

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950)

INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, occupies a very important position among the contemporary Indian philosophers of education due to his wide knowledge of East and West, ancient and modern system of education. He has presented an integral philosophy of education through his 'ashram' at Pondicherry. Here, experiments are conducted to evolve a new system of education which maybe adopted for the reconstruction of Indian education. He considers the fulfillment of *swadharma* as the law of life and wants that every individual in a nation should fulfill his *swadharma*. Hence, the purpose of education is to prepare the individual to serve their nation and humanity. His education philosophy in the field of modern education is very important.

LIFE OF SRI AUROBINDO GHOSH

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, a famous sage, poet, patriot, philosopher and an educationist, is known by the name Aurobindo, was born on August 15, 1872 in Kolkata. The word 'Aurobindo' means 'Lotus' in Sanskrit. His father Dr. Krishan Dhan Ghosh loved the Western culture and he wanted his son to grow up into a fake Englishman. So, Aurobindo was sent to England at the age of seven and he lived there for 14 years. He got education in London and Cambridge, and he became a master in English, Greek and Latin. He passed the Indian Civil Service Examination in 1890 but he could not appear for the horse-riding test. As a result, he was disqualified for the job and he returned to India in 1893.

Aurobindo studied sanskrit language and literature in India and served as an adviser and sometimes as secretary to the Maharaja for fourteen years in the princely state of Baroda. He became a professor of English at Baroda College. He learnt Bengali, Gujarati and Marathi, and delved deeply in the culture and philosophy of India. He practiced yoga in 1904. As per the instruction of the Indian National Congress, he became the principal of Bengal National College (now Jadavpur University) at Kolkata. After the Bengal Partition (1905), Aurobindo resigned from his job and became an active freedom fighter. He launched the journals *Vande Matram*, *Karma Yogi*, *Dharm* and the Bengali daily *Yugantar* to propagate his revolutionary ideas and arouse intense feelings of nationalism among the people of India. His political and nationalistic sentiments were expressed through his writings and fiery speeches. The British Government arrested Aurobindo and put him in Alipore Jail for a year in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case in 1908. When he was in jail, he spent most of his time in yoga, meditation and the study of the Gita, philosophy and spiritual literature.

Once he was in Alipore jail, he realised the presence of God in a dream. After his release from the prison, he shunned all his political activities immediately and returned to Pondicherry for penance and spiritual advancement. He spent his retired life at his ashram in Pondicherry. He became a yogi and devoted his time to yoga and meditation. He preached his philosophy of dharma, education, spiritual advancement and brahmacharya across the country. He had set up an international ashram and International Centre of Education at Pondicherry and started several educational and social activities. He established Auroville as a city of universal culture for international cooperation and human unity. Aurobindo propounded his major philosophy and published it in *Arya* a new journal in English from 1914 to 1921. Aurobindo, the great saint, passed away on December 5, 1950. His demise put an end to a glorious chapter in the spiritual history of India.

AUROBINDO'S GENERAL PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of life is based on an experienced integralism. It is a synthesis of idealism, realism, naturalism and pragmatism. His life began with psychic experiences connected with his political, philosophical and poetic life. The general philosophical ideas of Aurobindo are found mostly in his weekly newspaper "karma yoga".

Corner stone of Indian thought: *Jnana* (knowledge), *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Karma* (work ethics) are the three cornerstones upon which the Indian philosophy of life has been built. Those who resort to *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* can walk on the divine path. Aurobindo stood against the exclusive emphasis on them. He did not want to deprive the individual of the variety of life. He believed any such emphasis resulted in the lopsided development of a personality.

He felt that there should be a combination of India's genius consisting of spirituality, creativeness and intellectuality. Spirituality is indeed the master key of the Indian mind, the sense of the infinite is native to it. The first age of India's greatness was a spiritual age when she sought passionately for the truth of existence through the intuitive mind and through an inner experience and interpretation of both the psychic and the physical existence. Aurobindo had a great faith in the creativeness of India. "For three thousand years at least ... India has been creating abundantly, incessantly and lavishly with an inexhaustible many sidedness republics and kingdoms and empires; philosophies and cosmogonies and sciences; creeds, arts and poems ... systems of yoga, arts spiritual, arts worldly, ... the list is endless and in each item there is about a plethora of activity". The third pillar of India's genius is its strong intellectuality. In the words of Aurobindo, "the greatness of Indian culture depends on its strong intellectuality. It is at once austere and rich, robust and minute, powerful and delicate, massive in principle and curious in detail.

Integral approach to Indian thought: Aurobindo wanted to discover integration in Indian thoughts. He also wanted to see life as a whole. As he wanted to strike a balance between the multicoloured shades of life, he turned to the Gita. He says that there is a fellowship between God and man. The fellowship with God can be achieved by disinterested action (*Nishkan Karma*) in society, never-ending meditation, self-forgetting devotion and feeling a kind of unity of all things in God.

Synthesis and understanding: The basic principle of Aurobindo's philosophy of life is the synthesis and understanding of life and the universe. He believed that the Gita preserves a proper balance in the world of knowledge, devotion and work. In the words of Aurobindo, "He in whom all three meet and become one entirety". He is the supreme being, the *Purushothama*. Swami Sivananda says, "Aurobindo is the consummate expression of the Indian spirit of synthesis".

Unity of truth: Aurobindo arrived at the concept of the basic unity of truth by synthesising the views in Indian thoughts. He observes, "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 rightful place in the total scheme of knowledge".

Supermind: This is the keyword of Aurobindo's philosophy. He believes that the mind of man is imperfect and is not in a position to understand the integral truth. Only the supermind can have an understanding of the integral truth. Aurobindo remarks, "Man will become a super mind. Super mind will have a super mental consciousness. Consciousness of Sat-Chit-Anand: Truth. Self, Bliss: Truth, Beauty, Goodness".

Superman: Man becomes a superman when he attains a supermind. He surrenders himself completely to the will of God and becomes a superman.

Aurobindo aimed at the integral man. The superman is the integral Man, the ideal man who makes an ideal society.

Purna Yoga: Aurobindo thought that there is a wide gulf between the ordinary mind and the super mind. He tried to integrate them into a single whole through purna yoga (Fig. 9.1). He believed that purna yoga helps man to realise the supreme, the *Purushothama*. According to him, "All life is "Yoga". In the words of Aurobindo "The very first lesson in this yoga is to face life and its trials with a quiet mind, a firm courage and an entire reliance on the Divine Shakti". According to Aurobindo, "An unconditional surrender to God is the first step of Yoga". In fact, Aurobindo's yoga aims at the creation of divinity in the whole man. The education of the mind is stressed in order to achieve the aim of yoga.

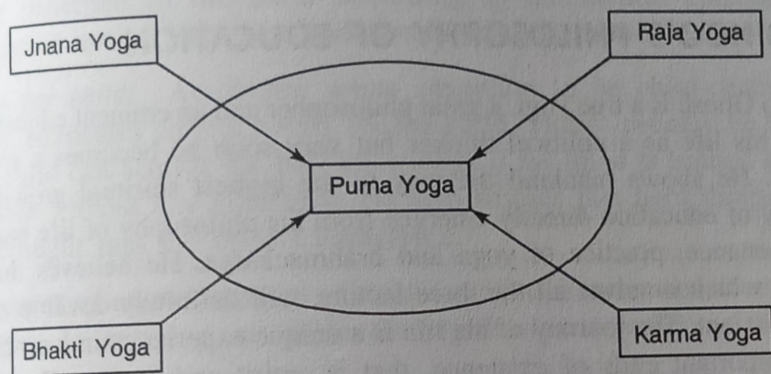


FIG. 9.1 Types of yoga.

Life: Aurobindo was of the opinion that life is universal and it is imperishable. According to him, "Life is a form of cosmic energy, a dynamic movement or current of it, positive or negative, a constant act or play of the force which builds up forms, energises them by an unceasing process of disintegration and renewal of their substances".

Rebirth: Aurobindo had a deep faith in the philosophy of rebirth. According to him, birth and death are a predetermined process in the scheme of evolution. In the words of Aurobindo, "All the secrets of circumstances of rebirth center around the capital need of the soul, the need of growth, the need of experience, that governs the line of its evolution and all the rest is accessory".

Law of karma: Aurobindo believed that man is the maker of his own fate. But the heredity and environment are determined by the present and past actions of man. He found continuity between different births. In this way he believed the doctrine of *karma*. However, *karma* does not determine the fate of soul.

Evolution of man: Aurobindo was of the opinion that the individual is in the continuous process of evolution to attain the union of the individual soul with the supreme soul. According to him, "Life is not for life alone, but for

God. There is an inner law and meaning for all things depending on the supreme". This is the inner law, which guides, regulates and controls the universe, and propels it into action.

Experienced integration: Aurobindo's philosophy is the result of his concept of "experienced integration". It is an integral approach to solve various problems of human life. It is a synthesis of the idealism, realism, naturalism and pragmatism of the East and the West and of the old and the new.

Spiritualism: Aurobindo was a spiritualist. He regretted the neglect of spiritual elements, which is responsible for the decay of human societies. He says, "The radical defect of all civilization has been the neglect of the spiritual elements".