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The Mother inaugurating Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education, 6 January 1952

With this issue, we start a year-long series (August 2021 to August 2022) of especially curated issues of Sri Aurobindo's Action Journal to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo and the 75th anniversary of India's Independence. We start the series with this issue on *Education for India's Resurgence* Curated by Beloo Mehra.

Editorial

Education for India's Resurgence

We are happy to launch a special series of Sri Aurobindo's Action journal dedicated to celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo and 75 years of India's Independence. Starting with this issue, every issue over the next one year will explore a specific theme or subject in the light of the vision and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Each issue will be compiled by a different editor, thus giving our readers a rich and diverse set of materials to read and enjoy. The common thread is our aspiration to explore the significance of these areas toward the resurgence of India and the future of humanity.

The theme for this first issue of the special series is — Education for India's Resurgence.

Based largely on an industrial-rational-materialistic view of individual, life, and society, India's mainstream education, as elsewhere, has been reduced to being a means for individual and social success, a doorway to socio-economic upward mobility. The limited focus of such education is to acquire certain skill sets and gather certain subject expertise to help secure one's economic and social future. Mad rush to pursue a career-oriented education, high demand for private tutors, and coaching centres for children as young as fifth-graders clearly suggest that education has become like any other business.

A good education should certainly help learners become equipped with the right training and preparation for a profession or vocation of their choice. But this must be done in the larger framework of a wider and deeper purpose of education. Grounding our education in a more humane, holistic, Indian spiritual view of an individual and the aim of human life is the need of our times.

There is also a growing sense of disillusionment among a large section of India's youth, particularly urban youth, with the shallowness and superficiality they see being presented as the Indian cultural way of life through mass media and other pop-culture means. This leads them to quickly label the Indian 'way' as regressive, outdated, backward-looking and irrelevant for present times. Being uprooted from the spirit and ethos of the Indian cultural view of life and living, they are prone to believe that whatever is modern and progressive is also 'Western' and vice versa.

Education must help correct this. Our children and young people must be encouraged to develop a profounder understanding of the Indian view of human life and its purpose, the idea of a gradual progress and evolution of an individual, and the Indian approach to a harmonious individual and collective existence.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognises this need, but only partially. It speaks of the ancient Indian knowledge tradition as its "guiding light":

"The rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this Policy. The pursuit of knowledge (Jnana), wisdom (Pragyaa), and truth (Satya) was always considered in Indian thought and philosophy as the highest human goal. The aim of education in ancient India was not just the acquisition of knowledge as preparation for life in this world, or life beyond schooling, but for the complete realization and liberation of the self"¹.

Interestingly, while the policy speaks of "complete realisation and liberation of the self" as an aim for education valued in ancient India, it does not speak of what is meant by such an aim in our contemporary context, and how it may be pursued. The policy document also fails to mention what is meant by the 'self' which is supposed to guide the education envisioned for India's future resurgence.

It is best to leave it to time to see the degree and extent to which some of the systemic reforms such as greater decentralisation in decision-making, institutional autonomy, greater curricular choice, rethinking student assessment, or revitalising teacher education, as mentioned in NEP 2020, are actually implemented. Turning our attention to something more fundamental, something often ignored in all educational rethinking in our country, including the NEP, we pose a



STUDENTS' PRAYER
[Given at the inauguration
of the Sri Aurobindo
International University
Centre.]

Make of us the hero warriors
we aspire to become. May
we fight successfully the
great battle of the future
that is to be born, against
the past that seeks to
endure; so that the new
things may manifest and
we may be ready to receive
them.

6 JANUARY 1952

|| The Mother ||

¹New Education Policy 2020, p. 4

question: are there some essentials which must be kept at the forefront as we envision an education for India's resurgence?

Sri Aurobindo takes us 'back to basics' in this regard:

*"...there are three things which have to be taken into account in a true and living education, the man, the individual in his commonness and in his uniqueness, the nation or people and universal humanity. It follows that that alone will be a true and living education which helps to bring out to full advantage, makes ready for the full purpose and scope of human life all that is in the individual man, and which at the same time helps him to enter into his right relation with the life, mind and soul of the people to which he belongs and with that great total life, mind and soul of humanity of which he himself is a unit and his people or nation a living, a separate and yet inseparable member."*²

This foundational principle can help us arrive at a clear picture of our true national education. India today stands at a critical turning of her destiny, and if she aspires to repossess her inner greatness and takes her due and natural place in the life of humanity, her one great need is to find and rebuild her true self — in individuals and in her people.

The role of education in shaping the collective consciousness of a people is well understood. That is why it is highly important at this juncture that we Indians wake up to the need of infusing our education with the true timeless spirit of India, which by its very nature takes into account all the three things Sri Aurobindo emphasises in the passage quoted above: the individual in his commonness and in his uniqueness, the nation or people to which the individual belongs, and the universal humanity.

Mainstream Indian education must be based on a model of human development which recognises the role of a conscious aspiration and effort to constantly develop, perfect and harmonise the various becomings of the real self, the soul, the inmost being, even when we are not in direct touch with that real being within.

Education for India's resurgence can never ignore its collective or social purpose, which is closely inter-related to individual existence. But this purpose is not limited to only the immediate society or nation, it extends to the whole of humanity. This has great implications for curriculum planning, pedagogy and actual day-to-day teaching practice in classroom. But here again it is important to ensure that we first have our fundamentals correct.

Sri Aurobindo reminds us that a true and living education should have three central aims — 1) for an individual, it is growth of the soul and its powers and possibilities, 2) for the nation, the preservation, strengthening and enrichment of the nation-soul and its Dharma, and 3) to raise both the individual and nation into powers of the life and ascending mind and soul of humanity.

*"And at no time, will [education] lose sight of man's highest object, the awakening and development of his spiritual being."*³

Each nation is a unique *shakti*, and has a distinct group-soul with its particular temperament and inner genius which determines the role it is destined to play in the world. India today is trying to re-discover her unique place and role in the future of the world. It is time for we Indians to sincerely ask ourselves — what is my individual obligation toward helping India rise up to her true genius and work toward fulfilling her true mission in the world? This is more than an outwardly-oriented vitalistic-sensationalist activism which generally ends up boosting the collective ego in the name of cultural or national pride; it necessitates searching for the truth of one's being as well as the true being of India.

An education rooted in the deeper aim of 'knowing oneself' is absolutely indispensable. Only when we truly know who we are as individuals, in the complexity of our being, we become more conscious of our choices and decisions in life. Only then do we become not only responsible and creative citizens but also more conscious and well-balanced individuals walking on the path of a conscious evolution of the human race.

Guided by a spiritual view of the aim of human life, Indian education must help the individual prepare himself for that aim. It should aim to develop the physical, the mental, the emotional, the aesthetic parts of learners not only because they may have a greater satisfaction or because "*that is man's finer nature, because so he feels himself more alive and fulfilled.*"⁴

It should aim to develop all these parts also and primarily "*because these things too are the expressions of the spirit,...*"⁵

Learners' moral and ethical development should be much more than a means to develop "*well-regulated individual and social conduct which keeps society going and leads towards a better, a more rational, temperate, sympathetic, self-restrained dealing with our fellows.*"⁶ Such moral and ethical development — both for the learner and teacher —

²CWSA, 1: 425

³CWSA, 1: 427

⁴CWSA, 20: 35

⁵CWSA, 20: 35

⁶CWSA, 20: 35

must become a means for greater self-discovery and self-becoming.

A true Indian education must not reject any aim of life or exclude any activity, but should take them all and steer them toward a greater purpose of facilitating in the learner an aspiration to gradually discover the deeper truth of one's being and nature. It must never reject matter or learning and mastery of matter, but it should direct the learner to view matter as only a limited manifestation of the spirit which is involved in it.

These and other related points are the subject of this special issue focused on the theme — “Education for India's Resurgence.” Keeping an eye on mainstream education in India, we have carefully curated a set of readings which will throw light on some specific areas that must be re-thought and re-energised if we wish education to contribute toward a true Indian renaissance.

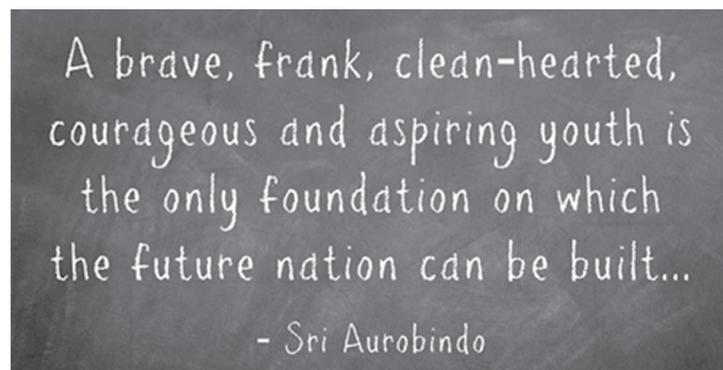
Inspiring and important passages from the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and several other leading lights are included which highlight essential aspects relevant to our theme. Given the large number of writings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother on various areas of education, some essential

insights from those writings have been integrated in a couple of essays allowing for a more focused presentation.

Readers will also find here some fresh voices from the field of practice. A detailed report highlights a Bengaluru-based school's experiments in the area of Vital Education. A young college student shares with us some of her experiences and suggestions. And finally, Yuvaan's quest is now also directed toward exploring an important aspect of education necessary for the integral development of the learner.

Offered with Gratitude at the Feet of the Mother.

BELOO MEHRA



Indian View of Aim of Life and Education

For education to be truly national in spirit, it must be:

“...an education proper to the Indian soul and need and temperament and culture that we are in quest of, not indeed something faithful merely to the past, but to the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self-creation, to her eternal spirit. It is this that we have to get clear in our minds and for that we must penetrate down to fundamentals and make those firm before we can greatly execute.”⁷

To ground our educational philosophy, policy and approaches in the evolving soul of India, in her eternal spirit, we must, first of all, thoroughly examine the Indian vision of the concept of man — the individual, and the aim(s) of human life, which can be the true foundation of our vision of education.

Indian View of Life and Aim of Human Existence

The Indian vision of human existence tells us that an individual is, in his or her essence, a dynamic eternal portion

of the Divine, capable of finding that inmost divinity and exceeding his outward, apparent, natural self. While on the surface, a human being may seem to be a half-evolved creature still carrying in him the influence of the animal and all other rudimentary life-forms that is not at all his whole being and is not in any way his real being. Outwardly veiled in the works of the tri-fold nature of *prakriti* (*tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*), an individual is always moving to gradual self-discovery, and is destined to find his true inmost self.

To truly know oneself is the key to knowing all — this truth revealed by Indian seers and sages has great significance for the field of education. But what is this self that we are trying to know? For this we must have a clear understanding of: what essentially a human being is; what are the different parts or layers of a human being; how are these different parts interconnected; and how should these parts be developed and educated. This must inform the blueprint of education for India's resurgence.

"The aim of education is not to prepare a man to succeed in life and society, but to increase his perfectibility to its utmost." (CWM, 12: 120)

⁷CWSA, 1: 418-419

Know Thyself: Central Aim of Education

The most important aim of education, the Mother tells us is — *“To know oneself and to control oneself.”* She explains further what this means:

*“This means to be conscious of one’s inner truth, conscious of the different parts of one’s being and their respective functions. You must know why you do this, why you do that; you must know your thoughts, know your feelings, all your activities, all your movements, of what you are capable, etc. And to know oneself is not enough: this knowledge must bring a conscious control.”*⁸

An individual is not a single entity, but rather a complex being with different parts — physical, vital, mental — intermixed and interacting with one another; but these are only the outer instruments or powers of the true self within, generally spoken of as the soul. Indian yogic psychology speaks of the double nature of human beings. Ordinarily human beings primarily live in their outer nature and know themselves only through the ego-self. Behind the surface or frontal consciousness of the outer being there is an inner or subliminal consciousness. And behind the inner being is the true, inmost being, which is a spark of the Divine Presence within the individual. This inmost part is often called soul, but in Sri Aurobindo’s terminology is referred to as psychic being.

The external nature is further determined by an intermix of three components — mind, life, and body, constituting the three parts of the outer being — the mental, the vital and the physical. Though separate and distinct, these three main divisions of the outer being are interconnected and interact with one another. Thus, we have several subdivisions whose workings can be discerned by close self-observation and analysis for greater self-control.

Each part has its own nature or even different natures contained in the same part, and tries to assert its dominance and act according to its own preferences, likes and dislikes. This is what leads to a sense of ignorance about why we behave in a certain way or feel a certain emotion or sensation, leading up to a sort of inability to gain mastery over ourselves. The path to knowing oneself begins by knowing the working of these parts and becoming conscious of their movements through constant self-observation and a sincere examination of our motivations for all that we choose to do or not do. The more we know about ourselves, the greater the self-control and self-mastery we can gain.

Facilitating such self-awareness for the learners must become one of the most essential goals of education. In order to do this, schools and colleges must offer opportunities for learners to engage in thoughtful activities which can help develop their various faculties of observation, analysis, reasoning, imagination and expression. Curriculum planning, pedagogical approaches, selection of study materials, learning activities, assessment methods, all must be decided keeping this purpose in consideration. Introspection, journaling, quiet contemplation, self-analysis and other such inward-oriented exercises must be part of regular activity in the classroom. In the hands of a good teacher, every subject can become a means for the learner to know a little bit more of himself or herself.

The inner or subliminal being also has an inner mind, an inner vital and an inner physical which are in touch with the corresponding universal planes of existence. While the outer being knows things only indirectly from their outer touches as perceived through the senses and the outer mind, the inner being is directly aware of the surrounding universal forces that act upon and through us. The inner being receives the contacts of the environing world through the environmental consciousness; this is why it is important to develop a deeper awareness about the nature of the working of this inner being.

*“It is through this [environmental consciousness] that the thoughts, feelings etc. of others pass to enter into one — it is through this also that waves of the universal force — desire, sex, etc. come in and take possession of the mind, vital or body.”*⁹

Even a sufficient mental awareness of the working of this inner being can help the growing mind to appreciate the value of developing a good sense of discernment when it comes to external contacts. By gradually taking charge of the suggestions and influences that enter into one’s being, one can progressively develop a more conscious sense of individuality.

The outer and inner beings are both supported by an inmost being which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother speak of as the “psychic”. The psychic entity is a spark or portion of the Divine present in all things and creatures. In the human being, in the course of evolution, it grows into an individual psychic personality and is called the psychic being.

Indian spiritual psychology speaks of the *ātman*, the Self, which is unborn, and stands above the evolutionary process and is unaffected by it. The psychic being is a projection of this *ātman*, is the evolving soul which, though immortal in its essence, passes through cycles of physical birth and death, growing from life to life. It expresses itself through its

⁸CWM, 4: 34

⁹CWSA, 31: 601

instruments of mind, life and body, and evolves as these parts are developed through life experiences and education. But for a long time, it exercises a concealed, partial and indirect action on these instruments.

Sri Aurobindo describes the true role and purpose of the psychic being in the evolution of human being in these words:

*“It is this secret psychic entity which is the true original Conscience in us deeper than the constructed and conventional conscience of the moralist, for it is this which points always towards Truth and Right and Beauty, towards Love and Harmony and all that is a divine possibility in us, and persists till these things become the major need of our nature. It is the psychic personality in us that flowers as the saint, the sage, the seer; when it reaches its full strength, it turns the being towards the Knowledge of Self and the Divine, towards the supreme Truth, the supreme Good, the supreme Beauty, Love and Bliss, the divine heights and largenesses, and opens us to the touch of spiritual sympathy, universality, oneness.”*¹⁰

All that is genuinely beautiful and noble and right and true is an inherent quality of this inmost being, the psychic personality in us. The more this psychic entity, this divine spark grows and evolves in us, the more these high and noble qualities grow in us. When we aspire for Beauty, Truth, Good, Right, Love and Harmony, it is the psychic in us that aspires.

Shouldn't education's highest goal be to help facilitate the gradual evolution of this inmost divine spark within each learner?

“The fulfilment of the individual is not the utmost development of his egoistic intellect, vital force, physical well-being and the utmost satisfaction of his mental, emotional, physical cravings, but the flowering of the divine in him to its utmost capacity of wisdom,

*power, love and universality and through this flowering his utmost realisation of all the possible beauty and delight of existence.”*¹¹

An education necessary for true resurgence of Indian spirit must give great value to appropriate care; growth and cultivation of the mental; intellectual; ethical; dynamic; aesthetic and physical parts of the being; it must also recognise that all these are powers of a soul that manifests through them and grows with their growth. This is how an individual gradually ascends to his or her ultimate divine selfhood.

Education must facilitate an opening in young minds and hearts to the fact that there is a personal inner truth, independent of, and transcending all the layers of outer identity of the individual. And that the discovery of this inner truth through intense self-search and deep self-knowledge is a fundamental aim of human life. Seen in this light, all life becomes a means of education, in order for us to walk the path of discovering and realising the aim of our life – individually and collectively.

BELOO MEHRA

“National education cannot be defined briefly in one or two sentences, but we may describe it tentatively as the education which starting with the past and making full use of the present builds up a great nation. Whoever wishes to cut off the nation from its past is no friend of our national growth. Whoever fails to take advantage of the present is losing us the battle of life. We must therefore save for India all that she has stored up of knowledge, character and noble thought in her immemorial past. We must acquire for her the best knowledge that [the West] can give her and assimilate it to her own peculiar type of national temperament. We must introduce the best methods of teaching humanity has developed, whether modern or ancient. And all these we must harmonise into a system which will be impregnated with the spirit of self-reliance so as to build up men and not machines...”

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, 7: 895)

¹⁰CWSA, 21: 239

¹¹CWSA, 25: 46



EDUCATION FOR INDIA'S RESURGENCE

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Curated by: *Beloo Mehra*

Basic Issues of Indian Education

Editorial Note: In August 1965 an Education Commission of the Government of India visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to evaluate the ideals and educational methods of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE). At that time a group of SAICE teachers submitted a few questions to the Mother (presented below in italics).

In the answers as well as further explanations provided by the Mother to follow-up questions, we discover some key fundamentals, presented precisely and succinctly and in a sutra-like manner bringing out their essence, which must be at the basis of Indian education if it has to aim at a true resurgence of Indian spirit in new forms.



The Mother at the courtyard of SAICE, 1953

1) In view of the present and the future of national and international living, what is it that India should aim at in education?

Prepare her children for the rejection of falsehood and the manifestation of Truth.

2) By what steps could the country proceed to realise this high aim? How can a beginning in that direction be made?

Make matter ready to manifest the Spirit.

3) What is India's true genius and what is her destiny?

To teach to the world that matter is false and impotent unless it becomes the manifestation of the Spirit.

4) How does the Mother view the progress of Science and Technology in India? What contribution can they make to the growth of the Spirit in man?

Its only use is to make the material basis stronger, completer and more effective for the manifestation of the Spirit.

5) The country feels much concerned about national unity. What is the Mother's vision of things? How will India do her duty by herself and by the world?

The unity of all the nations is the compelling future of the world. But for the unity of all nations to be possible, each nation must first realise its own unity.

6) *The language problem harasses India a good deal. What would be our correct attitude in this matter?*

Unity must be a living fact and not the imposition of an arbitrary rule. When India will be one, she will have spontaneously a language understood by all.

7) *Education has normally become literacy and a social status. Is it not an unhealthy trend? But how to give education its inner worth and intrinsic enjoyability?*

Get out of conventions and insist on the growth of the soul.

8) *What illusions and delusions is our education today beset with? How could we possibly keep clear of them?*

a) The almost exclusive importance given to success, career and money.

b) Insist on the paramount importance of the contact with the Spirit and the growth and manifestation of the Truth of the being.

5 August 1965

Editorial note: Based upon the Mother's replies to the series of questions in the previous letter dated 5 August 1965, following four follow-up questions were asked by a teacher.

1) *How to prepare children for the rejection of falsehood (a) when the falsehood is still within the blood and every cell of my body? (b) when attachment to falsehood is*

becoming stronger and stronger by the egoistic and possessive nature?

2) *How can the unity of each nation be realised (a) when there is no unity within the individual? (b) when there is no unity between two members of a family? (c) when there is no unity in one organisation or institution?*

3) *How to get out of conventions and insist on the growth of the soul when even an Ashramite spreads the infection of social status to satisfy personal wants?*

4) *How not to give an almost exclusive importance to success, career and money when everyone is running after money for the exhibition and satisfaction of one's ego and self-importance?*

To each one a *body* has been given to do that work, because it is in realising these things in *oneself* that one helps humanity to realise them upon earth.

The teacher must absolutely possess the qualities and the consciousness he wants his students to acquire. (CWM, 12: 250-252)

"I would like them (the Government) to recognise Yoga as education, not so much for ourselves, but it will be good for the country.

**Matter will be transformed, that will be a solid base. Life will be divinised. Let India take the lead.
(CWM, 12: 250-252)**

THE MOTHER

Three Principles of True Teaching

The true basis of education is the study of the human mind, infant, adolescent and adult. Any system of education founded on theories of academical perfection, which ignores the instrument of study, is more likely to hamper and impair intellectual growth than to produce a perfect and perfectly equipped mind. For the educationist has to do, not with dead material like the artist or sculptor, but with an infinitely subtle and sensitive organism. He cannot shape an educational masterpiece out of human wood or stone; he has to work in the elusive substance of mind and respect the limits imposed by the fragile human body.

... It is only by strengthening and sharpening these instruments [*of knowledge*] to their utmost capacity that they can be made effective for the increased work which

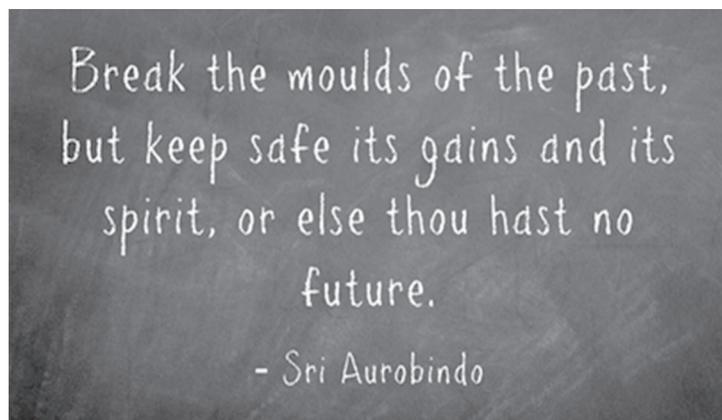
modern conditions require. The muscles of the mind must be thoroughly trained by simple and easy means; then, and not till then, great feats of intellectual strength can be required of them.

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 guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. The distinction that reserves

this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child, is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine. Child or man, boy or girl, there is only one sound principle of good teaching. Difference of age only serves to diminish or increase the amount of help and guidance necessary; it does not change its nature.

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. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own *dharma* is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Every man has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of strength and perfection in however small a sphere, which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it, use it. 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. The basis of a man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he



breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly. From that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. There are souls which naturally revolt from their surroundings and seem to belong to another age and clime. Let them be free to follow their bent; but the majority languish, become empty, become artificial, if artificially moulded into an alien form. It is God's arrangement for mankind that they should belong to a particular nation, age, society, that they should be children of the past, possessors of the present, creators of the future. The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit. Each must have its due and natural place in a national system of education. (CWSA, 1: 383-385)

SRI AUROBINDO

The Three Principles of Education and the Gita

Ramesh Bijlani

The Gita is essentially a lesson delivered by the divine teacher, Sri Krishna, to a highly accomplished human disciple, Arjuna. If one looks at the Gita carefully, one would find that it incorporates almost every principle of enlightened teaching. The learning is problem-based; besides solving the problem, there is plenty of lateral learning; the lesson is student-centred; the student is encouraged to ask questions, and much of the lesson is guided by the student's questions (inquiry-driven learning). Now let us see Sri Aurobindo's three principles of education in relation to the Gita.

Arjuna was an action-oriented person. Therefore Sri Krishna, the Divine teacher, started with karma (from the near to the far: third principle). However, while talking about karma, he created in the student curiosity for knowing more. Only when the student had become receptive, he was given the knowledge (nothing can be taught: first principle). The student, although a warrior, was a yogi at heart. Therefore, he was given in-depth knowledge of yoga (the mind must be consulted in its own growth: second principle.)

~ Excerpted from *'The Philosophy and Practice of Integral Education: A Handbook for Teachers and Parents'*, pp. 51-52

Striking Deficiencies of Contemporary Indian Education

Editorial note: This selection from the essay titled 'The True Aim of Education and Our Present Situation' was included in the volume '*A New Approach to Education*' (1996), published by Sri Aurobindo Institute of Research in Social Sciences, Sri Aurobindo Society, pp. 49-51. Only selected passages are reproduced here.

We live in a rapidly changing world, a world of great progress or one persistently asking for the new and the unknown. It is not content to live by past standards. There is otherwise a lack as to the meaning of life, which generates a general sense of dissatisfaction.

In a world like this, India as a whole is under a great pressure, internal and external, to discover herself, her genius, her essential seeking and be a master of her situation. In an India like this and in a world full of change, the Indian education is an object of special dissatisfaction. A few striking deficiencies of our contemporary education are:

1. It does not evoke spontaneous joy and acceptance. There is a lack of identity in the national aspiration and contemporary national education. It is felt as a foreign graft and yet felt as necessary.
2. The Indian temperament feels secure when it is geared to the intrinsic values of life. Utilitarianism does not inwardly satisfy it. Our present education is primarily a utilitarian education or rather it is carried on in a utilitarian spirit. The same, however, could be pursued in the spirit of intrinsic values but that is the task to achieve.
3. Education does not command the respect of being the highest and the abiding cultural activity of life. That place of valuation has to be accorded to it. But this the society must do. When teachers demand it, then it tends to defeat itself.
4. Response to science has not been as enthusiastic as it could or should have been. This is partly because science has not been disengaged from its original premises of historical circumstances and properly set in the framework of Indian cultural values. If that is done, it should evoke a deep passion of search for truth in the field of nature. Of course, our attitude of

regarding the world and phenomenon as unreal also needs a conscious reorientation.

5. The Indian spirit has been traditionally interested in unity and synthesis. Western knowledge since the days of Aristotle has persistently pursued analysis, separation, division, fragmentation. Analysis is indeed a great power of intellect, but we are today landed in a situation where unity of knowledge and life have become a strong motivation. But to have imposed on the Indian mind a knowledge breathing the spirit of analysis in disregard of the synthetic approach of the Indian mind was educationally a doubtful thing. This is a fundamental issue and a very difficult one, but the force of it cannot be ignored.
6. With the idea of unity goes the idea of continuity. Education in the Indian way is an unending process stretching across incarnations. Educationally this idea has great value. Our present arrangement tends to emphasise that education is finished when an examination is passed. We might consider how the idea of continuity can be more fully ingrained in the process of education.
7. Our emphasis is far too much on the content of education rather than on the growth of personality and the cultivation of its faculties. Many of our problems arise out of lack of recognition that formal education can never give all that an individual needs to know for life. The general atmosphere imparts a great deal and this can be positively cultivated too to serve its purpose more fully. Otherwise the individual needs to be given the facilities and the interest and he will learn in life what he needs to learn. Our problem of languages needs specially to be considered in this light. Given a helpful atmosphere, the learning of languages could be made a great deal spontaneous.
8. We are much worried by the fissiparous tendencies we notice in our social and political life; an education has its share of responsibility in the matter. At any rate, education is sought to provide the integrative forces. We seek, in this connection, to rely on external uniformities. But what is more important is that we may have amongst us an increasing number of individuals with deep inner all-India dedication, good-

will, love and identification. But to create men of such identification is a matter of the education of selected and gifted children. And that means long personal contact and interest in promising individuals on the part of the teachers and the leaders of the present generation.

In this connection, it may be asked, what is it that unites? Uniformities of habit and sentiment do unite, but far more powerful are the ideals which we actively seek to realise. The sense of national goals and destiny need to be kept alive as best as possible. When we come down to the level of the normal goals

of life, then rivalries and jealousies tend to become dominant.

9. Lack of due recognition of the educational value of sports and other extra-mural activities also needs to be mentioned. Character is moulded and trained essentially by these. Class contacts can impart an idealism, if that is intended. When classroom teaching is geared to passing the examination, then even idealistic pieces of literature can tend to become utilitarian and uninspiring.

INDRA SEN

Education for Character Development

In the economy of man the mental nature rests upon the moral, and the education of the intellect divorced from the perfection of the moral and emotional nature is injurious to human progress. Yet, while it is easy to arrange some kind of curriculum or syllabus which will do well enough for the training of the mind, it has not yet been found possible to provide under modern conditions a suitable moral training for the school and college. The attempt to make boys moral and religious by the teaching of moral and religious text-books is a vanity and a delusion, precisely because the heart is not the mind and to instruct the mind does not necessarily improve the heart. It would be an error to say that it has no effect. It throws certain seeds of thought into the *antaḥkaraṇa* and, if these thoughts become habitual, they influence the conduct. But the danger of moral text-books is that they make the thinking of high things mechanical and artificial, and whatever is mechanical and artificial is inoperative for good.

There are three things which are of the utmost importance in dealing with a man's moral nature, the emotions, the *samskāras* or formed habits and associations, and the *svabhāva* or nature. The only way for him to train himself morally is to habituate himself to the right emotions, the noblest associations, the best mental, emotional and physical habits and the following out in right action of the fundamental impulses of his essential nature. You can impose a certain discipline on children, dress them into a certain mould, lash them into a desired path, but unless you can get their hearts and natures on your side, the conformity to this imposed rule becomes a hypocritical and heartless, a conventional, often a cowardly compliance. This is what is done in Europe, and it

leads to that remarkable phenomenon known as the sowing of wild oats as soon as the yoke of discipline at school and at home is removed, and to the social hypocrisy which is so large a feature of European life. Only what the man admires and accepts, becomes part of himself; the rest is a mask. He conforms to the discipline of society as he conformed to the moral routine of home and school, but considers himself at liberty to guide his real life, inner and private, according to his own likings and passions. On the other hand, to neglect moral and religious education altogether is to corrupt the race. . . .

As in the education of the mind, so in the education of the heart, the best way is to put the child into the right road to his own perfection and encourage him to follow it, watching, suggesting, helping, but not interfering. . . . The old Indian system of the *guru* commanding by his knowledge and sanctity the implicit obedience, perfect admiration, reverent emulation of the student was a far superior method of moral discipline. It is impossible to restore that ancient system; but it is not impossible to substitute the wise friend, guide and helper for the hired instructor or the benevolent policeman which is all that the European system usually makes of the pedagogue.

The first rule of moral training is to suggest and invite, not command or impose. The best method of suggestion is by personal example, daily converse and the books read from day to day. These books should contain, for the younger student, the lofty examples of the past given, not as moral lessons, but as things of supreme human interest, and, for the

elder student, the great thoughts of great souls, the passages of literature which set fire to the highest emotions and prompt the highest ideals and aspirations, the records of history and biography which exemplify the living of those great thoughts, noble emotions and aspiring ideals. This is a kind of good company, *satsāṅga*, which can seldom fail to have effect, so long as sententious sermonising is avoided, and becomes of the highest effect if the personal life of the teacher is itself moulded by the great things he places before his pupils. It cannot, however, have full force unless the young life is given an opportunity, within its limited sphere, of embodying in action the moral impulses which rise within it. The thirst of knowledge, the self-devotion, the purity, the renunciation of the Brahmin,—the courage, ardour, honour, nobility, chivalry, patriotism of the Kshatriya,—the beneficence, skill, industry, generous enterprise and large open-handedness of the Vaishya,—the self-effacement and loving service of the Shudra,—these are the qualities of the Aryan. They constitute the moral temper we desire in our young men, in the whole nation. But how can we get them if we do not give opportunities to the young to train themselves in the Aryan tradition, to form by the practice and familiarity of childhood and boyhood the stuff of which their adult lives must be made?

Every boy should, therefore, be given practical opportunity as well as intellectual encouragement to develop all that is best in his nature. If he has bad qualities, bad habits, bad *saṃskāras*

WHO IS AN ARYAN?

The Aryan is he who strives and overcomes all outside him and within him that stands opposed to the human advance. Self-conquest is the first law of his nature. He overcomes earth and the body and does not consent like ordinary men to their dullness, inertia, dead routine and tamasic limitations. He overcomes life and its energies and refuses to be dominated by their hungers and cravings or enslaved by their rajasic passions.

He overcomes the mind and its habits, he does not live in a shell of ignorance, inherited prejudices, customary ideas, pleasant opinions, but knows how to seek and choose, to be large and flexible in intelligence even as he is firm and strong in his will. For in everything he seeks truth, in everything right, in everything height and freedom.

(CWSA, 13:442-443)

whether of mind or body, he should not be treated harshly as a delinquent, but encouraged to get rid of them by the Rajayogic method of *saṃyama*, rejection and substitution. He should be encouraged to think of them, not as sins or offences, but as symptoms of a curable disease alterable by a steady and sustained effort of the will,—falsehood being rejected whenever it rises into the mind and replaced by truth, fear by courage, selfishness by sacrifice and renunciation, malice by love. Great care will have to be taken that unformed virtues are not rejected as faults. The wildness and recklessness of many young natures are only the overflowings of an excessive strength, greatness and nobility. They should be purified, not discouraged. (CWSA, 1:389-392)

SRI AUROBINDO

Story of *da! da! da!*

Prajapati had three kinds of offspring: gods, men and demons (asuras). They lived with Prajapati, practising the vows of *brahmacharins*.

After finishing their term, the gods said to him: "Please instruct us, Sir."

To them he uttered the syllable *da* and asked: "Have you understood?"

They replied: "We have. You said to us, 'Control yourselves (*damyata*)'."

He said: "Yes, you have understood."

Then the men said to him: "Please instruct us, Sir."

To them he uttered the same syllable *da* and asked: "Have you understood?"

They replied: "We have. You said to us, 'Give (*datta*)'."

He said: "Yes, you have understood."

Then the demons said to him: "Please instruct us, Sir."

To them he uttered the same syllable *da* and asked: "Have you understood?"

They replied: "We have. You said to us: 'Be compassionate (*dayadhvam*)'."

He said: "Yes, you have understood."

That very thing is repeated even today by the heavenly voice, in the form of thunder, as "Da," "Da," "Da," which means: "Control yourselves," "Give," and "Have compassion."

Therefore, one should learn these three: self-control, giving and mercy.

~ From Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 5.2.1-3

Spirituality in Classroom

Editorial note: We highlight a few responses of the Mother to questions and clarifications asked by some teachers concerning meaningful integration of spirituality in the classroom teaching-learning context. Here we also find important hints on the role of teachers in the conscious development of the students. Teachers' questions or clarifications are presented in italics below.

"The division between 'ordinary life' and 'spiritual life' is an outdated antiquity." (The Mother, CWM, 12: 401)

"We discussed the future. It seemed to me that nearly all the teachers were eager to do something so that the children could become more conscious of why they are here. At that point I said that in my opinion, to speak to the children of spiritual things often has the opposite result, and that these words lose all their value."

"Spiritual things"—what does he mean by spiritual things?

Obviously, if the teachers recite them like a story...

Spiritual things... They are taught history *or* spiritual things, they are taught science *or* spiritual things. That is the stupidity. In history, the Spirit is there; in science, the Spirit is there—the Truth is everywhere. And what is needed is not to teach it in a false way, but to teach it in a true way. They cannot get that into their heads.

He adds: "I have suggested that it might be better to meet and listen to Mother's voice, for even if we don't understand everything, your voice would accomplish its own inner work, which we are not in a position to evaluate. About this, I would like to know what is the best way of bringing the child into relation with you. For all the suggestions, including mine, seemed arbitrary to me and without any real value."

"Mother, wouldn't it be better if the teachers were to concentrate solely on the subjects they are teaching, for you are taking care of the spiritual life?"

I shall give him this reply: There is no "spiritual life"! It is still the old idea, still the old idea of the sage, the sannyasin, the... who represents spiritual life, while all the others represent ordinary life—and it is not true, it is not true, it is not true at all.

If they still need an opposition between two things—for the poor mind doesn't work if you don't give it an opposition—if they need an opposition, let them take the opposition between Truth and Falsehood, it is a little better; I don't say it is

perfect, but it is a little better. So, in all things, Falsehood and Truth are mixed everywhere: in the so-called "spiritual life", in sannyasins, in swamis, in those who think they represent the life divine on earth, all that—there also, there is a mixture of Falsehood and Truth.

It would be better not to make any division.

(Silence)

For the children, precisely because they are children, it would be best to instil in them the will to conquer the future, the will to always look ahead and to want to move on as swiftly as they can towards... what will be—but they should not drag with them the burden, the millstone of the whole oppressive weight of the past. It is only when we are very high in consciousness and knowledge that it is good to look behind to find the points where this future begins to show itself. When we can look at the whole picture, when we have a very global vision, it becomes interesting to know that what will be realised later on has already been announced beforehand, in the same way that Sri Aurobindo said that the divine life will manifest on earth, because it is *already* involved in the depths of Matter; from this standpoint it is interesting to look back or to look down below—not to know what happened, or to know what men have known: that is quite useless.



The Mother with students of SAICE

The children should be told: There are wonderful things to be manifested, prepare yourself to receive them. Then if they want something a little more concrete and easier

to understand, you can tell them: Sri Aurobindo came to announce these things; when you are able to read him, you will understand. So this awakens the interest, the desire to learn.

I see very clearly the difficulty he is referring to: most people—and in all the things that are written, or in the lectures they give—use inflated speech, without any truth of personal experience, which has no effect, or rather a negative effect. That is what he is referring to.

Yes, that is why they should do as I have said.

Ah! But not so long ago, most of the teachers were saying, “Oh! But we must do this, because it is done everywhere.” (Smiling) They have already come a little distance. But there is much more to be covered.

But above all, what is most important is to eliminate these divisions. And every one of them, all of them have it in their minds: the division between leading a spiritual life and leading an ordinary life, having a spiritual consciousness and having an ordinary consciousness—there is only one consciousness.

In most people it is three-quarters asleep and distorted; in many it is still completely distorted. But what is needed, very simply, is not to leap from one consciousness into another, but to open one's consciousness (*upward gesture*) and to fill it with vibrations of Truth, to bring it in harmony with what must be here—there it exists from all eternity—but here, what must be here: the “tomorrow” of the earth. If you weigh yourself down with a whole burden that you have to drag behind you, if you drag behind you everything that you must abandon, you will not be able to advance very fast.

Mind you, to know things from the earth's past can be very interesting and very useful, but it must not be something that binds you or ties you to the past. If it is used as a spring-board, it is all right. But really, it is quite secondary.

(Silence)

It would be interesting to formulate or to elaborate a new method of teaching for children, to take them very young. It is easy when they are very young. We need people—oh! we would need remarkable teachers—who have, first, an ample enough documentation of what is known so as to be able to answer every question, and at the same time, at least the knowledge, if not the experience—the experience would be better—of the true intuitive intellectual attitude, and—naturally the capacity would be still more preferable—at least the knowledge that the true way of knowing is mental silence, an attentive silence turned towards the truer Consciousness, and the capacity to receive what comes from there. The best would be to have this capacity; at least, it should be explained that it is the true thing—a sort of demonstration—and that

it works not only from the point of view of what must be learned, of the whole domain of knowledge, but also of the whole domain of what should be done: the capacity to receive the exact indication of *how* to do it; and as you go on, it changes into a very clear perception of what must be done, and a precise indication of when it must be done. At least the children, as soon as they have the capacity to think—it starts at the age of seven, but at about fourteen or fifteen it is very clear—the children should be given little indications at the age of seven, a complete explanation at fourteen, of how to do it, and that it is the only way to be in relation with the deeper truth of things, and that all the rest is a more or less clumsy mental approximation to something that can be known directly.

The conclusion is that the teachers themselves should at least have a sincere beginning of discipline and experience, that it is not a question of accumulating books and retelling them like this. One can't be a teacher in this way; let the outside world be like that if it likes. ...

5 April 1967, (CWM, 12: 401-405)

What is the best way of preparing ourselves, until we can establish a new system?

Naturally, it is to widen and illumine your consciousness—but how to do it? Your own consciousness... to widen and illumine it. And if you could find, each one of you, your psychic and unite with it, all the problems would be solved.

The psychic being is the representative of the Divine in the human being. That's it, you see—the Divine is not something remote and inaccessible. The Divine is in you but you are not fully conscious of it. Rather you have... it acts now as an influence rather than as a Presence. It should be a conscious Presence; you should be able at each moment to ask yourself what is... how... how the Divine sees. It is like that: first how the Divine sees, and then how the Divine wills, and then how the Divine acts. And it is not to go away into inaccessible regions, it is right here. Only, for the moment, all the old habits and the general unconsciousness put a kind of covering which prevents us from seeing and feeling. You must... you must lift, you must lift that up.

In fact, you must become conscious instruments... conscious... conscious of the Divine. ...

8 Feb 1973, (CWM, 12: 428)

Q: I don't even know whether I have a soul, but as a teacher I am expected to help the students and “insist on the growth of the soul”—some light please.

The Mother: The contradiction comes from the fact that you want to “mentalise” and this is impossible. It is an attitude, an inside attitude mostly but which governs the outside action as much as possible. It is something to be lived much more than to be taught. (CWM, 12: 175)

When Young

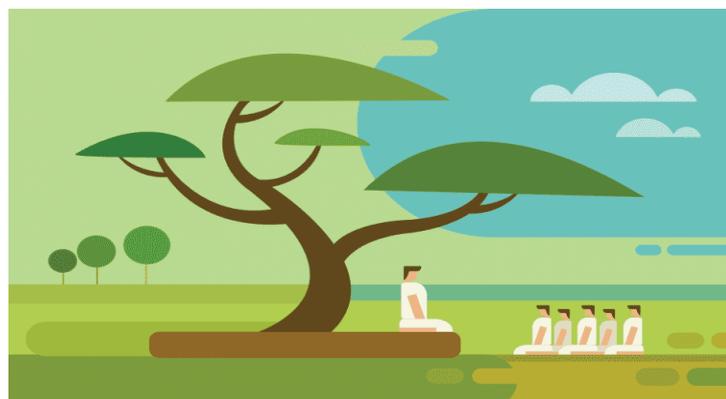
Yuvaan had been feeling a deep sense of joy and peace for the past few days, ever since his arrival in Pondicherry. His early morning and late evening hours were spent near the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother — just simply sitting in silence. The growing quietude within was so palpable — it was as if he had no questions left at all.

For days he had not even felt any need to read anything, which was surprising to him because he had always been a voracious reader; and especially ever since he had been regularly reading the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, he had been experiencing a whole other kind of inner joy in the company of such deep, oceanic wisdom. But now all he wanted to do was spend time at the Samadhi, walk or sit quietly by the beach near the Ashram, or just be with himself in his room. Silence was truly becoming precious for him.

But that day something impelled Yuvaan to take up a small project he had been postponing for a while. His professor, the one who had published a few of his articles in a journal, had sent him a couple of reminders to send a new article. Sitting at the Samadhi that day, Yuvaan felt inspired to take education as the subject for his next article, particularly addressing a growing lacuna in modern mainstream education — that of inculcating a sense of greater self-control and self-mastery.

Yuvaan was already fired up to read some of Sri Aurobindo's writings on Indian education. He also did some research on education in ancient India. Reading, reflecting, and taking notes over the next several days gradually led Yuvaan to weave together the various strands of thoughts into a coherent piece of writing — an exercise that had always helped deepen his growing understanding.

Education in Ancient India and Some Lessons for Today



Picture credit: <https://leverageedu.com/blog/gurukul-education-system>

We have heard about the glorious heritage of teaching-learning traditions in ancient India, especially the *gurukula* system and the great universities. Today we hear about the need to bring back some of that glorious tradition; some attempts are also being made in various parts of the country to revive the old *gurukula* model of education. It compels the question whether such an attempt is feasible or even desirable in present times. Sri Aurobindo reminds us that we must first discover the essential principle on which the ancient Indian educational thought and practice was based. Only then we may be able to identify and create new structures which could be based on some of those essential principles and yet be more appropriate for our times.

“What was the secret of that gigantic intellectuality, spirituality and superhuman moral force which we see pulsating in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, in the ancient philosophy, in the supreme poetry, art, sculpture and architecture of India? What was at the basis of the incomparable public works and engineering achievements, the opulent and exquisite industries, the great triumphs of science, scholarship, jurisprudence, logic, metaphysics, the unique social structure? What supported the heroism and self-abandonment of the Kshatriya, the Sikh and the Rajput, the unconquerable national vitality and endurance? What was it that stood behind that civilisation second to none in the massiveness of its outlines or the perfection of its details? Without a great and unique discipline involving a perfect education of soul and mind, a result so immense and persistent would have been impossible. It would be an error to look for the secret of Aryan success in the details of the instruction given in the old ashrams and universities so far as they have come down to us. We must know what was the principle and basis on which the details were founded. We shall find the secret of their success in a profound knowledge of human psychology and its subtle application to the methods of intellectual training and instruction.”¹

That essential principle on which a great intellectual superstructure can be built, that fundamental basis of the ancient vision of true education of soul and mind, according to Sri Aurobindo, was the all-important discipline of *brahmacharya*. This discipline helped provide a strong

¹CWSA, 1: 369

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foundation for all the stupendous and rich activity ancient India witnessed in all spheres – spiritual, intellectual, vital, aesthetic, economic and organisational.

Brahmacharya, the Student Stage

Brahmacharya, as is commonly known, is also the name given in the Indian tradition to the first of the four *āshramas* or stages of human life, with *grihastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (forest dweller), and *sannyāsa* (renunciation) being the other three. In this context, the word *brahmacharya* refers to the stage when an unmarried student is focused on his or her education, training in some specialised knowledge and preparing for a vocation. In this stage, celibacy is emphasised as part of the discipline necessary for a student. This discipline is imposed because it helps conserve the students' energies and helps them remain focused on their immediate goal of mastering their studies. The teacher or guru is regarded as Brahman in human form, and the student is referred to as *brahmachārin*, follower of Brahma or Brahman.

Generally, people in the first 25 years of their lives would go through this formal student stage. Some ancient *dharmashāstra-s* suggest that the *brahmacharya* stage of life should extend from when a child is ready to receive teachings from a guru and continue for a period of at least twelve years. As per the *Manusmṛiti*, this period could range from between 9 to 36 years, till the student has mastered his subject.

The general practice was that upon the child's *upanayana samskāra*, the young person would begin a life of study in the *gurukula* (the household of the guru). The studies were meant to inculcate in the young mind all the values of *dharmic* living, the righteous living. At the same time the goal was to prepare him or her for a vocation suitable to his/her inner temperament and aptitude by directing the studies in various *shāstra-s* related to subjects of his or her interest. Students were also given sufficient grounding in spiritual scriptures such as some parts of the Vedas and Upanishads. During this long period, the students were expected to lead austere and highly disciplined lives. This stage of life was characterised by the practice of celibacy.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that in ancient India the education of girls was never ignored. Also, no restriction of age to pursue learning was present in ancient India. Often older people aspiring for higher learning also sought teachers who were authorities in certain areas of knowledge, particularly spiritual knowledge, knowledge about *ātman*,



Atukuri Molla (1440–1530), a Telugu poet who authored the Telugu-language Ramayana, Molla Ramayanam (Picture credit: <https://bharathgyanblog.wordpress.com/2020/03/13/aatukuri-molla/>)

inner Self, and Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. For example, in section 5.11 of the Chandogya Upanishad we meet five adults — all wealthy householders and great scholars, who approached a sage named *Uddalaka Aruni* to learn from about Self and Brahman. Admitting to his deficient knowledge, Uddalaka suggests that they all go to King Asvapati Kaikeya for gaining this knowledge.

सत्यं वद । Speak the Truth
धर्मं चर । Practise Virtue
स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः । Do not neglect your daily study
आचार्याय प्रियं धनमाहृत्य Offer to the Teacher whatever pleases him
प्रजातन्तुं मा व्यवच्छेत्सीः । Do not cut off the line of progeny
सत्यान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । Do not neglect Truth
धर्मान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । Do not neglect Virtue
कुशलान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । Do not neglect Welfare
भूत्यै न प्रमदितव्यम् । Do not neglect Prosperity
स्वाध्यायप्रवचनाभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यम् ॥ Do not neglect Study and Teaching
(Taittiriya Upanishad, Shikshavalli, 1:11:1)

Guidance for students at the completion of their studies

The graduation from the *brahmacharya* stage of life was marked by the *samāvartana* ceremony. The *snātak* (graduate) was then ready to either start the householder stage of life or, if he or she wished, pursue a life of *sannyāsa* and solitude.

Once a student, after completing his or her education, marries and enters the householder stage of life, the discipline of *brahmacharya* takes the form of the virtues of moderation and fidelity. Additionally, and more importantly, in the context of householders *brahmacharya* is also seen as

a way of engaging in sexual behaviour as a conscious, co-creative practice rather than merely as an unconscious habit to fulfill one's lowest instinct. This also involves pursuing a lifestyle that includes dharmic living; spiritual practices such as meditation; study of scriptures; religious rituals etc.; and sincerely performing one's duties toward the family and society.

Thus, *brahmacharya* is essentially a discipline for mastering one's lower nature and self-preparation for pursuing the higher goals in life. This involves controlling one's desires on all levels — physical, emotional and mental, and developing a habit of detachment from the objects of desire. *Brahmacharya* is also understood as purity in thought, word and deed. It is celibacy and continence. But it is not mere bachelorhood. It includes the control, not only of the sexual desire or impulse but also control or restraint over all other senses, in thought, word and deed.

Psychological Theory Behind the Discipline of Brahmacharya

In a series of essays titled, "The Brain of India" Sri Aurobindo in 1909 gave an excellent presentation of the deeper philosophical and psychological understanding of the discipline and practice of *brahmacharya*, which he said was at the basis of the ancient system of education. That was an education founded in the deep knowledge of human psychology which made possible the greatest accomplishments of Indian civilisation — be it in literature, art, philosophy, sciences, architecture, engineering, or any other field.

"At the basis of the old Aryan system was the all-important discipline of Brahmacharya. The first necessity for the building up of a great intellectual superstructure is to provide a foundation strong enough to bear it. ..."

"An infinite energy, ...pervades the world, pours itself into every name and form, and the clod, the plant, the insect, the animal, the man are, in their phenomenal existence, merely more or less efficient ādhāras of this Energy. We are each of us a dynamo into which waves of that energy have been generated and stored, and are being perpetually conserved, used up and replenished. The same force which moves in the star and the planet, moves in us, and all our thought and action are merely its play and born of the complexity of its functionings. There are processes by which man can increase his capacity as an ādhāra. There are other processes by which he can clear of obstructions the channel of communication between himself and the universal energy and bring greater and greater stores of it pouring into his soul and brain and body. This

continual improvement of the ādhāra and increase in quantity and complexity of action of the informing energy, is the whole aim of evolution. When that energy is the highest in kind and the fullest in amount of which the human ādhāra is capable, and the ādhāra itself is trained utterly to bear the inrush and play of the energy, then is a man siddha, the fulfilled or perfect man, his evolution is over and he has completed in the individual that utmost development which the mass of humanity is labouring towards through the ages.

"If this theory be correct, the energy at the basis of the operation of intelligence must be in ourselves and it must be capable of greater expansion and richer use to an extent practically unlimited. And this also must be a sound principle, that the more we can increase and enrich the energy, the greater will be the potential range, power and activity of the functions of our mind and the consequent vigour of our intellectuality and the greatness of our achievement. This was the first principle on which the ancient Aryans based their education and one of the chief processes which they used for the increased storage of energy, was the practice of Brahmacharya."²

Brahmacharya, a System of Human Energy Management

Although the practice of *brahmacharya* is normally understood to mean celibacy, when understood in its psychological sense as a system of human energy management its primary aim is not mere sexual abstinence for the sake of moral purity, but the conservation and transformation of the biological and vital energy stored in the human being into pure intellectual and spiritual energy.

"The sex-energy utilised by Nature for the purpose of reproduction is in its real nature a fundamental energy of life. It can be used not for the heightening but for a certain intensification of the vital emotional life; it can be controlled and diverted from the sex-purpose and used for aesthetic and artistic or other creation and productiveness, or preserved for heightening of the intellectual or other energies. Entirely controlled it can be turned into a force of spiritual energy also. This was well known in ancient India and was described as the conversion of retas into ojas by Brahmacharya. Sex-energy misused turns to disorder and disintegration of the life-energy and its powers."³

The right practice of *brahmacharya* depends on the right understanding of the physiological structure of the human receptacle of energy. Indian occult physiology tells us that

²CWSA, 1: 369-371

³CWSA, 31: 504-505

all human energy has a physical basis and foundation, though the source of all energy is spiritual. This physical basis of human energy exists in the human body as the vital-sexual fluid at the bottom of the spine. Known as *retas*, this fluid state of energy potentially contains within it all the other higher luminous states of energy, known as *tejas*, in the form of heat, light and electricity. Sri Aurobindo explains:

“All energy is latent in the retas. This energy may be either expended physically or conserved. All passion, lust, desire wastes the energy by pouring it, either in the gross form or a sublimated subtler form, out of the body. Immorality in act throws it out in the gross form; immorality of thought in the subtle form. In either case there is waste, and unchastity is of the mind and speech as well as of the body. On the other hand, all self-control conserves the energy in the retas, and conservation always brings with it increase.”⁴

The practical discipline of *brahmacharya*, therefore, consists of preventing all wastage and downward gravitation of the vital energy and directing it upwards by giving it a higher orientation. All forms of uncontrolled indulgence of vital desires and passion, especially sexual passion, in thought, feeling and act waste the vital energy. All forms of conscious self-control preserve and increase energy.



kalaripayattu

But to achieve the higher aims of *brahmacharya*, that of attaining self-mastery, increased strength, greater capacity for knowledge and capacity of action, and the ultimate goal of attaining or realizing the Self, the increased energy also must be directed upwards toward the realisation of some higher mental, moral or spiritual aim and creatively released in intellectual, artistic, ethical or spiritual pursuits.

⁴CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 372

Sublimation not Suppression

“Vices are simply an overflow of energy in unregulated channels.”⁵

The practice of *brahmacharya* is not about suppression but rather an elimination of an obsession with one's lower vital impulses. Any suppression actually brings back the desire in newer and stronger forms, with redoubled force, and also brings greater frustration, irritability and restlessness of mind. At the same time, an unhealthy obsession with any desire, particularly sexual desire, brings down the energy, creates dullness, weakens the mind and dampens the overall vigour for life. It hinders one's mental, intellectual, emotional, psychological and spiritual progress. So, it is important to subdue and channelise the direction of one's energies to sublimate such lower vital impulses.



Marchpast in Ashram playground, 1948

The solution lies in widening and heightening one's consciousness, in regulating one's energies in directions that help elevate the consciousness and widen the mental vision. Consciously participating in uplifting activities — of the body, mind and emotion — can be of great help. Spending time in nature — walking, gardening, relaxing — is highly recommended to help widen the consciousness.

⁵CWSA, Vol. 28-31, p. 424

Regular spiritual practices such as mantra-chanting, *japa*, worship, prayer, meditation help purify the mind of its perversions and dullness. Rigorous physical exercise and the practice of *yogāsana* are highly recommended — while the former helps to channel and regulate the physical energy in the body, the latter helps stabilise the mental energy and reduce the restlessness of both the body and mind. The mind, consisting of thoughts and emotions, is closely related to the breath. *Prānayama* has been proven to regulate the vital force and help still the mind.

Insights for Education Today and Tomorrow

To ensure that our youth blossom into healthy, capable and self-controlled human beings, who can consistently grow in *shakti* and contribute constructively to the upliftment of their motherland and humanity at large, we must help them gain greater understanding of how to regulate, channelise and sublimate their abundant youthful energies. This cannot be done by adding bigger and bigger loads of mental information to the students' course of studies, but by carefully and consciously educating their natural life instincts and body impulses.

Generally, these parts of the student's nature are left to themselves, and educators do not dare or care to handle them consciously, or they themselves are simply unaware as to how to proceed. It is time we re-evaluated the deep significance of the principle of *brahmacharya* and make it an important part of our education.

In the absence of a strong sense of self-discipline and self-control, we generally see gross misuse or abuse of freedom and autonomy — values which are today accepted as essential for the overall growth of the child. What is often spoken of as individual freedom today is more slavery than freedom, slavery to our commonplace animal nature. To follow one's impulses and instincts freely is not true freedom at all.

Some element of discipline and order must be part of a well-designed approach to holistic education, but the question is how to practically incorporate it. In ancient times this could be done because the student also led the life of an aspirant, living in the house of the teacher, in the atmosphere of his direct presence and influence. The teacher was also not doing his work in a mechanical manner, but ideally was someone who genuinely cared for and loved the students in his charge and took great pains to ensure their overall development.

For today's students, life and study are two separate things with nothing to connect them. There is life and then there is school. One may be a good student and attain great intellectual achievement, yet in life one may remain quite ordinary with very normal reactions.

*“The separation between intellectual culture and life movement has to be healed up; human personality must be made a unified whole. The training given under Brahmacharya will be of immense help in that direction. The deeper purpose, however, of this discipline is not merely a unification of the personality, but a heightening also, lifting it to a level of consciousness from where it can envisage its spiritual destiny and seek to realise it.”*⁶

After several days of writing and rewriting, Yuvaan was finally satisfied with the article. With a deep sense of gratitude and inwardly offering this work to the Mother, he emailed it to his professor and was soon on his way out, walking with a joyful heart to the Samadhi.

BELOO MEHRA

⁶Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, 1: 269-272



The Mother on Physical Education

All education of the body should begin at birth and continue throughout life. It is never too soon to begin nor too late to continue.

Physical education has three principal aspects: (1) control and discipline of the functioning of the body, (2) an integral, methodical and harmonious development of all the parts and movements of the body and (3) correction of any defects and deformities.

It may be said that from the very first days, even the first hours of his life, the child should undergo the first part of this programme as far as food, sleep, evacuation, etc. are concerned. If the child, from the very beginning of his existence, learns good habits, it will save him a good deal of trouble and inconvenience for the rest of his life: and besides, those who have the responsibility of caring for him during his first years will find their task very much easier.

Naturally, this education, if it is to be rational, enlightened and effective, must be based upon a minimum knowledge of the human body, of its structure and its functioning. As the child develops, he must gradually be taught to observe the functioning of his internal organs so that he may control them more and more, and see that this functioning remains normal and harmonious. As for positions, postures and movements, bad habits are formed very early and very rapidly, and these may have disastrous consequences for his whole life. Those who take the question of physical education seriously and wish to give their children the best conditions for normal development will easily find the necessary indications and instructions. The subject is being more and more thoroughly studied, and many books have appeared and are still appearing which give all the information and guidance needed. (CWM, 12: 12-13)

THE MOTHER

Calming and Refining the Vital

Our Experiments in Vital Education at Creative School

This article shares some of the approaches we have tried and tested for a decade at Creative school in North Bengaluru. We are deeply grateful and indebted to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They are a lighthouse for today's society, showing the way to purify ourselves and raise children with compassion and purpose.

In designing our approach to the education of the vital, we are inspired by the following words of the Mother:

“...vital education has two principal aspects, very different in their aims and methods, but both equally important. The first concerns the development and use of the sense organs. The second the progressing awareness and control of the character, culminating in its transformation. ...”

“To this general education of the senses and their functioning there will be added, as early as possible, the cultivation of discrimination and of the aesthetic sense, the capacity to choose and adopt what is beautiful and harmonious, simple, healthy and pure. For there is a psychological health just as there is a

physical health, a beauty and harmony of the sensations as of the body and its movements.”¹



“As the capacity of understanding grows in the child, he should be taught, in the course of his education, to add artistic taste and refinement to power and precision. He should be shown, led to appreciate, taught to love beautiful, lofty, healthy and noble things, whether in Nature or in human creation. This should be a true aesthetic culture, which will protect him from degrading influences. ...as a sign, perhaps, of the decline of civilisation and social decay, a growing vulgarity seems to have taken possession of human life, individual as well as collective,

¹CWM, 12: 20-21

particularly in what concerns aesthetic life and the life of the senses. A methodical and enlightened cultivation of the senses can, little by little, eliminate from the child whatever is by contagion vulgar, commonplace and crude. This education will have very happy effects even on his character. For one who has developed a truly refined taste will, because of this very refinement, feel incapable of acting in a crude, brutal or vulgar manner. This refinement, if it is sincere, brings to the being a nobility and generosity which will spontaneously find expression in his behaviour and will protect him from many base and perverse movements.

“And this brings us quite naturally to the second aspect of vital education which concerns the character and its transformation.

“Generally, all disciplines dealing with the vital being, its purification and its control, proceed by coercion, suppression, abstinence and asceticism. This procedure is certainly easier and quicker, although less deeply enduring and effective, than a rigorous and detailed education. Besides, it eliminates all possibility of the intervention, help and collaboration of the vital. And yet this help is of the utmost importance if one wants the individual's growth and action to be complete.”²

“To become conscious of the various movements in oneself and be aware of what one does and why one does it, is the indispensable starting point. The child must be taught to observe, to note his reactions and impulses and their causes, to become a discerning witness of his desires, his movements of violence and passion, his instincts of possession and appropriation and domination and the background of vanity which supports them, together with their counterparts of weakness, discouragement, depression, and despair.” (CWM, 12: 22)

During the past eleven years, we have tried and implemented many approaches to vital education and observed the impact of these processes on our children. We have implemented these approaches in a steady and age-appropriate manner with children. We have also tried not implementing these and noticed the difference.

Over the years, we have realised that calming and refining the vital energy in ourselves and our children is a rigorous process. It is something that cannot be just done once and forgotten. But instead, it is a sadhana that deserves space in the very fabric of a school. With society changing rapidly for better and worse, calming and refining the vital has become foundational for a school.

²CWM, 12: 21

Our approach to vital education has been Education through Self-experience. Sri Aurobindo emphasises that a child should be free to learn by his own efforts and experiences. This leads to permanent learning and will prove useful for his future life. As the child learns and experiences, plenty of reflection time is given for the child to internalise these concepts.

Interweaving of vital education happens in many ways, some of which are —

- ❖ Through dedicated time for personal growth for both teachers and children. Teachers have bi-weekly self-work (inner development), pause times to bring awareness and wisdom to their ways of functioning.
- ❖ Children have weekly classes through “Life and Living” or “Teen Circles” — a subject created for overall development. In these classes the child is given space to explore within and develop awareness, express, transform and celebrate. Since vital education is not something that can be taught, our approach in these classes involves facilitating an exploration by the children of a series of experiences which require them to look within themselves.
- ❖ Every morning begins with daily prayer, chants, yogasana, breathing exercises and meditation time. Children participate in an age-appropriate manner.



- ❖ In the classroom, a learning process called Four Step Learning has been integrated, which makes space for reflection for every child. It creates pause times for digestion and reflection.
- ❖ When conflicts arise, children are encouraged to go within and observe what is happening within them. Opportunities are given for reflection, developing new perspectives and discernment.

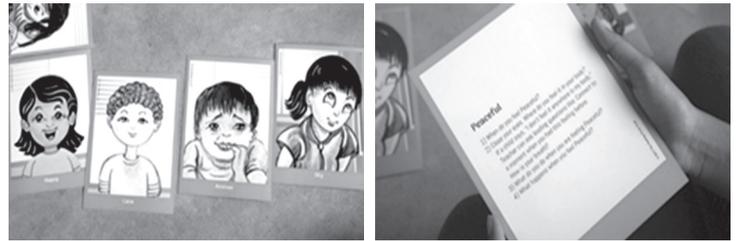
Some Approaches Integrated at Classroom Level

At the classroom level, several methods are integrated in an age-appropriate manner to address the development of the vital part in children. These include the following:

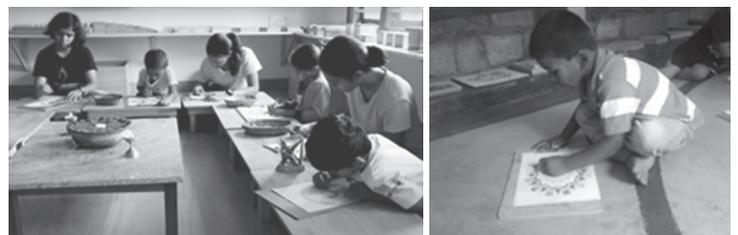


- ❖ **Peace Corners:** Every classroom has a Peace Corner, a dedicated space that evokes calmness and offers simple suggestions for children to take the time to return to peace. In most cases teachers and children have worked together to design this beautiful space in age-appropriate manner. The idea behind the Peace Corner is that this should be a safe and inspiring space for the child to take a pause from whatever might be disturbing for him, and return to peace.
- ❖ **Breath-based practices:** The breath has tremendous capacity to make one calm and slow down, while energising one at the same time. The simplest breathing practice for children is taking 20 conscious breaths, as taught by Leonard Orr, or simply relaxation breaths. At Creative School, we use these practices with children as young as 3-year-olds. With older children, we use several age-appropriate breath-based practices to help them calm their vital. In addition to balancing different parts of the child's brain, conscious breathwork can also open up intuition.
- ❖ **Cultivating Self Awareness:** We help children learn in becoming aware of their body sensations, feelings, thoughts, — and for the older ones, also their judgments and beliefs. Beginning with fifth grade, a process of conscious reflection is introduced to help children become aware of their inner strengths and areas of growth. This process also helps them

become aware of various inner happenings and gradually learn how to become a better version of themselves. We also help children practice observing the impact of their emotions in their physical being, an exercise which is very useful for slowing down their mechanical thoughts and bringing in some vastness. The depth and impact of such practices depend upon the child's age and his inherent nature.



- ❖ **Opening and Closing Ceremonies:** Before starting and closing the lessons, there is a small ceremony chosen by the teacher to bring a sense of harmony in the class, create right intentions and tune the child's being. We have found that these ceremonies help tune and harmonise various parts of the child's being including the vital.
- ❖ **Reflection based activities:** When children are given space to assimilate and reflect upon their lessons and given an opportunity to offer their understanding and perspective, they feel heard. Over the years, this contributes to a calmer vital and also the mental part becoming flexible and open to different points of view. Self-reflection also happens through journaling and writing. Time and space are created in school to encourage children to do this regularly.
- ❖ **Intuitive Art-based activities:** One such activity is spontaneous painting which allows children to spontaneously express through art. Children older than 9 years of age are encouraged to attempt this activity using their non-dominant hand. This method is very useful for children ten years and older to calm and free their inner being. A completely non-judgmental space is provided to the children.



❖ **Mandala meditative art.** The word ‘*mandala*’ in Sanskrit literally means centre and circle. It represents wholeness. The centre and circumference always appear together, one cannot live without the other. Mandalas have been used for meditation in many spiritual traditions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism. Children love this activity. The slow and deliberate process of making and staying with the mandala can take us deep within ourselves. There are many ways in which we can connect with mandalas – colouring, creation in sand and just focusing on the centre of the mandala in meditation. The simplest form of colouring mandalas is one that we practice a lot at Creative School. We sit down together, adults and children, in silence, each one of us colouring the mandala pattern to which we are drawn. Several pre-existing patterns are available and we intuitively pick one that appeals to the heart. As we stay with the mandala colouring activity, we lose track of time. A natural quiet descends in the room as each one of us starts listening to the inner guidance. Mandalas are also very aesthetic and build a refined inner sense.

❖ **Pookalams and creation of flower arrangements:** These are truly wonderful and beautiful activities that facilitate experiential immersion in the consciousness of flowers. Children work in small groups in silence. This calms the vital while really building an aesthetic sense.



❖ **Connecting with the Five Elements (*Panchabhutas*):** This is facilitated through simple child-friendly activities and meditations. Mother Earth and Father Sun are there for all of us as we grow in wisdom and love. Earth activities bring in grounding, calmness and presence. Fire related activities help ignite the inner forces. Water helps us flow with life. The vastness of space is pure potential and spaciousness. Air element helps us realise that no matter what we can always breathe! As children experience a connection with the elements, they naturally learn to balance themselves using the presence of that natural element within.

Some Observations by Teachers and Children

“Every man has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of strength and perfection in however small a sphere, which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it, use it. 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.”³

When children grow up in an environment where all parts of their being are acknowledged and given space for development, they begin to see life in an integral manner. All parts of their beings are tuned into the slowly-evolving harmony of life.

Some children inherently open fully to a state of harmony and balance, based on their innate potential. Others become more respectful of the way the vital part acts and expresses in themselves as well as in others. Most importantly, they begin to internalise that it is possible for them to come back into a state of balance.

Thanks to the steady practice in the classroom all children at Creative School develop an awareness of their emotions as well as experience growth in self-understanding and expression skills. Only those who are ready take the next step of refining and regulating their emotions. We have seen that some children are truly inspired from within for perfecting themselves. Others take a less challenging route.

We have observed that for children who are ready in their journey, vital education can play a pivotal role in their self-development.

Children have their own favourite methods to explore themselves. Most children take to journaling and free flowing art. Mandala art meditations are also immensely popular. Older children realise the full value of Fire and chanting. Most are ready for longer meditation time and acknowledge that when they do not meditate, they don't feel good within. Grounding is another popular tool. Older children are ready to internalise that they have the power within to make choices for themselves and let go what no longer serves them in their journey. Concepts such as forgiveness and gratitude are also explored with 15-18-year-old students.



³CWSA, 1: 384

To summarise, we have discovered that acknowledging the vital in education truly forms the foundation for an inner turning and conscious self-development in children.

The Role of Parents

Many factors affect how a child explores education of the vital. Encouragement at home and a sync between school and home can be of much help in this regard. This is especially true for non-residential schools such as ours. We have observed that children who are fully engaged with vital education approaches are also those who have the right support both at school and home. For facilitating parents' involvement at home, we have tried to engage the larger parent community by making them familiar with our learnings and processes. It is our observation that parents who are receptive have indeed greatly contributed to their child's overall development.

Training Teachers from Government Schools

The Nation Education Policy 2020 has explicitly called out the importance of vital education through what is termed as Social Emotional Learning. There are also specifications in the framework to help create Anger-free and Hate-free schools. The above areas truly need proper education of the vital.

With the Divine Grace, we were recently given an opportunity to train government school teachers from schools in Odisha and Karnataka.

Our training first helped honour the teacher as a whole human being and brought in the concept and practice of vital education for the teacher. We then introduced them to simple practices of acknowledging every child, bringing in opening and closing ceremonies to harmonise the classroom, encouraging better connection between teachers and children, consciously choosing positivity in the face of challenges, having peace corners in the classroom, breath-based practices, and simple meditations.

These were absorbed by the teachers who were quite happy to learn these — both as part of their own practice and also for application in their classrooms.

We are grateful for this new opening that has come in for furthering our work in vital education by sharing our experiences and lessons learned with teachers from other schools.

A Few Closing Words

The three principles of true teaching also guide the education of the vital. The first principle is that nothing can be taught. We can only point the child inwards and give opportunities for exploration. Vital education cannot be taught but facilitated while fully respecting the child.

The second principle is that the mind must be consulted in its own growth. A child must never be forced into any activity. In fact, when a child's choice is respected, he or she is naturally inspired to look within.

The third principle of true teaching is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. This is practiced when children are encouraged to explore their own experiences, and when such experiences are made relevant and relatable for them.

Education that helps cultivate a strong and calm vital is invaluable for a child's integral development. It requires steady and persistent efforts from the facilitators. The whole school experience itself should be a means to help refine and develop a balanced vital. Undertaking this journey is truly worthwhile for all — teachers, children, and parents.

JAYASHREE ASHOK

(About the author: Jayashree Ashok is the co-founder of Creative School with her husband B. Ashok. Her life's work spans the areas of education, parenting and health through inner transformation. She recently completed the Indian Culture and Self-development course offered by Sri Aurobindo's Action.)



Breath



I noticed a child monk—he can't have been more than ten years old—teaching a group of five-year olds. He had a great aura about him, the poise and confidence of an adult.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"We just taught their first class ever," he said, then asked me, "What did you learn in your first day of school?"

"I started to learn the alphabet and numbers. What did they learn?"

"The first thing we teach them is how to breathe."

"Why?" I asked.

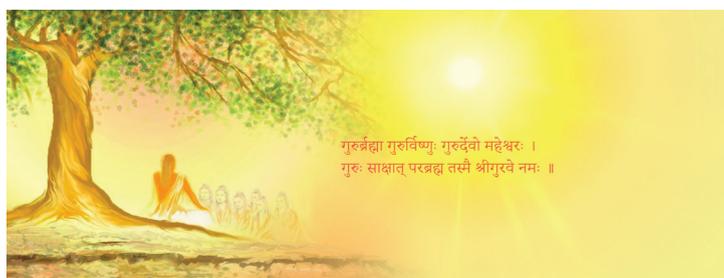
"Because the only thing that stays with you from the moment you're born until the moment you die is your breath. All your friends, your family, the country you live in, all of that can change. The one thing that stays with you is your breath."

This ten-year-old monk added, "When you get stressed—what changes? Your breath. When you get angry—what changes? Your breath. We experience every emotion with the change of the breath. When you learn to navigate and manage your breath, you can navigate any situation in life."

Inhale the beauty.....
Exhale with Gratitude.

Courtesy : THE INTERNET

True Professor



Painting by Ritam Upadhyay

The Mother says a professor, a true professor, must be truly a yogi. That is to say, a teacher, even a schoolteacher, one imparting what is called secular education, has to be nothing less than a yogi. The Indian term for teacher is 'guru' and 'guru' meant a teacher both spiritual and secular. This

distinction of the two words is made by the modern spirit, it did not belong to the ancient culture. The secular knowledge was also considered a necessary part of the spiritual knowledge, that which prepared for it and led towards it. The 'apara vidya' or the 'Vedānga' were but limbs of the supreme knowledge 'para vidya' and 'Veda'.

A teacher has to be a yogi does not mean that he is to be a paragon of moral qualities, following, for example, the ten commandments scrupulously. Not to tell a lie, not to lose temper, to be patient, impartial, to be honest and unselfish, all these more or less social qualities have their values but something else is needed for the true teacher, something of another category and quality. I said social qualities, I might say also mental qualities. The consciousness of the teacher

has to be other than mental, something deeper, more abiding, more constant, less relative, something absolute. Do we then prescribe the supreme Brahma-consciousness for the teacher? Not quite. We mean the consciousness of a soul, the living light that is within every aspiring human being. It is a glad luminousness in the heart that can exist with or without the brilliant riches of a cultivated brain. And one need not go so far as the Vedantic Sachchidananda consciousness.

That is the first and primary necessity. When the teacher approaches the pupil, he must know how to do it in and through that inner intimate consciousness. It means a fundamental attitude, a mode of being of the whole nature rather than a scientific procedure: all the manuals of education will not be able to procure you this treasure. It is an acquisition that develops or manifests spontaneously through an earnest desire, that is to say, aspiration for it. It is this that establishes a strange contact with the pupil, radiates or infuses the knowledge, even the learning that the teacher possesses, infallibly and naturally into the mind and brain of the pupil.

Books and programmes are of secondary importance, they are only a scaffolding, the building within is made of a different kind of bricks. A happy luminous consciousness within is the teacher's asset, with that he achieves all; without it he fails always.

If the teacher is to be a yogi, the pupil on his side must be at least an aspirant. But I suppose a pupil, so long as he is a child, is a born aspirant. For, as the Mother says, a child's consciousness retains generally something of the pure inner consciousness for sometime at least until it is overshadowed by the development of the body and the mind in the ordinary normal way. Something of this, we know, has been expressed in the famous lines of the visionary English poet:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,¹*

But if the right teacher is found, that pure flame in the child's consciousness can be kept burning, can even be made to burn brighter and higher. A teacher too on his side in the presence of a pure child-flame in his pupil may profit by its warm touch; for the two by their intimate interaction grow together towards a greater fulfilment in both.

When we speak or think of education and consider the relation of the teacher and the pupil, we generally confine ourselves to the mental domain, that is to say, aim wholly or mainly at the intellectual acquisition and attainment, and only sometimes as per necessity as it were we turn at most to the moral domain, that is to say, we look for the growth of character, of good manners and behaviour — social values as we have said. Here we have tried to bring into the educationist's view a more important, a much more important and interesting domain — a new dimension of consciousness.

Nolini Kanta Gupta
(Collected Works Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 4: 256-258)

¹Wordsworth: Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood

An Interview with a College Student

Editorial note: Tuhina Roy lives in Mumbai and is currently enrolled at a prestigious college, pursuing a B.A. degree in English Literature, with Sanskrit as an additional subject of study. She plans to earn a higher degree in Education as she believes she can be a good educator in future. Because of her family background, she is open to the influence of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and has a deeper approach to life not commonly seen in most young people of her age.

Tuhina was invited to share with the readers some much-needed student perspective on some of the key aspects concerning the present and future of Indian education. Her

responses are thematically organised, appropriate for the special focus of the present issue, and have been edited only for brevity, language and grammar; some information not directly related to the topic has also been taken out without compromising the integrity of her response.

1. Please share a few most rewarding learning experiences in high school and college which brought you any new insights about yourself.

Tuhina: For my schooling, I attended a Dayanand Anglo Vedic institution and I loved our mantra chanting hours. We

used to assemble and chant together, creating an energising atmosphere. As I grow older, I feel much thankful to my school for instilling this habit early in my life. Chanting Gayatri Mantra was a daily mandatory activity at the school. I follow this practice still today, and I find it disciplines my mind and body and makes me a happier person.

Along with Gayatri Mantra we also used to sing Saraswati Vandana and several patriotic songs. Nobody ever opposed this as far as I know. In fact, it made us feel more at ease.

My present college in Mumbai, a leading Christian institution, has a diverse group of students and encourages multi-faceted activities. Studying here has opened up for me a simple yet a profound principle of *exploration*. I have actively participated in group projects such as presentations and organising exhibitions, all of which have helped me connect deeper with the subject of study, and eventually myself. The process has always been intense as I immerse myself in those activities.

One of the major troubles that I have faced at college has to do with my inability to understand how much to exteriorise and when to interiorise. Fortunately, I have found an activity which I truly love and connect with, namely, Inter-Play Yoga, conducted by our Jesuit Father Prashant. It has kept alive my quest for self-improvement.

2. In what way has your formal education facilitated (or not) your emotional and psychological growth? Briefly describe one or two examples to illustrate.

Tuhina: My school tried to facilitate our emotional growth by introducing mandatory group activities and school trips. But I found them only satisfactory because given the highly competitive academic environment in classroom these infrequently used approaches were not much effective and felt forced. Most teachers were either indifferent or even hostile; they barely discussed about anything outside of the prescribed syllabus. We had to stick our noses into our books all the time. The only way they smoothened our failures was by presenting a report card which was less about marks and more about our unique qualities. Small mercy! But the ranking of students was still based on marks.

Having chosen Humanities as my subject for college studies, I now understand the value of expression and authenticity. At college we are encouraged to participate in different activities with a large number of meritorious students from various parts of India. Instead of fostering a sense of competition, this facilitates a greater self-integration process.

3. Does our mainstream formal education emphasise some aspects of an individual's self-development while ignoring others? Please give some examples from your high school or college life to illustrate.

Tuhina: At my school, there was a great pressure to become a valedictorian, especially for bright students. There was hardly any scope for creativity. Classroom discussions were pretty engaging when it came to subjects like History and Mathematics. But Linguistics and Literature were not given their due importance. As a result, I feel I missed out on developing a good appreciation of the human condition and human enterprise. This lacuna was one of the reasons why I chose to pursue a degree in English Literature and Sanskrit, which I think would deepen my understanding of life.

At my college, our professors look for passion and clarity. And I think I have passed that test through rigorous practice. That practice for me hasn't been intellectual alone, I have had to physically become fit and also work on my inner growth. My faith in the Mother and my regular reading of Savitri by Sri Aurobindo have helped me tremendously, especially in developing a greater sense of harmony.

4. To what extent did your formal education help you become aware of the deeper cultural spirit of India? Please give an example or two from your experience.

Tuhina: At school, the spirit of Sanskrit resonated with most of us. I think that kept us somewhat connected with our nation's spirit.

Sadly, in most of the departments at my college, I haven't seen anything more than an emphasis on intellectual growth. Anyone who can articulate well and argue successfully is proven to be the best. For some time, this idea of a lopsided growth blinded me to the true and vibrant spirit of India which encourages a more harmonious growth of the individual.

But the turmoil intensified my aspiration to find the truth and I started attending various informal sessions outside college where Sri Aurobindo's works were discussed. It opened me up and I feel that now when I have to participate in a more formal environment, there is a whole new power.

5. Does our mainstream education help inculcate in our youth a healthy pride for our motherland and her cultural heritage and civilisational uniqueness?

Tuhina: At this point, I believe yes it does. My school gave me and my peers a good grounding in our sense of national identity and spirit, despite certain misses and slips here and there.

In college, initially I saw the superficiality of mainstream education that tried to cage us into rigid and artificially constructed intellectual identities. But during the next two years I could make a distinction between those rigid elements and other liberating forces at work which helped inculcate a pride for our motherland and cultural heritage. Open discussions on a variety of topics in our classes and various seminars helped us connect with ourselves and several sublime aspects of Indian culture.

6. What one key change would you propose at the school and college level education if you were the education minister?

Tuhina: At college level, I would propose an increase in the student exchange programs, expanding it to countries such as Israel and New Zealand.

At the school level, I would propose a workshop where teachers can refresh themselves through meditation with the help of people who are doing sincere spiritual sadhana. I would propose that such workshops happen at least once in two months.

7. What two main changes would you introduce at your college if you were the principal or director?

Tuhina: If I were the principal of my college, I would introduce activities that encourage and facilitate silencing of the mind; such activities should be ideally offered by advanced spiritual aspirants who have attained some of this inner silence.

I would also introduce the concept of human library where one can freely and openly share one's insights on life with one's peers and teachers, and feel uplifted through this process. But this need not be formalised because that might diminish the holistic aspect of such an organic exchange and intensify the very thing it is meant to mitigate — stress!

8. What two main changes would you introduce in the curriculum if you were the head of the department of the particular course in which you are currently enrolled?

Tuhina: At present I wouldn't want to change anything in my department's curriculum. Our professors are open to additions and subtractions in the curriculum which makes our learning free and wholesome.

TUHINA ROY

A Touching Story about a Teacher

As she stood in front of her 5th-grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children an untruth. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. However, that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he did not play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. In addition, Teddy could be unpleasant. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big 'F' at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise.

Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, 'Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners... he is a joy to be around..'

His second-grade teacher wrote, 'Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle.'

His third-grade teacher wrote, 'His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father doesn't show much interest, and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken.'



Teddy's fourth-grade teacher wrote, 'Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and he sometimes sleeps in class.'

By now, Mrs. Thompson realised the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing and a bottle that was one-quarter full of perfume. But she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist. Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, 'Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to.'

After the children left, she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her 'teacher's pets.'

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was the best teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in life.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he'd stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and favorite teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer. The letter was signed—Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

The story does not end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he had met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit at the wedding in the place that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. Moreover, she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together.

They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, 'Thank you, Mrs. Thompson, for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference.'

Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back. She said, 'Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you.'

Courtesy: THE INTERNET

Swadharma, a Learning Journey towards Wholeness

Editorial note: This is an excerpt from the original essay published in *Namah: The Journal of Integral Health*, 27 (1), April 2019, Sri Aurobindo Society.

According to The Charter of Auroville, given by the Mother,

"Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages."¹

Further, she explained in a seminal document called 'To Be A True Aurovilian':

"The first necessity is the inner discovery in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the centre there is a being free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the active centre of our being and our life in Auroville. ...The fulfilment of one's desires bars the way to the inner discovery which

¹CWM, 13: 193

can only be achieved in the peace and transparency of perfect disinterestedness.”²

This inner discovery is at the heart of a lifelong learning journey in Auroville. Ever since its founding ceremony on 28th February 1968, over the last five decades, Auroville has grown into an integral living campus covering more than 3,000 acres of afforested landscape. Auroville began on a barren plateau but when the inner call became the top priority of its members its direct and most visible outer consequence was the regeneration of the entire landscape into a thriving ecosystem. It is living proof that when people come in touch with their soul and follow its call, they will honour the larger life of which they are an integral part.

The huge diversity of creative activities found in Auroville is a direct consequence of the great individual freedom with which members of the community explore their *Swadharma*. This diversity of activities is also now attracting thousands of volunteers and interning students from across the world. However, there were hardly any facilitated long-term learning programmes offered to volunteers and interns to help them discover their inner calling.

While integral education is lifelong learning and Auroville is to be a place of unending education, it is yet to re-imagine itself to be a new kind of university where learning in action is the norm with Karmayoga as its deeper means. The *Swadharma* programme was initiated to embark upon this greater destiny of Auroville.

The *Swadharma* Programme

Since 2016, Auroville has been offering five-week long educational programmes focusing on the idea of *Swadharma* for youths aged between 18 to 28 from around the world. The word *Swadharma* is often mis-translated as ‘one’s duty’ which has a sense of external social responsibilities or moral and legal obligations. But that is not its essential meaning. Our approach to *Swadharma* is guided by the deeper perspective which Sri Aurobindo describes as:

“...to live in one’s self, determining one’s self-expression from one’s own centre of being in accordance with one’s own law of being is the first necessity. Not to be able to do that means disintegration of the life; not to do it sufficiently means languor, weakness, inefficiency, the danger of being oppressed by the enviroing forces and overborne; not to be able to do it wisely, intuitively, with a strong use of one’s inner material and inner powers, means confusion, disorder and finally decline and loss of vitality.”³

Swadharma is not an external duty one must perform in the society based on any economically or culturally formed social roles. *Swadharma* is one’s own law of being, an inside-out movement arising from one’s own inmost centre. Such a movement is fundamental to the integration, order and vitality of life and therefore the well-being of the individual and society.

Swadharma offers young seekers an opportunity to embark on a transformative learning journey with the goal of self-discovery in the context of Auroville. The multi-disciplinary foundation programme has an option for a self-directed internship in Auroville after five weeks. The duration of stay after the five-week programme is left to the learners to decide.

The focus of our programme is to help the learner to experientially discern their true self from all its instrumental layers and bring this inner guide to lead their actions. This is true self-directed learning. We recognise that the awakening and growth of the inmost being is a lifelong process and the purpose of the programme is to initiate and establish the learner on the path of unending self-exploration, self-discovery, and self-creation. A growing passion for the joy of learning and creative self-transformation will be the sign that the inherent force dormant within the individual is awake and beginning to chart its course of growth. Such an individual will be self-driven and in harmony with the individual purpose and the purpose of the larger whole of which the individual is a part.

Our pedagogy simultaneously enables the learner to be:

1. in harmony with one’s inner nature
2. in harmony with one’s outer work
3. in harmony with the larger whole of which the individual is a part.

Pedagogy

How do we awaken the learner to the divine spark within? How do we help them to gather this spark into a growing flame? How do we help them to express it in outer action? How do we do it using the resources available within Auroville? These were the questions that were alive in us while designing the programme.

The *Swadharma* programme has no textbooks. The only book to read is one’s own interior and the challenge is to invoke the presence of the inner fire. This is done best not as an information exchange but by transferring the inspired energy by those who are already following its call. Thus, the

²CWM, 13: 207-208

³CWSA, 20: 49

most precious support in the learning journey is the presence of the people who have spent decades toiling in Auroville manifesting their dreams in action. In this process we broadly cover three areas – Self, Society and Environment. It is their struggle and battle with challenges on the way and the sharing of this precious experience in their own living contexts that makes the biggest impact on the learners. There is plenty of sharing and plenty of learning.

While encounters with the living intensity of the fire on the path provide great stimulation and inspiration, it is not enough for the learners to orient themselves towards their own inner fire. This is done through detailed self-observation to discern between sensations, impulses, desires, drives, emotions, thoughts, ideas, values, imaginations, insights and inspirations. Such self-observation is facilitated through deep listening, awareness through the body, journal writings, sharing circles, natural peer-to-peer learning and feedback from vigilant mentors.

Theatre too is actively used in inner exploration. A general understanding of the various parts of our being and their psychological nature is provided as a reference for self-observation. All this is meant to help the learner discern between the external parts of their being and the signals coming from the inmost centre. The learners' first challenge is to discover their values and potential lines of external work in alignment with their inmost truth and its guidance. Once the learners feel themselves to be on their own unique trail of growth, they begin exploring their specific domains of interest by meeting with domain experts.

But it is not sufficient that one gets some inner connection and its inspiring insights, there must be a readiness and capacity in the outer instruments to put them into daily life context. Unless the outer life changes, the inner contact cannot come fully alive and lead the learner.

This naturally demands the learner to encounter one's instrumental nature in terms of the body, the vital energy animating it and the intelligent will of the mind. Each of these instruments is to be observed in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. Such an understanding arises vividly only when the learner attempts to bring out the inner contact into practical action by attempting to do dream projects of his or her choice.

While engaging in action the complexity of surrounding life brings out the strengths and weaknesses of each learner. That's when more precise understanding of the needed daily practices to purify and develop the instrumental nature comes into active awareness of the learner. It is this encounter that is at once external and internal, that brings out the shadowy elements within that refuse to change. That's when the battle begins between the light and shadow within.

Self-doubt, laziness, impulses, distractions, fears, sorrows, inner wounds, depression, anger, childhood traumas and all that were hidden in the inner cellars start showing up when learners embark upon actively changing their daily life-patterns. That's when a safe space to share with deep bonds of love and care becomes a necessary condition for everyone to be vulnerable and open. This enables the learners to leave behind their outer persona and embrace confusion and pain and dive inward to find the deeper truth and its healing presence. Often breakdowns lead to breakthroughs and facing confusion and walking through their clouds leads to luminous clarity. This naturally brings out the importance of faith, aspiration and sincerity on the path.

Everyone has their own pace and each one is on his own authentic trail with its own unique challenges. And it is a lifelong journey. Five weeks of focused exploration only puts the learner in touch with what is possible and shows them how to walk the path and build their own transformational practices. The *Swadharma* programme is not about finding one's career, but about how to take authentic steps on the path so that one's inner call naturally unfolds into outer fields of action.

More about the programme can be found here: www.Swadharma.auroville.org

MANOJ PAVITRAN

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