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# ETHICS WITHIN A SPIRITUAL/ METAPHYSICAL WORLD VIEW TOWARDS INTEGRAL VALUE-BASED EDUCATION. THE SAGES OF INDIA: Vivekananda, Tagore and Aurobindo

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**Abstract:** Most of the publications on integral value-based education focus on Western educationists, either classical authors such as Rousseau or modern pioneers such as Steiner. Too often, the Western world forgets the contributions from other civilizations. This paper opens the horizon of holistic value-based pedagogies from the vast and rich heritage of Indian philosophy, studying in particular the integral value-based philosophy of education of three major figures of modern India: Swami Vivekananda, R. Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. The paper finally shows that the Indian sages have spoken about ethics and education not from the prevailing materialistic utilitarian paradigm but rather from another world view, which is spiritual and metaphysical in deep coherence with Western Philosophical Idealism –from Plato to Hegel and Steiner–, and also in deep coherence with quantum physics and the new holistic paradigm.

**Keywords:** *philosophy of education, pedagogy, integral/ holistic/ value-based education/ education in human values, ethics, Indian philosophy, Vedanta, Neo-Vedanta*

## INTRODUCTION

Western scholarship rarely pays attention to the contributions from other civilizations; our ordinary handbooks on the history of philosophy or the history of art are usually centred on Western culture in exclusive terms. Before this cultural scenario –and bias–, the renowned scholar from Varanasi and Santa Barbara (California), Prof. Raimon Panikkar, has worked throughout his entire career to open Western culture and scholarship to intercultural dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

In the educational field, in particular, non-Western pedagogies are generally ignored, even amongst the advocates of integral value-based education, who could be considered more open-minded than the average population or scholarship. If we observe what happens in the expanding sector of progressive value-based pedagogies, we can easily realize that almost everybody focuses exclusively on the Western pioneers, Steiner and Montessori in Europe, Dewey and Kilpatrick in North America.

As R. Panikkar stressed in his books and lectures, the Western world can learn many things from other civilizations, India for instance; all his academic and philosophical career was an earnest defence of intercultural/ inter-religious dialogue. This paper tries to open Western pedagogy and ethics to this needful intercultural dialogue, showing Western educators and scholars that our paths of integral value education can be enriched through the educational philosophy of major sages of India such as Swami Vivekananda, R. Tagore and Sri Aurobindo.

Moreover, we should not forget that this enlightening philosophy of education has been implemented through vast educational organizations providing decades of pedagogic experience. India can offer to the Western world an accumulated experience of more than one hundred years and thousands of schools devoted to the practice of holistic value-based education rooted in a deeply ethical world view.

<sup>1</sup> Cf for instance Panikkar R., 1978 and 1999.

However, Western scholars and educators must be aware of another crucial issue, that of the paradigm. Most Westerners in the post-modern world assume that there is only one paradigm –which is materialistic, mechanistic and utilitarian, and ultimately technocratic–. The sages of India we examine here –just as Plato, Hegel or Steiner in the Western world– speak of ethics and education from another world view, which is spiritual and metaphysical. Only from this depth within, which, as quantum physicists have understood, is made of the same stuff as consciousness, can true ethics and true education evolve: the Socratic path of self-inquiry as a symbol of this mystical/ metaphysical paradigm buried down by the triumph of materialism and reappraised today by quantum physics and the new holistic paradigm.

In the words of the Indian scholar S. Samuel Ravi:

“Education (in the Indian tradition) was used as an instrument to enable the individual to rise above and to attain the truth, the beautiful and the good”.<sup>2</sup>

This metaphysical trinity, “satyam”, “sundaram”, “shivam” in Sanskrit, which Tagore heartily embraces,<sup>3</sup> evolves from within through a Socratic path of self-inquiry and self-realization. In the Indian “gurukula”, the community of the master with his disciples, the “guru” knows from experience, and not from mere bookish knowledge, that the truth, the beauty and the good exists in the depth within the “chela” (disciple). So, education becomes a loving guidance through which the adult accompanies the growing youth in the unfolding of this ethical and spiritual depth from within, which is as real as the empirical world, though it is commonly overlooked by the prevailing metaphysical ignorance or “avidya”.

This metaphysical depth or reality is what the Indian “chela” wanted to know and not mere intellectual knowledge.

“He (Bhrigu) again approached his father Varuna and said: –Venerable Sir, teach me Brahman.”<sup>4</sup>

This well-known instance from the Taittiriya Upanishad (Chapter III Section 2) exemplifies the Vedic world view from which the Idealistic conception of education stems in search of this metaphysical reality, the Brahman, that is certainly real, as real as matter, and that lies within each and everyone and not outside the empirical realm.

<sup>2</sup> S. Samuel Ravi, 2011, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Cf S.K. Chakraborty, Pradip Bhattacharya, 2008, p 73.

<sup>4</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, 1994, p. 554.

The renowned Indian scholar R.N. Sharma, who has earnestly studied the Indian educational system, emphasizes the intimate link between the Vedic metaphysical worldview and its pedagogic translation:

“According to Vedic world view the world is pervaded by divinity and the aim of every living being is to achieve liberation. This is possible by following one’s own dharma. Thus, according to the Vedas the aim of education is liberation.”<sup>5</sup>

However, the modern scholar must be aware that this kind of liberation –which is metaphysical– has nothing to do with the socio-political liberation of the French Revolution or Marxism. In “Philosophical Foundations of Value Education in India”, the renowned Indian scholar, S.P. Ruhela differentiates between this metaphysical liberation and the modern liberation of P. Freire for instance –“The Pedagogy of the Oppressed”–. This is the difference between Philosophical Idealism –represented by the Upanishads– and Critical Thought –represented by P. Freire after Marxism or the Frankfurt School–. While Freire and radical thinkers like him want education to raise pupils or conscience to such a level that they come to know very clearly and critically, about the reality of their social situation, and then they are motivated to adopt all sorts of social means, the Upanishads and Philosophical Idealism want people’s conscience to be raised by meditation, introspection, value education, and other such non-violent, spiritual means.

Modern sages such as Swami Vivekananda, R. Tagore or Sri Aurobindo restate this perennial philosophy of education for the modern world. This is what we try to make the contemporary readers in this article aware that Western scholarship and education has usually overlooked this major contribution from Indian Philosophical Idealism.

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) is one of the most important spiritual masters of modern India and one of the precursors of the Hindu Renaissance.

His favourite and closest disciple, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) would become another major figure of Indian philosophy and spirituality with greater international resonance. Vivekananda is considered one

<sup>5</sup> R.N. Sharma, 2011, p. 157.

of the fathers of Neo-Vedanta, and one of the forerunners of integral value-based education in India.

The Ramakrishna Order bearing the name of the Master comprises the twin institutions named Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

The Ramakrishna Math came into being under the guidance of the Master himself, although it was organized as such in 1886 (registered in 1901) after his passing away by his prominent disciple, Swami Vivekananda. It is a monastic order, with headquarters at Belur (near Kolkata in West Bengal).

The Ramakrishna Mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1897 (registered in 1909). It is now a formally registered society in which monks from the Ramakrishna Math and lay professionals work together to conduct various types of social service as part of their spiritual practice, particularly in the educational arena, and also in other fields: medical services, attention to weaker sectors, relief in times of natural calamities, spiritual and cultural activities, etc.

#### THE VISION AND GOALS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

- The ideology is traditional in spirit though modern in outlook, essentially ethical, spiritual and also practical.
- Its aim is universal, so it is addressed to all human beings irrespective of their social/ religious background.
- It emphasizes the essential divinity of all beings, and hence their sacred dignity; each being is God's manifestation or embodiment.
- It postulates that all religions are equally true, for which all of them can lead to spiritual realization if properly followed.
- It believes that service to fellow beings is service to God.
- It advocates an integral vision of the human being and the spiritual path, integrating the three Yogas (domains or ways): Jnana (knowledge/ wisdom), Bhakti (love/ devotion) and Karma (action/ service).

Vivekananda is preeminently important still today for a modern defence of Philosophical Idealism and its pedagogic translation into integral value-based education. As S.P. Ruhela explains in his works devoted to value education:

“Vivekananda is perhaps the first modern Indian thinker to be at once traditional in spirit and modern in outlook. Imbued with the spiritual attainments of his Master and himself having the first-hand spiritual experience, he could speak about ancient Indian soul and spirit in an unflinching way. His views on education are also therefore traditional in value substance but most modern in its material compass.”<sup>6</sup>

Beyond Philosophical Idealism, for many Indian scholars Vivekananda is still relevant in general terms as for as national development and the building of a national system of education is concerned.<sup>7</sup> With the new BJP government under the steering of Mr N. Modi, Vivekananda is the object of even greater attention to inspire public policies for both the nation and the educational development.

#### THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IS ESSENTIALLY INTEGRAL AND VALUE-BASED<sup>8</sup>

It has been implemented across 900 schools/ colleges. Vivekananda is convinced that mankind is going through a serious crisis –with which more and more people would agree today–. Scientism and mechanism have reduced civilization to technocracy –a major theme of the illustrious philosopher Raimon Panikkar–. This historical process has undermined spiritual and human values together with ethics. Vivekananda concludes that the only solution to these structural flaws and their subsequent social evils lies in education, which was the deepest conviction of Kant and Hegel as well.

In Vivekananda’s own words:

“The education that our boys receive (under British colonization) is very negative. The schoolboy learns nothing, but has everything of his own broken down.”<sup>9</sup>

For this major philosopher and sage, education signifies man-making; the formation of character is as important as academic training. Hence, the pedagogic process must be seen as self-development. This means that education must be child-centred, unfolding the Svadharma –the deepest nature– of every child.

<sup>6</sup> S.P. Ruhela, 2000 B, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Cf for instance S.K. Hooda, Sarika, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Cf Swami Vivekananda on education, 1932, 1957, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> “The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. Part IV”, 1932, p 416-417.

According to Vivekananda:

“A child educates itself.”<sup>10</sup>

In this perspective, education must be above all transformative –the very key of integral education–, which for Vivekananda means that the fundamental goal of education should be awakening the spiritual self within –the very foundation of Philosophical Idealism, Socrates’ motto–. Vivekananda emphasized that education implies unfolding the dormant potential within, which is essentially divine, though obscured by the ignorance prevailing in this world. This corresponds to the etymological meaning of the Sanskrit concept “bala vikas”, that is, unfolding the depth of the boy/ child from within.

Vivekananda expressed this concept in clear terms:

“Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. Knowledge is inherent in man, no knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside.”<sup>11</sup>

“The Light Divine within is obscured in most people.”<sup>12</sup>

Vivekananda makes it clear that this Socratic path of Bala Vikas –unfolding– implies the removal of a series of negative aspects in order to unveil the depth inside: purifying the ego, liberating oneself from false identifications and ignorance.

From this point of view, the sage warns teachers:

“You (the teacher) can take away the obstacles. You can supply the growing seed with the materials.”<sup>13</sup>

Meditation certainly helps to produce this transformative catharsis towards the realization of our true nature: this inner self or perfection within, with which we gradually identify ourselves through inner work of self-inquiry.

When human consciousness reaches this true deeper identity, it realizes the major teaching of all sages as a living reality: our own self is identical with all other selves of the universe, that is, the unity underlying diversity and cosmic consciousness. Education ultimately enables us to comprehend our own self within as the self everywhere. Unity –ontological unity– becomes the foremost goal of education of an integral and humanistic vision of education beyond mere academics.

<sup>10</sup> Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 4.

<sup>11</sup> Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 1.

<sup>12</sup> Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 3.

<sup>13</sup> Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 4.

Since we are in this world here and now, the spiritual foundation of education should not be achieved in isolation from others or from the world. Vivekananda advocates a humanistic integration of body, mind and soul within our community, when life becomes realization of our innermost nature and service to the community and fellow beings who are essentially One with us. Education should also promote universal brotherhood.

Among educational methods, Vivekananda prefers the Socratic method of dialogue guiding the student to inquire by himself or herself.

This implies the fundamental ethical dimension in education: the pedagogic process as the formation of character. However, ethics is not the compliance of something outside but the unfolding of something from within; a Kantian internal imperative with a metaphysical entity: again, the Socratic path.

These words of Vivekananda have become famous in India:

“The end of all education, all training, should be man-making.”<sup>14</sup>

Vivekananda also promoted discussion and guidance/counselling to students.

According to him, all knowledge lies already inside, since our inner self is the Self of everything. Knowing means re-discovering, unveiling from within. The teacher helps the student to remove the obstacles so that this inner knowledge can unfold.

Hence, Vivekananda would encourage child self-education to some extent and under the caring guidance of the teacher as Guru.

In his own words:

“You cannot teach a child anymore than you can grow a plant. The plant develops its own nature. The child also teaches itself. But you can help it to go forward in its own way.”<sup>15</sup>

“No one was ever really taught by another. The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work to understand things.”<sup>16</sup>

Like recent spiritual masters such as Sathya Sai Baba, Vivekananda emphasized the role model of the adults, teachers or parents; the main task of any educator is to be a living example, a source of inspiration.

Also like Sathya Sai Baba or Swami Prabhupada, Vivekananda praised the profound spirit of the Indian Gurukula, the master/ disciple relation-

<sup>14</sup> Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 8.

<sup>15</sup> Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 2.

ship, which he calls “gurugriha-vasa” following the Sanskrit tradition. Hence, an ideal school should try to revive this spirit in a modern frame in order to develop all the potential of human relationship, the very basis of education.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of curriculum, Vivekananda proposed an integral syllabus comprising all the main academic subjects, music and arts, culture, values and ethics, physical exercise and the spiritual path as the foundation of everything.

In the philosophical and spiritual domain, Vivekananda advocated the teaching of Vedas, Upanishads and Vedanta in an open frame of mind embracing all spiritual traditions.<sup>18</sup> Obviously he also recommended the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of spiritual practice, he emphasized the role of meditation and yoga.

Beyond mere techniques, educators should never forget that the spiritual path, the Socratic self-inquiry towards self-realization, should always remain the innermost core of the pedagogic system.

From Vivekananda’s point of view:

“Religion is the innermost core of education.”<sup>20</sup>

“First of all self-knowledge.”

“Infinite power is latent in this jivatman (individualised soul); from the ant to the perfect man there is the same Atman (essence) in all, the difference being only in manifestation.”<sup>21</sup>

Vivekananda certainly promoted a national resurgence of India in front of British colonization and he is still regarded all around the country as one of the Founding Fathers of modern India. His picture can be seen in the halls, offices and classrooms in all schools all around the country from the new middle-class outskirts of Bangalore to the most remote hamlets of rural Andhra.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, we should be cautious on that respect, because he was not a politician but rather a philosopher, sage and “guru”. Even if he speaks of national development, we should remember that his ideas on

<sup>17</sup> Cf Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 30.

<sup>18</sup> Cf Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 45.

<sup>19</sup> Cf Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 85.

<sup>20</sup> Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 39.

<sup>21</sup> “The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. Part IV”, 1932, p 417.

<sup>22</sup> Cf Swami Vivekananda, 1957, p 68-76.

the Indian renaissance are part of a spiritual world view whose very centre is not about politics but spirituality, the process of spiritual transformation of the human being. This spiritual journey – “sadhana” – evolves within the society itself, not in a cave in the Himalayas; this is another important part of Vivekananda’s mission. Still, there is no Indian renaissance without human renaissance, and the rebirth is essentially spiritual and global. Whether some politicians have later reduced his message to narrow-minded politics while forgetting the depth of his spiritual quest is another matter.

As we have quoted above, Vivekananda clearly stated:  
 “First of all self-knowledge.”

The Socratic quest and the famous motto engraved in the Temple of Delphos was the very core of Vivekananda’s vision and mission, not mere politics.

After his inspiring legacy, the Math and Mission has been running around 900 educational institutes, which gives us an idea of the gigantic dimension of the social service started by this lighthouse of India and the world that was Swami Vivekananda under the inspiration of his master, Sri Ramakrishna. Not by chance Swami Vivekananda himself called for the education of the masses as an indispensable step towards a renaissance of India. The twin organizations also run 15 hospitals, 125 dispensaries and around 50 mobile medical units.

One of the most significant institutes of the Math and Mission is the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture at Golpark, Kolkata. Another well-known academic space is the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education in Mysore.

We have had the privilege of interacting with schools of the Ramakrishna Mission in South India, particularly in Chennai, such as the Main Higher Secondary School (Mambalam), Matriculation School (Mambalam), Boys’ Hostel (Mambalam) or Students’ Home (Mylapore). Besides the touching human experience with the children and the teachers, we have been able to realize how difficult it is to implement Vivekananda’s message in daily life in middle-class or humble neighbourhoods of an Indian city today. The lack in proper training from the side of teachers, the precarious background of many children, the burden of the official syllabus with excessive information and mechanical tests that do not leave time for anything else, etc., a whole set of factors does not make it easy to follow Vivekananda’s inspiration in the real classroom that has nothing to do with the perfection of ideals on written books. Real life is

something entirely different, not only in India but also in Europe and everywhere, and here, at the level of daily life, in the classroom, integral education is not an easy task. Still, the Students' Home in Mylapore, near the majestic Shiva Temple, does its best and creates a special atmosphere where we can feel that Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are still alive.

## R. TAGORE AND SHANTINIKETAN

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is one of the greatest poets/ writers of India, and undoubtedly one of the major figures of world literature, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. His poetry expresses a unique sensitiveness and beauty, with a profound spiritual spell. He can be considered as a major mystical figure of the modern world who expressed his sublime vision through poetry, literature and also music.

Furthermore, his humanism was translated into a sincere passion for education, and we can certainly conclude that this mystical poet of India has provided one of the most enlightening messages in the modern world for a more humanistic, integral and spiritual kind of education, which S.P. Ruhela emphasizes in his works on value education:

“Deeply rooted in the Upanishadic idealistic spirit, Tagore was very much influenced by the Vaisnava poets of Bengal (...) Tagore, the high priest of aesthetic and spiritual expression advocates the same idea with a greater force and richness of content as the ultimate aim of education. (...) Tagore, like other modern Indian educational thinkers, recognises that the final aim of education is freedom.”<sup>23</sup>

But this is not the freedom of Marxism or the Frankfurt School, even less the freedom of throwing off our bonds in the common ego, but rather the joyful realization of that deeper truth experienced and unveiled by the Upanishadic sages or the Vaisnava mystical poets.<sup>24</sup>

Tagore's influence on progressive or holistic education has been widely recognized, not only in India but also in the Western world. His ideas on education can still inspire the needed transformation of educational systems towards integral value education.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> S.P. Ruhela, 2000 B, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> Cf Dastoor N.D., Minocher Homji, 1998, p. 3-8.

<sup>25</sup> Cf for instance The Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies, Edinburgh Napier University.

The Indian scholar S. Bhattacharjee stresses Tagore's impact on the Indian educational system:

"Tagore's educational ideals have been agreed by other educationists and many of his innovations have now become part of general educational practices, but his special role lay in the emphasis on harmony balance between materialism and spiritualism in total development of personality."<sup>26</sup>

#### TAGORE'S EDUCATIONAL AND HUMANISTIC TRINITY

In 1901, Tagore moved to Shantiniketan, where he founded an ashram that included an experimental school. In 1921, Tagore and agricultural economist Leonard Elmhirst set up the Institute for Rural Reconstruction, later renamed Shriniketan. Shriniketan would be connected with the Vishva-Bharati University, created in the same year, 1921.

Between 1878 and 1932, Tagore visited more than thirty countries on five continents, which contributed to the international recognition of his lofty legacy. His fame and notoriety rapidly grew in the Western countries, to such an extent that we could soon find kindergartens in European cities bringing the auspicious name of the great Indian mystical poet and educationist. From this point of view, Tagore's work contributed to build up a prestigious image of Indian culture and spirituality in the Western world.

Although the name of Shantiniketan is surrounded by a certain aura in the West, Tagore's prominence as a mystical poet or writer has probably cast some shade upon his philosophy of education, which has often been overlooked while stressing other educational reformers of the modern age. Tagore's pedagogy can bring invaluable insights into the understanding of integral education in depth; his intercultural aperture and his mystical vision of the unity of mankind may cast a purer light upon a world still divided by national, religious and social conflict.

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Cf also Elmhirst L.K., 1961.

For Tagore's impact on Indian education, cf Pushpanathan T., 2013, Bhattacharjee S., 2014, Jalan R.V., 1976.

<sup>26</sup> Bhattacharjee S., 2014, P 37-38.

Tagore did not write a proper treatise on education, unlike some other major figures of the history of educational philosophy. Hence, his pedagogic ideas must be gleaned through his various writings; they can also be apprehended through his educational experiences in Shantiniketan. His major work dealing with education would be “The Centre of Indian Culture”.

His educational philosophy is deeply mystical, pure reflection of the inner vision of a spiritual poet, seer and sage. Therefore, he emphatically embraced the message of all saints and spiritual masters.

“Then in the world where does our liberation lie? In love.”<sup>27</sup>

For Tagore, love is the key to shift from mechanical necessity to blissful freedom. It is the key of human liberation, the very essence of Man since it is the very essence of God. Hence, it is the very core of education.

Here, Tagore exemplifies both Philosophical Idealism and its pedagogic translation: the Indian “gurukula” or the Socratic method.

The reference to the Indian “gurukula” becomes explicit in Tagore’s writings.<sup>28</sup> The poet from Bengal defended with enthusiasm the ideal of “tapovana” –the forest of the yogis– where the “gurukula” –the community of the master with his disciples– evolved through centuries and even thousands of years. For Tagore, these forest-dwellers, seekers and teachers, kept the genius and essence of India.

“India has proved that it has its own mind, which has deeply thought and felt and tried to solve according to its light the problems of existence. The education of India is to enable this mind of India to find out truth, to make this truth its own wherever found and to give expression to it in such a manner as only it can do.”<sup>29</sup>

In Tagore’s words, the forest of the yogis “has established the link of the soul with the universal”, and this is what the “guru” (master) taught to the “chela” (disciple), or rather, this is what the disciple unveiled under the loving guidance of the master. This is the very core of education for Tagore, and also for Vivekananda. This is the very essence of the Indian “gurukula” gradually vanishing with the establishment of European modern schooling under the British through colonization. This “gurukula” so akin to Socrates and Plato is what Tagore wanted to recreate in India. For him, the Upanishads stand as a symbol of this light from Ancient India.

<sup>27</sup> S.K. Chakraborty, Pradip Bhattacharya, 2008, p 105.

<sup>28</sup> Cf S.K. Chakraborty, Pradip Bhattacharya, 2008, p 256-283.

<sup>29</sup> Tagore, “The Centre of Indian Culture”, p 6.

Tagore believed that the modern school created by Europe enhances the ego, whereas the Indian “gurukula” frees the soul. The renaissance of the “gurukula” or “tapovana” is crucial for him, and also for Vivekananda, for a general renaissance of India and the world. “Tapovana” should inspire the national education of India instead of the British-made school; it could also inspire many true seekers all around the world.

However, this has nothing to do with narrow-minded or exclusive political nationalism, from which Tagore clearly withdrew; it has to do with genuine mysticism.<sup>30</sup> It is a spiritual and universal vision.

In Tagore’s beautiful expression:

“In this forest man has realized in serene meditation the union of his soul with universal nature.”<sup>31</sup>

Another wonder of Tagore’s vision and mission would be Vishva-Bharati, an intercultural space for the arts and science, where persons from different areas and countries could work together in a common pursuit of Truth. With this purpose, Tagore invited artists and scholars from other parts of India and the world to live together at Shantiniketan and share their pursuits in a spirit of unity in diversity.

Vishva-Bharati has been seen as the international University of Shantiniketan ashram and school. From its beginning in 1921, it has developed under Tagore’s aura, and it was made the fourth central university of India by the National Government in 1951.

Shantiniketan, Vishva-Bharati and Shriniketan stand as symbols of the best educational efforts of modern age, the most sensitive and inspirational pedagogy, deeply humanistic, profoundly mystical, and truly integral, envisioned and taught by one of the most sublime souls that have lived in the world in the modern age, one of the greatest poets and educationists of India and the world, Rabindranath Tagore.

#### TAGORE’S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY FOR AN ALL-ROUND HUMAN PERSONALITY<sup>32</sup>

Tagore’s pedagogic system is rooted in the immediate context of the child, whilst it is also open to the cultures of the outer world.

<sup>30</sup> Cf Tagore’s “Words of Freedom. Ideas of a Nation”.

<sup>31</sup> S.K. Chakraborty, Pradip Bhattacharya, 2008, p 281.

<sup>32</sup> Cf Tagore on education, 1929, 1991, 1995, 2008.

This means that Tagore's pedagogy is systemic. In his own words:

“For true education is to realise at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings.”<sup>33</sup>

His pedagogy is clearly child-centred towards self-realization, with pleasurable learning sensibly individualized to the personality of every child, nothing imposed and repressive as it has often happened in modern schooling. His pedagogy is also ethical, value-centred and spiritually-based, requesting teachers not to emphasize wars and conflict but rather the progress of mankind. He always defended self-discipline twinned with self-learning and the freedom of the child directed towards self-expression.

It is worthwhile noticing that Dr M. Montessori visited Shantiniketan in 1939 and immediately admired Tagore and his school.<sup>34</sup> Dr Montessori realized that Tagore's Shantiniketan was based upon self/ experiential learning, which she advocated throughout her entire life. In fact, Montessori stayed for a long period of time in India, more than initially planned, and settled down in the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, Chennai.

Tagore was very fond of the Rousseauian pedagogy with classes held in the open air under the trees nurturing this typically Romantic and organic unity with Nature.

In this perspective, Nature walks and hiking should be part of the curriculum.

Observation of Nature, direct experience and activities should constitute major pedagogic methods. Tagore insisted that education must arise the feeling of living in harmony with all things and all existence. As we can easily realize, the poet had a quantum mind *avant-la-lettre*; his world vision and pedagogy breathe a spirit of interdependence and interconnectedness, harmony and unity.

Tagore suggested to celebrate seasonal festivals throughout the year. This practice would blend natural cycles and the organic relation with Nature, cultural diversity and spiritual inspiration for the young.

Through the daily life of his own school, he always requested flexibility in terms of class schedule, avoiding fixed patterns and a mechanistic routine.

Coming to the integral nature of the curriculum, Tagore insisted that the aesthetic part of education should be as important as the intellectual

<sup>33</sup> Tagore, “The Centre of Indian Culture”, p 7.

<sup>34</sup> Cf Palmer J.A., 2004, p 196.

one, something that the mainstream schooling of modern age has brutally ignored for centuries until very recently; and so, the poet gave great prominence to literature, art, music, dance and drama, and very specifically to music with its tremendous potential for transformation.

This great Indian pedagogue always encouraged debate/ discussion and the creativity and self-expression of children, not only through the arts but also through literature, for which his fortunate students were allowed to present their own writings in literary evenings.

In this horizon, Shantiniketan students were able to publish their own illustrated magazines and freely issue their own publications.

In Tagore's own words:

“(...) in education the most important factor must be the inspiring atmosphere of creative activity.”<sup>35</sup>

Finally, his pedagogy was totally open to universal fraternity and the unity of mankind.

#### INTEGRAL EDUCATION AND THE UNIVERSAL MAN. FROM ETHICS TO METAPHYSICS. FROM METAPHYSICS TO EDUCATION

Tagore's pedagogic thought is deeply holistic in the sense that it aims at offering a comprehensive educational process for the evolution of all the facets of human life. Developing an all round personality would include five major domains: physical, mental, moral, aesthetic and spiritual.

Only an integral pedagogy may unfold man's perfection, a crucial concept in Tagore's philosophy. However, perfection is a process and a horizon, and the very goal of education. Perfection means the gradual development or unfolding of the five domains of humanity from within. Only then can the educational process manifest the self-realization of the child or human being.

For the great poet Bengali, this holistic and humanistic process should be realized on a universal scale, since all children or human beings, in India and all around the world contain the seeds of this perfection, this five-fold integral personality to be manifested through self-realization, in a way that will be unique to everyone. Ultimately, Tagore's educational philosophy could be summarized through the concept of the Universal Man.

<sup>35</sup> Tagore, “The Centre of Indian Culture” p 7.

In Tagore's own words:

“Spiritual birth is being born out of this egg of inarticulate consciousness. It is by that birth that we shall be twice born.”

The poet withdraws here from the Brahmins' twice-born ritualism to embrace the true metaphysical second birth.

“That is to be truly born in the world, the birth of individual consciousness in universal consciousness.”<sup>36</sup>

In general terms, we can say that philosophy of education cannot be properly grasped without taking into account the general philosophical background of a particular school or author. This is particularly important for Tagore, since his pedagogic proposal is but the reflection of his metaphysical vision centred upon the notion of the Universal Man, an ideal where Philosophical Idealism and Humanism, the East and the West, blend in a shining horizon of self-realization and unity for mankind.

The Universal Man, which should be the ultimate goal of education, can be seen as a poetical vision of the ultimate reality. It will never be fulfilled through the second eye of knowledge, the intellect or reason; it must be realized through the awakening of the third eye, the metaphysical vision, while integrating the second eye –the mind– and the first eye –the senses and the body–. Hence, the realization of the Universal Man can only be integral; for this reason, the educational process must also be holistic.

For Tagore, the human being is much more than reason and body; he is a soul, Spirit. But Tagore is aware of the metaphysical insights of the Upanishads: there are not as many spirits as individuals; there is only One Spirit in all and in everything. The Universal Man is aware of the fundamental unity underlying diversity. Self-realization means that we see the Self in us and in all.

In the Universal Man, God, Nature and Man are reunited; the Universal Man embraces Nature and God. He is synonym of relation and interdependence. He is the cradle of unity. The Universal Man lies in everybody, even in the humblest. Hence, everybody should be respected as an embodiment of this cosmic vision: the Universal Man.

Then, a fundamental question may arise: how can we produce the transition from the present human imperfection and limitation towards the Universal Man? For Tagore there would be one answer only: through education.

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<sup>36</sup> S.K. Chakraborty, Pradip Bhattacharya, 2008, p 7.

Steiner was an intellectual and mystic, but not a poet; Montessori was a physician, certainly very spiritual, but not a mystic. Both shared an undeniable pedagogic concern, and both made decisive contributions to the modern world towards a more humanistic, value-based and integral pedagogy.

But what is unique and soul-subduing in Tagore is his poetical vision of the world transported into the educational field. Here lies a treasure for mankind, the finest sensitiveness of a universal poet designing and practicing the most genuine holistic value-based education deeply imbued with ethics and aesthetics. Tagore's legacy will stay for generations to come as a lighthouse to inspire many around India and the world.

Like other scholars, Jha Narmadeshwar draws a parallelism between Tagore and other progressive educationists:

“In many respects Tagore's ideas relating to the education of children resemble those of Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, Montessori and others.”

“Through contact with nature, by making them (the children) aware of community relations and with the help of literature, festivals and religious teaching, he tried to develop the souls of the children.”<sup>37</sup>

## **SRI AUROBINDO' S INTEGRAL EDUCATION AND THE MOTHER**

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) has been one of the major spiritual masters of India in the modern age; he can also be considered as a major poet/writer of English language and one of the main philosophers of the XXth century at the crossroads of the East and the West. Furthermore, his contribution to integral education stands as one of the deepest proposals for pedagogic renewal in our epoch.

In his ashram in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo was assisted by his spiritual companion, Mirra Richard (born Alfassa), called The Mother (1878-1973) by her devotees. The Mother enhanced Sri Aurobindo's interest in education and developed a whole campus around the ashram.

Aurobindo's life presents a fascinating shift from freedom fighter (for the independence of India) to yogi, philosopher and Guru. The central theme of his work would be the evolution of Man and Life into a Life Divine.

<sup>37</sup> Narmadeshwar Jha, 1999, p 9.

Among his various profound and beautiful books, we should highlight “The Life Divine”, “Savitri”, “The Synthesis of Yoga”, “Letters on Yoga”, “The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth”, “The Human Cycle”, “The Ideal of Human Unity”, “The Future Poetry”, “The Secret of the Veda”, “Upanishads”, “Essays on the Gita”, “Collected Poems”, etc.

SRI AUROBINDO'S AND THE MOTHER'S PEDAGOGY  
IS A PROPOSAL OF INTEGRAL EDUCATION FOR THE GROWTH  
OF THE SOUL<sup>38</sup>

The human being is an individual soul, a spark of the Divine wrapped in a body and mind, a conscious manifestation of the universal Self. Hence, education should not be reduced to the body and the mind, but should also incorporate the soul or deeper self. The pedagogic system must help the growing child to become aware of his or her deepest nature, awakening all the powers and possibilities of the soul.

Education is conceived as a process of organic growth, and each child presents a different pattern of growth, for which reason true education can only be child-centred, taking into account the rhythm of progression, the inclination and characteristics of every child. The Svadharma (inner nature) and Svabhava (inherent disposition) must be acknowledged by any sensible educator.<sup>39</sup>

The Indian scholar S.P. Ruhela has stressed the significance of Aurobindo for an integral value-based philosophy of education today.

“Among all the modern Indian educational thinkers he (Aurobindo) is the one who gives a clearly worked out philosophical basis to his thoughts. A theory of education in order that it may be called a philosophy of education should give an account of man, his goal and values in a way that is speculative, satisfying and complete. While others like Gandhiji were more of practical teachers, Aurobindo was primarily a philosopher and hence he has offered the philosophical details of his educational theory.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Cf Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, Sri Aurobindo, 1970, 1982, 1997, and the Mother, 1973, 1994.

<sup>39</sup> Cf Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, p 2.

<sup>40</sup> S.P. Ruhela 2000 B, p. 64.

Cf also S.R. White, 2007.

Regarding the current globalization and its critics, S.R. White stresses the value of Aurobindo's contribution to the future of education and civilization.

"Aurobindoian thought has core values that can serve as the foundational framework for a holistic global education agenda."<sup>41</sup>

ACCORDING TO AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER,  
THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS REVOLVES AROUND FIVE  
COMPLEMENTARY DOMAINS<sup>42</sup>

The senses and physical training. Education must proceed from direct experience; it should not be too abstract. It must train the senses with accuracy and sensitivity; it must also develop attention and multiple concentration. In general terms, a healthy body is a necessary condition for intellectual and spiritual achievement. Under Platonic influence, Aurobindo stresses that physical education must also nurture a sense of beauty.

The mind: intellectual/ academic education. Beyond mere academics, Aurobindo and The Mother include the development of general mental capacities. They also emphasize the role of curiosity and imagination together with the spirit of inquiry and investigation. The aberration of modern education has consisted of divorcing intellectual training from our emotional and moral nature, and even more, from our spiritual depth.

Moral education/ vital domain: to master one's character. Here, Aurobindo warned many times against the mechanical teaching of ethics through textbooks used for catechism as in any other academic subject. True moral education must be transformative. Aurobindo also denounced the traditional moral/ religious education imposing a certain discipline out of coercion, fitting children into an external mould fabricated by the adults; all this is heartless and hypocrite, not truly moral. On the other hand, to neglect moral education as it has happened so often in valueless pedagogies, is to precipitate mankind into a total crisis. Integral education must incorporate values and ethics, but this domain of human personality must become part of ourselves, which only occurs when it unfolds from within.

<sup>41</sup> White S.R., 2007, p 126,

<sup>42</sup> Cf Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, from p 8 on.

Psychic education. The psychic being would be the psychological centre of Man; at its core lies Love. Here, Aurobindo and The Mother attach the greatest importance to the positive transformation of character, inseparable from positive values. With psychic education we come to the true motive of life, the reason of our existence and the purpose of life on Earth. However, the most important is to live the experience, not to merely think or read about it.

Spiritual education (also called supramental). First of all, spirituality does not mean for Aurobindo and The Mother the annihilation of the individual or ego, but its purification and enrichment through contact with the Absolute. For them, it is clear that the contemporary crisis of mankind arises from the unbalance between material progress and inadequate spiritual evolution. Hence, a major aim of education is the awakening of spiritual consciousness. In Aurobindo's words, intellectual training cannot change man; it can only provide him with better information and more efficient machinery, leaving the same unchanged ego or mind. Only true spiritual education can bring significant change, but again, not a new kind of imposition or catechism as in the past, but a really transformative spiritual education unfolding the deepest self from inside.

#### SOME ADDITIONAL REMARKS ON SRI AUROBINDO'S AND THE MOTHER'S PEDAGOGY

In terms of pedagogic methods, Aurobindo and The Mother disliked the teacher's negative attitude, so typical in mainstream schooling, and the repressive ways of imposing through compulsion. If a child shows bad inclinations or habits, they said, he should not be harshly treated as a delinquent, but encouraged to cleanse these inclinations or habits and positively transform his/her character.

In the horizon of spiritual education, the major pedagogic method would certainly be Yoga, which means union with the source of our being. Aurobindo and The Mother always defended a synthesis of all the various schools of Yoga – Hathayoga, Rajayoga, Jnanayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Karmayoga, etc. This synthesis they called Integral Yoga, for integral education towards an integral human being.

Integral Yoga blends all the kinds of Yoga in the Sadhana (spiritual path), and integral education combines all the domains of humanity and

the pedagogic process. Hence, the syllabus for integral education is the whole life, which is the very core of Yoga.

From this integral philosophy of education, Aurobindo and The Mother warned against all the misunderstanding inherent to the dichotomy between matter and spirit. Their vision is not a “fuga mundi” –escaping from this world of sorrow towards a better world somewhere else–, but rather bringing The Life Divine upon Earth, hence transforming human consciousness and matter itself. The material or mundane world is not false or illusory as some incorrect interpretation has often postulated, particularly in India. The empirical realm has its truth too; what is false or illusory is to reduce truth and reality to this only. This new spiritual perspective is what genuine integral education must unfold. This new spiritual perspective gives Yoga and pedagogy their real integral nature. Integrating matter and spirit is the main aim of Yoga and hence education.

In the words of Aurobindo himself, education must be centred upon “the growth of the soul and its powers and possibilities.”<sup>43</sup>

Then, in Aurobindo’s own words, “Life will be divinised.”<sup>44</sup>

The sage makes it clear that integral education has a spiritual foundation, something that has been overlooked by many advocates of progressive pedagogies in Western countries unaware of the materialistic bias of mainstream culture in the modern world.<sup>45</sup>

From this perspective, Aurobindo addresses himself to educational authorities:

“I would like them (the government) to recognize yoga as education.”<sup>46</sup>

And integral yoga as understood by him is not a “fuga mundi” but rather it implies the very transformation of the empirical plane.

“The integral yoga does not reject life. It transforms life.”<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, p 3.

<sup>44</sup> Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, p 4.

<sup>45</sup> Cf Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, p 4.

<sup>46</sup> Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, p 4.

<sup>47</sup> Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, p 5.

## EXPERIMENTS IN INTEGRAL EDUCATION

In 1943, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother established a school with only 20 students at Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry. It grew rapidly, and in 1951, it was expanded into Sri Aurobindo International University Centre. Today the school is known as Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

These educational institutions sought the manifestation of a new light and power. In spite of human imperfection, the institutes of integral education at Pondicherry –later expanded to Delhi– remain as important attempts to develop holistic value-based education in this world under the enlightening inspiration of two great figures of the XXth century, Sri Aurobin and The Mother.

Besides the Ashram, Aurobindo's educational philosophy has also been implemented in the visionary city of Auroville, and it has inspired a vast pedagogic movement through many schools all around India and in the state of Orissa in particular, with around 500 schools and 60 000 students.

The Centre of Education at Pondicherry does not award degrees. The Mother was very keen on this point, this avoiding academic pressure and the dismissing of proper education due to overemphasis on tests and exams.

Flexibility in the pedagogic process has been one of its cardinal virtues.

Physical education is given great importance here, with contests and tournaments, not in the traditional spirit of competition however, but rather in a spirit of progress.

Another salient feature of this pedagogic system is the Free Progress stream, which means the distinct and unique progress of every child guided by his or her soul. It is the progress of the entire integral human being, which is essentially different for everyone. This progress is obviously not reduced to academic achievement, it is the progress of human consciousness in its self-discovery. This implies an expansion of consciousness, an increasing awareness of the inner power and principle of guidance. It is about a total evolution of our entire being so as to transcend all the present limitations: the Socratic path of self-inquiry.

All this means that the educational process can be neither rigid, nor coercive. Education must be a process of free growth.

Aurobindo recalls one of the basic principles of integral education from Philosophical Idealism, so emphatically stressed by Vivekananda:

“The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher (...) is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest not to impose. Teaching is not imparting knowledge to pupil but to show him how to acquire knowledge by himself. Knowledge is within.”<sup>48</sup>

The pedagogic system also stresses the possibility of educating oneself, of self-experimentation, and above all, the genuine experience of freedom. As he grows older, the student has an increasing capacity to select his subjects and the organization of his time; but his self-education has to be properly guided, the middle path that has always been advocated by Philosophical Idealism. Freedom should not be misused.

Hence, a great stress falls upon the individual work of students: avoiding the excess of collective projects so fashionable in pseudo-progressive schools.

Additionally to lectures, discussions are cultivated in the school.

Projects are an important part of the evaluation system too.

It is worthwhile to recollect here one conversation between Aurobindo and his disciples, through which the master asked his followers whether they knew about Montessori’s Method. Through this talk, Aurobindo said pretty clearly: “Montessori is right”.<sup>49</sup> Quite obviously, Aurobindo was aware of the profound parallelism between his own philosophy of education and Montessori’s. The principle of self-learning would certainly constitute a common ground for both philosophies of education, but not only this; first and foremost, both had a spiritual/ metaphysical world view and both shared the principles of Philosophical Idealism.

We should not forget that Montessori was a Theosophist, an undeniable fact proved by the records of the Theosophical Society. Many followers of Montessori, prejudiced through mainstream materialism, have felt uncomfortable about it and have tried to deny it or at least minimize it; but the official records of the Theosophical Society speak by themselves.

For Aurobindo, the ethical dimension is inherent in a deeply value-based pedagogy. However, as it is the case for R. Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Plato, Hegel or R. Steiner, the ethical dimension in Sri Aurobindo Schools does not consist of mere compliance with something external but rather the deeper realization of something internal: the Kantian internal imperative with a metaphysical depth that Kant did not have but Philosophical Idealism has always had.

<sup>48</sup> Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, p17.

<sup>49</sup> Cf “Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo”, 1982, p 355.

Needless to say, meditation is also cultivated in this Socratic process of self-inquiry and self-realization.

It is important to keep in mind that Aurobindo envisaged his philosophy of education as a proposal for a national system of education that becomes separated from the British influence through colonization, to go back to the essence of the Indian genius. For Aurobindo, a new system of national education is inseparable from a national resurgence. In parallel to that, integral education constitutes the very foundation of the “sadhana” or spiritual path of transformation.<sup>50</sup>

Again, we should warn here what we already stated in relation to Tagore and Vivekananda. The return to the Indian tradition does not constitute a political form of nationalism in the mystical Aurobindo –nor in Tagore, nor in Vivekananda– but rather a way of mysticism –as in Tagore and Vivekananda–, a spiritual path that does not evolve in a cave in the Himalaya but in the midst of society as a service to society. For the three of them, there must be a national renaissance in front of British domination, but the national resurgence is inseparable from the inner path of transformation towards a spiritual horizon, because the three of them had a deeply spiritual/ mystical world view.

We should remember the profound transformation undergone by Aurobindo himself through his personal life, from the young nationalist or revolutionary to the latter mystic or spiritual master; in the very turning point of this fascinating career there was a genuine mystical experience and a long spiritual process.

In Aurobindo’s own words:

“In very ancient times it was the spiritual building of character which was the aim of education (...)

Of course there was also cultural training, but it was not the main thing (...)

In Greece it was intellectual and aesthetic.”<sup>51</sup>

## AS A PHILOSOPHICAL CONCLUSION

Which is the daily reality in Aurobindo’s institutions today? We have been able to interact with the Ashram school in Pondicherry as we have

<sup>50</sup> Cf “The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo. Vol 8”, 1997, p 385-389.

<sup>51</sup> “Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo”, 1982, p 358.

been able to visit Ramakrishna, Krishnamurti or Sri Sathya Sai schools. Our personal testimony would draw a conclusion that should not be a surprise to anybody who is aware of the human condition on Earth. The reality of the Ashram school is pretty far from the ideal of Aurobindo's writings. With all our respect for individual persons and our appreciation of their efforts, we dare to say that the real school presents some limitation, even some dogmatism, that has nothing to do with the light and the aperture of Aurobindo's writings.

It is obvious that the followers do not have the spiritual depth or attainment of the master. This does not apply to Aurobindo Ashram only but to all institutions on Earth. The main problem of integral education is that the children in the real classroom do not have Aurobindo as a teacher but his followers, just as Waldorf students do not have Steiner as a teacher but ordinary men and women. And until now in human history there has always been a gap between the original master and the latter followers who always imprison the purity and the freshness of the original message into fixed rigid systems that do not correspond to the intention of the founder. This is not only the history of Aurobindo Ashram; it is the whole history of humanity on Earth. J. Krishnamurti has brought profound insights into this fundamental matter that is basically about human consciousness.

Nobody will be surprised then at learning about the conflicts that occurred amongst Aurobindo's followers after the demise of the Mother. The Kali Yuga in Sanskrit –the Age of Conflicts– corresponds to the egos of the followers; the original master was in another state of consciousness. This other state of consciousness is what we should awaken in the children. But how many teachers experience it themselves? Can you teach values that you do not live yourself? The teacher should be a living example; this is one of the pillars of integral value education. But who lives internally That which the original master did experience? In the Indian tradition, only those who really live the Brahman should teach about it. But who lives the Brahman in this world? Everywhere what predominates is mere theoretical bookish knowledge, and this is the only thing that mainstream schooling teaches.

Ramana Maharshi referred many times to those intellectuals who are scholarly ignorant. Ramana was a living example of human values such as love and compassion. He had the inner experience and that light was visible in his eyes. He would deeply touch many without saying one single word; just by looking at him many would have tears in their eyes.

The main problem of integral spiritually-based education is that it is extremely difficult to find teachers like Ramana, like Vivekananda, Tagore or Aurobindo, precisely because they were pioneers in a world much more limited in terms of consciousness, where the mainstream educational system enhances mere intellectual bookish knowledge and not the inner light that was shining in Ramana's eyes awakening the lost memory of that depth buried down within each and everyone.

This is the very core of integral education according to the sages of India such as Vivekananda, Tagore or Aurobindo, in deep coherence with Plato's Parable of the Cave, and needless to say, in deep coherence with the message of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. Therefore, we can conclude that integral education understood from this spiritual/ metaphysical world view constitutes the human process itself through the whole human history, or to put it in Aurobindo's words, the adventure of consciousness on Earth.

That is why teachers' training in integral value-based education is so important. As Sathya Sai Baba said many times, before you open one school first you must train the teachers not in academic terms but from the point of view of human values.

According to the sages of India, in spite of human imperfection we should not drop the effort and the attempt to strive for integral education. We should not wait to be perfect to start, first of all because everything is in process in the human condition, and any honest endeavour –though imperfect– will make a difference and will be valuable. The educational philosophy of the Indian sages such as Vivekananda, Tagore or Aurobindo, just as that of Plato, Kant or Steiner, will always be there in the horizon as a source of inspiration.

## **SOME FURTHER SOCIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

We hope that these few pages have awakened the interest of the Western reader, and encouraged him or her to investigate a little bit more about the educational philosophy of these three sages of India, Swami Vivekananda, R. Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, in the horizon of integral value-based education. We also remind the Western reader that these three philosophies of education, deeply holistic, ethical, humanistic and obviously spiritual, have been implemented and developed by a large number of schools and colleges. Western educational authorities

can also find useful materials in this accumulated experience of India in order to assess and design educational policies on holistic and humanistic lines.

It becomes also clear from this paper that the sages of India who have spoken about pedagogy have explicitly stressed the spiritual/metaphysical foundation of a truly integral or value-based kind of education. In Aurobindo's words:

"India has seen always in man a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body, a conscious manifestation in nature of the universal self and spirit."<sup>52</sup>

This vision from India can help Western scholarship to clarify deeply-rooted misunderstanding and confusion. The peculiar religious history of Europe has nurtured reactions and debates that do not exist in India or in Buddhist countries. The educational philosophy of the Indian sages can make it clear for the Western public that there is a spiritual dimension beyond politics or debates, since it is not outside –within the frame of institutionalized religions or religious organizations– but inside –in each human being, within the inner depth of each and everyone–. This inner domain can only evolve in freedom; it is not a matter of belief but rather of experience. True ethics stems from this inner dimension, and then ethics unfolds the ontological texture of human values.

An army of utilitarian and technocratic scholars have still not grasped this fundamental point. But quantum physicists and in general all the advocates of the new holistic paradigm have clearly understood it. In fact, it is a tremendous irony of human history that scholars imitate now the Newtonian concept of science even in the humanities and needless to say in economics and social sciences, whereas this Newtonian world view as a paradigm, not as pure physics, has been totally debunked by quantum physics, astrophysics, relational theory, new biology, epigenetics, neuroscience, sophrology, etc. New science and the new holistic paradigm have clearly understood the Socratic path of self-inquiry within a spiritual/metaphysical world view that lies at the core of the ethical and educational philosophy of the sages of India or Western philosophers such as Plato, Hegel or Steiner.

Quantum physicists and Jungian/ transpersonal psychologists have certainly grasped the meaning and significance of this millenary message

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<sup>52</sup> Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, 1973, p 1.

of Philosophical Idealism –both Eastern and Western–, which, we should not forget, can also be found in the Western tradition, not only in India, from Plato to the Romantics and Hegel, and needless to say, among Christian mystics. However, the sages of India may allow Westerners to better understand the spiritual foundation of integral value-based education beyond the confusion and polemics too often present in the Western world.

At the same time, we should not overlook the complexity of the Indian society and of the educational system today. According to the Indian scholar S.L. Bhyrappa:

“Rapid development of science, industrialisation and its effects in the form of urbanisation and disintegration of family; Marxism; psychological theories; Darwin’s theory of evolution; growing individualism and the empirical outlook of life –all these have fashioned the contemporary Western notions of values. India is exposed to these influences in all the respects and there is a cultural crisis in which the old has not completely died and the new not fully entrenched.”<sup>53</sup>

Contemporary India offers a fast process of Westernization –not only modernization– that imitates quite often the USA rather than Europe and in general the most superficial or the worst aspects of the West instead of the deepest or better. This produces as a reaction a nationalistic response and advocacy of a certain “Indian tradition” that may be real to some extent and also a political construct from another perspective. The Westernization of India has forgotten the “tradition” and the new nationalism has misunderstood it, reinvented it and ultimately perverted it. To come back to the genuine contents of Indian Philosophical Idealism is something urgently needed in Indian society and culture, not only due to modern materialism and Western influence but also due to the political usage and distortion of the “Indian tradition” by political interests.

Thus, the great sages of India such as Swami Vivekananda, R. Tagore or Sri Aurobindo can still perform a crucial role to inspire the Indian educational system beyond the fallacies and illusions of modern materialism and also beyond the politics of nationalism and governmental policies. The most profound message of the Vedic heritage and modern sages awaits silently on the threshold of Indian –and Western– schools to uplift the children and to inspire the teachers and the parents.

As Prof. Raimon Panikkar always stressed: Wisdom is an invitation only; you can take it or not: this is your freedom.

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<sup>53</sup> S.L. Bhyrappa, in S.P. Ruhela, 2000, p. 148.

Already in 1964 the Education Commission of India under the chairmanship of Prof. D.S. Kothari stressed the need of moral value education, which was reinforced by later documents such as the famous report “Challenge of Education. A Policy Perspective” of August 1985 (Ministry of Education/ Government of India). More official committees and papers have followed, but the major initiatives with a real impact on the school scenario have come from private organizations such as the Vidya Vahini Programme launched by the Sri Sathya Sai Organization with the support of the Tata Group, and needless to say, the immense contribution of the Ramakrishna Mission, Tagore’s institutions and Aurobindo-inspired schools amongst many other genuine initiatives, from Krishnamurti schools to small endeavours that do not come out to the public light.<sup>54</sup>

However, the most important point is that both public authorities and private schools in India –and all around the world– realize the depth of value education beyond the more instrumental or utilitarian level, and here Indian philosophy of education has brought a decisive contribution from Vedas or Upanishads to Vivekananda, Tagore or Aurobindo. This paper tries to restate the significance of these philosophers of education for the schools of the XXIst century, both in India, the West and all around the world.

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<sup>54</sup> Cf Somnath Saraf, 2000.

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