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Relevance of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of education to national education policy 2020

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Abstract---The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to turn India into a 'vibrant knowledge-driven society' by designing a 'India-Centric' education ecosystem capable of disseminating high-quality education to all in a sustainable way. In this pursuit, it is necessary to review the educational philosophy of great Indian philosophers. The paper presents the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy to NEP 2020. In this vein, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi informed to Indian people about Aurobindo's vision of national education on which NEP 2020 is founded during his monthly radio broadcast on Mann ki Baat , on 29th November 2020. From this perspective the present paper explored, examined, and explicated the Aurobindo's educational philosophy regarding NEP 2020 themes.

Keywords---educational policy, integral education, NEP 2020, philosophy of education.

Introduction

In the first half of the early 20th century, India was facing a social, political, and educational crisis. People of India were being brutalized for their yearning to be liberated person. Several suppressive draconian acts of the British Government were in practice to check the behavior and actions of Indian leaders. It was common to put people in jail to curb the spirit of freedom and nationalism. Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore were prominent educationists and spiritual teachers. They were very influential and tried to stir the mind of millions of Indians and were concerned to enlighten the Indian mind. Their idea of the revolutionary movement was more humane and non-violent. Through their reasoning, thinking, and oratory skills, they used to ignite the collective consciousness of the Indian people. Through their philosophical thought, they made masses to be awakened from the slumber of slavery. They provided a direction to society toward obtaining lost dignity and honor.

By the means of education, they shaped the society, culture, and mind of the nation at that time. Education is the finest way and most powerful means to

change the imagination, thinking perception, beliefs, attitude, opinions, and values of the people. Joseph Henrich (2020), an eminent professor of human evolutionary biology and anthropology at the University of Harvard, considered culture as a 'package' and formal education like schools, colleges, curricula, technologies, and printing press are a significant part of the culture which shape the human brain. People during the British colonial period realized that they needed to develop a 'national mind' way of thinking and understanding for being a free citizens of India. In 1835 Lord Macaulay wrote in his minute "we must at present do our best to form a class of persons Indian in blood and colour and English in taste, opinions in morals and intellect." It reflects the vile intentions of the British Raj. The focus of the school and universities was to produce clerks and other lower-grade jobs. Thrust was on the mastery of the English language. So, education was not rooted in the tradition and culture of India.

Therefore, Indian philosophers, educationists, and leaders like Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhiji, Rabindranath Tagore, and many more were desperate to evolve a proper system of education. In their writings and their experiments, each tried to envision a better India. They thought that the only way for India to evolve and regenerate was to re-search the beliefs, values, languages, civilizations, knowledge, and wisdom that were an integral part of ancient India. Their goal was to place education in the holistic transformational vision that included spiritual, political, socio-cultural, and economic factors.

Life Sketch of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on 15th August 1872. He received his higher education from Cambridge University. In 1890 he passed Indian Civil Service (ICS). But he joined as staff of Baroda Service in 1893. He taught English and French part-time. He learned Sanskrit and Bengali to know Indian culture better. He got published many works in 'Indu Prakash' and 'Arya'. When Bengal was partitioned in 1905, Sri Aurobindo left his position in Baroda and moved to Calcutta to lead the freshly awakened spirit of nationalism. He remained in politics for four years, but during that time he transformed political thought in the country with his writings, speeches, and contributions to prestigious magazines such as *Bande Matram*, *Karma Yogin*, and *Dharma*. He instilled a strong sense of nationalism in the Indian people and announced complete independence as the ultimate goal of the independence war. He was imprisoned once for his revolutionary political actions. In a dream, while imprisoned in Alipur, he sensed the presence of God. He was profoundly impacted by the Divine Vision; God's Vision. Along with his close spiritual collaborator Mirra Alfassa known as 'The Mother', he formed an Ashram known as 'Aurobindo Ashram' in 1915. In Ashram he performed Yoga Sadhna, meditation for his spiritual growth and development. This led him to transform from a politician to a philosopher and spiritual teacher. By that time he got famous for his philosophy of Dharma, Spiritual development, yoga, and Educational philosophy. He has got a prominent place in designing Indian past. In his book 'A System of National Education' (1921) he opined that having national system of education would not be in favour of controlling by European system of education an ideas in all matters.

National Education Policy 2020

It is very common for countries to plan their educational system and transform it from time to time to progress further (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). The Government of India (GOI) has created the National Policy on Education (NPE) to encourage education across all economic strata and to include common/ordinary people in the mainstream. This strategy covers a wide range of topics from elementary school education to institutions for higher education both in rural and urban contexts. The first NPE was proposed and disseminated by the Government of India in 1968, the second policy in 1986, and the third significant reformative policy in 2020 by India's current Prime Minister Narendra Modi (Govt. of India, 2020).

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) presented a draft of the National Education Policy (NEP) in 2019, which was followed by many proposals and consultations from stakeholders and the general public. The Draft NEP (2019) discusses reducing curriculum content to enhance essential learning and critical thinking. The Union Cabinet of India approved the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) on July 29, 2020, which defines the goals for India's new education system. The vision of the National Education Policy is: *"National Education Policy 2020 envisions an India-centric education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society by providing high-quality education to all"* (pp. 40)

The policy envisions an India-centred education system. In other words, it contributes directly to transforming the nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all (Sawant & Sankpal, 2021). Jerome Bruner who was a specialist in Spiral Curriculum claimed that "the construction of curricula proceeds in a world where changing social, cultural and political conditions continually alter the surroundings and the goals of schools and their students" (Bruner, 1960, p. 8). Framing the educational policy is a grand and highly conceptual task and developing the curriculum framework is the most challenging task as everything else depends on the efficacy of the implementation part. Dr. K. Kasturirangan, the Chairman of NEP 2020, realized that the challenge is the ability to implement the Policy in the spirit in which it has been articulated. The policy is now preparing the Curriculum Framework and textbooks prepared by NCERT and other concerned bodies. Any educational policy is framed with the same objective to fulfill the agenda of the nation.

Similar Aspects of Aurobindo's Educational Philosophy and the National Education Policy 2020

In the present paper, the salient aspects of NEP 2020 will be highlighted along with the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo which may provide some concrete direction and insight at the preparatory level of curriculum and pedagogical framework

Revival of Indian past: Traditions, culture and Knowledge of Ancient India

India has a rich heritage of ancient Indian Knowledge, considered the guiding light of NEP 2020. It focuses on the students toward the understanding of the Indian traditions, culture, and knowledge for reviving the Indian past. The student will be given exposure to understand and appreciate the glory of ancient India. This will lead to inculcating a sense of pride through the knowledge of great scholars of mathematics, logic, law, economics, astronomy, and yogic practices. The students will be given the knowledge and tradition of India. The ancient literary work will form an integral part of the curriculum. Knowledge of sixty-four 'Kalas' and Banabhatta's *Kadambari* has been mentioned by the policymakers. In past India was famous for its extraordinary work in paintings, textile works, drawing, architecture, and many more artistic works. The Indian concept of 'art' has been an integral part of Indian culture which is labeled as 'liberal art' that has been focused on by NEP 2020. These visions of NEP 2020 are vividly reflected in the important seminal work of Sri Aurobindo's book on 'A System of National Education (1921)' which eloquently stresses that "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" (pp 7).

Sri Aurobindo made a very significant contribution to the foundation of Indian Culture which is explained in terms of three tasks that India had to accomplish. The first task is regarding the recovery of ancient spiritual knowledge (Veda, Upanishad, Puranas, and Gita). As for the second task, Sri Aurobindo said that India has to pour that knowledge into new modes of philosophical, scientific, and critical knowledge. It has been well explained in his philosophical work *The Life Divine*. The third task, Sri Aurobindo has said, is to deal with the contemporary problems in a new manner, and to realize a spiritualized society (Auroville Society).

According to Aurobindo, eternal knowledge is the full development of sensitiveness achieved through yogic discipline or 'Sushmadrishthi'. Telepathy, thought reading, character reading, and clairvoyance are the forms of sushmadrishthi which belong to the power of the mind (Aurobindo, 1921). It has been practiced in ancient India. He recommended that these powers need to develop through education, purification of nerves, and proper training. Training the mind of students through meditation and yoga practices is the fundamental concept of Sri Aurobindo's Integral education. He also suggests the use of books, literature, history, and biographies containing the exemplary behavior of great souls and presentation of the passages related to the highest ideals, dreams and aspiration of the great people. Aurobindo had firm faith in the inherent nature of the child. According to Ghose (1921) "every child is the lover of interesting narrative, a hero, a worshipper, and a patriot" (pp. 33). Therefore it may be summed up that for the revival of Indian past, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy has significant relevance.

Multidisciplinary and a broad-based liberal education

The Major and distinct theme of NEP 2020 is the Multidisciplinary and Broad-based liberal education. It is a major paradigm shift in the Indian system of

education which is related to interconnection and integration across the level of education. The objective is to discover the relationships among the various disciplines (science, arts, humanities, and languages). This approach will lead to the 'cross-fertilization of ideas' (Draft NEP, 2019). The concept and ideas of the multidisciplinary approach are to be interwoven across the discipline and educational activities at the level of higher education. The outcome of this approach is expected in the holistic, integrated, and all-round development of the student with the final aim of realization and liberation of the self. In the NEP 2020 the focus is on the multidisciplinary and broad-based education that would lead to the development of the mind of both sides (right and left side). As mentioned in the Draft NEP 2019 it would enable the students to become well-rounded and develop the both sides of the brain (artistic, creative and analytical).

The whole philosophy of Sri Aurobindo revolves around the Integral system of education for well-rounded and holistic development. His philosophy was imbibed in his famous book 'The Synthesis of Yoga' which appeared regularly in a monthly review of Arya between 1914 and 1921. Later in, it was appeared in the book form in 1955. Another work of Aurobindo known as A System of National Education (1921) presents his philosophy and basic principles of education. Both of his works gave a detailed account of a holistic and integrated approach to education. His reflection and recommendations may provide direction to the curriculum framework and transactional strategies. The relevance of the philosophy of education of Aurobindo to the fundamental theme of NEP 2020 viz. multidisciplinary, holistic, and integral education for the well-rounded development appears to reflect the letters and spirit. This theme is interwoven in his philosophy of national education as well as in yogic philosophy. Many of his ideas can have implications for the understanding of the essence of the multidisciplinary and broad-based nature of the education as well as for the construction of the curriculum framework and its transaction which is under processing in NCERT.

In Synthesis of Yoga (1955), Sri Aurobindo asserts that “the true human existence, therefore, only begins when the intellectual mentality emerges out of the material and we begin more and more to live in the mind independent of the nervous and physical obsession and in the measure of that liberty are able to accept rightly and rightly to use the life of the body” (pp.12). So in the 1920's he could envision the education of the 21st century. He disclosed that for any educationist, Buddhi or intellect is the basic instrument. He enlists two groups of faculties of the mind/brain along with their functions: the faculties and functions of the mind situated on the right side; and the faculties and functions of the mind situated on the left side. Table 1 has been constructed for the descriptions faculties of mind and their functions.

Table 1
Buddhi/Intellect: Faculties an its functions according to Aurobindo

Sides of brain	Faculties	Functions	Catering the Areas of Knowledge
Right side	Comprehensive, Creative and	These are concerned with	Master of knowledge and touches the soul

	Synthetic	observation, memorizing, imagination, judgment, comprehension and manipulation.	
Left side	Critical and Analytical	These are concerned with comparing, reasoning, generalization, deducing, inference and making conclusion.	It provides services to the faculties of right side of the brain. It touches the body of knowledge.

Source: A System of National Education (Ghose, 1921)

The Table 1 indicates intellectual faculties along with functions and the kind of knowledge which result out of the interaction of the various functions. For the holistic and well-rounded development, Aurobindo prescribed the practice of yoga. He cites “the vedantic formula of self in all things and all things in self, and all things as becoming of the self is the key to this richer and embracing yoga” (Ghose 1955, pp.27). In this way the whole exercise of integration goes on. Finally, the liberation of the self results into get rid of ‘I-ness’ and ‘my-ness’ (Ghose, 1955). After going through Draft NEP 2019 and NEP 2020 one gets impression that under the heads of multidisciplinary and broad-based education. The cognition and intellectual processes can be identified.

Focus on Multilingualism and the Power of language

India is a multilingual country and a variety of ranges of languages are spoken from North to South and East to West. NEP 2020 envisioned that classical, as well as modern languages, are to be given importance. It is also imperative that multilingualism would result in national integration. According to the policy up to the elementary level medium of instruction will be mother tongue. It is also recommended that all students from pre-school to grade I will have to learn three or more languages. The focus would be on developing proficiency in speaking and reading basic texts. Draft NEP 2019 asserts that Indian languages are more scientific and the most expressive in the world. Sri Aurobindo was against imparting education through the English medium. He believed that the youth of India receiving education in foreign languages would lead to the European way of living and would make the youth as hypocritical and heartless (Ghose, 1921). He put more stress on the mother tongue as the medium of instruction and will direct the child toward the mastery of language. This mastery of his/her own language would lay the foundation to lead to mastery over the other languages. Aurobindo was proficient in many languages like Bengali, Sanskrit, and French. He believes that children are equipped with imaginations and ideas which facilitate them to learn nation history and literature.

Aurobindo advised that an educationist and a teacher should not be confined to either modern or ancient methods of education but select the one which would be

directed toward perfection and mastery in a short period. For learning the languages, he specified the steps. The first step is to use "mental faculties" and then the words and ideas. The mind must learn to notice the word and its form, sound, and meaning (sense) and then to do compare and contrast which would lead to forming the foundation of grammar. The next step is to learn the distinction in terms of the senses of similar words and then proceed to the formation and rhythm of different sentences. This would lead to the evolution of the grammar (Ghose, 1921). NEP 2020 also asserts that different language learning has been emphasized in India. Further NEP 2020 also stresses learning the classical languages like Sanskrit, Pali and Persian as well as modern languages like French, Spanish etc. The curriculum can be planned by keeping in mind the views of Sri Aurobindo.

Experiential and Field-Based Pedagogical Approach

Learning by doing has always been emphasized in successive National Educational Policies of India. NEP 2020 reiterates experiential learning in its own way. It aims that the students of foundation classes, elementary level, and secondary level will be exposed to several kinds of livelihood and life skills viz., pottery making, electrical work, metallic work, woodwork, paper crafting, textile making, sewing, and printing. As per the social contexts, the artisans and craftsmen will be identified by the school. They would be contacted for demonstrating their life skills in the school. In this way, students would have hands-on experience. NPE 2020 mandates to evolve pedagogy for learning science, mathematics, social science, literature, and knowledge about Indian heritage with a focus on a constructive approach as it was also the major focus of the previous policy.

Sri Aurobindo's one of the principles of education are related to experiential learning. He asserts that it is "to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. ... A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. ..." (Ghose, 1921, pp.6). It means any student has to grasp things through their senses and then conceptualized what it should be. He believes that true education cannot be separated from the natural environment. The process of collecting information through the five senses has been elaborated by him. He explains all five senses collect materials in terms of images of thought from the outside world. These images and impressions are stored in the 'MANAS' which are the materials of the human thought process and become the source of actions and reflections.

He cites examples of poets, painters, and yoga practitioner who use their senses for their creations. Another example is the scientists who frame theories that are based on observation of the thing. In his book *A System of National Education* (1921) Aurobindo demonstrates that the observation of flower, its form, colour, and fragrance which in ultimately help to form the structure of the flower. In same way, the knowledge of astronomy is derived from the observation of stars. The observation of various aspects of the earth leads to develop the knowledge of geology. The role of teachers is central to experiential learning. Aurobindo states that "every child has an insatiable intellectual curiosity and turn for metaphysical enquiry. Use it to draw him on slowly to an understanding of the world and

himself" (Ghose, 1921 pp.33). The knowledge derived through the experiences is used by him/her with the touch of "imaginative power". Sri Aurobindo further argues that there can be no scientific object which cannot be presented during early childhood for giving him exposure to learning as to how to observe, compare and remember various classes of objects. This kind of training should be given to the child early so that he/she could become an enthusiastic and dedicated scientist.

Conclusion

The implication of education policies has always been a challenging task. To a greater extent, we have been falling short at the implementation level. The children and youth have lots of energy in body and mind. Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of the discipline of mind and body can provide insight into the design of the pedagogic measures for the "India-Centered" education which is the main thrust of NEP 2020. His concept of purification of body and mind needs to be revived for building the edifice of a new India. He (1921) boldly reasons "unless we revert to our old system in some of its principles, we must be content to allow this source of disturbance to remain". For this, he maintains that the cause of distorting reality can be located in the nervous system which causes the emotional disturbance. Through the discipline 'habit of clam' can be developed 'Nadhi Suddhi' is one such remedy. It may further be stated that Aurobindo had a great vision for the education of the people of India. He held the idea that the education of any nation should be rooted in its indigenous culture and heritage. Equality and social justice were his another major focus. He believes in the 'universalisation of opportunities' for the progress and advancement of all, irrespective of their castes, class, and race. This particular issue has always been mandated by the policymakers in successive documents of education policies. NEP 2020 has derived major themes from Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy.

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