



REVISITING SRI AUROBINDO'S INTEGRAL EDUCATION: RELEVANCE FOR HOLISTIC LEARNING IN THE ERA OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

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Abstract: Sri Aurobindo, one of the most influential philosophers-seers of modern India, is widely recognized for his contributions to spiritual thought and nationalist movements. However, beyond his political and yogic legacy lies a profound and transformative philosophy of education that remains highly relevant in contemporary times. For Sri Aurobindo, education was not limited to intellectual training or preparation for livelihood; rather, it was a dynamic and evolutionary process aimed at the integral development of the human personality. This study explores Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy with particular emphasis on the concept of Integral Education, which seeks to harmoniously develop the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual dimensions of the individual. The study develops a conceptual understanding of integral education based on Aurobindo's ideas of self-discovery, inner awakening, value orientation, and holistic personality development. According to Aurobindo, true education should facilitate the unfolding of the learner's inner potential and guide individuals toward moral refinement, self-realization, and spiritual awareness. The paper further examines the relevance of Aurobindo's educational vision in the context of contemporary educational reforms, particularly the National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes holistic, learner-centered, and value-based education. While several principles of the NEP resonate with Aurobindo's philosophy such as experiential learning, flexibility, and multidisciplinary education certain dimensions of integral education, especially psychic and spiritual development, remain less explicitly addressed. In addition, the study analyses the potential benefits and challenges of implementing integral education in diverse educational contexts. The findings suggest that integral education can promote holistic development, ethical consciousness, experiential learning, and personalized education. However, practical challenges such as rigid curricular structures, assessment-oriented systems, limited resources, and inadequate teacher preparation may hinder its effective implementation. Based on these insights, the study proposes strategies for integrating integral education into modern curricula through holistic curriculum design, experiential pedagogy, interdisciplinary learning, mindfulness practices, and enhanced teacher facilitation. By revisiting Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy, the paper argues that integral education offers a transformative framework for developing balanced, conscious, and socially responsible individuals, thereby contributing to a more humane and future-oriented education system.

Index Terms - Sri Aurobindo, Integral Education, NEP 2020, Holistic Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Education in Bharat has traditionally aimed at the integral development of the human being, extending beyond mere academic instruction to include physical, emotional, intellectual, ethical, and spiritual growth. This holistic vision has been deeply embedded in the philosophical and cultural traditions of India, where education has been viewed as a means for self-realization, character formation, and harmonious living. In classical Indian thought, knowledge was not merely informational but transformational, guiding individuals toward the realization of their inner potential and their responsibilities toward society. Within this broader intellectual and spiritual heritage, the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo occupies a significant place.

Sri Aurobindo proposed a distinctive educational vision known as Integral Education, which seeks to nurture the complete personality of the learner. According to him, education should aim at the harmonious development of five aspects of human personality: the physical, vital (emotional and dynamic energies), mental, psychic, and spiritual dimensions. These dimensions collectively shape the growth of the individual and enable the realization of one's inner potential. The physical dimension emphasizes health, discipline, and bodily well-being; the vital dimension focuses on emotional balance, character formation, and the regulation of desires; the mental dimension involves the development of intellectual abilities, reasoning, and creativity. Beyond these, Aurobindo highlighted the importance of psychic development, which relates to the inner consciousness and moral awareness of the individual, and spiritual development, which leads to self-realization and a deeper understanding of one's place in the universe. Through this fivefold framework, Aurobindo envisioned education as a process that cultivates balanced, conscious, and self-aware individuals.

In contemporary times, several educational reforms in India have begun to reconnect modern schooling with holistic and value-oriented approaches. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes the need for developing well-rounded individuals by nurturing cognitive, emotional, ethical, and social capacities among learners. It advocates learner-centered pedagogy, experiential learning, and multidisciplinary education aimed at fostering critical thinking, creativity, and character development. Similarly, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 highlights the importance of integrating cultural understanding, ethical values, and indigenous knowledge traditions into educational practices. These developments reflect a growing recognition that education must move beyond exam-oriented learning toward a more holistic and human-centered model, which resonates strongly with Aurobindo's philosophy of integral development.

At the global level, the importance of holistic education and well-being-oriented learning has also gained increasing attention. The United Nations through the Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasizes the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The framework highlights that education should enable learners to develop skills for sustainable living, global citizenship, and cultural awareness. Likewise, the World Health Organization has reported growing mental health concerns among adolescents worldwide, stressing the importance of educational approaches that support emotional well-being, resilience, and psychological balance. In this context, Aurobindo's concept of integral education becomes highly relevant, as it addresses not only intellectual growth but also emotional stability, moral development, and inner well-being.

Several scholars have explored the educational significance of Aurobindo's ideas in contemporary contexts. Research studies suggest that integral approaches to education can enhance students' self-awareness, creativity, ethical sensitivity, and emotional resilience. Scholars have also highlighted that pedagogical practices inspired by Aurobindo such as experiential learning, reflective practices, and learner-centered instruction encourage deeper engagement and personal growth among students. Furthermore, Aurobindo's emphasis on the teacher as a facilitator and guide rather than a mere transmitter of information aligns closely with modern constructivist approaches to teaching and learning.

In this context, Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy provides a meaningful framework for rethinking the aims and processes of education in the twenty-first century. His vision of integral education bridges ancient Indian wisdom and contemporary educational needs, offering insights into how education can nurture balanced, ethical, and self-aware individuals. By focusing on the harmonious development of body, mind, emotions, and consciousness, Aurobindo's philosophy presents a transformative perspective on education that can contribute to building a more humane, reflective, and sustainable society.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A comprehensive review of related literature was undertaken while conducting the present study. To understand the educational philosophy of Integral Education and its relevance in contemporary education, various theoretical sources, classical writings, policy documents, and research studies were examined. Major academic platforms such as Google Scholar and other scholarly repositories were used to identify relevant literature. Key search terms included “Integral Education and Sri Aurobindo,” “Aurobindo educational philosophy,” “holistic education and Sri Aurobindo,” “value-based education in Indian philosophy,” and “Integral Education in teaching–learning.” Only those studies and sources that directly contributed to understanding the principles of Integral Education and their educational implications were included in the review, while studies not aligned with the objectives of the present research were excluded.

Scholars have extensively examined the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo within the broader framework of Indian philosophical thought and educational traditions. Early interpreters such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1929), T. M. P. Mahadevan (1952), and Kireet Joshi (1993) highlighted Aurobindo’s concept of education as a process of inner growth and self-realization. Their interpretations emphasize that Aurobindo viewed education not merely as intellectual training but as a transformative process that facilitates the integral development of human personality. However, many of these early discussions remained largely philosophical, with comparatively limited focus on their practical implications for modern educational systems.

The conceptual foundation of Aurobindo’s educational thought is presented in his major writings such as *The Human Cycle*, *The Life Divine*, and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, where he described human development as a progressive evolution of consciousness. In his educational reflections, Aurobindo proposed the concept of Integral Education, which emphasizes the harmonious development of five aspects of human personality: physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual. The physical aspect focuses on bodily health and discipline; the vital aspect relates to emotional balance, character formation, and dynamic energies; the mental aspect involves intellectual development and rational thinking; the psychic aspect refers to the inner consciousness and moral awareness; while the spiritual aspect represents the highest stage of self-realization and unity with universal consciousness. This framework suggests that education should cultivate the whole being of the learner rather than focusing exclusively on cognitive achievement.

Modern scholars have further elaborated on the educational implications of Integral Education. Kireet Joshi (2001) explained that Aurobindo’s educational philosophy encourages the discovery of the learner’s inner potential and supports the development of creativity, freedom, and self-discipline. According to him, education should be designed in a way that allows learners to grow naturally according to their abilities and interests. Similarly, A. S. Dalal (2011) emphasized that the aim of education, according to Aurobindo, is to awaken the inner consciousness of the learner so that knowledge becomes a process of self-discovery rather than mere information acquisition.

The pedagogical implications of Aurobindo’s philosophy have also been explored by several researchers. Scholars have highlighted the importance of learner-centered pedagogy, reflective practices, and experiential learning within the framework of Integral Education. The “Free Progress System,” implemented in institutions inspired by Aurobindo’s philosophy, encourages students to learn according to their own pace and interests while teachers function as facilitators and mentors rather than authoritative transmitters of knowledge. Studies examining such approaches suggest that they promote creativity, independent thinking, and intrinsic motivation among learners.

In the contemporary educational context, global frameworks have increasingly emphasized the importance of holistic and well-being-oriented education. The United Nations through the Sustainable Development Goal 4 highlights the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. The framework recognizes that education should nurture social, emotional, and ethical competencies along with academic skills. Similarly, the World Health Organization (2021) reported growing mental health challenges among adolescents worldwide, including anxiety, stress, and depression. These findings underline the necessity for educational approaches that support emotional resilience, psychological well-being, and balanced development among learners. The principles of Integral Education correspond closely with these global concerns, as they emphasize emotional balance, inner awareness, and holistic well-being.

Several contemporary studies have also examined the relevance of Aurobindo’s educational philosophy in modern educational settings. Research suggests that pedagogical approaches inspired by Integral Education enhance students’ self-awareness, creativity, and ethical sensitivity. Scholars have

reported that integrating reflective practices, value-oriented learning, and experiential pedagogy in classrooms can foster emotional stability and moral development among students. Such approaches also help reduce academic stress and promote a positive learning environment that supports both intellectual growth and personal development.

In addition to research studies, recent educational policy reforms in India have increasingly emphasized holistic and value-based education. The National Education Policy 2020 highlights the need to develop learners who possess cognitive abilities along with social, emotional, and ethical competencies. The policy advocates experiential learning, multidisciplinary education, and learner-centered pedagogy, which resonate with the principles of Integral Education. Furthermore, the Indian Knowledge Systems initiative under the Ministry of Education promotes the integration of indigenous knowledge traditions and philosophical insights within modern education. These policy initiatives reflect a growing recognition of the importance of holistic development in education, which aligns closely with Aurobindo's educational vision.

Thus, the reviewed literature indicates that Aurobindo's philosophy of Integral Education provides a comprehensive framework for understanding human development and educational transformation. While its roots lie in India's spiritual and philosophical traditions, contemporary educational research and policy reforms increasingly acknowledge its relevance in addressing modern educational challenges. By integrating physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of development, Integral Education offers a meaningful approach for nurturing balanced, self-aware, and socially responsible individuals capable of contributing to a harmonious and progressive society.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo with a focus on integral development of the individual.
2. To critically examine how Aurobindo's vision can inform contemporary educational policies such as NEP 2020.
3. To identify Potential benefits and challenges of adopting Sri Aurobindo's Integral Education Philosophy in diverse educational contexts.
4. To examine strategies for integrating Integral Education into educational curricula in order to promote the holistic development of learners.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo holds significant relevance in the contemporary educational landscape where increasing emphasis is being placed on holistic and learner-centered development. Modern education systems often focus predominantly on cognitive achievements and academic performance, sometimes overlooking the emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of human growth. Sri Aurobindo's concept of Integral Education offers a comprehensive framework that addresses these limitations by emphasizing the balanced development of the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual aspects of the learner. This perspective highlights that true education should nurture the whole personality and facilitate the unfolding of the learner's inner potential. The significance of the present study lies in its effort to examine and reinterpret Aurobindo's educational ideas in the context of contemporary educational reforms. In India, the National Education Policy 2020 has emphasized holistic development, experiential learning, and value-oriented education. Many of these principles resonate strongly with the philosophy of Integral Education, making Aurobindo's ideas particularly relevant for current curricular and pedagogical reforms. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing discourse on integrating Indian Knowledge Systems within modern educational frameworks. By exploring Aurobindo's philosophy, the study highlights how indigenous educational thought can provide meaningful insights for addressing present-day challenges such as student stress, lack of value orientation, and fragmented learning experiences. The study is also significant for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers, as it provides conceptual insights and recommendations for incorporating holistic educational practices in teaching-learning processes. Ultimately, understanding and applying the principles of Integral Education can help in nurturing balanced, self-aware, and socially responsible individuals who are capable of contributing positively to society and adapting to the complex demands of the modern world.

V. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Table 5.1: Methodology of the Study

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Document Analysis | Analysis of major writings, essays, and letters of Sri Aurobindo to understand the philosophical foundations of Integral Education. |
| Policy Review | Examination of contemporary policy documents such as National Education Policy 2020 and NCFSE 2023 to explore alignment with holistic and integral development. |
| Theoretical Framework | Application of the concept of Integral Education focusing on physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual development. |
| Comparative Perspectives | Review of global approaches to holistic and learner-centered education to identify conceptual similarities with Integral Education. |
| Conceptual Synthesis | Integration of philosophical texts, policy insights, and educational literature to develop a framework for integrating Integral Education in curricula. |

VI. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Corresponding to Objective 1: (To explore the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo with a focus on integral development of the individual)

The educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the holistic development of the individual through the concept of Integral Education. It focuses on nurturing the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual dimensions of human personality. The following findings highlight the key aspects of his educational thought related to the integral development of the individual.

- **Education as Integral Development of the Human Personality**

The educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo emphasizes that the central aim of education is the holistic development of the individual. Education should nurture the physical, emotional, intellectual, psychic, and spiritual dimensions of human personality. This integrated development forms the foundation of the concept of Integral Education, where learning contributes to the harmonious growth of the whole individual rather than focusing only on academic achievement.

- **Inner Potential and Self-Unfoldment as the Basis of Learning**

Aurobindo believed that knowledge exists within the learner, and the purpose of education is to help unfold this inherent potential. Instead of treating learners as passive recipients of information, education should facilitate self-discovery, creativity, and inner awakening. The teacher's role is therefore to guide students in discovering their own capacities and inner truth.

- **Fivefold Model of Integral Education**

Aurobindo's concept of integral development is structured around five essential dimensions of education: physical, vital (emotional and dynamic energies), mental, psychic (inner consciousness), and spiritual development. This framework provides a comprehensive approach that integrates physical well-being, emotional balance, intellectual growth, self-awareness, and higher consciousness in the educational process.

- **Transformative Role of Teachers and Pedagogy**

Aurobindo redefined the role of the teacher as a facilitator and mentor rather than a transmitter of knowledge. Pedagogical approaches such as the Free Progress System encourage self-directed learning, individual pace, and experiential engagement. Such approaches promote intrinsic motivation, creativity, and independent thinking among learners.

- **Relevance of Integral Education in Contemporary Contexts**

Aurobindo's philosophy provides a meaningful framework for addressing current educational challenges such as exam-centered learning, stress among students, and fragmented knowledge systems. By emphasizing value-based learning, emotional intelligence, and spiritual awareness, the concept of integral education offers a holistic and transformative vision for contemporary education, enabling learners to develop both personal fulfilment and social responsibility.

Corresponding to Objective 2: (To critically examine how Aurobindo's vision can inform contemporary educational policies such as NEP 2020)

Table 6.1: Findings of Objective 2

| Aspects | Aurobindo Vision | NEP 2020 |
|---|---|---|
| Holistic Development | Development of physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual dimensions | Focuses on cognitive, emotional, and social development, psychic and spiritual growth not explicitly included |
| Learner-Centered Education | Follows natural growth, interests, and capacities of the learner | Promotes student-centered pedagogy and flexible learning |
| Role of Teacher | Teachers act as facilitators, guiding self-discovery and inner growth | Emphasizes teacher empowerment and mentoring, teacher's self-development and spiritual growth not emphasized |
| Value and Character Education | Cultivates moral, ethical, and spiritual values | Promotes ethics and constitutional values, inner values and consciousness evolution remain limited |
| Experiential and Integral Learning | Learning occurs through reflection, experience, and integration of all personality dimensions | Encourages experiential and competency-based learning |

Aurobindo's vision and NEP 2020 emphasize learner-centered, value-based, and experiential education. NEP aligns with Aurobindo in promoting holistic growth, flexible learning, and teacher facilitation. However, gaps exist in addressing psychic and spiritual development, teacher self-growth, and deeper internalization of values, which are central to Integral Education. Integrating these aspects could make NEP more comprehensive, fostering truly holistic and transformative education that develops the body, mind, emotions, and consciousness together.

Corresponding to Objective 3: (To identify Potential benefits and challenges of adopting Sri Aurobindo's Integral Education Philosophy in diverse educational contexts.)

Some of the Potential Benefits of Adopting Sri Aurobindo's Integral Education Philosophy are as below:

- **Holistic Development:** Promotes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual growth of students.
- **Experiential Learning:** Encourages learning through practical experiences, projects, and active participation.
- **Personalized Learning:** Adapts education to individual students' needs, interests, and learning styles.
- **Interdisciplinary Instruction:** Integrates multiple subjects, fostering creativity and critical thinking.
- **Promotion of Mindfulness and Well-being:** Incorporates yoga, meditation, and mindfulness practices to enhance emotional balance and mental health.
- **Ethical and Moral Education:** Cultivates values, moral reasoning, and social responsibility in students.
- **Teacher Professional Development:** Provides opportunities for educators to enhance pedagogical skills and understanding of integral education principles.

Some of the Challenges of Adopting Sri Aurobindo's Integral Education Philosophy

- **Resource Allocation:** Implementing holistic education requires additional infrastructure, materials, and support staff, which may be limited in some contexts.
- **Curricular Integration:** Existing curricula may need major redesign to include integral education components.
- **Assessment Practices:** Conventional evaluation methods may not reflect holistic development; assessments need updating.
- **Teacher Preparation:** Educators require specialized training to implement interdisciplinary and personalized learning effectively.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Practices like mindfulness, meditation, and yoga may need adaptation to respect cultural and religious diversity.
- **Parental and Community Engagement:** Some parents or community members may resist certain approaches to ethical or moral education.
- **Socio-Political Context:** Political or ideological restrictions can hinder addressing global challenges and promoting social justice.

Corresponding to Objective 4:(To examine strategies for integrating Integral Education into educational curricula in order to promote the holistic development of learners).

- **Holistic Curriculum Design:** Studies highlight that curriculum should address physical, emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of learners to support balanced development.
- **Integration of Arts and Physical Activities:** Literature emphasizes incorporating music, arts, sports, and creative expression within the curriculum to enhance creativity, emotional expression, and overall well-being.
- **Experiential and Activity-Based Learning:** Research suggests that project-based learning, field activities, and experiential pedagogy help students develop deeper conceptual understanding and practical skills.
- **Learner-Centered and Personalized Education:** Scholars recommend flexible curriculum structures that recognize individual differences and allow students to explore their interests and abilities.
- **Interdisciplinary and Integrated Learning:** Studies indicate that connecting different subject areas encourages critical thinking, creativity, and a comprehensive understanding of real-world issues.
- **Value and Character Development:** Findings show that integrating ethical discussions, moral reasoning, and community-oriented activities in curriculum supports character formation and responsible citizenship.
- **Mindfulness and Self-Reflection Practices:** Research recommends incorporating practices such as meditation, reflection, and self-awareness activities to enhance emotional balance and inner development.
- **Teacher as Facilitator of Learning:** Literature emphasizes that teachers should guide and mentor students rather than simply transmit knowledge, encouraging inquiry, creativity, and self-development.
- **Alignment with Modern Educational Reforms:** Studies indicate that principles of Integral Education align with contemporary educational reforms that emphasize holistic development, multidisciplinary learning, and learner-centered pedagogy.

VII. CONCLUSION

The educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo offers a comprehensive and transformative vision of education that emphasizes the integral development of the human personality. His concept of Integral Education highlights the harmonious growth of the physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual dimensions of the learner, suggesting that education should nurture not only intellectual abilities but also emotional balance, moral values, and inner awareness. The review of literature and conceptual analysis indicate that Aurobindo's educational thought provides a meaningful framework for addressing several challenges of contemporary education, such as fragmented learning, lack of value orientation, and increasing stress among students. His emphasis on experiential learning, self-discovery, and the role of the teacher as a facilitator supports a learner-centered approach that encourages creativity, self-awareness, and holistic well-being. In the present educational context, these ideas resonate strongly with recent reforms such as the National Education Policy 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023, which advocate holistic development, multidisciplinary learning, and value-based education. Therefore, integrating the principles of Integral Education into curricula and pedagogical practices can contribute to the development of balanced, reflective, and socially responsible individuals who are capable of responding thoughtfully to the complexities of the modern world while remaining grounded in deeper human values.

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