Chapter 3rd

METHODOLOGY

Two thoughts influenced the entire process of data collection and engagement with data; first is Ethnography, which is the research design to observe the practice of Integral view in schools at the Ashram at Pondichéry and other two schools at Auroville. Ethnography highlighted the multi-layered reality instead of generalizations of findings from the field. Second is Integral Yoga's view of reality, knowledge and methods to experience the reality to analyze the issues emerging from the data. Ethnography holds certain epistemological, ontological standpoints and so does Integral Yoga. Research Design weaved both in order to seek answers to the research questions. It is relevant to mention epistemology and ontology according to Integral (Yoga) worldview (Gupta, 2011; Thapan, 2000& Adams, 2006). Since, Integral view is also a paradigm that construes the issues of individuality, reality, knowledge and identifies processes of 'knowing' reality. The view has been an 'alive' thought at the field practiced affirmatively by the participants while the researches engaged in ethnography to collect data. It is also relevant since Integral Yoga is the chosen (world) view of life by the participants and they tend to practice at varying level. The view of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is the declared 'reality' of the field.

First section of the chapter describes field and schools in it. Next section of chapter builds the argument of 'Ethnography' developing over its use in contemporary times and elaborates on its relevance for present research. The contemporary view of ethnography allows elaborating on culture of the field as confluence of different factors. The culture of this field is multi-ethnic, multi-lingual since the participants are individuals of different cultural backgrounds. It is in relation to Integral Yoga worldview and gives rise to 'collective' practices. Schooling is the main and important collective practice, which the participants engage in. Rest of the chapter details out steps of the field, method, data collection techniques, analysis of data, and ethical considerations required in the field.

Description of the Field

The field comprises of three schools, one is from Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondichéry and two from Auroville (Tamil Nadu) near Pondichéry[1]. Pondichéry is a union territory, and French colony situated in Tamil Nadu in South India (see: Annexure 3.1b). It has often been referred as 'sleepy town'[1]. Pondichéry has Tamils as native population but Indian and Western individuals and their cultures cannot be overlooked. The French decided to leave Pondichéry amicably in

1954 unlike the British who left India after a freedom struggle in 1947. There are many signs of French legacy, which persists in Pondichéry. Among the most conspicuous are the names of the roads written in French '*Rue...*', the uniform of policemen, names of restaurants, and the statue of Dupleix on seaside. Among the official symbols are French Institute called in French as *L'institut Francais*, schools like, *Lycee, Calvé*, which has French as its medium, French certificate upon passing from these schools and the institute for French soldiers known as *Foyer du Soldat*. Many Tamil individuals also have dual citizenship of India and France, and they still take part in democratic process of France.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, since they attract visitors and residents at Pondichéry from all over India and rest of the world. 'Ashram' as it is colloquially referred to, is officially Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It was officially started in 1926 when several followers of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo started living there. Auroville is an international township (intentional community) with vision of human unity. Auroville was formed in 1970 by the Mother and its inception was marked with a ceremony in which people of different nationalities put handful of soil of their respective countries in an earthen urn, as the symbol of international unity. The institutions at the outset declared values of Integral Yoga of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as their central aim of all the activities of life. The two institutions have one of the visions to be part of 'evolutionary' process to attain Supramental consciousness (Annexure 3.2 (a &b): for goals of the Ashram and Auroville). Ashram and Auroville are intentional communities and therefore, 'restricted' institutions. Joining any program depends upon an individual's commitment to the vision, to its principles and to the practices. Individual's commitment is not totalitarian. Since, the institutions 'vision has component of individual freedom and choice to work, to be there and chart their individual journey or path of 'progress' and 'perfection'.

The Ashram and Auroville have several units of works or departments (see: Annexure 3.3).Out of all other departments or units, the school came out as one of the significant and vast department of Ashram and Auroville. Jass (2004) highlighted the critical link of SAICE with the Ashram and Ashram connected individuals. In everyday usage of addressing the life at the Ashram, participants often referred, with respect to what is 'not' Ashram's way of life (also in Auroville) as 'outside'. The demarcation was done for the life, the ideas, actions and

participants contextualized these as something happening 'here'-*"it happens here...., we think here...., oh! The outside world..."* The Ashram and Auroville maintain its interface with the flux and ways of 'outside' world through various other departments however, the school being an intense stage among all other department. The intensity was highlighted since at SAICE many ex-students came back to the school for their children's admission to the same school and relived the issues of faith in the schooling, and culture around the school.

Schools

There are three schools, which I chose for the study these are, first is 'Ashram school', its official name is Sri Aurobindo International Centre for Education (henceforth: SAICE). It started with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as guides. The Ashram school is located just opposite the *Samadhi* of the two masters or *gurus*. The main school building with its office is just opposite the *Samadhi*, which is held as 'symbol' of deep devotion for most of the *Ashramites* (Ashram inmates) and devotees (individuals who have reverence for the Masters or the Ashram).

The Mother recognized 'education' as a very important part of Integral Yoga facing even few challenges. The school was initially meant for few students but gradually the number of students expanded. The conception of school has a popular anecdote that the Mother decided to have children as part of the Ashram when people insisted on being there in the year 1942, however the formal opening was in December, 1943[iii]. The school started with informal teaching and learning of certain languages and other skill based works, it maintained its informal character for long time and was formally registered as SAICE in December 1951. The anniversary of the school is celebrated on December 2nd considering the school's inception from 1943. During the fieldwork the school had approximately 450:150 student-teacher ratio.

The second school Light Bearer (Henceforth: LB) is relatively a new school situated in Auroville and has started approximately twelve years back. Present team has been managing it for the last seven years. An ex-student of SAICE was one of the team leaders. LB calls itself 'free progress' school, a concept given by the Mother and elaborated by *Tanmayda* (as he is referred by the *Ashramites*) in practice and writing[iv]. 'Free Progress' is education for the soul, where the freedom given to the child leads to getting in touch with his/her soul and find

his or her true nature. It is the most challenging concept of Integral Education and several times reinvented and put to practice at SAICE as well. The school had 60:15 student: teacher approximately.

The Third school 'The AID' was located at Auroville. It was the first school for the children from various villages of Auroville; currently there were few more schools. Auroville had villages surrounding it, which did not form its part. Parents of many children who were studying at the Aid were from these villages. They had been dependent for their livelihood on Auroville and Aurovillians. The Aid was first of the initiatives of the Ashram for 'community welfare' at Auroville. During fieldwork there were around 100 students, thirty teachers and other help for manual work in the school. The school is recognized by Tamil board and children take exams to get a certificate from the board.

The oldest of three schools was SAICE, then the Aid and then the Light Bearer. Light Bearer is the youngest of three. Since it was managed by an ex-student of SAICE, the school children and teacher visited the Ashram, ex-students of SAICE and the Ashram trustees as part of the annual organized by Auroville visited LB. It was valuable to have LB since the relation or comparison as examples of Integral Education institutes was easier. As a researcher I did not search for the reference points of Integral Education and what an Integral Education institute should have; they were openly talked about or compared from the theory given by the Masters or what happened at the Ashram school as an exemplary.

Participants

The participants were students; teachers and parents at the schools and at the Ashram and Auroville. The Ashram and Auroville have further categorized them. Categorization or classification was colloquial but often registered or recorded by the Ashram or Auroville. It helped these institutes to organize entry and distribution of services to various kinds of participants.

Students: Many *students* at SAICE are related to the Ashram inmates or most likely their parents studied or are settled at Pondichéry. Students in schools have familial relations with the adults in Ashram and Auroville. Students at LB were categorized as Auroville children, children of guests or children of friends of Auroville. LB came up with a classification of children, where children were of Aurovillians or born at Auroville and of volunteers or of guests. The children of latter formed an 'initiation' group at the School. Initiation group

children were the most challenging and interesting group since they had wide range of age and mostly did not know enough English or French to communicate with the rest of the group. Initiation group class had six or seven students. It centered on learning language, some individual time spent with a teacher or volunteers in the school and interactions also involved on playing games. However, in the meetings at LB, we always questioned that why are we erecting categories like 'outside' world, but nonetheless it was important to deal with the Auroville school board to give the categories of students, because of the differential fee that a child has to pay as per their category.

Children at the AID came from the nearby villages or few were children of Aurovillians who were Tamil. But the latter was very small in number and the classes I observed during my fieldwork none of the child was from Auroville. There was only one child from European family who came to the school, as I observed the parents dropping and picking the child. I was told that the parents want the child to learn Tamil so they sent the child to the AID.

It also had children of labors who had migrated to work at Auroville. Among them were families from Nepal known as *'bahadurs'* or *'Gorkhas'* in India. The children knew Hindi, picked up Tamil and adjusted with rest of the group.

Teachers: at SAICE were mainly Ashram inmates and volunteers, the former found a bigger chunk of teacher population; however, volunteers always found their way into the system and were welcomed for assistance. Volunteers were mainly parents or ex-students or individual devotees or visitors like me. All the teachers were on non-payment basis but got food and medical facilities at the Ashram.

Teachers at LB were mainly Aurovillians, and volunteers who had come to experience lifestyle at Auroville. Many parents as 'newcomer' to Auroville joined the LB as volunteer. Many ex-students of LB and SAICE volunteered as teachers or some administrative help at the schools. However, at LB to get remuneration charges for them was not possible. The Aid had many *Aurovillians* as teachers but there were also teachers who were not *Aurovillians* and were paid[v]. At the Aid I interacted more with *Aurovillians* and volunteers; not much with the teachers who were of Tamil and came from adjoining towns. They were not part of the classes I observed and also came from town which was not linked to the Ashram or Auroville.

Parents or Familial Relations: of the participants was a conspicuous feature and way of introduction that the participants reported. For example, introduction of oneself begin with I am someone's daughter/son, grandson/daughter, niece, siblings and eve grandniece/nephew. A good number of the students have familial links with the Ashram inmates at SAICE giving it a unique cohort and sub-cohorts of families to study. At LB mainly parents volunteered part-time or were full time teachers. Many parents or grandparents of children at the Aid worked for Auroville as technicians, workers and as manual help at the school. The study focused more on students and teachers, opinion of teachers and sometimes of other participants like visitors, but not of servants *chinnamma* or simply *ammas* (as 'help' in school), the latter were not addressed directly[vi].

Ethnography

Ethnography entails freedom of different methodological inclusion in the research design. Wide array of methods under the umbrella term of ethnography makes it a comprehensive research design (Park Ethnography Program, n.d.) and as a design it is open to the use of different techniques (Dalal, 2011). Main method of Ethnography has been Participant observation. Participant observation or Field work is identifying feature of any ethnographic work. The idea is to know the field as an 'insider' well and to experience what the people in the field are doing. Participant Observation means to participate in the everyday activities in the field and become as the participants are–

> *"The reality we attempt to explicate requires that we put ourselves in a position to interact closely with our informants, for as long as possible, in as many social contexts as possible."*
> (Smith, 1992, p. 194)

Ethnographic studies are also very important insight into conceptualization and identifying various problems of Human Development. The problems are mainly due to reasons such as, upsurgence of post-positivism, history and philosophy of science which has changed the view of looking at scientific concepts; subjectivity of individuals that gets lost in the relation of two variables; and internal debate of discipline (of Human Development) over epistemological issues and indiscriminate application of 'objectivity of Science' to research in the discipline (Jessor,1996). On the other hand, anthropologists who study human behavior (including developmental issues) primarily focus to paint the picture of reality with its fineness and details as 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973).

Ethnography analyzes the detail observations with reference to theoretical framework (Willis, 2000) which could answer several questions left unanswered by research designs and methods inspired by positivism. At the level of everyday practice developmentalists, educationists, and teachers need to be able to bring in changes and not see things merely as cause and effect since causes are largely out of their hands owing to the complexity of context. Many times 'meaning' is central concern of adopting ethnography against the standard quantitative method of developmental sciences (Shweder in Modell, 1996). Meaning is how individuals define, act and interpret different actions and settings in school or in any social system. Ethnography involves the techniques to think, imagine, and visualize the relation of these causes.

Ethnography in Changing Times

Ethnography as a method (or design)[vii] in area of social sciences aligns with several schools of thoughts of social reality or human behavior. Harrington (1982) states the parameters and relevant paradigms ethnographers have been studying and the same have undergone many changes over the years. The present study draws form the works of Eisenhart (2001),Marcus (1995) and Ogbu (1981) for understanding ethnography. Eisenhart(2001) mentions 'ethnography of conflicts' that implies to highlight the disagreements that one sees and it is not only important to look at patterns of reality in a field. She raises the question that the work of ethnography is to describe the field with neat categories or is it to highlight the misfit of descriptions and opinions due to presence of so many views in and around the field? In case of educational ethnography culture is not cohesive, comprehensive states Eisenhart (2001) and cites authors like Ray McDermott (McDermott &Gospodinoff, 1979), John Ogbu (1974, 1978), and the sociologist Hugh Mehan (Mehan,1979; Mehan, Hertweck, &Meihls, 1986) to elucidate 'that political and economic factors, as well as culture', were sources of conflict between students and teachers in school. Apple (cited in Smith, 1992) argued that the confluence of child's culture and culture of schooling results in conflict. Heath (1996) cited in Eisenhart refers to trouble of changing living patterns, effect of capitalism and industrialization on studying a culture; it becomes difficult to describe culture as monolithic whole especially where there is cultural, political and economic confluence in contemporary times. Marcus (1995) acknowledges the role of ethnography in changing times in terms of displacement of cultures, upcoming technologies and relevant existential issues of human,

and many other issues that upsurge in the field. However, being true to any classic ethnography, this research also unfolds its own journey and methods apart from following the contemporary view of ethnography especially about describing culture. Fisher(2009) argues that it is important to mention that how any methodology unfolds and it is not to identify only with classical Anthropology that focuses on intricacies of field work, notes taking and romanticism alone.

Emerging sites and changing levels

Our research relies on certain views that enlarge education from the purview of schooling as an activity carried out in closed boundary of classrooms in a school. Eisenhart (2001) cites the work of Nespor highlighting the networks and intersections of different culture- school, home and other factors like market and society in order to describe the schools they were studying-

> *"... Instead of treating the school as a container filled with teacher cultures, student subgroups, classroom instruction, and administrative micropolitics....* (schooling is) *extensive in space and time, fluid in form and content; as intersections of multiple networks shaping cities, communities, schools, pedagogies, and teacher and student practices...- (1997, p. xiii)"*
> (Nespor's in 'Tangled up Spaces' cited in Eisenhart, 2001, p 23)

Ogbu(1981) presents *macro ethnography* and *multi-level* ethnography to widen the view of education and link it with other institutions in a social set up; this applies well to study the field. The field in our study also does not remain fixed at one or two sites; it tries to find the linkages between different sites and the idea running behind it. To quote,

> *George Marcus (1995, 1998) calls ..... "multi-sited ethnography."... designed around chains paths threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographers establishes some form of literal physical presence with an explicit posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography (1995 p . 105)*
> (Eisenhart, 2001, p 22)

The main feature in this research is to study schooling with respect to various age group (mainly of children), and their respective learning activities within the boundary walls of schools and classrooms. However participant observation with an openness to explore ideas and to 'be' in the field allowed to widen the schooling from walls of classrooms to the cross roads, families, events and other religious and cultural functions participants thronged together like: Christmas celebrations, *garba*, Aug-15 etc. Each of the three schools in the

study has its own rituals and practices to do the same. With reference to schooling the obvious sites may seem to be classrooms alone but the sites where schooling spread were homes, streets, playground, the Ashram, restaurants or researcher's house or even a market place in Delhi where the symbols or products were associated with the Ashram or Auroville. Choice of methods happened with relevance to the fact that the field had a central vision in its actions, intellect and emotions, the data draws from the actions, meaning practices, products or objects which have relevant symbolism in the lives of the participants.

There were discussions on educational issues over a long walk or while working for a collective activity or on dining table or while in the kitchen helping in the cooking. The discussions would be about a particular student's behavior and background and other relevant issues. Since the schools had been part of the larger institutions, the Ashram and Auroville with its innovative structure and life, it was imperative to throng different places physically and intellectually during the fieldwork. Our research believes that these schools function with other challenges of a normal schooling as discussed in the last chapter that construes the phenomenon of schooling while the belief of Integral as relevant worldview effect the existential issues at the field.

Emergence of various sites and issues over there is closely connected with the complexity of reality and concepts that is, macro, micro formal or micro substantive[viii]. The present study in field is 'macro substantive' which expands on life of two institutions the Ashram and Auroville in relation to schooling these two have, the communities around it and its various facets. Even micro facets of everyday life were seen through the lens of 'macro' concept like Faith with reference to the present indicators of relation of human development and education that is, domains, norms, age specificity with reference to learning activity. These had been explored in dynamism of individual meaning and culture of the Ashram and of Auroville. However our researchmoved along the three levels: Micro-formal aspect of field was relevant since the focus was life of participants linked with 'schooling' of two Integral worldview institutions[ix]. Research could have chosen to be micro formal only since most of the data unfolds about the everyday life, action, spaces, opinions, discussions, arguments, learning of individuals across the life span. It shares the vantage point of micro-substantive since the researcher lived like any adult who throng the field and be part of many processes like volunteer services, eating at community dining areas, participating in the programmes,

availing services, attending study circles to name a few offered to other adults on staying at Auroville or Ashram[x].

The present study acknowledges in the concept of 'multi-site ethnography' by summarizing in the following ways-

- Relevance of macro-theoretical concepts like Faith in present study, along with domains, norms (which are widely applied concepts of Human Development) is main focus of field study. The broader conceptual ideas and the disciplinary assumptions find manifestation in the field at several levels which the research studied.
- Mobility to go to places and choose different sites, different ideas, levels, disciplines (cross- disciplinary) and meet different people to answer questions. Traveling was imperative where sites were separated by physical distance, new spaces in the sites and the factors emerged within the larger site give clear picture of manifestation and 'interplay' of concepts in the field.
- Participant Observation focused on different or similar application of the same idea in the similar time but different spaces that is three schools and other places even beyond Pondichéry. The research answers the questions that how participants (parents, teachers and students) address the ideology in different alternative schools in contemporary times.
- Methodology is a recursive 'pedagogical process', it originates as an idea and need to be probed through use of existing or newly defined techniques. In the present purview of the research, therefore, to study alternative institutions and their processes and products is journey of unfolding of methods to embark upon.
- A very important feature was reading the various writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. An active engagement of the researcher with the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in self-study mode or in discussion with various experts[xi] was a constant feature before, during and even after the data collection. This activity helped understand the reality of the lives in field more deeply and participate with them. Reading of the works with the Ashram inmates coupled with participation in kind of activities available for volunteers (in various departments of the Ashram or at various sections in Auroville) who come to the institution both formally and informally added to naturalistic way of knowing the way of life.

Culture at the Field

The immediate cultural currents in field can be identified as multicultural and multi ethnic due to presence of individuals from different parts of the world. Broader cultural factor is the Integral Yoga worldview on which the institutions are based; which results in a 'discourse' of education and human development indicating at new paradigms, new concerns, issues or concepts at national and international level. In the field there were various institutes' regional and at international level which were trying to popularize or spread or work upon the vision through publications, workshops, lectures and seminars. I did not study them directly however these often came across as individuals shared about these or through email or in the newsletters.

The field and its experiments give an outlook of relevant 'innovative' schooling practices to make sense of. Exceptionality of the field is owing to several factors like, Pondichéry is unique due to its history and presence of the Ashram (Exhibition on Sep 15-30, 2012 of Cartier Bresson's pictures of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondichéry at New Delhi) and even Auroville.

Culture in present study will also be 'schooling culture' as identified as sociologically meaningful phenomenon around certain 'rituals and practices' (Thapan, 1996 & Stambach, 2001) 'meaning making' of activities (schooling, education and its various components, and life in (and around) school and life outside by teachers, students, parents and other participants of research. For present research culture at the field is existence of multiple views, confluence of life within (generational changes) at Ashram and Auroville and between; life referred as 'outside' world- changing social and economic conditions at Pondichéry.

Culture of the field also signifies economic, social and even emotional element of the participants' feeling and their 'negotiations' on being part of this 'experiment' of humankind. Their monetary, social and other faith or non-faith based reasons to be part of the experimental 'way of life'. Studying culture of confluence with wide variety in life would also mean to me the relation of respective individual cultures and the space they share with each other.

Epistemology in the Integral Worldview

After defining the various factors of culture of the field, it is important to draw on the epistemological basis of Integral Worldview. The research kept in reference the Integral framework of approaching knowledge. The view highlighted what coming together of languages, individuals at one place indicated. Integral view of knowledge and reality allowed looking at reality of participants' life beyond patterns, categories, and classification of Reality as different languages, ethnicity, and opinions. The view allowed experiencing the different views not as conflicts but as dynamic reality of the life at field both at Ashram and Auroville which share characteristics of an 'intentional' community. The conflicts among views would only be an appearance that can be synthesized to emerge a new view. Synthesis is possible since each view has its place in the 'whole' reality. Construction of knowledge in Integral View is seen as 'Being' and 'Becoming' (Sri Aurobindo in Gupta, 2011) rather some static fundamentals, principles or hypothesis. Therefore same phenomenon in the field is likely to have multiple manifestations and layers of reality of a theme. The layers have to be seen as part of 'whole' or moving towards some holistic sense indicating 'oneness' in the understanding. The 'one' thought therefore, becomes 'many' in several forms of interpretations of individuals (there is a possibility of error in some understandings that cannot be ruled out. Since the research at first place is not judgmental that is to find the errors was not the main objective). The understanding about the field and research questions emanate from different identified sources of information, perception and views (see: annexure 3.5). Research views that a phenomenon in the field finds its manifestation in views, objects, texts, and their placement also matters.

Steps in the Fieldwork

- ***Establishing relations*** is the most critical part of any ethnography. I used personal acquaintance as the method to gain entry. Then as the practice at the Ashram and Auroville, I was left to find entry at respective levels: school, individuals, community, and work. 'Volunteer work' was a useful method to gain entry and establish relations than just observations or interviews at the outset. From an ethnographic perspective this was the most natural way to gain entry. Due to following the regular method of entry, I was accepted and participants felt less suspicious of my entry into their classrooms. Making friends while working was easy and to start working with anyone

was equally possible. (Both the sites had welcoming attitude and curiosity over new presences and especially that of the researcher.) Yet I was looked as a spy of outside world, which I decided to incorporate sometimes as 'respect' towards or other times 'objectivity' or 'neutrality' from the *Sadhaks' Sadhna.*

I could visit different departments depending on availability of time and permission granted. I choose to work and to observe at the same time. My main work at the Ashram was at the 'Corner House' (mess for students and teachers) to help in the kitchen. I used to observe classes and to help sometimes at *L'avenier* (Lower primary section of SAICE: introduced in next chapter). Apart from this I was a part time volunteer at LB where I used to teach. The time at AID was spent during initial fieldwork. The acquaintance was made with one of the caretakers of the school during a seminar in Delhi on Auroville.

Initial field work gave a feel of the space which is important to move, manage time and also record observations. This was done through field visits and observation of the practices and discussion and interviews with teachers, parents and students there before the conceptualization of research proposal.

- ***Erecting boundaries***- Field work in ethnography means to identify a physical space with reference to certain idea of research questions in mind of researcher. Borzak (1981) says that field never exists out there but is created by the researcher. And in case of an institution, at an obvious level it involves the challenges of gaining entry, building rapport and complex position of researcher vis-à-vis the field. In case of school it may seem that school is a closed boundary, but the researcher when follows the participants, break the boundaries and create new sites other than classrooms. And each form of new data in a different setting was looked with curiosity and serendipity that how participants related it with lifestyle and education. For example, riding as pillion on an ex-student's bike and discussing his memories of 'multi ability classrooms' and issues of age was considered relevant from the perspective of a particular theme and also in general how schooling and its memories held the students back to the field.
- ***Timing the field work***- One of the characteristic feature of Ethnography is long association with the field, ideas, and people to draw certain statements about phenomenon under study, which becomes very costly on time and money. Why the

time spent by the researcher has to be long in school? It allowed my access to different sites of school and events which were not possible is short time or stay (Geoff and Tormon in Jeffery &Tormon, 2004). The present field work started in June 2009 for a month, December 2009, October, 2010 and intensive field work was taken from December 2010 to March 2012.

Techniques

Hymes (1977) raises the view that ethnography means trying to answer the questions that arise in understanding schooling and its culture by use of different methodological tools. Researcher used techniques like Interviews, Conversations and Dialogues, Discussions, Actions, field notes.

- ***Conversations*** are most important aspect of ethnographic data apart from observation since it gives an opportunity to researcher to co-construct (Jeffery in Jeffery& Tormon, 2004) the reality together. I remember when I used to take interviews during my first fieldwork at the Ashram School, I would rather break into conversations talking about education at the Ashram as an alternative set up and what usually happens in schools outside. These were the points where interviews or simple conversations broke into 'dialogue'. There were several such incidents especially in LB where the researcher and the teachers' co constructed the reality of schooling. Since there my participation was more as a teacher, the reflection was more. Interactions were largely informal, with an individual or with a group; with children and various adults of field. It is very important to understand various processes involved in ethnographic study to establish dialogue or identify opportunities to dialogue with various participants.
- ***Conflicts (cultural dilemmas) and action***- From discussions and dialogues flow conflicts during daily transactions, which a present culture or a community experienced. The researcher's point of view on those issues mattered. For example, in present research, conflicts were common like, how to understand the child's behavior, difference of opinion for an action, problem with construction at school to name a few and so were discussions regarding a particular student or what to teach or react to response of children to what they were taught (ref chapter 6 for details).
- ***Caveat***- However, one has to draw a thin line between information in these discussions and gossip (Thapan, 1991). A discussion might also end in difference of opinion or

conflict and sometimes supported by some action not unanimous. In such cases it was found relevant to follow the discussions in relation to its criticality to education and opinion of both the sides mattered.

- ***Interviews***-were a different forum of conversation for 'formal' validation of data. Development of a closed ended and open-ended interview schedule (See : Annexure 3.4) as survey of participant profiles for specific issues of faith and rituals or names of individuals or names of houses. The areas addressed in the interview schedule were Individual's relation with the Ashram, Auroville (vision and practice) – as indicator of personal belief; Relation through work, faith, family members; Linguistic development as a feature of multi-lingualism; Status of family members and their link with the Ashram. Open ended questions were introduced or posed when respondents wanted to talk about an issue from their experience of life for example, physical education, experience with any teacher to name a few. Formal interviews were also means to reach out to individuals who were not part of the field work on daily basis but I met them at different places of field. Interviews were conducted in the houses of Ashram inmates, in classroom, dining hall, or at eating joints outside where the younger generation love to visit. Interviews were last technique of data collection, after that any conversation with students or teachers, if required for a theme. Conversations were also done after analysis with theoretical and reflective viewpoint was done and also once again when the draft of thesis was getting ready. It was made clear to the respondent that this conversation or information was to validate what I had been observing and discussing with them.

Since questionnaires and interviews were not part of culture or ideology of Integral school of thought as the participants often insisted upon, the researcher took care not to offend but administer the questionnaire in relaxed and 'conscious' manner[xii]. I also informed the respondents about what research is concluding. Eventually it was also enjoyment I had, to interview individuals who wanted to be involved, since others were interviewed and they were curious to be interviewed as well. Or sometime with friends with whom close friendship was enjoyed, I made my dinner as their responsibility, this can be described in the Ashram lingo '*researcher bullied them*!'

- ***Recording Field Notes***- Observations, Discussions and Conversations mainly form part of field notes, which is a record book of everything of what happens in the field (Sanjek,

1990). The first forms of field notes were typed on computer. And then in between, due to demands of field I chose to write on small scrolls or cards (which I got from Ashram as the waste paper to be reused). Field notes even spread to dairies, note books, and small-chit of papers. For the sake of safety most of them were scanned and saved as 'soft copy' on the computer. Field notes were mainly descriptive. Personal Reflections were about the researcher in the field; it is important to keep personal or reflective and descriptive field notes as separate (Sanjek, 1990). 'Theoretical reflections' about the observations initially formed part of descriptive field notes in the same text. These were discontinued since it was important to allow the data to flow freely only as descriptions and any other theoretical or personal reflections were recorded separately.

- ***Video, Audio Recording, Photographs and Other objects*** - Photography or video recording was prohibited in the Ashram and Auroville because of ethical reasons. Where ever allowed and possible photos were taken to gather visible document of phenomenon. Photographs were good for pictorial memory and record. Sometimes photographs by the schools were also used.

  Other objects of particular relevance were plants, food products like *kaju* (cashew nut) toffees, Christmas cakes, brochures, printed articles, clothes, out of which list was generated of products that are perishable and non-perishable and relevant themes associated with these objects.

Organization of the Data: Sources and Nature

Foremost source of data were field notes, at first the researcher noted down all what was observed or talked about, which was more 'general'. Second source of data was more focused observations of classrooms and teaching experience and observation of other events at the field. This is what is further divided into primary and secondary. I call **primary source** of data, in which I also include magazines- journals (of the time I was there), text books, formal meetings, photos, video or audio recordings done by me. It also included objects from the fields organized as **perishable** item like *kaju* toffees, cakes, bread, soup, puffed rice all of which formed part of everyday living at the field. Some of the items were strongly and overtly connected with the Ashram or Auroville like incense sticks, *kaju* toffees or Christmas cake mainly with the Ashram; clothes, perfumes, soaps with Auroville.

Secondary source of data is the data when I was not present at the event like the anecdotes about rituals and practices, incidents about the Masters or about other individual collected through informal discussions with the participants. These discussions were recounting of an incident either in the past by some ex-student or a practice that ex-students used to indulge in, but he/she might no longer do the same. Incidents about oneself were given more preference than incident about other individuals; since latter could be a gossip and was likely to have ethical considerations since it is the third party which was being discussed. Care was taken when it was a negative or condescend[xiii] piece of information about an individual or incident or place. Secondary data also included experience of a student of what happened in his class during the field work, because I was not there in the class.

Relevance of 'records' that is, the publications of the Ashram cropped up during the fieldwork. First, one of a very senior teacher (and who had studied there from the time of the Mother) suggested me to look at one of the journals, *Vers L'avenier* which was maintained by the students but had been discontinued. Second occasion was when participants made reference to their photographs in the bulletin, articles, and other journals related to the Ashram or Auroville. Photographs in these journals involved memories or connection with the institutes. It became imperative to refer them and find traces of data for certain themes.

Lastly, I added **semi-structured interview**, which is administered on forty ex-students of the Ashram on aspects drawn from the participant observation. Research associate and I used laptop to fill in the responses.

Data Analysis

A major work of ethnographer is to read the data and look for patterns and themes (Thapan, 1991 and Willis, 2000). Eisenhart(2001) describes the analysis of ethnographic data in widespread manner-

> "*Ordinarily, one researcher works alone to collect the data, analyze the results, and write up the findings. Analysis of the data focuses on the identification of regular patterns of action and talk that characterize a group of people (Spradley, 1979, 1980; Wolcott, 1999).*" (p. 18)

An important and critical dimension to idea of categories and classification of knowledge in present research is the Integral (Yoga) worldview (as elaborated by Sri Aurobindo) which sees knowledge based on the processes of synthesis and beyond synthesis (Gupta, 2011). For the purpose of developing a comprehensive view of data, wherever possible categories have

come up, but these are not water tight compartments and traits of one category not exclusive to it. A relevant example was categories of children at LB, participants questioned the unjustified use of it by fellow participants. Categories of children were to help organize learning but not to differentiate between the children in order to experience life of Auroville, which mainly included visit to various departments and places of relevance. All children who were part of LB can participate everywhere.

Analysis purported to paint an 'overview' of the field and data as indicative of some central features of the whole cohort.

Steps in Analysis

The ethnographic data undergoes steps of analysis which could be identified for the present research as-

1. Familiarizing with data required to read the data in order to know what kind of broad themes has emerged from the field. After the first few readings of data, organization of the notes was done chronologically- each episode of observation, (interactions, or discussions) are organized and codified date wise. So each date as code has set of episodes. For example, **Obs no/26 nov10/page no**
2. Then the data was reread (Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994) in view of the research questions using the process of 'axial coding' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), entries were codified in to sub themes of research questions. For example, for the first research questions the spaces of schooling was categorized as, Spatial Arrangement of the three schools. Several sub-themes of research questions were further delineated or categorized for example, Spatial arrangement of the schools, objects in the classrooms, learning with the objects to name a few. There were themes that emerged out of the process of 'open coding' that did not directly relate to research questions and kept aside. And several themes (like world of *sadhaks*, relations between different institutions, breaking rules in institutions) were dropped in accordance with the research questions than in general about life. for a detail organization of data sources with respect to the research questions (see Annexure 3.5)
3. A visually identifiable cue like colors was very helpful for the organization of data episodes with respect to themes. The researcher found the use of the same in analyzing the themes in unstructured qualitative interviews by Adams (2006).

However, Adams did the same on word document, while I found the use of cards very useful and used small mark of color to identify the category. The researcher then made entry of codified data that is, date and page number of the original record in the small card; to segregate for schools the same color code for respective theme was used, however the number of cue was added that is, if small red circle means 'faith' based category, the two circles would indicate another school or three circles would mean third school. The cue's color and shape remained the same, only numbers were added (see: annexure 3.6).

4. Next step in codification was done indicating the episode shared as observations, interaction or participation. observation acronym used 'obs'; for an interaction acronym used is 'int'; or participation acronym used 'part' or if it is combination of activities, it is mentioned likewise. Next is the month and year of the episode (exact dates were avoided to hide identity of the participants) then the place is mentioned out of the various settings; followed by naming the activity and last by the participants. **Episode/month year/place/ activity/participants** for example,

Obs/int Dec 2010 /Golconde (a dormitory of ashram)/ - working for Christmas. participants- ashram inmates and outsiders/ volunteers like me.

This code is put at the end of the data shared to act as cue for the reader to understand the episode better; since the data out of three main schools and various sub sites, if not mentioned may confuse the reader.

5. Then the next step is to look at data closely through the lens of research questions, however linking data with research questions is a reiterative process that happens alongside the data collection. Usually this kind of linkage was done in the reflective dairy, where link with theory is established or a category is made. For example, researcher finds the episodes of school sports activities discussed by people at many different sites other than sports grounds, which made research look more deeply into the concept of physical education. As a result, the research question of learning and knowledge forms was looked thematically strengthened by view of 'physical education' as program and as in the lives of the participants.
6. Interviews were analyzed separately using descriptive statistics that is bar graphs and pie charts.

7. Member checks or Expert checks- Informal discussions were carried out with the participants as about the themes generated initially. Discussions were part of data collection, analysis, chapter writing and before final drafts of chapters were made. Once the final draft was ready, various members from the field (who volunteered) read it to validate the themes. Their suggestions after the discussion or correction of factual information were incorporated.
8. A very important aspect of ethnographic data is to validate it with theory (Atkinson, 1983; Willis, 2000) ethnographer work is of imaging the field and its responses with theory and therefore to draw theories and researches from other disciplines becomes imperative. Reading of various theoretical ideas was done once themes were formed after the initial analysis. For example, work of Zerubavel (1991) for sociology of time was found relevant to describe the schools' conception of time and learning (refer chapter 4 for details). Conception of categories and themes was kept independent of relevant theories or research in the field, since initially a comparison between the field and research emerges, which affects the data collection and formation of themes.

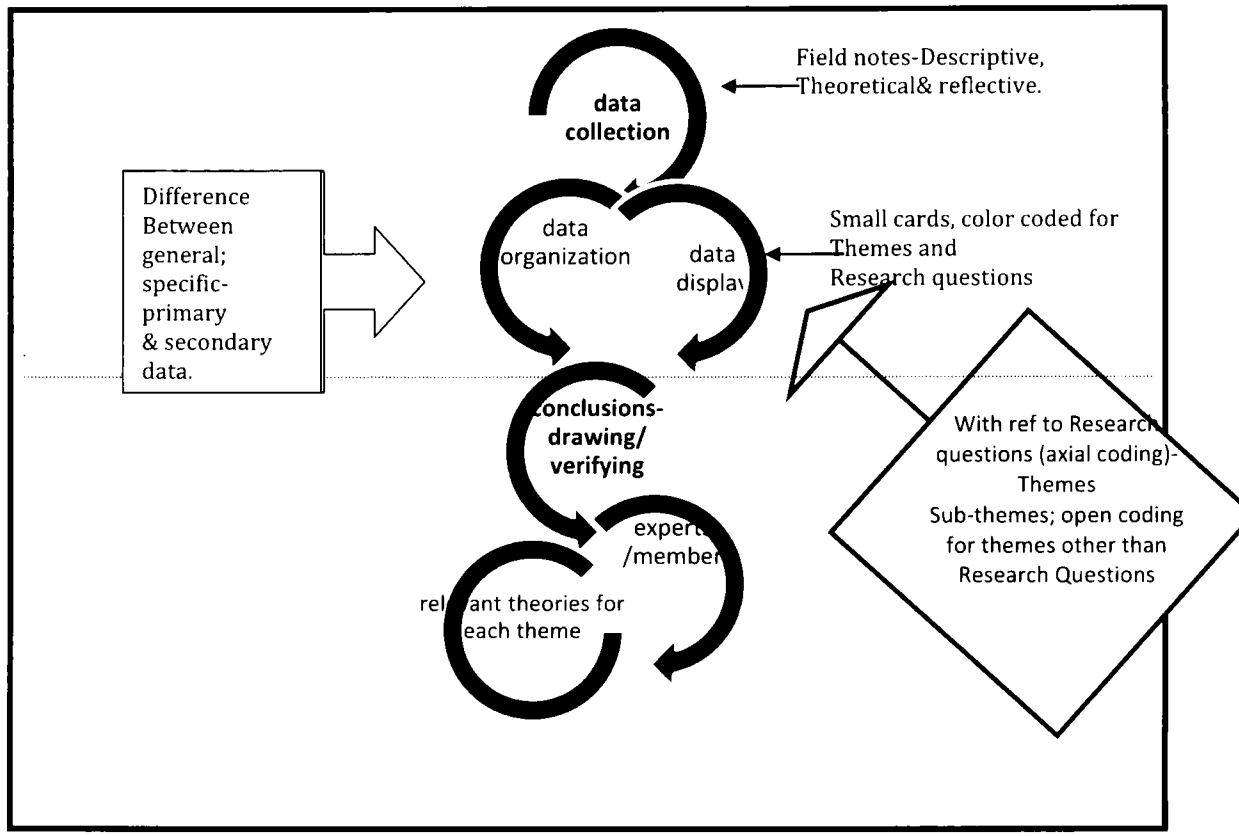

Fig 3.1 Summary of the Steps in Data Analysis

Challenges of the Design

Ethnography is often criticized for methodological drawback it carries intrinsically

> "*.....is loosely designed, opportunistically conducted, magically analyzed, and notoriously unreliable persists in some quarters....many excuses for this (e.g., the threat to an existing academic elite, some anthropologists' position that Ethnography cannot or should not be systematized ...)*
> (Eisenhart, 2001 p no 19)

It may sound loosely designed with reference to the standardized data collection and analysis methods but it can always compensate the same with 'rigor'and being 'conscious' with data throughout the research.

Another threat is that the ethnography relies predominantly on researcher's imagination at all levels. Modell(1996) talks about establishing the importance of ethnography in Human Development while he begins with interesting caution,

> *"Interdisciplinary courtship is a sweetly and dangerously ambiguous game: some seductions, some small deceits, some small misdirections are inevitable and*

necessary if curiosity is to lead to understanding by bringing the disciplines onto one another's home ground." (p. 480)

Present research draws on the principles of qualitative research and applies it to the ethnographic data. Research uses the argument for 'apparent validity' and 'theoretical validity' (Kirk & Miller, 1986) which are both high for ethnographic researches as the researches are always present there and theoretical framework is one of the main peg for the field notes, hence a systematic attempt is made to link the analyzed data with relevant researches and theories.

Relations in the field: 'consciousness', 'gratitude' and 'goodwill'

"The tension between protecting those studied and reporting details in ways that compel deeper understanding has been a persistent one. The tension is exacerbated when multiple and diverse perspectives (or "voices") must be represented.
(Eisenhart 2001 p no 19)

These lines state the predicament of an ethnographer. A researcher is an outsider participants are curious to know about and many are keen to talk to. There are times when researcher found controversial information that someone might share out of the friendly relation that had developed. I personally tried to use only information, which would not harm the integrity of a person or place, instead used the same to widen my overview. I made sure not to use it as a 'case' to elucidate any theme. The names, gender and identity of participants have been carefully guarded (as clear in the coding described above).

Some times researcher may have disagreement with the participants and another ethical challenge for researcher is to resolve conflicts with participants if any. As a researcher, I found it important to be conscious of or observe my emotions and relations rather to severe or suppress. In case of sharing an opinion, which was in conflict with a participant, it was important to state it and 'step back' rather to get in an argument.

Ethical dilemmas could be dealt with consciousness keeping in mind the integrity of research, place and generation of knowledge. A question which often fellow researchers asked are, 'How much one can be personal with friends, one make during fieldwork?; Especially in (culture like) India where friendliness, warmth is important and one talks less of research as academic pursuit since one is almost right in the mid of activities and personal lives of individuals.' The old or young people I came across I preferred to help them in my own way as sense of 'gratitude' to their presence, help and the 'good will' they showed to

talk to me. Helping in the field is another form of taking ethical responsibility and to do things for participants as sign of gratitude towards them and to the knowledge they shared. It would make things mutual, when one is not only taking the data but shares a mutual bond by fulfilling the role of what participants would do for each other.

The Scheme of Results' Section

The results of the study are presented in four major chapters. The first chapter addresses main themes of – spaces and time, various daily activities, knowledge to understand basic structure of schools in relation to the learner and teachers; second, explores faith issues of the participants; third looks at view of the child, knowledge areas and teaching; fourth chapter looks at physical education and body as instrument to learn.

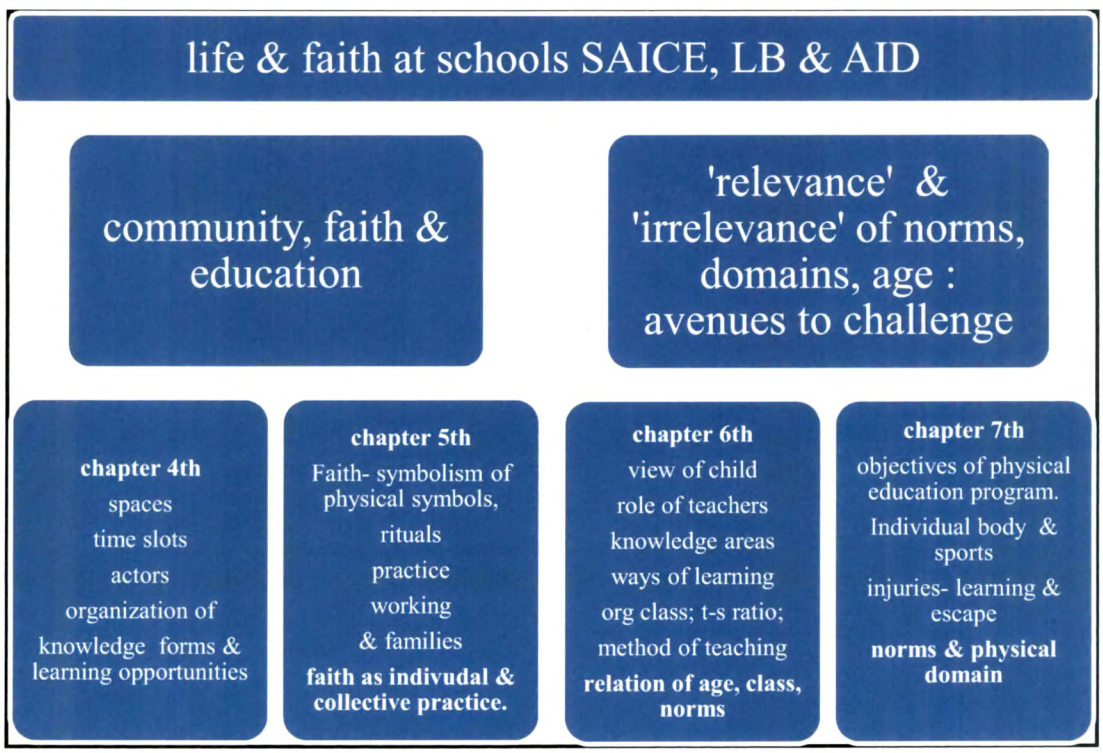

Fig 3.2 Scheme of the Results' chapters

In the above scheme, relevant themes are generally presented in the form of description to let the reader experience the field. However, both the views have been presented: one that supported and another that challenged a theme to show the 'dynamism' in the life of the participants. The two central boxes show the central concern- that the themes in respective

chapters support. The two central boxes focus on central views of Human Development in the educational programs at the schools. The central views of Human Development from the schools were also analyzed with respect to 'norms, domains and age specifications of participants undergoing various learning experiences along with issues of faith and community.

Endnotes

[vii]Pondichéry (Spelling are in French) was renamed as Puducherry but throughout the dissertation word 'Pondichéry' is used since the participants used it unless otherwise.

[vii]Bresson in his diary notes of 1950 about the Ashram mentions Pondichéry as the sleepy town. The notes were displayed as part of the Exhibition of his works in Alliance Francaise de Delhi September, 2012.

[vii](source: http://www.sriaurobindoashram.org/ashram/saice/index.php)

[vii] Refer to series on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Education (1992) 'A new Education for a New Consciousness' Puducherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

[vii]*Aurovillians* are given a fixed amount of money as maintenance for the minimum number of hours they spent at any department or unit of working

[vii] Not to have servants or help included in the study is major limitation of the study. *Ammas* were ubiquitous in study. There were in schools carrying out many important activities of school. Since they form particular class and were mostly Tamils they are missed in the whole study. However I found my personal interactions useful with them either at my home or at the schools.

[vii]Whichever is applicable since the research at this juncture cannot differentiate between two, but for present research ethnography is a design, it's a school of thought that trains researchers to carry out research with certain broad parameters. It is the creativity or imagination or subjectivity of researcher to create methods- tools and techniques to gather data.

[vii]Phenomenon in a field could be at different levels as Hammerslay and Atkinson, 1983 put Ethnography in three categories- Macro substantive for example, Radcliffe Brown, Sahlins and Service, Harris; Micro-formal for example Goffman 'total institutions' and Micro-substantive for example on becoming a Marijuana user by Becker.

[vii]Since the two institutions were not completely totalistic (which is an important feature of micro-formal ethnography) in their view and functioning because the structure allows the two worldviews that is, institutional and rest of the world to mingle over several spaces and in some cases rather function together. There is however a categorical reference made to life lived at the institutions- Ashram and Auroville as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. The 'inside-outside' world divide and its relation is also relevant theme that runs across the analysis in the result section.

[vii]Most of the adults had been part of the processes to become 'the Ashram or Auroville' inmates. Individuals who come to the Ashram and Auroville by identification with virtue of their faith, others are called in as 'chance' in their life allows or opportunity to be there.

[vii]I used the facilities at the Gnostic Centre and The Academy of the Future, which gave a platform for regular meditative and reflective studies of the various works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

[vii] I have not started taking interviews and my fieldwork was going on, I met my teacher a beautiful mentor and companion who told me, "Harpreet you need to create an environment in which you can interview." I could not really understand what she meant, but her words echoed whenever I was lost in field to act. After reading and re reading my data and talks with many youngsters and ex-students from SAICE, who have been interacting with me about my dissertation, I decided to take the plunge to make them and many other ex-students comfortable to talk formally as part of interviews. I found it opening up of a 'new world'.

[vii]What is condescend or negative can also be data to look at. That is what the participants consider as negative but it was avoided due to ethical reasons and in order to delimit the world.