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Upanishadic Influence on Educational Thoughts of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh with reference to *Brahmacharya* on Education

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Abstract: In the Upanishadic age the famous educational framework of ancient India was surely built upon the discipline of 'Brahmacharya' which happens to be the secret of ancient India's pivotal discipline of the head & heart. In Integral Education Sri Aurobindo carefully retains the fundamental principles envisaged in the disciple of *Brahmacharya*. He has introduced Integral Education on the basis of this ancient goal of self-knowledge with the modern goal of world-knowledge. Both of these goals are admirable, and the two of them must go hand-in-hand in any educational system that is integral. To him education is a life-long learning process that makes it possible for anyone to manifest the full potential from their inner-most being and to create opportunities for living a better life.

Keywords: Upanishadic, *Brahmacharya*

Introduction: After a thorough study of all our ancient scriptures like the वेद, उपनिषद् and गीता etc. Sri Aurobindo is of opinion that we may derive from them things of immense value that may as well be delivered to future humanity and there is undoubtedly a fundamental eternal Truth for which all have been striving hard and by the significance of which all other truths owe their right meaning in the scheme of knowledge. Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo says that one must be of one's own guard lest there might be a serious mistake on one's part. He also reminds us that even if the method of attaining the truth is so valuable it cannot again be looked upon as a single trenchant rule for ever. With the passage of time and in the changed set of circumstances factors responsible for such changes must also be taken into account and relevant changes in the method of attaining knowledge, if necessary, must also be made, – of course, keeping in view the fundamental eternal Truth as the aim. This is why Sri Aurobindo in the changed circumstances has been inclined to introduce integral method of education to enable the scholars to attain higher stage of life under the guidance of the effulgent light of the psychic consciousness. What he has said regarding the method of the Upanishad etc. is shown below — *It may therefore be useful in approaching an ancient Scripture, such as the Veda, Upanishads or Gita, to indicate precisely the spirit in which we approach it and what exactly we think we may derive from it that is of value to humanity and its future. First of all, there is undoubtedly a Truth one and eternal which we are seeking, from which all other truth derives, by the light of which all other truth finds its right place, explanation and relation to the scheme of knowledge. But precisely for that reason it cannot be shut up in a single trenchant formula, it is not likely to be found in its entirety or in all its bearings in any single philosophy or scripture or uttered altogether and forever by any one teacher, thinker.*¹

Although Sri Aurobindo has received academic training and knowledge right from his early days to the University level out and out in the western system and has bathed for years together in the deep-sea water of the western culture and learning ultimately he emerges as a modern seer-poet and educator – the counterpart of the ancient seer-educators (ऋषि) of the

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Upanishadic age. Through self-knowledge he occupies a unique position in respect of forming a macro view of life that alone can give us a vision of a comprehensive man-making ideal for the present-day humanity and of the posterity. From the writings of Sri Aurobindo, we come to know that with great devotion he goes through the Upanishads and clings to the Truth that he receives from the Upanishads and looks upon the eternal Truths as the bed-rock of human knowledge and on the basis of which he erects the edifice of his system of education popularly known as Integral Education covering both the world-knowledge and self-knowledge. Here lies his cryptic remark on the Upanishads - *The Upanishads are epic hymns of self-knowledge and world knowledge*²

In fact, Sri Aurobindo forms his educational philosophy by the study of the Upanishads and other Indian scriptures and he makes serious attempts to realize the truths contained in them by applying the methods of the Rishis as he cannot satisfy himself with the philosophical ideas alone that come through intellectual exercise only. Surely at the outset there is no denying that the Upanishadic truths become an important source of knowledge to him but the methodology of attaining self-knowledge becomes an ideal of his educational philosophy which becomes fully developed only when knowledge spontaneously flows to him from higher consciousness as he devotes himself to meditation like the Rishis. It is better that we listen to the words of Sri Aurobindo himself in this regard - *My philosophy was formed first by study of the Upanishads and the Gita; the Veda came later. They were the basis of my first practice of Yoga; I tried to realize what I read in my spiritual experience and succeeded; in fact, I was never satisfied till experience came and it was on this experience that later on I founded my philosophy ... The other source of my philosophy was the knowledge that flowed from above when I sat in meditation, especially from the level of the Higher Mind when I reached that level.*³

As a great seer-teacher the import of the Upanishads is indeed very great to Sri Aurobindo. He looks upon the Upanishads as a store-house of knowledge, nay, a store-house of jnana and as such, in his macro view of the educational programme the modus operandi of attaining the truths of the Upanishads has a great role to play and in his Integral Education side by side with his recommendations for the training of the exteriorized aspects of man his emphasis on practice of the psychic consciousness has been made significantly important especially, by showing it as the leader of the march. In this connection let us glance over a few words of Sri Aurobindo - *The Upanishads are Vedanta, a book of knowledge in a higher degree even than*

*the Vedas, but knowledge in the profounder Indian sense of the word, Jnana.*⁴

At the basis of the old Aryan system is the all-important discipline of Brahmacharya.⁵ The first necessity for the building up of a great intellectual superstructure is to provide a foundation strong enough to bear it. Those systems of education which start from an insufficient knowledge of human faculty, think they have provided a satisfactory foundation when they have supplied the student with a large or well-selected mass of information on the various subjects which comprise the best part of human culture at the time. The school gives the materials, it is for the student to use them, —this is the formula. But the error here is fundamental. Information cannot be the foundation of intelligence; it can only be part of the material out of which the knower builds knowledge, the starting point, the nucleus of fresh discovery and enlarged creation. An education that confines itself to imparting knowledge is no education. The various faculties of memory, judgment, imagination, perception, reasoning, which build the edifice of thought and knowledge for the knower, must not only be equipped with their fit and sufficient tools and materials, but train scholars to bring fresh materials and use more skilfully those of which they are in possession of. And the foundation of the structure they have to build can only be had with the provision of a fund of energy sufficient to bear the demands of a continually growing activity of the memory, judgment and creative power.

The Upanishadic education although is an ancient Indian system it contains a unique and unparallel feature of Brahmacharya, never conceived or experienced by any other nation of the world, causes unlike the piecemeal training of the physical, mental and intellectual education prevailing all over the world an all pervading and comprehensive transformation from the physical unit रेतः to तेजः and from तेजः to ओजः right from the formative age of the learner. The Rishis or the seer-poets of the Upanishadic age are well aware that dynamic changes can be caused through the channels of the inner nature that automatically have great impacts on exteriorized aspects of human faculties. Thus, after receiving education through Brahmacharya a learner undergoes a radical change though silent yet revolutionary in the body, life and mind as well by degrees wears a new vision of life and becomes quite fit for performing the working hypothesis of life without difficulty.

Kireet Joshi is also of opinion that – *In the Indian system of education, there was a great deal of emphasis on discipline. The life of the pupil began with a resolve to impose upon himself the ideal and practise of Brahmacharya, which*

mean not only physical continence, but a constant burning aspiration for the knowledge – ब्रतं चरिष्यामि.⁶

In the story of 'श्वेतकेतु-आरुणि'⁷ of छान्दोग्य उपनिषद् the dialogue that chiefly explains the secret cause of creation in its entirety is of a father and a son. The theme referred to here is यथा सोम्यैकेन मृत्पिण्डेन सर्वं मृन्मयं विज्ञानं स्यात्⁸ The suggestion is that before worshipping an image of earthly material the worshipper usually infuses the earthly image into an incarnation of a supreme image with the help of the dynamic and subtler power of the mantra. The man-making programme of the Upanishadic system of education strives to give shape to a full-fledged and integrated human being with the pulsation of an effulgent Light monitoring every movement of thought and action. The system of education of the Upanishadic age is known as the Gurukul system. Under the gurukul system the tender-aged young learner is required to observe Brahmacharya or celibacy and stay in the residential house or the आश्रम of the guru for undergoing an all-round and integrated course of training that aims at physical, intellectual and moral development in the light of Brahmacharya (ब्रह्मचर्यः) through the exercise of the spirit which ultimately makes communion with the Transcendental Being - तत्त्वमसि⁹ It transpires that श्वेतकेतु is highly impressed by the role of knowledge of Brahnavidyā.

The methodology for imparting knowledge to the young disciples in the Upanishadic age may not be the same as that of Sri Aurobindo's thought of education and surely there is a marked difference between the two methodologies viz, Brahmacharya-based education and Integral Education but the fundamental objective of both the schools seems to be one and the same with some degrees of changes of some terms and all that for when the Upanishadic teachers lay emphasis of self-knowledge Sri Aurobindo equally gives stress on psychic light in view of attaining a higher stage of life. In the following lines Sri Aurobindo has outlined how the Rishi-teachers of the Upanishads have given the guideline for seizing higher knowledge by marshalling the rays of knowledge along with accumulating and arranging the store in the steady or 'धीर' mind and the right application of thoughts and intuitions through elimination of extensions and misapplication of false thoughts created by hasty mind - *We must give time for the viveka to seize on our thoughts & intuitions, arrange them, separate their intellectual from their विज्ञान्मय elements, correct their false extensions, false limitations, misapplications & assign them their right application, right extension, right limitation, make, in the image of the Upanishads, the व्यूह or just marshalling of the rays of the sun of knowledge, सूर्यस्य रसमयः. Knowledge is not for the hasty mind but only for धीर, who can sit long*

accumulating & arranging his store and does not rush away with fragments like a crow darting off with the first morsel of food on which it can seize.¹⁰

It occurs to us that the fundamental truth contained in the Upanishadic system of education has struck his mind so deeply that he is laid to believe that genuine advancement through educational programmes has to be made on the basis of such truths that the seer-teachers of the Upanishadic age have offered to the mankind for further progress. Modern education system all over the world as it prevails in our contemporary world is simply piecemeal imitation of the European academic world. At best it imparts education on the basis of some psychological leanings of the human mind. But Sri Aurobindo as a seer-teacher is convinced with his intuitive knowledge that the conventional mechanical type of European education is not capable of serving the demand of the present-day man as well as the future man and in view of constructing educational methodology requires ways and means for harnessing deeper consciousness of the young learners. Sri Aurobindo says that in the circumstances many lovers of the past system may come with the proposal of introducing the Upanishadic system of education at the present moment as they are of opinion that it is high time to resort to this for surely it would meet the demand of the day. But Sri Aurobindo differs with them. He points out that the fundamental principles of the Upanishadic system of education must surely be retained but the modus operandi or the method has to be discovered to suit to the changed conditions of life. Here are the findings of Sri Aurobindo in this context - *It is not our contention that the actual system of ancient instruction should be restored in its outward features, - a demand often made by fervid lovers of the past. Many of them are not suited to modern requirements. But its fundamental principles are for all time and its discipline can only be replaced by the discovery of a still more effective discipline, such as European education does not offer us.¹¹*

In this connection Sri Aurobindo also says- *Each human being is a self-developing soul and that the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material.¹²*

Summary: Thus, in the educational schemes of Sri Aurobindo we also come across the effulgent light of the Upanishadic ideas and he develops such ideas in the scheme of 'Integral Education'. Sri Aurobindo points out that the ancients of this land had the view that all knowledge is within and has to be evoked by education rather than instilled from outside.

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