

Chapter 7

PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR BODY AND MIND

Integral Education makes a strong case for a well formulated and disciplined physical education program. Since chapter four has described the arrangement and management of space and time of physical education activities in three schools. This chapter primarily traces the relevance and unique aims of Physical Education program; which are a) it is established research based area ,b) act as reference for other institutions and, c) relevance of 'learning from body' that participants mentioned. The Mother has detailed the philosophy of the program in her volume on Education (1950/2002). She had also personally supervised the development of the present program at the Ashram in its initial phases. The program since its inception is for the inmates and the children at SAICE, while LB and AID were developing an centralized and organized program.

All three schools have a regular physical education program; Physical Education Department (henceforth: PED) at the Ashram is the oldest, centralized and compulsory program unlike in the other two schools.

The Physical Education program had various conspicuous norms and adherence to time and spaces. This was a shift from the freedom to learn, to choose, to argue and to move in different spaces over the time for the teachers and students to a more space-time specificity. The chapter therefore, at the outset explains aims of physical education program as reflected in the program as 'official and published' sources and the unofficial sources as the interpretation of the practices by the participants. It then explains the concept of 'groups' for division of participants to organize them. The organization in the sports was similar to how classrooms were divided as chapter six explained it. Subsequently the chapter explains few unique features of the program. The focus is not to only to master the various sports activities but to develop 'body awareness' and consciousness of the body.

The chapter takes into account 'meaning' of these physical activities for the students, the teachers, and the challenges faced by them. This information was part of the natural occurring conversations. Individuals mentioned the activities they participated in or watched others doing it. They also described the events during sports to each other and even to the researcher. The reflections were also during the interviews (of ex-students), if any participant

mentioned specially about their experience of physical education program, which they considered as 'unique' feature of their education at the Ashram.

The Two Programs: PED and *Dehashakti*

PED's Program has well organized components of the program. Several mentions have been made about the program. Bressonⁱ mentioned in his diary, when he visited the Ashram about the Ashram inmates doing gymnastics and dressed in uniform for their sports activities. He describes that a Gymnastics program in India was a remarkable achievement even in pre-independent times. The same is true for India in contemporary times. Reading the lines from Bresson's diary indicated that the department had maintained its status as the Ashram program invoked the same feeling in me at the first sight in 2003. Children and adults are ready in their uniforms for the sports program and on move to reach their respective venues. This is a regular feature of life at Pondichery for more than seven decades.

There was stipulated and organized timetable of various sports activities for a year. (See Annexure 7.1) PED has a special 'research' wing with main aim to study the health and physical activity of individuals. The research was mainly meant for the department's growth and was not shared with larger audience or as the field addressed 'outside' world.

The students at SAICE shared their awareness of PED as one of the best programs and with well-maintained and organized infrastructure. A student who was studying at SAICE mentioned, when I appreciated the Gym and its equipment:

*"...this was supposed to be the best gym of India, when it was made."
the gym was flawlessly maintained, the condition of instruments was good even if the gym does not have AC. the instruments were in good working condition and neatly kept. I observed various individuals of different age groups using different instruments.*

Into bs/ Sep2012/ Gymnasium at the Playground/ student of graduate program

Dehashakti (ref: Annexure 7.2) also draws on the aim of physical education that the Mother has stipulated which even the Ashram follows. The rationale behind *Dehashakti* is to 'work' (that is, to improve) on the body for its perfection and growth, which is also the central aim of Integral Yoga. The practical aspect is also to 'organize' the activities for the body. The program is mainly for the children and participation of adult is only as the sports coaches. Many similarities could be observed in the two programs for example, importance of food for the body, division of groups etc. The common point of contention was the regularity and

essentiality of a physical education program. This argument enriches the debate on the education of body and relation of body and mind, as the subsequent sections would highlight.

Division of Groups: Basis, Rationale and Practices

The children were divided into group primarily age wise but group division also involved the 'capability' and 'performance' of the individual. The groups at the Ashram have been alphabetically arranged and addressed likewise or at times addressed by the color of shorts assigned to each group.

- Group A1, A2, A3, A4, and A5- three years to 11 years [green shorts]
- Group B1, B2- 11 to 18 years [red shorts]
- Group C- 18 years plus girls [Grey shorts]
- Group D- 18 years plus males [Grey shorts]
- Group E- 21 years plus females till 50 (the Ashram inmates) [Khaki shorts]
- Group F- 21 years plus males till 50 (the Ashram inmates) [Khaki shorts]
- Group G-old females [white shorts]
- Group H- all old males [Dark blue shorts]

Each group had captains. Captains are individuals those who have outstanding performance in sports and can act as leaders. They have olive green color uniforms. They led their group during March Past (discussed in chapter 5).

Group allocation followed one stipulated norm of age and two other norms. These were, 'group strength' that is, number of individuals in a group and 'individual's physical strength.' Interactions with two senior captains and several students revealed the latter two norms about which the publications are silent. These norms were trends which were equally strong as the written policy. These trends also tend to contradict the central idea of grouping as indicated in the opinion of two captains. One of the captains suggested changing the practice of following the number strength in a group while grouping the students. This would help follow the ideals of grouping effectively. Another captain opined

"it is (grouping fixed as per number) an impediment but most of the other captains seemed to function like this."

Int/ Sep 2012/ SAICE/ group captain & researcher

General opinion revealed that groups in Physical Education were not formed on a logical argument of physical strength and performance of the students, which ideally should be the criterion of division. As a result some division in the group could not be justified. However, there was no resentment for the system or individuals, added the captain, *"here you can't change anyone, and everyone is free to do what they want to. But one can try and should try (to suggest the changes)."* However, the concepts like division to organize individuals facilitated and sometimes acted as impediment in the school. Many participants like this captain and students felt that there is a need to revisit these concepts and need not follow it the way it had been.

Each group was further divided into division as the last chapter showed based on performance of the participant. These divisions at PED were relevant during the competition seasons.

Coaches at *Dehashakti* also followed age wise and capability wise division of students. As a result each group had children of same age group from other schools of Auroville too.

Capability of a child was a criterion to re-group the child in higher or lower group. However, the group formation and their attendance were not strict like PED. The adults were not part of the groups at any point not even the older group as in case of groups C and D at the Ashram. However on other platforms and organized sports events of Auroville, adults and adolescents interacted together; for example, team sports like Frisbee and Auroville Marathon which in an international event.

At the AID it was a class of similar age group that used to play together rather division across the age. The age group 9, 10 and 11 years I observed that the boys and girls played together. The concept of division on basis of ability was not so overt here most likely due to different objective of the program and not being part of a centralized program. The annual sports event at the AID put children, teachers, and volunteers together in various games like tug-of war, races to name a few. For the other two schools the interaction of different age groups was during the competition season, which would be discussed in subsequent section.

Virtues of commands and uniforms

At *Dehashakti*, the group's identification was the color of the jacket that they wore on their t-shirts. Organizing team at *Dehashakti* had also developed following commands in Sanskrit with an ex-student, who is now an *Aurovillian*,

Ekta- at ease

Poornata-attention and

Shakti- ready for

PED had developed commands in French since its initial days. While the AID was free from this symbolism.

Before a group's activity begins or dispersed after the activity was over, there was a minute's silence called as 'concentration'ⁱⁱ, the children, coached and even the audience stood in complete silence. The captains blew the whistle and the group members collected at one place and stood in complete silence. This was the practice at the Ashram and at LB.

The practices of 'uniform' and 'commands' were idea borrowed from Army. However, the practices were much relaxed than an Army's regimented discipline. 'Discipline' and 'regularity' are essential qualities to train the body and were initiated with uniforms and commands. The notice at the main Ashram premises (where the Samadhi is) about the uniforms stated to respect the uniform and do not move in public places with the uniform. The practices were basically to inculcate discipline and regularity for the physical development only; as there was no uniform in the schools.

The competitions

Excelling was also the virtue which was an expectation for group activity all the year round and more conspicuously during the 'competition season' -

"...the yearly schedule is divided into four seasons during the first three, there is a period of training followed by competitions."

(The Mother on Education, 2002, p. 255)

The Mother used to give messages for the competitions (the Mother on Education, 2002, p.273 & 274). Any one of these messages was written on the board during each competition seasons at the Sports Ground.

PED, The AID, and LB had a unique program that made it compulsory for everyone to participate in range of activities and at the same time 'excel' in each one of it. As we would see that competitions and records mostly in case of PED were examples that implied each individual to 'excel'.

Various Aims of the Programs

The vision of the programs is rooted in the philosophy of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo but aims and objectives have evolved with program in course of time with its participants. The

objectives could be seen from mainly three perspectives. First are the words or works of the Masters as theoretical principles, the written objectives, and the presentations/ performances. These reveal both 'said' or 'official', and 'unsaid' or 'unofficial' objectives of the program. Third is the participants' experience or discussions about the program

Physical Education program at SAICE has a long history. 'History' implies its genesis, evolution of physical spaces, objects, activities, literature, and formulation of various norms general and specific to each sports' activity to refer to. Centralization of physical education as compulsory area added to life of the school and resulted in the individuals engagements, awareness exploration of 'body' and training for the same.

LB formed part of the centralized effort to organize sports of Auroville while the AID followed its own program. These two schools were relatively new and had few coaches, less resources at one place in order to run an organized sports program like PED at the Ashram. Therefore, Schools in Auroville might not have come up with a centralized department with a compulsory program for everyone and records or publications as PED. A relevant point here is that the choices of various physical education activities available to an Individual were more at Auroville (Annexure 7.3). Only these were not 'centralized' and 'regularized' as compulsory set of activities for all the Aurovillians. The features of two programs with similar vision and wide range of activities acted as relevant example of two accepted manifestation of the same vision.

The 'official' aims

In the physical demonstration program (on December 2nd, 2012) presented the history of PED's establishment. The program highlighted the individuals and their efforts involved, the time each activity was started and stories involved with it. Its long history and number of individuals associated with it has resulted in publications about the program, literature, records and a department for research. The publications reveal three major aspects and indicated at the ideas of: physical fitness, overall health and character building (Bhattacharya, 1992). To quote the expectation from a Physical Educator:

"A Physical Educator must have a high Ideal....put his Ideal in actual practice, be guided by it at every step, and must be able to infuse this Ideal into his students."
(Bhattacharya, n.d p.1)

Other Publications by the department describe the components of physical education program that is, tests, exercises, and the words of the Masters on the importance, care and role of body by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. To Quote,

"Do not forget that to succeed in our yoga one must have strong and healthy body. For this, the body must do exercise, have an active and regular life, work physically, eat well, and sleep well."

(The Mother, 1971/2004, p. 136)

"The basic programme will be to build a body, beautiful in form, harmonious in posture, supple and agile in its movements, powerful activities and resistant in its health and organic functions."

(The Mother, 1953/2002, p. 50)

The publications on tests and fitness (Annexure-7.4) are important indications of official and notified norms expected from the human body in the Ashram as per the age and sex. Other publications from the Ashram Press especially the bulletinⁱⁱⁱ and 'sports magazine' (the Sports Spirit) were circulated mainly in the centers (based on the ideas of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo). Therefore, research wing and reference to the functioning and program of PED were mutual. The circulation was among the group and also outside the group.

The norms of body's fitness and being able to carry out certain activities in particular way and time find their place in the expectations held by the participants in unfolding of events in everyday life. For example, one was expected to know about (yoga) *Asanas* group or visit a masseur, certain exercises or video to strengthen the body or recover from the injury. As a result, participants also suggested me to join the group of women for yoga *Asanas* to keep the body fit. Or there were other suggestions to visit a particular departments or individuals for advice to cure any injury. The exercises, individual expertise and the departments were 'norms' of fitness that an average individual should consult whenever the requirement was there, in case of general fitness or in case of an injury.

Norms: recorded, notified, and analyzed

Norms held a different relevance in PE program. These were more specific, measured in standard form and displayed giving it the status of 'official'. The meaning of norms is drawn here from three kinds of observations in the field namely: records, display of information on the notice boards and published papers. These formed part of official records while what students discussed, conflicts or changes that came up were part of 'unofficial' norms. Both

are norms since these were standards through which individual development of physical was viewed. Unofficial had more scope of critically analyzing the records or norms and hence render it 'dynamic'

Record means capturing, marking and preserving certain activity. It implies evidence of one's performance acting as flagship for others. Records are of different nature-

- displaying 'results' of current events,
- indicating records of Ashram (colloquially known as Ashram records) which included the best players in an event, especially individual events like athletics and swimming or winning teams in games and, third
- indicating the individual performance in games like basketball

Apart from records were the results of 'standardized medical or physiotherapy tests' and various other programs to study 'health' of Ashram inmates, students, and non-members. Few examples of the tests were: routine health checkup that is anthropometric, height, body weight, teeth, BMI test, and eyes. While adults underwent through a detailed and specialized health check-up required as per their age and gender.

The Notice Boards at Corner House, the mess for the students, displayed information for the students. The themes mostly displayed some information about food, health and exercise to take care of different body parts. These were recent addition at Corner House as per the inmates. The information signified researches on human body, food, wellbeing, and care tailored to provide information to the participants and invoke a sense of responsibility on their lifestyle.

The Main or the conspicuous (western) wall of the Corner House adorned two windows from which one can see the room where food was served. In between the two windows the space was painted black, one was used as Notice for information like, movies, PE program, matches to be watched during live telecast or recoding of some games and matches to name a few, and other had the message from the Mother or Sri Aurobindo written with the nice colored chalk (see: Annexure 7.5). Many participants and visitors reported to eagerly wait for the message. The message symbolized their reverence for the words and faith held in the self-empansipatory goal of the worldview.

Few researches at the Ashram also made a statement on the national norms of health fitness of young children. For example, a study was carried out on obesity level of children at

SAICE with respect to the different food eating habits due to regional affiliation was in order to make comment of 'growth' pattern of children in India. The research studied BMI and EC inferences as dependent variable indicating obesity. Independent variable was food along with confounding variables of regional background of different students. The study's attempt to develop a norm of the physical growth pattern was possible due to children of different regions in India studying at SAICE. There were similar studies that used different methods like 'cohort' analysis on developmental patterns of physical growth of group members of PED (Virani, 2005).

Many institutions and schools attempted to understand and implement the physical education program. During fieldwork, many individuals visited Corner House as part of their visit to the PED. One of the schools from northern part of India had brought its teachers and students to experience the physical education program, one of the PED in charges told me that they were planning to work out a course for the children and teachers. On another occasion, teachers from a school in Mumbai had come specifically to observe the PE program. During their visit, they visited all the three grounds, ate at the corner house (the mess for the PED members) and interacted about the program.

However, the program was of interest mainly to those who wanted to establish this kind of program at their institutions. These individuals could get an overview of the program mainly through observations and interactions if not participation. Participation in the program was severed for outsiders; as it requires special skills and awareness of unique aims which everyone may not be aware of (as the subsequent sections would explore). In rare instances, there was 'participation' of the experts to discuss techniques or international standards of different games.

In order to conclude the discussion till now about the program at the Ashram and to some extent LB or the AID, one can say that at the level of individual development the program offered a very structured and organized physical education that targeted both body's as well as mind's learning through the body (subsequently explained in the chapter). The body underwent the mechanical training, with participants' individual interpretations, reflections of records, literature, and publications. Medical Tests added to the information and awareness of the participants purely at the physiological level. The program was compulsory and coupled with other aspects of health. There were less probability of an individual student

(or an adult) missing it all together especially at PED. There were also other strong features of the program that emerged, which are described herein.

Participation of various age groups

The group division at PED allowed adults of wide age group to play together. During 'the competition seasons' four times in a year, there was an interesting feature of observation when the Ashram inmates including teachers competed with the older age group of SAICE. It was C group and older women in competitions and similarly D group (boys- as they were referred) and older men in competition. It was a rare event to watch participation of wide age group, and teacher-student relationship during the events.

At Auroville similar interaction were possible but not at *Dehashakti*. This was an example of ever 'learning ability' reflected at sports program at PED, 'juggling' and 'Frisbee' at LB at Auroville. The Ashram inmates, who joined as adults, were also keen to learn the techniques of various sports and also participate in the competitions. Males and females in their late thirties or forties spared extra time to get coaching in athletics and participate in the 'competitions' with D and C group students.

As mentioned earlier that the main motivation was to compete and perform their best rather to be in the best division and set records. C group captain and a friend also mentioned the idea to learn at a later age. During observation of a volleyball match when I asked her about hitting the ball and said, *"I don't think I would be able to learn ever, to which she added that all the ashram inmates who join late, learn, so can I."* On another occasion [in September 2012] I was told by a woman who joined Ashram in later stages, (when I was observing them during their competitions) that

<i>"...come" (gesture to call me) and join them on the tracks. She motivated me to come and run with them. She was similar age of mine. I told them that I am not allowed on the tracks since I am not an Ashramite, to be part of athletics competition.</i>

Int/sep2012/Sports Ground/ thirty year old Ashram inmates & researcher
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There was also vibrancy and 'awe' with which many participants and audience reacted especially when older age group outshone the youngsters.

One of the teachers commented

The good thing about this place is that when in day we sit and teach these students, in evening we guide them for sports. We eat here (at corner house) and discuss other things with them. there is another challenge that in the evening we sometimes compete with them. it gives us a unique relation.

Int/ May 2011/ Corner House-SAICE/ researcher and middle aged teacher

Teacher and student spent time at different occasions and spaces to learn but sports events brought them closer. As an extension of this unique adult-child interaction, there was interaction among wide range of age group of adults during the competitions.

Physical Education program: Compulsion or discipline?

At SAICE the inmates of the Ashram and students participated in the program all-round the year with exception for the students during the vacations. While at the other two sites the Aid and LB, the coaches faced major challenge to convince the students to play all the games and not just choose one. Centralization of sports and its being a compulsory area is also an issue that Auroville debates about. For example, 'do students need to be at one place and do compulsory sports or can they do what they like in Sports?' The coaches at LB not only had problem convincing students but often the parents questioned that if the physical education was important to be followed in a compulsory regime. The issue was constantly in debate at LB and contested during the fieldwork.

These **two reasons** that is, a defined physical education program and history of PED were discussed extensively at *Dehashakti* (where LB students went for the physical education program). Team member of *Dehashakti* felt that, "*the way physical education program is (compulsory and range of the activities) at the Ashram, it is essential feature of Integral Education and must be same at Auroville as well.*" The parents however held different view and at times were in conflict in the need and strong adherence in following of physical education program like PED. There were parents who were in favor of the argument of *Dehashakti* team members to follow a compulsory and organized program. The nature, content and essentiality of the sports program for physical education remained contestable as the issues discussed in chapter four under 'regularity of the sports'.

On the contrary away from all debates the children at AID slipped into their uniforms after the school around 3 pm and played without any interference from homes. As researcher

participated with them at the field, there were issues interpersonal, of physical strength and emotional they were resolving among each other rather interference from their homes.

Body and Sports: the Relationship

The episodes of descriptions were about an aspect of body by the individual for his/her or another body, their emotions during the game and skills or technique of the game. The description of body was with respect to sports activity, aesthetics and injury. Integral View's development of 'Body Consciousness' was also different from what an athlete or sportsperson would have, insisted teachers and some ex-students

-----he told how here their bodies have suppleness, which bodies 'outside' do not have. He said we have something about in our bodies here due to the physical education program...he said he can't find a word for it, (he meant suppleness). For spiritual development all is required -do this, do that. Every bit of all the things, the Mother has created that system. He told me that there happen to come a world class gymnast here, despite sports we(Ashramites) are much below their (gymnasts) standard but he said the way he(gymnast) ran was unusual, his body was not in correct posture or style of running.

Int/ May 2011/ Corner house SAICE/ researcher and sports captain

It is evident from the statement from this interaction that the program rendered their bodies a unique form and energy what could be vaguely termed as 'suppleness'. It's a rather complicated perspective to understand that focus of the program is 'body' and at the same time excelling in different activities. The latter is a means to an end and not an end in itself. Therefore if one excelled and worked on body awareness and consciousness it involved at the same time on one's emotions and thoughts. Excelling in physical sports was coupled with control of emotions and playing in fair manner. That was a major point stressed at SAICE and mentioned as strength of the program.

However, students and other inmates had to struggle with their emotions while playing. An observation of the same:

During one of the basketball match which was crucial between Div I (best) players of Group D, I sat among audience with one of the ex-student to watch the match. Her son Avinash was playing the game/ (I was always happy to have someone since I liked that someone explained to me what was happening in term of technicality of the game.) The students were playing a crucial match. It was tough and strong competition from both the sides, as we enjoyed the good shots or baskets from both the sides. The student who was maintaining the score board here has to stand up faster than the score keeper in the adjacent court.

Five fouls in basketball game means the player is out of the game, as we watched the game we saw the Avinash, who is a good player but due to fouls (his anger) during a crucial point he was out of the match. The team which was about to win suddenly had one less player and there was a possibility that team would lose the match. We were critical of Avinash's behavior who being a good player landed up doing fouls and was out of the match. The ex-student, a mother was critical of the behavior of young boy and I could empathise with her opinion.

Ob-Int Sep2011/ Basket Ball court/ Sports Ground/the players, spectators, researcher in conversation with ex-student who is a mother and her child is playing.

The ex-students also referred to nostalgic moments of holding the ball, playing, and reporting of yearning to be part of it the whole event again. Losing temper and getting hostile was something that player often reported and wanted to work upon.

Sudha who just finished her course is sitting next to me in the volley ball court. She said that she would love to play the game and added, "I wish I don't scream or hit anyone". She is nostalgic as for a moment as she hold the ball, when the ball came out of the court and she has to throw it back. She shared her reminiscences of playing games in this field and was sad that she could not play now.

Obs-int/ sep 2011/ Sports Ground, the Ashram/ ex-student and researcher

Playing games, the techniques, records, and controlling their emotions during the games were part of the memories of many students. Most of the students were eager to play games if given a chance out of their busy schedules.

In order to deal with their emotional reaction of the players, the jokes were part of the interactions and observations. I cite a referee (sports coach and captain) who cracked a joke on one of the players. Since the player, an Ashram inmate had not been able to control anger during the game

"oh! That's another sadhana to play the game in the same manner for past thirty years! 'L' has scared the referee away with her anger... due to her screams and accusations. I am sure the referee (another ashram inmate) won't turn up again."

Int/ sep 2011/SG/ ex-student & researcher

The joke was tongue-in-cheek over the fellow playmate who often lost temper in field, which was definitely not an acceptable behavior in the game.

The last two observations indicated that how organized game(s) involved playing in fair manner with self-control. The real purpose of sports is also achieved, when an individual is conscious about the weak point as a player and it is not only the skill which one needs to play the game technically but emotion that controls the player during the game. The emotion motivated them to play and acted as an impediment as well.

These remarks of participants need to be understood in the expectations of PE program at SAICE. PE program at SAICE has objective of perfection of body, expanding one's capacity/ability, improvement in skills and a fair play. The program and captains were strict about inmates playing it in a fair manner and expected individuals to challenge their own or other's records.

In many cases it was not the choice of the individual to excel in comparison with others but to improve his/her own standards, this was in sync with the objective of the program.

However since competitions were also part of the program, many individuals interpreted the purpose was to motivate rest of the students to excel others.

In interaction with two of the D group boys who tried to perform in all the required competition yet did not hold any record or position.

Boys remarked they were happy that they did well from what they did last time. An adult remarked that they were not competing as per their best level, to which the boys clearly asserted (in discussion with me) that competitions are for their own improvement and not mainly to compete with others. The boys avoided saying so to that adult that this is not the goal of the program here.

Int/June 2011/ SG the Ashram/ students 18 years old and researcher

One of the students in an interview mentioned on the issue of breaking the Ashram records in sports “...*I knew my strength and I never went that ahead...*”(and getting seriously injured) These responses reflect that there could be expectations from the participants to excel while they formed their own opinion. These responses are only glimpse of several other views that might be there in the field and need to be studied.

Response to injuries or an illness

Injuries were common either due to sports at all the sites or sometimes due to nature because of certain varieties of caterpillar, scorpions. Both were part of school culture, and so was medicine, exercises as per the nature of injury. This section describes nature of injuries with reference to different age groups of people and how they dealt with it. Injuries due to sports were most common at SAICE, these were also there at LB and the AID. LB as school also had injuries due to caterpillars, snakes or scorpions; none of them was fatal till the fieldwork continued.

Injuries due to sports as mentioned above were the most common, and discussions and treatment for these were found many times at the most informal places. For example, there were interactions outside the corner house, when the group activities at the Play Ground had finished; or when the school finished or during or after the lunch in the corner house. During one such meeting we sat in the corner house after finishing the meals, and one senior teacher, an Ashram inmate member of Group E comes and asks a coach (who is an ex-student too).

“There is injury in the foot” reports the teacher. The coach asks, “how did it happen? Where is it hurting?”, and then immediately suggests her, “to heal it first before you go for the physical activity.” Further suggestion is to stretch it so the pull occurs where the injury is and it cures it. The basic stretch at foot is meant to cure the pull in the muscle.

The coach is not trained in physiotherapy in formal sense, but has his own method because of his experience to heal, and is popular among students and teachers to heal the injuries.

Obs/March 2011/corner house SAICE/ Coach and students

This was the first time when the injury, its healing and its presence in everyday life at SAICE was striking. After that there were often discussions about injury and healing it. Not all injuries were alike, some required immediate medical aid, on one occasion there was a discussion that if the child was hurt during group hour and require medical aid, where the child should go? as dispensary closed at 4.30. After two days a notice was put on Ashram

notice board section meant for PE notices that in case of injury during group hours one can contact the doctors at (the Ashram's) nursing home.

Another form of injury to the body was because of the various fauna in the natural environment. The insect bites at LB were quite common, itchy caterpillar^{iv} would often crawl on a child's skin and they would rush to the office. Most of them were now scared of itchy caterpillar. The injury from the hairs of the caterpillar was quite itchy and the skin would get rashes. The remedy for itchy caterpillar was to apply *Apis* a homeopathy ointment or local treatment to apply salt and bear the pain. Children also tried to use cello tape to use as strip on skin to pull out the hair of caterpillar. This never stopped the children from exploring other insects and holding them from *birbahutis* to colorful lady birds and other local varieties of insects (which were not harmful). The children would often carry these insects on their hands or to the class, would appreciate the color and will keep on holding it for the sheer joy. However, on another occasion children needed to face the fear:

....a scorpion has stung a young girl, she was crying and other children equally concerned brought her to the office. The office and teachers were relaxed since scorpion bite is not fatal and there was some medicine in the office for the same. The teacher attended to her with calm and poise and told her there is nothing to worry.

Int/ Nov 2011/ LB/ 7 years old child & researcher

The girl though is strong about injury at sports otherwise, on another occasion I saw her lying on the ground.

I- *Why don't you go and eat your food Mausami (M)?*

M- *No! I don't feel like eating, my stomach hurts (she is little low, but in control of herself)*

I- *Are you sure? Eating will help you, may be you have not eaten anything?*

M- *No its not that. I hurt here (pointing towards her stomach) yesterday at sports. So I don't feel like eating.*

I- *OK. Do you think you need a doctor?*

M- *No, I think I will be all right. (she moves and climbs up the tree, sulking a bit)*

She loves animals especially the geese and dogs and is not scared of them, which many children are since geese sometimes have tendency to run after a human to attack.

Int/ August 2011/ LB/ eight years old child & researcher

In all the observations, the fear because of injury was discouraged or not addressed to. Some individuals were naturally calm and more prepared to deal with the injuries and others learnt it as part of the culture.

Injury: Healing or escaping?

Illness or Injury often meant for children off from the group activities at SAICE, escape from group or to go to nursing home. These were rare occasions at SAICE but discussed widely. Two of the coaches complained that these days 'hospital group', (where children went when they were injured while group activities were scheduled) is good escape for children and they are happy being there. *"in our days it was shame to be in dada's group or hospital group. But these days children are proud to be there."* there did not have any solution, but were sharing their opinion on being part of *dada's* or hospital group. There were often discussion for weaker bodies and contemporary times, the reason was often the affluence that had come in the community and brought change in dietary intake, availability of television, video games and internet.

However, there were responses contrary to this view about injury and healing. A student shared his/ her opinion in an interview on being part of *dada's* group's:

A student could not take part in the competition and had to go to 'hospital group'. he realized that how being at hospital group and doing different exercises with apparatus or follow a program helped him discover strength in various body parts which was not possible by being part of regular sports activities.

Scaffolding this observation is another episode at the gymnasium

After the students assembled and did the concentration for two min; the captain of the group asked each student to do exercises meant for that individual to strengthen the required body part. The student went to do the desired activity for a particular body part and then came back to take more suggestions from the coach. The coach explained this was the time when many children paused and took interest in their own physical development.

Obs/ Sep 2012/ SAICE gymnasium/ students of age groups 14-20+

This turned out to be positive for many students as they confirmed with me the coach's opinion. Students found it useful and important learning about their body. However, the participants also said that the body learns through compulsion, and observing it. These are challenging areas of human development where mind plays a role to understand the body and its behavior. Experiments like these how so ever contentious in terms of their departure from

the mainstream, these are fruitful to enlarge our view about certain concepts like, in this case it is body and its learning.

Food: Spaces, Occasions and Relevance

Food was an identifying feature of life at these institutions and relevant theme for physical development. There were centralized arrangements of providing food both at the Ashram and Auroville. Dining room and Corner house at the Ashram served food to all the inmates. All the *Ashramites* were provided with three meals breakfast, lunch and dinner. Breakfast included bread, milk or curds and *dalia*, sometimes sprouts, cheese or butter, bananas. In lunch and dinner, it was boiled vegetables and dal, sometimes-special chick peas or *khichdi*. The food was meant for *Sadhaks* and was not meant to be eaten for taste. There were occasions when sweets were distributed or someone offered packets of dates or raisins or cashews.

The Mother started the corner house for students. It is a huge building at the corner of *rue Law de Lauriston*. (see: Annexure 3.1) This place provided food to teachers, students and PED members. It also served non-vegetarian food items mainly chicken or mutton, which was prepared occasionally. Egg was provided every day in the breakfast, along with milk (or curds sometimes). However, it was optional for the participants to take non-vegetarian items. Apart from this students also ate at home, but they were not allowed to visit any restaurants outside. This was a much debated point and questioned by older students. They were allowed to go in two restaurants run by Ashram: the Cottage and Ganesh. These two did not serve non veg and few other items which are available in the market. However, Pondichéry being a tourist town offers multi-cuisines options like, Italian, French, south Indian, Chinese, Organic some of which is really authentic and nice preparation. This was one of the rules which implied disciplinary action for the students and few students often flouted it or discussed it as an 'unfair' treatment met out to them. The various arguments that students gave:

*"Oh! The crowd is better than what is there at the two restaurants of the Ashram.
The food is even better and service!
We have to go with our parents, families and friends.
When we can go in the same restaurants during vacations why not during the time school is on.
I can get a free home delivery and still eat the same food"*

Various places& time at SAICE/ students of age group 14+

During the fieldwork, I found numerous occasions when children ate food outside and rare occasions when there was any action taken for the same. However, for several other rules strict action was taken, such as for not attending the physical education group. This debate could not be resolved. A simple issue of food and rule associated with it for the discipline of physical health became complicated.

Similarly, Auroville has 'solar kitchen' which gave two meals to *Aurovillians* and also to visitors on some payment. The experience of food at the solar kitchen and restaurants of Auroville was an opportunity to experience multi-ethnic, organic cuisines. The solar kitchen also provided food to the schools. The AID and the LB both did not like the food and hence, there were experiments.

The cooking experiments

The school LB also had scope for experiments of cooking, which were insightful about food as cultural concept at Auroville, about children's like and dislike.

I started my English class with 11 and 12 years old, with a lesson on Avial, a dish from Kerala. We decided we will cook. Since recipe was difficult to follow, we kept on postponing it. However often other teachers and classes will cook something and it would be available, mostly dishes from Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra or Bengali. Once with Dragons (the oldest age group) we decided to cook khichdi after reading a story Birbal's khichdi. A South Indian version of North Indian khichdi is salted Pongal, but still we as the class decided to go with the experiment, we cooked moong dal khichdi. I found the children two Tamilians and one mix French and Italian were motivated to learn mainly because of two reasons- first most of the children never liked the food given at school, they wanted change. And second to cook something from North India was a new experience for them, Initially they just wanted to cook a small portion, then later on they decided they would like to share it with everyone in the school and not only teachers.

Cooking on other similar occasions was welcomed by all the children and the school. I could observe that children who otherwise appeared so reluctant to be in the class or to eat food, just liked new experiments. One of the experiment taken by another teacher was to make salad

Ob/ Part/ July 2011/ LB/ researcher and 12 years old

At the AID traditional Tamil food was served; the meals were cooked in the school for the teachers, students and all the help at the school. The children rejected the food that came from the solar kitchen. They wanted their traditional South Indian meal with rice, curds, salad, *rasam*, *sambhar* or *appalam*. The food was spicy to the taste of all children, gradually teachers from other parts of country or world have to develop this taste or move out from the space to eat somewhere else.

Sophiya a European woman, who was an Aurovillian and class teacher used to eat at school the traditional food. I enquired that how she manages this food, to which she said she has adjusted. Over some time she developed some loss of interest and we two decided to go to solar kitchen to eat the food.

Obs/ June 2009/ AID/ researcher &Aurovillian

Similarly, the parents of the only European child who studied at The AID had to go to solar kitchen for food since the food was too spicy for the child to eat.

The individual's taste and adjustment with the food was another challenge that one has to undergo. There were learning, adjustment, and conflicts over this. The Mother explains that training one's food habits is important part of physical education. The provisions for food at the field aimed to be simplistic in the form of centralized distribution of healthy food.

Participants however due to multiplicity of cultures and individual preferences did not rely on this function. Different experiences originated with reference to food, which indicated at complexity of individual's development of food habits. Collective cultural practices were more overpowering than the effort to make it simple and for the individual to be simplistic as well.

Conclusion: The Mind-Body Dynamics

The body and its education is more than a program for training for sports. Observations from the fieldwork reflected upon body as very important instrument and point of reference in 'life' in and around these institutions. The fieldwork was not drawn on any pre conceived idea of physical education or body narratives but tried to understand it the way it appeared in field of the participants. As mentioned in the publications, in physical training the role of teacher, will power and setting of goal was important. Forcing it on the student to excel with respect to fellow student was not part of the system, yet winning were important for many of them. The performance though objectively measured but the process or education relied on

the individual teacher and students' capability. The practice of the program gave rise to subjective world built around the practices.

Overlap of the domains

The idea discussed in this chapter also reflects overlap of domains that is, physical, vital and mental. It requires a wider understanding of human body to understand human nature and existence. It has important implications to human development and 'what develops'? The development in these programs is with reference to the body in terms of body consciousness and subjective experience of body about its capacity and capability. This view is different from the present view of Human Development that understands studies the body through 'maturation', 'growth' and studies the progress through biological basis. The concepts of maturity and growth of body facilitates development of language and intelligence is an often quoted example of interaction of domains. The overlap signifies that the growth of body is linked with the mind and mind is not separate from the body. Mind is involved in observing the body and its learning. this overlap of domain needs more elaboration through the experiences from the field.

Mind body unity

The body has always been subject to many interpretations especially in arts- body movement and non-verbal behavior even though mainstream psychology has not studied the complexity of physical development and learning through body. There are other interpretation of body that Urbancic, (n.d) brings to draw and argues for the relevance of human body to human's existence-

"....how the body acts as narrating agent through nonverbal communication, even in literary texts;becomes a historically fundamental narrative,may explain political events;is itself narrated by its socio-cultural environment." (P. na)

Theologists like Ladd (n.d.) studied the view of Mind body dualism and critically studied the New Testament view of Human body. Ladd questions the effect of Greek and Socratic view of man on theological (and psychological description) of what is it to 'be', a human. One can trace Cartesian dualism with the New Testament truth summarized in his famous line 'I think therefore I am.' Not only the body is subjugated but mind is held higher over the former. One can see that the mainstream education systems voice this dualism where learning through body is not of prime importance or divided extremely. Similar view of the mind body duality is voiced by Brinsmead (n.d.) and he reviews it's implication to the basic question of 'what

does it mean to be human?' He argues that the duality in theology sees human as soul which is 'related' to God, its religion, and social existence. The real value of man is in relation to his self which is possible when an individual studies 'self' in relation to the body.

The essence of learning opportunities for the body

The programs of physical education refuted the view of dualism by giving ample time and space to body. A compulsory Physical education program in these innovative programs firstly is based on importance and relevance of learning through the body. Secondly, it is not only healthy body and healthy mind, but it unearthed relation that exists between human body and mind and emotions. Health and fitness is important but field experiences extended human learning to getting involved with the body. A compulsory education program and daily consciousness of health and body control adds different dimension to the personality of individuals. There are several ways to do the same: Games, Athletics, Gymnastics, Gymnasium to correct the imperfections, heal the injuries, dance, body awareness programs and other form of exercises. These experiences have strong repercussions to the understanding of human beings since all humans live through this, till the time humans denounce the body through death^v.

Organized games in form of sports, athletics, and individual display in marks another dimension of human existence- team work, collective effort towards a common goal, and to excel. It has implications over discipline and control over the body in movement. And also control over emotions involved during the movements.

The nature of organized sports in modern times which is found in the Ashram (with its own ethos though) is meant for perfect the body, for competition and for simply pleasure. Von Karl Weule in Blanchard & Smith (1995) mentioned that sports have underlying element of pleasure for individuals who are playing. This element of pleasure was quite upfront at SAICE and AID to great extent at *Dehashakti*. The sports was not an activity that participants performed over there at particular space and time, but they discussed the body and its action on other forums both formally and informally at different time, spaces and also with participants that included the outsiders like me. The subjective experiences then formed unique aspect of 'learning through body' in these two worlds.

Endnotes

ⁱ Excerpts from the diary of Henri Cartier Bresson, the famous French photographer when he came to the Ashram in April 1950. the excerpts were displayed at an exhibition in Delhi in September 2012 at Alliance Francaise de Delhi.

ⁱⁱ The term in French was *rassemblement* meaning 'gathering together'.

ⁱⁱⁱ Publication of Bulletin from the JSAS four times a year (on four main Darshan days Aug 15, Feb 21, Nov 24, April 24) were like report of events during that period. There were writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on various issues.

^{iv} A variety of LT Lepidoptera.

^v The present study limits the idea to these programs and do not share the details about experiences of old age, disease, illness or death as experienced in the field.