

Revisiting Sri Aurobindo's Views on Education and NEP 2020

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Abstract:

Sri Aurobindo the sage of twentieth century India was one of the prominent leaders of Indian National Movement. He longed for the freedom of soul, so the concept of freedom from Britishers appeared a minor task compared to ultimate liberation of the soul. His philosophy though meant to make individual towards spiritualism, he proceeded with a different perspective. He preferred to make it science with all logical and rationale analysis. According to him spiritualism is not something which an individual should aspires at the advanced age when there remains no other aim in life but to turn towards God. He opines that spiritualism should be inculcated as habit and be made a part of study for all round development of the student. His opinions on different aspects of education are worth researching. The NEP 2020 followed his ideology and incorporated the directives prophesied by him. The Macauley system of education is still followed in India though it might serve the purpose satisfying the temporary demand of education system there is danger of limiting the scope of education and making it mere source of living. Aurobindo who was educated in England, though did not contradict with idea of western education, stressed the need to give importance to Indian mode of Gurukul learning where the education is more of cultivating the innate potential of the student and making learning student centric. The modern pedagogy encourages the techniques like flipped classroom etc which were already enunciated in Indian system of education. Aurobindo reminds us, through his ideology, that the educational policy should concentrate on upholding rich culture and heritage, make a point to include the legacy of our culture heritage into our texts and help in furthering the all-round development of the students. A careful study of NEP2020 makes us understand that the policy makers have taken many of Sri Aurobindo's ideas into consideration while drafting the new educational policy.

The present paper is a humble attempt to revisit the educational policy of Sri Aurobindo with a view to highlight the salient features of NEP2020 and bring a modest comparison between them.

Key words: Education, NEP2020, spiritualism, culture

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on 15 August 1872. He was educated in England and was in the service of Maharaja of Baroda and as a professor in Baroda College. In the beginning he also took active part in Indian national movement. He was the leader to share the concept of complete freedom. His affinity towards spiritualism was the reason for his reluctance towards politics after 1905. Spiritualism was driving force that made him to view life differently, he advocated the philosophy with a scientific approach and encouraged the idea of incorporating it in younger generations through education. He viewed education not merely as a source of livelihood but also as an institution that is capable of promoting reformation of the soul. According to Aurobindo education like religion has due share in commanding obedience and shaping the life of an individual.

Education should be aimed at allowing the student to identify his innate abilities. The power to understand, think and execute are hidden abilities, education should provide the student with the necessary wisdom to understand and excavate what is already in him and encourage him to attain perfection. It is one's education which keeps him vigilant about his actions and help to bring the best of his capabilities. "In every human being there is some God-given divine power, something that is his own, which can be moved towards perfection. The task of education is to identify, develop and use it. The main goal of education should be to fully develop the inherent power of the developing soul and prepare it for the best work." ('A System of National Education: Aurobindo, 1907).

The identity of a nation is sustained by its long-cherished culture. The heritage of a country is preserved by the cultural milieu, hence it must be safeguarded with utmost care. It is the pride in one's culture which helps to sow the seeds of patriotism. It is the responsibility of the education system to bring cultural awareness in the citizens and proceed with a motive to carry forward the cultural legacy of the nation. At any stage primary, secondary or tertiary level learning should be oriented towards imparting knowledge which makes to understand the

culture heritage of the country. The students should be motivated towards understanding the nuances of their culture and learn to pay tribute to traditional and cultural tenets.

Aurobindo Three principles of Teaching:

Principle 1: 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. (Sri Aurobindo, Early Cultural Writings: 'A System of National Education)

As clearly mentioned, the teacher is ought to get out of the traditional mould and must encourage students to get knowledge on their own. The regular chalk & Talk model teaching should be replaced by modern ways where students participate in learning. The participatory learning process involves students and encourages them to come up with their inborn talents. The National Education Policy 2020(NEP 2020) also aims at bringing change in the education “The school curricula and pedagogy will aim for holistic development of learners by equipping them with the key 21st century skills, reduction in curricular content to enhance essential learning and critical thinking and greater focus on experiential learning. Students will have increased flexibility and choice of subjects. There will be no rigid separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic streams”. (National Education Policy (NEP) 2020)

Principle 2: The mind must 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. (Sri Aurobindo, Early Cultural Writings: A System of National Education).

In today's educational system undue importance is given to science and technical education. The parents feel that science and related branches alone can give scope for bright future, with this misconception they are forcing the children to opt their choices only in the field of science and technology. This obviously limit the chances of excavating the natural talent of the student. This would turn precarious to the holistic development of the students at the same time world misses to view the great talent as it remains buried and finds no scope to come out. The NEP 2020 addresses this principle of Aurobindo by bringing desired changes. “The policy envisages broad based, multi-disciplinary, holistic Undergraduate education with flexible curricula,

creative combinations of subjects, integration of vocational education and multiple entry and exit points with appropriate certification”. (NEP 2020)

Principle 3: The principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that **which is** to that **which shall be**. Man’s nature is framed by the factors like his family lineage, cultural heritage, his place of birth and the set of habits he is accustomed to. Education though has influence on the nature of the individual but the factors that shape the nature are not unignorable, they do influence considerably in moulding the character and destiny. “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”. (Sri Aurobindo, Early Cultural Writings: A System of National Education).

A teacher has significant role in identifying and shaping the character of the student. A good trained and experienced teacher can alone identify the actual talent other characteristic of the student and help in moulding his character. A teacher must be capable of observing the group dynamics and requirements of the group and must be prepared to take up challenges that arise in the group during the process of instruction and design materials that work for the benefit of the participants. “A National Mission for Mentoring will be established, with a large pool of outstanding senior/retired faculty – including those with the ability to teach in Indian languages – who would be willing to provide short and long-term mentoring/professional support to university/college teachers”. (NEP 2020)

The scope of education is much more than gaining information so over emphasis should not be given to data pooling. There is a process of refinement that is essentially needed to convert information into knowledge. Education should strive to provide knowledge. The knowledge thus gained should be converted to wisdom which teaches the practical application. A trained mind can be tuned as per the demands of the situation and make itself ready to face any emergencies. Hence the future of a nation depends on its system of education.

Modernisation is the most aspired feature of life in the present era, but the scope of and definition are not defined properly. It is not merely advancement in technology or advocating the ideals of unrestrained freedom and adopting the western habits in lifestyle that explain the concept of Modernisation. It is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of concepts starting from the individual’s approach towards life to ability to answer to the demands of the nation. This complex phenomenon can be well understood only when individual can move

from the narrow constraints and learn to develop a cosmopolitan vision. This is possible only through education which aims at physical, mental, and spiritual purification. Education should aim at all round development of the student. It should at mentoring thoughts actions and building right attitude.

The ability of right speech propels toughest argument in right direction. Aurobindo stresses the importance of the right speech which is the outcome of proper emotional and mental development. This speech credited with moral commitment helps in prospering the interest of humanity. The ethical obligation is a discipline acquired through moral education aiming at implanting lofty ideals of love, compassion. Students acquire these qualities from their teachers. Hence the teachers should pose a positive influence in moulding the character of the students.

Education should aim at spiritual enlightenment. The ethics of spiritualism are not meant merely for emancipation and renunciation, they do contribute in moulding the character of an individual. Students should be taught to train themselves to stay in the path of spiritualism. This helps them in acquiring the traits that help them remain committed and dispassionate towards untoward influences.

Aurobindo advocated Curriculum Exchange which he meant should aim developing inherent talent. The curriculum should be designed in such a way that it helps in promoting creativity in students. The art of creativity can be made a part of education and there should be scope to learn to be creative.

Other salient features of Aurobindo's views on education are, the student should be given chance to think, mere knowledge acquisition should not be the aim of education. Knowledge is sometimes mis- interpreted and equated with information. This would narrow down the scope of education making the students mere information seekers. The information which is duly graded and assimilated helps in understand the real essence of the given idea is considered as knowledge which in turn matures to wisdom. Educations should aim at conquering in echelons of wisdom. To make this whole process run successfully, the curriculum should be designed in such a way that the learners find it interesting and relevant. It is dangerous to narrow down the scope of education and making it as tool for livelihood. If the learning of technology related sciences keep him away from disciplines of social sciences student loses touch with his fellow human beings which makes him lonely and helpless. Multidisciplinary studies would keep him engaged in healthy debates converting the journey of learning into

pleasure trip. “All professional education will be an integral part of the higher education system. Stand-alone technical universities, health science universities, legal and agricultural universities etc will aim to become multi-disciplinary institutions” (NEP 2020).

According to Aurobindo universal brotherhood should be aim of education. “Internationalization of education will be facilitated through both institutional collaborations, and student and faculty mobility and allowing entry of top world ranked Universities to open campuses in our country”.(NEP 2020). The growth of science technology is of course needed for development of a nation at the same time importance of technical advancement should not be exaggerated to an extent that cultural and spiritual part of education remain ignored. A nation progressing in the field of technology would prosper in terms of its material wealth and command over the world economy but there remains a lacune in terms of spiritual progress as these priorities remain unattended. Literature is the means to understanding culture and a source of spiritual enlightenment. If the scope of language is restricted to communication and the literary texts adorn the racks of the libraries and remain neglected and uninterpreted, the idea of universal brotherhood and the planet turning into global village will ever be an unrealised dream. According to Aurobindo English education is required as per the demand of the present day but if the native languages are not given due place in education the youngsters fail to reap great literary wealth of the nation which is very essential for maintaining dignified standards of life in tune with the demands of the soil. The new education policy has shown a way for this and accommodated this in the new education policy. “ To ensure the preservation, growth, and vibrancy of all Indian languages, NEP recommends setting an Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI), National Institute (or Institutes) for Pali, Persian and Prakrit, strengthening of Sanskrit and all language departments in HEIs, and use mother tongue/local language as a medium of instruction in more HEI programmes”. (NEP 2020)

Aurobindo’s ideals on Teaching: A teacher’s role is to make the student understand his/her natural capability. The teacher should not take the role of preacher and enunciate all possible information taking it as only means for quenching intellectual hunger of the student, instead the teacher should limit his/her role to guide and show the proper path. He/she should give confidence to the students to tread on their chosen path and reach their destination. The over enthusiasm of the teacher to impose restrictions on the students and pedantic ways in instruction would hamper the prospects of learning. The NEP gave scope for the ideology of

Aurobindo by encouraging the MOOCS platform for on-line education. The student is free to pursue the courses of his interest not being restricted by the instructors or institutions. They are free to opt the courses and learn at leisure. “This will be expanded to play a significant role in increasing GER. Measures such as online courses and digital repositories, funding for research, improved student services, credit-based recognition of MOOCs, etc., will be taken to ensure it is at par with the highest quality in-class programmes” (NEP 2020). This is in partial fulfilment of Aurobindo’s views on teacher and open-ended options for learning.

The relevance of Gurukul system of education is felt long back so the establishment of Shantiniketan by Rabindranath Tagore. Remaining near to nature keeps the soul calm a mandatory requirement for learning. Aurobindo stressed the inclusion spiritual element in the education which is possible by keeping the learners in touch with the nature and making Yoga and meditation as part of curriculum. According to Taittiriya Upanishad the secret of learning lies in managing the concentration in thought. The discipline of Yoga lies in bringing orderliness in thoughts and channelizing them properly. If mind gets control over thoughts, it can have a check on the unruly behaviour of the latter and help in holding concentration which aids not only in learning but also in making living a pleasant experience. Sri Aurobindo also stressed the importance on concentration and advocated four fundamental practices by which concentration can be accomplished:

- 1.meditation
- 2.contemplation
- 3.witnessing the passage of thoughts as they pass through the mind,
- 4.quieting and silencing the mind.

Aurobindo’s impression on yoga is, it is an amalgamation of the communal (physical or external) behaviour elevated to the philosophical level. It is a complete process of inner-self contemplation and outer-social execution. The components that are essentially addressed through mediation are (1) knowing (an attempt towards improving unbiased and rational thought process), (2) behaviour (social conditioning for impressive and positive psychological wellbeing), and (3) contemplation (Trying to understand unravel the secrets one’s mind and evolve into a better human being with all potency). He stresses on the surrender of soul to the absolute power that manifests the universe. A particular posture or a mere physical twisting and turning of the limbs or the other body parts do not really give desired result. It is soul that must be able to get connected to the body and help it to experience the surge of energy that is

present with in oneself. If a soul tries to coordination with the energy of the universe and becomes successful in identifying itself with the absolute, he/she will be credited with absolute peace . This energy (the energy pervaded in the universe) enables enlightenment and refinement of the individual.

The concept of meditation and Yoga are secular concepts they are not meant for individuals of a particular religion hence can be adopted at all levels in the process of learning and gaining knowledge. The NEP respects this doctrine and tries to give scope for Yoga and meditation right from the primary level of education.

A healthy mind in a healthy body. Spiritual enlightenment is essential but at the same time the importance of physical education cannot be undermined. According to Aurobindo physical education has three prime facets: (1) control and disciplined of the working of the body; (2) an vital, logical and harmonious progress of all the parts and movements of the body; and (3) correction of any imperfections and abnormalities. The NEP 2020 has made point to include physical education right from primary school level. “Beyond these forms of understanding, Physical Education and Vocational Education are important Curricular Areas. These areas become important due to the specific Curricular Aims of health and well-being and economic participation. NEP 2020 has given specific directions for Physical and Vocational Education”.(NEP2020). As aspired by Aurobindo NEP2020 has included all the aspects that encourage the overall development of the students. The students are the future of the nation thorough care should be taken to keep them physically, mentally and socially fit to build a strong nation.

Salient Features of NEP 2020:

- Aurobindo envisaged the need for a proper educational system to steer the nation towards development. The new education policy true to his vision aims bring overall development in the students equipping them with confidence, a sense of responsibility, intellect and wisdom required to face life with more zeal and enthusiasm.
- The Ministry has identified 181 tasks that will have to be completed under NEP 2020.
- To encourage research at a younger age fair amount of budget is allocated by the central government for research and development for final year graduate students; every year budget would be increased to build graduates with research and innovative ability.(NEP2020)

- Professional Education will be an integral part of the higher education system.
- Guaranteeing excellence in early childhood care and education for all children between 3-6 years •
- New Curricular and Academic Structure (5+3+3+4), the number of years to complete 12th remains the same.
- An innovative National Assessment Centre, PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) will be set up to assess the students.
- Vocational education will be promoted from school with an aim to expand its scope at higher education system.
- Setting up of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities(MERUs)
- Setting up of National Research Foundation(NRF)
- Taking proper care to check the commercialisation of higher education.
- Encouraging the art subject by weighing them equally with science subjects.
- Greater importance to practical learning, skill advance, knowledge development.
- Sports-integrated education
- Encouragement to creative and innovative abilities. Ex: Vocational training beginning in sixth grade, a ten-day bag-free period, and the use of some vacation days to expand knowledge and necessary skills to bring change the mindset and help to develop a creative and innovative attitude.
- Establishment of Academic Bank of Credit
- Sanskrit language is given due importance as it helps in furthering cultural, scientific, and intellectual development.
- Introducing Common Entrance Exam for Admission to HEIs to be offered by NTA.
- Higher education that are aligned with industry, business, or professional requirements in engineering, medical, law, and so on will assist our students in developing themselves as job creators, making it easier for them to find jobs, and generating many innovators and creators to attract global investors and consumers. (NEP 2020)

The Ministry of Education put a step forward towards implementation of the new education policy Though it might be impossible to implement all the aspects the policy immediately, the

devoted and persistent efforts of the government and the other stake holders, students and parents, would make the program march towards success.

Conclusion:

The genuine concern of New National Education Policy: NEP 2020 is to bring in student's overall personality development which is in accordance Aurobindo's vision on education. He highlighted that education should be in harmony with the needs of our real modern life. The NEP 2020 included the necessary elements to equip the students with all necessary skills to meet the demands of the present day. As discussed, earlier the policy incorporates Aurobindo's philosophy on education by including Yoga, meditation in the curriculum, at the same time giving due importance to physical education. If the programme is implemented meticulously, would help in building a strong nation. As per the recent census, the young demography in India is more than 60% (37% population is in the age group from 0-14, 26.7% is in the age group between 15 to 30) of population are below the age of thirty. Taking this fact as the criteria, India can be considered as a young nation. The dream of building strong and developed nation will be brought to reality only by taking proper efforts to build up strong youth. Education system alone has power to bring the transformation in the individual in all aspects of his character (Physical, mental, spiritual). The reformation in the education policy is one of the key steps to building in transforming the youth. The youth trained under proper education system are sure to become confident, energetic, joyful, committed, research and innovation oriented , NEP 2020 is the step taken by the government to build a strong student community in turn a strong nation.

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