually toward the ultimate 'supermind' status, so in this case, Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy works as a means to speed up the evolution of man's mind for arriving at the ultimate status faster (Datta 2011).

Sri Aurobindo considers three things essential for true and living education, the man, the individual in his commonness, and his uniqueness, the nation or people, and universal humanity. Therefore, in Sri Aurobindo's view, the idea of education is thus a true education that draws out with complete advantage and prepares individuals with full purpose and goals. This allows an individual man to enter into the right connection with life, mind, and soul. It drives individuals towards humanity, which helps in unifying nations and communities.

In this regard, true education is considered an instrument for working of the spirit in the person's mind and body, which ultimately improves individual life and the entire nation. Sri Aurobindo's view of education focuses not only on the individual man but also puts special places for the nation and humanity. His education system is effective in preparing the mind and the soul of the person and also of the nation for serving humanity, which is important for societal development. Thus it is true that Sri Aurobindo's system of education can be considered as the perfect mode of effective social change based on spiritual evolution.

Sri Aurobindo's colleague The Mother claims that India has or had the understanding of the

spirit but it seemed to neglect matter and as a result suffered for it. On the other hand, the West has or had knowledge of the matter but rejected spirit so suffered terribly for it. So in this context, integral education must be adopted by all nations, which can restore legitimate control of the spirit over a matter (Pani 2007). So the message given by The Mother pertains to the essence of the concept of integral education, which considers man to be neither matter nor spirit separately, rather man is both spirit and soul that are imbibed in the matter.

Thus it can be said the term 'Integral Education' reflects the educational approach of Sri Aurobindo, which is mainly focused on the spiritualistic view of man containing physical as well as mental development of a person. Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator Mirra Alfassa (known as 'The Mother') thought to form an experimental community in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram in Pondicherry in the 1930s for the devotion to human unity. This project was endorsed by the Government of India and UNESCO in 1968 for the sake of the future of humanity. The school system in Auroville is based on Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy, which is integral education. At present in Delhi, there are two schools Mother International and Mirambika, which are founded based on integral education. The integral educational system unveils individual potentialities, uniqueness, and commonness (Chandra and Sharma 2002).

Seikh (2020) suggested Aurobindo's educational thoughts are comprehensive, which is very much relevant, modern and psychological in nature. He focussed on integral education in the light of the national education system. Das (2020) carried out an in-depth study about Aurobindo's integral education. According to him, integral education prepares individuals to achieve the goal of divine life. He opined to train teachers to bring out spiritual consciousness among the students for functioning well in society.

Zulaski (2017) reviews the five principal aspects of a complete integral education, which contributes to innovative and learner-centred pedagogy for the holistic development of the individual. Akhter (2015) conducted a study related to the integral education of Sri Aurobindo. He came up with the conclusion that integral education helps in transforming man into a su-

perman by awakening their consciousness. He suggested including yoga as an integral part of education for enhancing spirituality, harmony, and willpower in a person.

In this paper, various kinds of literature on Sri Aurobindo's integral education have been studied to know how it helps to bring spiritual development and facilitate the mental health of the individual.

Objectives

The objectives of the paper are:

1. To understand the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.
2. To understand the concept of Integral Education and its relation to spiritual development and mental health.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive method has been used to analyse the content-based data of the paper. The descriptive content analysis examines the collected data qualitatively. The main purpose of this method is to draw out the realistic conclusions from the data. Data of the present study is collected through secondary sources for example online journals, books research articles, online magazines, and theses. The author used official websites of Sri Aurobindo's documents like Auroville School, Sri Aurobindo Studies, California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), and many more online libraries like Hathi Trust, Internet Archive, and Library.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integral Education as a Path to Attain Spirituality and Mental Health

Many researches have been conducted studies on implication of the integral education (Mohanty 2019; Yadav and Sharma 2018; Akhter 2015). Education, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the combination of spiritual, physical, rational, vital, mental aspects, which makes it an integral education system. According to Sri Aurobindo, integrated or complete education must have five principal aspects related to the five principles activities of human being namely, the physical,

the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual as shown in Figure 1. However, these phases of education normally follow one another in chronological order, based on the individual's development. It means that all must continue without replacing each other, complete each other till the end (Chandra and Sharma 2002).

The main aim of Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy is to create a dynamic citizen so that they can manage all complexities of life. Saini (2017) found that integral education is a whole-person approach that is not only focused on physical development but also on physical purity, which is ultimately needed for spiritual development. It means that the main foundation of spiritual development is laid by both physical development and purification.

Sri Aurobindo's concept of integral yoga is explained in his book 'The Synthesis of Yoga and The Life Divine'. His approach to integral yoga is explained as an integration of the physical social behaviour along with metaphysical level as a holistic system of inner-self meditation and outer social action. Sharma (2016) suggested integral yoga leads to produce evolutionary energy, which causes an increased level of personal evolution and spiritual awareness, which is essential for social evolution in the future.

Spiritual development and mental development are the main aims of Aurobindo's educational philosophy. For Aurobindo spiritual development is the most neglected aspect of life. So he demanded a proper education on the Indian soul, temperament, culture, and community.

He also felt a need for such education, which would be helpful and fruitful in making individual souls for future demand and eternal spirit. According to him, the main goal of education should help to grow souls to bring out the best and of noble use. Another main aim of education is to prepare an individual for the divine life. For him, education enlightens the inner soul of the person and their all-round development flourishes them. For this reason, Aurobindo realised to introduce integral education for the spiritual development of the individual. Through self-discovery, self-knowledge, self-awareness, self-realisation, and self-observation, an individual gains spirituality. By adopting these means, an individual not only becomes more capable, and more refined but also becomes more receptive to receiving the Supreme consciousness (Brahman) of soul and spirit and this makes one 'listen' to higher consciousness (Huppel 2012). According to Aurobindo, spirituality is considered a boon to humanity. It keeps humans in peace and harmony. Therefore, Aurobindo suggests some means to attain spirituality, wherein one is integral yoga and another is *sadhana*. Both yoga and *sadhana* are part of integral education. Roy (2018) concluded that Aurobindo believed that every person has divinity in them, which can only be attained by practicing yoga and *sadhana*, which transforms humans into a superhuman.

Sharma (2016) opined that Sri Aurobindo believed that man has various levels and forms of consciousness. One's thoughts and actions

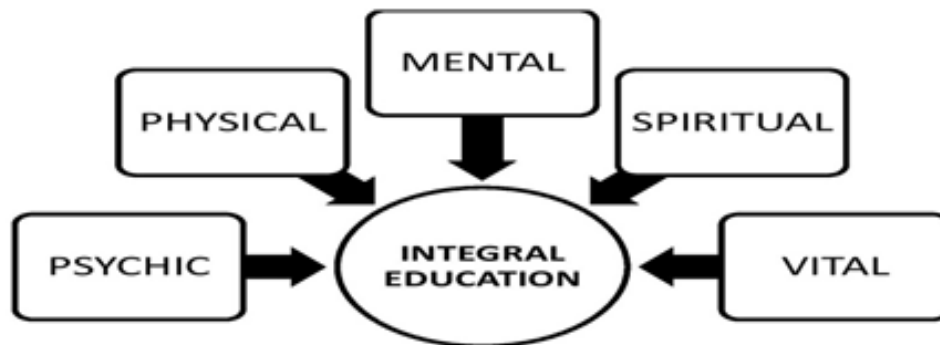


Fig. 1. Aspects of Integral Education

are indeed dependent on mental development. Here, mental development means the improvement of all mental faculties, for example, memory, emotion, cognition, thinking, reasoning, and imagination. Over time, humans have developed incredible complexities, which are hardly known by individuals. Thus, man is unable to bring out his true potential and his tremendous amount of energy. In today's modern life many people are suffering from stress and leading tense life. If one's mental health is not good one cannot be efficient and productive (Zaki 2018). Accordingly, Dini (2019) suggested for the proper training and with the help of techniques adopted in integral education, an individual can develop mental faculties for managing stress and become fully functioned. So, keeping in view these problems, Sri Aurobindo urged to develop an education system that could be a magnificent tool for bringing out man's true potential and developing all mental faculties, which can keep individuals in harmony and fully developed.

By practicing integral yoga one can achieve spirituality, which is ultimately helpful for keeping mental health functioning well. Sri Aurobindo was very much in favour of *dhyana*. Meditation and contemplation are the essential parts of *dhyana* that enhance the concentration of the mind regarding ideas and thoughts. These may lead to freedom from negative thoughts and feelings (anger, grief, depression, and anxiety) and help in integrating divine knowledge as part of personality. It will also lead to increasing purity and calmness of the inner consciousness (*Citta*) through which thought and emotion arise.

In general, education needs to implement and impose more effective methods that expedite the actions of humans to excel in innate tendencies. The impulse towards self-exceeding is an innate tendency of a human being. Self-exceeding, which has both spiritual and mental components, enhances the concept of *svadharma* and *svabhava*. *Svadharma* is an action that is governed by *svabhava*, the important law of one's nature. When a person acts according to inmost *svadharma*, the action that emerges is an expression of one's self (soul) (Huppel 2013). So, integral education makes individuals find the balance between developing, improving, training, practicing, and refining individual mind, body, and soul.

CONCLUSION

Sri Aurobindo was known to be one of the most important personalities in 20th century India. His role was varied in the context of Indian history. Sri Aurobindo's concept of integral education is one of the very influential concepts in the education system in India as well as abroad. Being considered as a complete system of education, integral education develops not only the cognitive mind but also influences different aspects of the personality (physical, vital, spiritual, and psyche) of the individual. It helps in the nourishing sense of integrity, beauty, and harmony included in aspects of humanity. Integral education helps in the unveiling of the potentials of the individual. According to him, true education is not limited to spiritual development but also mental development, which makes it integral education. By adopting proper training and techniques in education, one can achieve spirituality and by practicing forms of *dhyana* person can have control over the mind, which may lead to purifying the mind from all negative thoughts and feelings, which is likely to improve mental health. So keeping in view the above contexts, one can understand that Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy is effective in ensuring the holistic development of an individual's personality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study is about how integral education is helpful in enhancing spirituality and mental health, which play a pivotal role in individual development. Since the present study is a descriptive type study, the experimental study can also be done by developing tools for collecting data from the sample. Further research will also be required at a different educational level. The present study is limited to integral education, and integral yoga can also be studied concerning integral education.

Relevance of Aurobindo's Integral Education to NEP 2020

The educational philosophy of Aurobindo aims to change curricula, maximise learning modalities and help children to reach their full potential at their own pace during devotion to self-

discovery. The Central Government has passed National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which reflects some elements of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and drew out inspiration from his concept of integral education. The principles of both NEP 2020 and integral education are based on experiential learning and the holistic development of an individual. Both integral education and NEP 2020 focus on learner-centred as well as India-centred education. Totality, uniqueness, and integration are keys to integral education so as to NEP2020. This new national education policy echoes Aurobindo's words. This policy aims to develop each individual as a whole human being with moral values, character, knowledge, skills, creativity, resilience confidence and invention, as well as a leader with many qualities such as sportsmanship and teamwork (NEP, 2020).

If one works hard to create a new 'Bharat' that improves the world socially, culturally, and economically, Aurobindo's dream of education that integrates ancient wisdom and current science can be realised.

REFERENCES

- Akhter R 2015. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh: Pioneer of integral education. *International Journal of Educational Research and Development*, III(6): 092-095.
- Aurobindo S 1972. *The Hour of God and Other Writings*. Pondicherry: Birth Centenary Library.
- Chandra SS, Sharma RK 2002. *Principles of Education*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.
- Das PK 2020. Educational philosophy and contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the field of education. *International Journal of Creative Research Thought*, 8(7): 1698-1701.
- Dasgupta SN 1941. *Philosophical Essays*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press.
- Datta H 2011. *A Study on Sri Aurobindo and His Integral Education Some Aspects*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. West Bengal: University of Calcutta.
- Dini F 2019. *An Integral Education for Growth and Blossoming*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication.
- Frankl VE 1985. *Man's Search for Meaning*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Girdhar M 2016. *Problem Solving Ability of Adolescents in Relation to Mental Hygiene, Birth Order, and Socio-Economic Status*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia.
- Grinde B 2016. *The Evolution of Consciousness: Implications for Mental Health and Quality of Life*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Huppés N 2012. *Integral Education: Challenges and Perspectives*. Gujarat: University Press Sardar Patel University
- Huppés N 2013. Integral Education: An application of Indian Psychology. In: RM Matthijs Cornelissen, Girishwar Misra, Suneet Verma (Eds.). *Foundations and Applications of Indian Psychology*, 2nd Edition. New Delhi: Pearson Education India, pp. 293-302.
- Jahoda M 1958. *Current Concepts of Positive Mental Health*. New York: Basic Books.
- Jayanthi S, Arasi MU 2016. Sri Aurobindo as a spiritual optimist: An over view from Savitri, The life divine, and the synthesis of yoga. *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(10): 1271-1277.
- Mohanty SB 2019. Theory and practice of integral education. *University News*, 57(3): 11-16.
- National Education Policy 2020: MHRD. From <https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf> (Retrieved on 11 December 2021).
- Pani RN 2007. *Integral Education Thought and Practices*. New Delhi: APH Publishers.
- Radhakrishnan S 1953. *The Principal Upanishads*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Roehlkepartain EC, King PE, Wagener L, Benson PL 2006. *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Roy AK 2018. Aurobindo's idea on spiritual education. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 8(11): 750-755.
- Saini A 2017. Educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh. *Recent Researches in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2(4): 70-75.
- Seikh HA 2020. Philosophical thoughts of Aurobindo: Its impact on modern educational system. *International Journal of Engineering Applied Sciences and Technology*, 5(8): 232-234.
- Sharma A 2016. A study of Aurobindo's spiritual and philosophical vision. *Globus Journal of Progressive Education*, 6(2): 1-3.
- Sharma P, Charak R, Sharma V 2009. Contemporary perspectives on spirituality and mental health. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 31(1): 16-23.
- Underhill E 1990. *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Human Consciousness*. New York: Doubleday.
- Yadav S, Sharma RR 2018. Sri Aurobindo's integral education: Practice of physical and spiritual in Auroville Schools. *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education*, 15(9): 305-311.
- Yogeshchandra SS 2016. *Study of Perception of Spiritual Intelligence and Spiritual Development Held by Teacher Educators*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia.
- Zaki S 2018. Enhancing teacher effectiveness through psychological well-being: A key to improve quality of teachers. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 8(7): 286-295.
- Zulaski J 2017. A completed integral education: Five principal aspects. *Integral Review*, 13(1): 20-29.

Paper received for publication in December, 2021
Paper accepted for publication in May, 2022