



Integral Education

The thought and vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was focused on the divinisation of man. It aimed at a transformation of our human existence with its ignorance and suffering into a divine life united inwardly with the Supreme and expressing outwardly that greater, infinite existence in a transformed mind, life and body. Their aim was not only that this change would be made in a select number of individuals, but that a new divine principle of being and consciousness, the supramental consciousness, would be active in the earth consciousness and working towards its transformation. They envisioned that this consciousness would be accessible to all those in humanity that could open and become receptive to its influence and power. In this wider aim of the general uplifting of humanity towards its divine possibilities and transformation, education has an important role, because the early years of life are so important in the formation of the character and instrumental nature, and because a poor or misguided education can be so destructive of the actualization of an individual's divine potentialities.

Although this area of their thought and vision was less developed or articulated than some other areas, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did establish various guiding principles for a new form of education, which became known as the Free Progress System, and the Mother established a school that was based on these principles. In addition, we can find in their writings and talks many other guidelines and suggestions that can be readily applied in the educational setting. This educational approach can also be informed and developed by integrating it with other foundational writings such as those in Integral Yoga Psychology, and with alternative educational methods with which it is in affinity, such as the Montessori method. Other thinkers and writers following Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's approaches also have made advances in the consolidation and development of integral education. In many ways, and due in part to its applied nature, this area of study is most readily accessible to further research and development.

Sri Aurobindo outlined three fundamental principles of integral education. The first is that “nothing can be taught.” He indicated that the proper role of the educator is not to instruct or to impart knowledge to the pupil, but rather to help and guide the student in acquiring knowledge for himself or herself. The educator's role is to suggest and to encourage the pupil in the quest for knowledge, and to assist the learner in finding it. The true knowledge comes from within, it is not supplied in the form of information from outside. The provision of outside resources and a stimulating and enriching environment is useful in that they may help to awaken the individual to potentialities that are hidden within, while at the same time providing materials and a field of experience with which to manifest these latent possibilities. But the choice of these materials, the



manner and timing in which they are utilized by the learner, must be determined according to nature and rhythm of inner development and awakening of the individual student.

The second principle is related to the first. It is that “the mind has to be consulted in its own growth.” This means, again, not to impose knowledge on the pupil, nor to arrange for the student to develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, or a prearranged career. Each individual has a unique dharma, a particular Divine-given talent and duty, and it is the educator's responsibility to help the student identify these innate interests, predispositions, and abilities and to develop and perfect them. To externally impose some arbitrary set of ideas, capacities, or qualities determined by others is to deflect the individual from his or her natural developmental trajectory, to separate and estrange the person from their own soul, and to lead the individual in wrong directions and hamper and cut short the potentialities of the life.

The third principle is “to work from the near to the far.” This principle pertains to the basic observation that in addition to the importance of the soul and its past development in shaping the individual nature, other factors such as heredity, the immediate surroundings in which one lives and breathes, one's nationality and ethnic customs, the country in which one lives, all play important roles in the development of the outer nature. Educationists should use these material, work in the individual's own context, allow the individual's roots in this native soil to grow strong and develop. When this basis is securely established, it is easier and safer for the individual to reach out and expand the circle of these first established moorings. But this principle may be applied to various levels of development, not only the physical and cultural milieu. In general, the individual must be guided from what is known, what is accomplished and secure, to further extensions of knowledge and ability that lie within reach but are as yet unrealized or undeveloped.

The Mother also established basic guidelines for integral education, as well as a wealth of practical advice and suggestions. She indicated that a complete education must include five aspects that correspond to five fundamental aspects of the human being— the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic, and the spiritual—and provided a sound basis of knowledge for the proper and full development of each of these domains. Here we provide a few of her guiding principles and suggestions in each area.

She indicated that the education of the body should begin at birth and continue throughout the life. In the education of the physical consciousness, method, order, and discipline become paramount. The early development of sound habits, consciously cultivated and controlled, yet supple and adaptive to circumstances, is important for a full and effective manifestation of the possibilities of the nature. All the parts of the nature are intertwined, and the divine possibilities of the nature, as well as the mind and vital, each require a sound body for their full manifestation. Habits of proper eating, rest, hygiene should be developed early. Also required is “a total, methodical and harmonious development of all the parts and movements of the body.”



The Mother indicated that the education of the vital is very important, but there is much confusion about how to go about it. She also said that it is very difficult and therefore requires a great deal of patience and persistence. She indicated it has two aspects: “The first is to develop and utilize the sense organs, the second is to become conscious and gradually master of one's character and in the end to achieve its transformation.” She said that the development of the sense organs should continue throughout life, and they can be cultivated to achieve a much greater precision and power than generally believed. For example, she indicated it is possible to widen the physical consciousness and project it out of oneself so that the senses could operate at a great distance from the physical body. In addition there are other senses that can be cultivated such as the aesthetic sense, the sense of beauty and harmony. Regarding the gaining of conscious awareness and mastery over the vital, the Mother indicated that this should begin at an early age with the child being taught to observe his or her reactions, impulses, desires, and their causes. In addition, there must be instilled in the child a will towards progress and perfection, towards the mastery of these movements. It is then a matter of proceeding towards this mastery with strictness and persistence, through the exertion of effort and application, which in turn strengthens the power of the will.