

Implementation of Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Education at Primary Level: A Case Study

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Abstract

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872–1950) was one of the greatest philosophers of his time. Sri Aurobindo presented the concept of Integral Education and Principles of True Teaching which has great relevance in the present education system in the context of deteriorating values. The education system if guided by his philosophy can unleash the great potential in each child. The study aims to explore the extent to which a reputed School in Delhi is following Sri Aurobindo's philosophy at the pre-primary and primary level and its impact on the students. The case study method was used and data obtained were analysed qualitatively to arrive at some significant findings. The outcome was found to be positive and beneficial for primary school students. This study, if followed up with similar research findings in other educational institutions, can lead to a major paradigm shift in the present education system.

INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872 -1950) was one of the greatest philosophers and educators of his time. His philosophy has great relevance in the present education system in the context of deteriorating values. Sri Aurobindo's vision of education is reflected in his quote, "It should be clear that the only true education will be that which will

be an instrument for the real working of the spirit in the mind and body of the individual and the nation." According to him, real education is that which provides freedom, and creativity, develops the mind, moral and aesthetic sense and finally leads to the development of an individual's spiritual powers.

Today, there is a crisis of character and morality in the present education

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system. The system is suffering from the melodies of materialism, lack of spirituality and erosion of values. Students lack discipline and strength of character. The basic tenets of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy have a great role to play in the current scenario. Sri Aurobindo deals with ways of bringing about harmonious development of a child's personality, developing concentration, self-control and strength of character. The education system if guided by his philosophy can unleash the great potential in each child and lead him along the path of spirituality to attain transcendence.

To make our children good human beings, it is necessary to redesign and revitalise the education system. To regenerate the education system, radical changes will have to be brought about in the activities and methods of teaching. Sri Aurobindo through his philosophy gives us glimpses of such an education system which develops the latent powers of children and develops their self-control, humanism and other desirable values. Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy has been put into practice in some educational institutions in India. The Mother's International School is one such Institute. This institute has been selected for this research study. It was established in 1956 and is one of the most reputed private schools in Delhi. It is a private school run by the Sri Aurobindo Society and draws its inspiration from Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa (The Mother).

The school aims to help the child to realize his unique potential in light of Sri Aurobindo's vision of Integral Education. The questions that the study attempts to answer are:

1. Are the methods of teaching and activities carried out in the school based on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy?
2. Are these methods and activities able to instil values and provide holistic education to the children?

A review of related literature showed that no such study about the above research questions has been conducted earlier. However, many researchers have written conceptual research articles on Sri Aurobindo's Educational Philosophy. The research articles by Mohan (2013), Kaur (2015), Rani (2016) and Sharma (2016) have highlighted the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in the education system. But very few researches have been conducted on the implementation of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in educational institutions. Rao (2015) explored the process of education at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Puducherry and found that holistic quality education is being provided there. Since a positive impact of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy has been found, it becomes imperative to conduct further research in this direction to confirm the findings of the previous research. Also, there is a need to study the implementation and impact of his philosophy on primary school children because

appropriate educational methods used at this stage can form a foundation for a strong character and holistic personality development. If Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is found effective, it should be taken up for further research at the national level so that its benefits can percolate into the students' community as a whole.

SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

In his 'Essays on Gita,' Sri Aurobindo presented the concept of Integral Education. Integral education regards the child as a growing soul and aims at developing all facets of his personality. It attempts to awaken his latent potentialities and bring out all that is best. As per Sri Aurobindo, integral education aims at holistic development through developing the five principal aspects of a human being: the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual. Physical education focuses on the harmonious development of the body parts and coordinated body movements. Sri Aurobindo emphasised *yoga* and *pranayama* for physical development. Vital education aims at the development of sense organs and the transformation of one's character. It can be achieved through the training of senses and the development of desirable habits. Mental education deals with developing the power of concentration and control of thoughts. It also emphasises on developing an understanding of things rather than cramming. Psychic education assists

a human being to become conscious of a psychic presence embedded in his inner being and discover the true purpose of his existence on earth. Spiritual education aims to detach from earthly manifestations and realize the presence of God.

Sri Aurobindo has given three fundamental principles of true teaching. According to the first principle, "Nothing can be taught". It implies that the teacher should not impart knowledge but rather show the pupil where knowledge lies and how to acquire it. As per the second principle "The mind has to be consulted in its growth". The child is not an object to be transformed by the teachers or parents. The main aim of education is to find the inherent potential in a child, draw it out, encourage the child to grow by his nature and perfect his potential for noble use. The third principle says, "Work from the near to the far, from that which is, to that which shall be". Education should begin from the surroundings, rather than concepts which are alien.

Sri Aurobindo has also suggested some methods of teaching. Each individual is unique and should be considered a self-developing soul. Therefore, methods of teaching should be individualized and dynamic, involving the active participation of the child in the growth of his potential. Every child should be given the freedom to grow naturally and spontaneously. Pedagogy should be such that it inspires joy in the child. Teaching

should begin with the study and observation of nature. For teaching moral values, discipline should not be imposed rather it should be suggested through daily conversation and reading books containing great thoughts of great souls. The child should be directed to the right path by winning his heart and helping him reject bad habits and substitute them with desirable ones.

Every child is an investigator, a hero worshipper and likes to hear interesting narratives. By using the storytelling method, these natural qualities can be utilised to focus and concentrate the attention of children. Questions should be asked while teaching, to arouse students' curiosity and interest. Overburdening the mind with bookish knowledge through rigid teaching and memorisation of rules should be avoided. Informal activities should be used to clear the concept. Once the concept is understood, it can be formalised by introducing the technical names. Opportunities should be given to the child to explore, find out cause-effect relationships, use logical reasoning and draw inferences from the facts. Initially, examples of any particular concept should be discussed and these should lead to the generalisations and rules. Sri Aurobindo suggests an environment of love, sympathy and freedom during teaching. He advocates learning by doing and self-experience by the child. Education should involve cooperative activities

of the teacher and students and should be according to the needs and interests of the child.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Since Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is very vast and has many dimensions, it is difficult to cover adequately all the aspects in one research study. Therefore, the study is delimited to a critical analysis of the methods of teaching and activities advocated by Sri Aurobindo and their implementation at pre-primary and primary levels in Mother's International School.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the extent to which the methods of teaching and activities organised in pre-primary and primary classes are as per Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.
2. To study the impact of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy on the students at pre-primary and primary levels.

METHODOLOGY

Population and sample of the study: The population included pre-primary and primary classes from Nursery to Class V of Mothers International School. The sample included 120 students from classes Nursery, I and III, five teachers from primary school, In-charge of nursery wing and Headmistress of primary wing. The case study method was used to examine the implementation of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy at the primary

level in Mother's International School, New Delhi. The activities organised and methods of teaching were observed through participant observation (for primary, nursery, I and III) over one month. The relevant points were noted in the context of the objectives of the study at the time of observation and later elaborated upon. The teachers in-charge of the nursery wing and the headmistress of the primary wing, were interviewed. They were asked questions related to various aspects of the implementation of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in the school and its impact on the students. Their responses were noted down.

Data analysis: Data obtained was analysed qualitatively. The observation of classes and responses obtained during interviews were analysed in the context of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. The extent to which the method of teaching and activities organised as per Sri Aurobindo's philosophy was examined. The influence of Sri Aurobindo's educational tenets on the students was also investigated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since the study is limited in scope in terms of its sample and population (which is limited to a single school), it cannot claim to make any generalisations. However, some innovative methods of teaching and unique activities were observed in this school which are worth discussing as they had a major impact on the students of this school.

Methods of teaching: The methods of teaching are child-centred where students are active participants. Children in various classes were observed to be happy and cheerful and enthusiastically participated in various activities. At the pre-primary level, the play-way method was used to teach the students. The children were asked to bring pebbles from the ground and count them. There is a sand pit area attached to each classroom where students enjoyed playing with sand, running, jumping and playing freely. Opportunity for physical development and development of gross motor skills is provided in this manner. Fine motor skills are developed through activities like drawing, transferring objects from one container to another, pouring liquids, pounding, etc.

The school has a Montessori lab where Montessori method is followed. Students learn concepts from working with concrete objects. Training of senses is accomplished through various activities such as distinguishing between smooth and rough surfaces using touch boards, identifying colours of pebbles, smelling materials and listening to music. Students are also trained in everyday skills like buttoning, tying laces and using lock and key through practical hands-on experiences. For teaching Hindi, flashcards having objects starting with the alphabet to be taught are shown by the teacher and students make drawings based on their observations. They also

match pictures with the alphabet and words for further clarity and retention of concepts. Students are taught counting using beads and number cards. At the primary level, the concept of addition is introduced by adding objects like pencils, then pictures of objects followed by counting on fingers.

The storytelling method is also used by teachers. To teach the English alphabet, the teacher tells a story having lots of words starting with the alphabet to be taught. Also, English alphabets are taught by relating them to their phonetic sounds instead of asking the students to cram. There is another unique activity called circle time. The students sit in a circle along with the teacher and discuss a particular theme. First, the teacher checks their previous knowledge related to the theme and then builds upon it. Students discuss their experiences and knowledge related to the theme. It is a kind of social constructivism based on mutual learning and discussion of personal experiences. This kind of teaching is also in accordance with Sri Aurobindo's educational ideology of moving from near to far; concrete to abstract.

At primary level, the project method is used for teaching EVS and English in an integrated manner on topics like Myself, around me and Delhi in Class I. Students in small groups complete activities like pasting pictures on charts, and

making figures with paper, and circular cut-outs. This is followed by presentations by the groups. Students are also taken for visits. For instance, for the project on Delhi, students visited various monuments in Delhi. This was followed up with a discussion on what they observed and learnt.

Activities organised: At the primary level, students are given exposure to varied activities such as dance, music, yoga, gymnastics, clay modelling and meditation. Activities like clay modelling and freehand drawing provide an opportunity to express their emotions and enhance their creativity. Annual talent events and sports events are held at the primary level in which every student participates. Activities like meditation, yoga and prayer are an integral part of the curriculum right from the pre-primary level. Such activities lead to concentration of mind and spiritual inclination among students right from childhood. At the primary level, students have a creative writing notebook. In this notebook, they write on topics such as 'If I was trapped in a bubble...' or make their own stories or poems on the given theme. This gives them ample opportunity to think creatively and express themselves freely.

Impact of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy on pre-primary and primary school students: The students were observed to be active class participants. They showed

conceptual clarity and were able to reply to application-based questions asked by teachers. The students showed respect for their teachers and listened to them. They maintained discipline even when the teacher was not there in the class. The students moved in proper lines for the assembly and bus line without any directions from teachers, thus showing evidence of self-discipline. They participated with full enthusiasm and vigour in various academic and co-curricular activities. They were observed to be cheerful and happy most of the time.

CONCLUSION

The Mothers International School provided a truly holistic education to pre-primary and primary students. It was found to implement Sri Aurobindo's philosophy effectively. The school provided integral education by providing vital education through training of senses in the Montessori Lab. Physical development was focused upon through yoga and games. Mental education was provided through hands-on activities like project work. Psychic and spiritual education was given by practising moral values of humility, love, respect, meditation and recitation of bhajans. Daily conversations with children in the form of Circle Time provided opportunities for free expression of feelings leading to socio-emotional development. The fundamental principles of true teaching given by Sri Aurobindo are also practised in

true spirit. Students are exposed to various activities at the primary level, their inherent talents and interests are identified and they are consulted to further choose the activities of their interest. Also, students are taught using concrete objects initially later followed by an introduction to abstract concepts. Thus, they move from concrete to abstract and near to far as advocated by Sri Aurobindo. According to Sri Aurobindo, methods of teaching should be such that they inspire joy in the child. The use of the play-way method, storytelling and interesting activities made learning joyful. Also, the teachers dealt with the students very lovingly. This made the children cheerful. Children are not overburdened with bookish knowledge rather they are provided ample opportunities to explore, investigate and express their creativity through active participation in activities and projects. The influence of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy pervades the environment of the school. It provided an ideal setting to develop a spiritual inclination and strength of character. The outcome of implementing Sri Aurobindo's philosophy was found to be positive and beneficial for primary school students as their personalities developed holistically. If further researches confirm these findings in other institutions also, integral education has the potential to lead to a major paradigm shift in the present education system.

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