A REVIEW

of

The Educational Research in the Ashram and Sri Aurobindo Society
1963–1983

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AT the Sri Aurobindo Society actually started in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (S.A.I.C.E.) in 1963. At that time, there was felt the need to keep teachers and students supplied with up-to-date information and material on their particular subjects and to set up a general information centre and a reference library, so as to serve the immediate interests of the teaching staff of the S.A.I.C.E. as a whole.

To this endeavour The Mother gave Her Blessings, deeming it "an excellent idea." It was to be the practical basis upon which the development of our research was to take place, over the next 7 years, closely catering to the needs of the Ashram School as part of the S.A.I.C.E.

About the purpose and organisation of education in the Ashram, The Mother once remarked in no light terms: "We are not here to do what others have done." Initiating research into the use of worksheets to replace much of the work hitherto done by textbooks already was a step of the future—which now a few educational projects in the world have taken up, with some measure of courage as against current dogmas of education for the mass. In the S.A.I.C.E. the worksheets were intended for all subjects and for various levels of student activity, thus providing newly created material.

At the same time, the up-to-date files of the Information Section did much to inspire students and encourage them to initiate in full freedom their own projects, while teachers could come into contact with current trends in teaching techniques over a wide range of subjects from all over the world.

In the wake of those humble beginnings, The Mother in 1970 asked me to start a school for the children of Aspiration, Auroville, where other ideas could be implemented, such as student-activated Areas of Work. A daily
record has been kept of this experiment, entitled: "Aspiration School." This was an attempt to apply in full Sri Aurobindo's psychology to education in a still wider international environment.

In 1970, the office of the Department was moved to the Auroville Beach Office of the Sri Aurobindo Society where it became the "Department of Educational Research and Development" (D.E.R.A.D.). At the request of The Mother, it was to comprise such activities as foreign relations and correspondence, reception of visitors and an extension of the library, opening new files from the material collected in the S.A.I.C.E. and from educators abroad.

Besides an extensive range of worksheets, in 1965 we had started to publish in Mother India a regular Newsletter on Educational Research. In the following years, the need arose for specialised textbooks. Subsequently, there came out two English Primers, two books on English Grammar, Poems for Children and a story symbolic of the psychic evolution in man, in the manner of a fantasy for children. These books, printed in the Ashram Press, have since then been reprinted several times and the specialised textbooks were used in schools other than the S.A.I.C.E., in Pondicherry and Karnataka.

It was also seen that more material was needed for the teachers, to help them better understand the substance and practical implications of the new trend in education such as Sri Aurobindo and The Mother envisaged: an education for the whole of man and for his whole life. The "whole of man", that is, at the five levels of his being: physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual; for "his whole life", that is, as a continued progression of his consciousness towards higher levels of awareness and being when he becomes able to fully manifest the Spirit in Matter in a Divine Life. For man is a soul and has a body. Children are souls to be "cherished and fostered" in a climate of love and trust within an educational structure devoid of fear.

All our educational research takes its significance from its roots in the educational experiments first started in the Ashram School, and later pursued in Auroville. In 1973, another step took it further when the publication of an "Integral Education Series" was launched. With the collaboration of former Lucknow University Dean of Education, Dr. S. Jayaswal, a series of books appeared on Integral Education. The aim was to integrate the stream of thinkers of the New Consciousness as it had emerged at the end of the Second World War, to assess their contribution to a much needed change in psychology and education in the light of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's Synthesis. It was at the same time an opportunity to dwell in greater depth on old Vedic Truths; to renew and expand our understanding of the true meaning and purpose of education - which is to educate the inner potential
lyng dormant in the child - thus going back to the essence of education, as it had originated in the gurukals of India and the monasteries and abbeys of the West; and to emphasise the urgency for man to make a new beginning by first knowing himself.

Seven titles were successively published, which included: "Education of the Child", "The True Teacher", "Dimensions of Spiritual Education" and "Yoga in Education". They were handled, like our previous publications, by Sabda and soon out of print.

The fact that the series had to be discontinued in 1979 is significant of the evolution of our research which was now expanding with a multinational team into wider avenues. As early as 1973, a new series of experiments had begun with the purpose of understanding in depth what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother meant by the education of the Five Minds and the importance of their right functioning in the human being. The team work followed a progression which spontaneously assumed the gradual unfoldment and manifestation of the first four minds, that is the physical mind, the vital mind, the mental mind and the psychic mind.

A Healing Group functioned until 1976, towards a holistic approach to health and psychotherapy. In 1980, the Ashram Press published a compilation on "Health and Healing" from the writings of The Mother which had been started four years earlier. The substance of the experiment was recorded in a series of articles published in 1975, under the title of "Holistic Healing". It has been reprinted for the third time in 1982. Parallel to this research, a Section on Health Education, Food and Nutrition was established. Experiments were also carried out in body movement (hatha yoga and dance improvisation) and recorded.

Expressions of the Vital Mind produced, between 1975 and 1978 alone, over 1,400 drawings and paintings. Most of them were sent to Centres abroad and to private collections, after being exhibited in the Hall of Beach Office. Later, artists from the West joined in our efforts by exhibiting their own works, such as Arne Solomonsen in 1979.

On the Mind levels, compilations were started from the works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother: "The Education of Integral Man", "The Hierarchy of Minds (The Mind Levels)" and "The Psychic Being". "The Hierarchy of Minds" is now being published by the Ashram Press. "The Psychic Being" has received proposals for publication. In the last year, several study files have also been made to relate the progress of recent discoveries, in New Physics and the human brain, to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's experiences and realisations.

The first approach to psychic education took the form, in 1980, of a Seminar Workshop on the Fourth Dimension. The
notable factor was that, although only some 20 invitations had been extended - mostly to Indian educators and administrators - 47 people turned up, representing 14 countries including India. This was to have a considerable impact on the follow-up. The experiment was recorded not only on tape but into a file and a manuscript entitled: "The Higher Country of the Mind". This collection of essays and poems, written for the most part as a preparation to the Workshop, is now ready for publication. Finally, we have put into a file a recent psychic experiment in the Ashram School, made with the children by the teachers of Delaffond, under the title: "Meditation on a Star".

The list of tapes, slides and photograph collections, books and files accumulated in the last 8 years is too long to be mentioned here. "Psychology for Future Education" has been published in a second, enlarged edition in 1980 by an American publisher. A translation in German has also been published, in 1982.

All this growing material has provided many a means of discussion, study and research for the various Workshops and Seminars organised since 1973 by this Department, for teachers, educators and administrators, from all over the country as well as from abroad. Aspects of practical implementation have been envisaged in projects of model educational institutions at all levels of education and in the M.I.R.A. Project. Visitors can now visit and observe two small experimental schools: one for Tamil children, started in 1979 at Pitchandikulam, Auroville, with the help of Joss and Cristl; and the other one, opened last year in Pondicherry, the "Matripuri School of Research" for 23 children of devotees.

From all levels of education, a network of educators has spontaneously grown, which extends far beyond the borders of India. From everywhere, particularly from all corners of this country, more and more educators come to express their concern and to seek advice as to how best to implement Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's ideas on education as the only solution to the present plight of school systems. This has given us a unique insight into the problems the world faces today and the direction our research is to take, if it is to be of any use at all to the educational goals we have set before us, both in the Ashram and the Sri Aurobindo Society.

In fact, the participation of this Department to the works of the Commission on Education at the Annual Conference of the Sri Aurobindo Society has been constant for over 10 years. In 1974, a series of most important recommendations were made by the Commission, urging their immediate implementation. I am pleased to say that this Department has contributed towards the realisation of their most important points in a significant manner. Yet, we still need to explore
The D.E.R.A.D. is now the outcome of some 30 years of experimental research and teaching in psychology and education as applied to educational problems to be found in the various states of India with comparative studies of educational problems throughout the world.

In recent years, especial emphasis has been on comparative psychology - the ever widening gap between traditional Western psychology and the recent modern revival and re-statement, through Sri Aurobindo, of ancient Indian psychology.

It is our thesis that this re-statement of Sri Aurobindo, by virtue of his personal and inner experiences and realisations of the ancient truths of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita, especially framed in his work "The Synthesis of Yoga", gives us the KEY to all problems which man's mind has created but which man's mind alone cannot solve.

This Department has applied the principles of this psychology especially to the field of education and has formulated a basis for the educational needs of the future. These needs are becoming more and more urgent if we are to deal with the fast growing complexities of life.

The foundations of education for the next generation have to be laid now. The old methods of specialisation and division of subjects and tasks leads only to dissolution and decay. We have to build a synthesis of true experience both in our approach and in our work of implementation as against the disintegration of information and value - if we are to manifest our full inner potential for the Holistic Reality of the Future.

This foundation has to be the work of those who have recognised Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's experience and the way it points to the future of man, particularly the Ashram and Sri Aurobindo Society. The time has now come for a holistic unity of action, probably unprecedented in the history of mankind's consciousness.

Today, the first major effort of the Sri Aurobindo Society should be to come closer together with the Ashram in all its activities, so as to take some of the responsibility that now, more than ever before, devolves upon the Ashram Trust, in the field of education as in other spheres of activities. A response is asked from us in the world-wide recognition of Sri Aurobindo's Works, especially in the new books now being published in America and Germany in the fields of New Physics and Psychology as well as in Music and Indian Mysticism.
It is suggested that an Annual Conference be convened by the Ashram Trust and the Executive Commission of the Sri Aurobindo Society, where responsible members be invited to submit their views on the many issues being discussed throughout the world, as regards education, in particular The Mother’s advanced views on education of the future, especially with reference to the Fourth Dimension of the human personality.

Finally, through all the years of research enumerated above, it is observed that those who sincerely wish to put this progressive experience as a practical offering at the service of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, can come together to implement now the promises made in the original manifesto of declaration of the Sri Aurobindo society,* viz:

a) To make known to the members and people in general the aims and ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother...

b) To train selected students and teachers from all over the world in the integral system of education, i.e. spiritual, psychic, mental, vital and physical.

This can best be done by instituting a Teachers Training College – the Academy of Future Man – on an international basis of implementation, whereby the best of two worlds can meet for a continuous and ongoing dialogue where the tenets of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother’s ideas and experience can serve as a world source of guidance for the education of the future.

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June, 1983