

## Chapter 8<sup>th</sup>

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this study was to bring forth the richness of 'life' based on the Innovative idea of Integral Yoga Worldview. Integral worldview of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, the two institutions the Ashram and Auroville (situated at Pondichéry, India) based on their ideas; and the three schools, which were part of the Ashram and Auroville are the main focus of the study. The research studied the schools with reference to the three pointers of the relation of Human Development and Education namely: domains, age, norms and learning. This resulted in theoretical enrichment of the primary objective of the study. We mostly understand the Innovations as a departure or a separation from the mainstream. Birth of an alternative idea, establishment of institution and life forms (every day practices, rituals, formation of spaces and individual experiences) need to be understood, re understood over the time in order to formulate a 'dialogue' with the mainstream academic discourse. The research traced and focused on the estuaries or borders where the two world of alternative, 'inside' and the mainstream, 'outside' world run into each other, separate and meet again; all at the same time.

The study used various ethnographic methods to collect data. Implications for the design were drawn from 'multi-site' and 'multi-level' ethnography. The method, which was initially observation and conversation only, became participation in various activities or events, informal/ formal conversations. The researcher also referred various publications by the Ashram and Auroville, distinctive items available in the field, and eventually conducted interviews to validate certain themes. The research design acknowledged the dynamism of life at the field and epistemological principles of Integral Yoga worldview, one of which is the synthesis of the reality. Therefore, analysis of data required special attention; that is, to view the various themes at these special experiments as indicators of an emergent viewpoint of Human Development and its relation with Education. The evolving viewpoint is a flag post of the 'journey'<sup>1</sup> of these alternative institutions and relevant views for discourse on Human Development and Education.

Longer stay at the field at first allowed observing the annual rhythm of school, a whole cycle that schools and children underwent in a year. It was valuable to observe children graduating from one class to another. For example, I could see the advancement and growth children

made in terms learning language like French or their performance in sports over the period; it supported the developmental principle that development progresses from simple to complex. Issues like these helped me make further connection with the discourse on Human Development and Education. Other positive aspects were namely, access to information, trust and long-term association with the participants which might not have been possible during a shorter stay at the field.

### **Issues of Faith and Praxis: Three Experiments of Integral Education**

The Integral Yoga worldview, its ramifications in the form of Integral Education and the lifestyle at the Ashram and Auroville are inspiration for many individuals and a conviction to regulate their lives as well. The individuals are part of the two institutions and visitors who came from different part of the world. The different views of mainly teachers, students and parents had resulted in schools and their respective cultures. Schools shared some common and few distinctive practices. In a way, the unique character of each school was preserved yet drawn from the basic model of Integral worldview and Education. The last two points once again strengthen two views: Individual freedom and multiple manifestations emanating from 'oneness' of reality which Integral Yoga worldview indicates.

Chapter four reflected on the theme of schooling spaces and concept of time to organize learning experiences. Each school had its unique journey or story of acquisition, design and utilization of the school spaces. It made a strong case for value of 'matter' and 'aesthetics' which is stated in Integral Yoga worldview and schools adopted the educative aspect of the same. I do not conclude that all children or adults acquired the same values or were instilled with; the environment of class and schools were beautiful and individuals explored their relation individually. This research found that individuals in the field were not caged in the spaces but acted and created the spaces and crossed the set boundaries. Lefebvre in Simonsen (2005) describes this phenomenon in the field as dialectical nature of individual body with the spaces. The boundaries were of space (physical), time and knowledge forms (both abstract) and individual's action on these. Individual's action is a learning being an educationist I realized that how the students learnt this behavior.

By the time, I ended my fieldwork in 2012 the children at all the three schools had moved out from one schooling space to another. Movement of the children from these buildings conveyed qualitative changes for children in terms of various curricular and developmental

experiences of thought, freedom and choices. Hence, to me it was not only schooling that was happening in these buildings but also a change of human behavior with a conscious approach.

Chapter five highlighted the importance of rituals and practices that showed an individual in relation with the symbolism and values of the practices. However, most of these like *pranams*, Darshan visits had no strict pattern. Strict pattern in practices like the March Past held adherence to place, precision of act or movement and time. Participants were critical of these practices and were free to interpret their significance or relevance in their own growth. Few participants gave into the unquestioned essentiality of the practices; but most of them followed their own relevant logic. For example, an old Ashram inmate commented that, he found the importance of Sri Aurobindo's presence at his Samadhi; he asserted his belief as Sri Aurobindo has been laid to rest at the Samadhi for 60 years. Each person like him had considerable freedom to imagine, express and practice. The collective 'self' was also evident in family patterns and the participants' volunteer work in the institutions. The identification with values mainly through voluntary work was through the lifetime. The adherence was both for those who joined the Ashram and for those who did not.

Chapter six and seven indicated that alternative implied organization of knowledge forms and norms of learning with reference to domains mainly mental and physical. The Vital and Psychic were implied and not stated overtly. Norms as expected learning outcomes took mainly two forms: written and oral. Physical Education and games had stricter adherence to written norms than learning in the classrooms.

The curricular practices implied organization of various learning opportunities without overt focus on disciplines; as a result the boundaries of knowledge areas and authority of 'disciplines' were naturally questioned. These were not completely done away with and some form (of Mathematics, Sciences and Languages teaching) was maintained. Teachers continuously organized field visits, talks and projects that made curriculum non-centric on 'discipline' or 'subject area'. 'Integration' of curricular and non-curricular learning opportunities happened but not always with continuation of skills or knowledge in two areas. The continuation was implied and possible for children to grasp; especially in 'new' and 'contextual' knowledge areas like 'Aquarium section' and 'life sciences section' at LB.

In resonance with the basic model of Integral Education, 'physical education' found prominence in all three schools with essential debates about an ideal program of physical education. It reflects a relevant and disputed theme of Human Development mind-body dissonance or the mind body unity. The research found support for the latter viewpoint and strong awareness in the whole cohort to use body as means of learning.

The child's individuality was more in focus in classrooms than in the sports. The sports program did not have choices as against the classrooms where the teachers accepted, analyzed and facilitated the child. However, in both the cases the teacher-student relation had important implication on traditional hierarchical role of adult-child. The teachers' authority was not unquestionable in classrooms but acceptable in the sports. However, in the sports the young or the old proved their mettle in various competitions.

#### **Porous boundaries of the two worlds**

The two institutions the Ashram and Auroville are the departures from the 'mainstream' world, which the participants often referred as the 'outside' world. Howsoever 'firmness' the boundaries of the alternatives implied, in terms of gaining entry or becoming an Ashram or Auroville inmate. There were also exceptions to enter these worlds, to relate with the worldview, discover it with faith and get involved in the work. Substantial number of individuals came from the world to volunteer in various departments. Because of erection of the boundaries both physical and the rules, there were various categories of the participants. There were first level of category was of the Ashram inmates or Ashramites, Aurovillians, both were physically close to the institutes; next were aspirants, new comers, and lastly were devotees, guests or friends. Each category or individuals formed their association as they found entry into the 'enclosed' or 'inside' world of these two institutes. Individual's interest, capability to work or even destiny as they narrated in their stories affected their type of entry into the institutes including the schools.

Apart from these there was a category of individuals who formed their own 'world' around the Ashram or Auroville. For example, the visit to *Ambashankar*, a piece of land, I met an old gentleman by the same name as the land; dressed in his shorts with bare chest. His white hair formed the crest over his head and eyes were small but light within them oozed out without any aberration. He shared his teaching experiences when he used to teach at the Ashram school. At the time of the visit, he used to camp at various parts of India or at his

piece of land at the beach across Auroville. Sometimes students or adolescents from Auroville came and helped him at his piece of land. He offered me some sweet tea with the Ashram bread. The bread baked at the Ashram Bakery was symbol of life form at the Ashram available at this place, despite the land is physically away from the Ashram. There were similar examples of other individuals who explored and lived with their own set up around the Ashram and Auroville. Many such examples strongly added to the vitality and multiplicity of the phenomenon. Therefore, the field has layers of reality, but this fieldwork could uncover only certain of them. Individuals like cited in this example carried their own existential, physical, phenomenological (and inner spiritual) world.

The outside world further interspersed the enclosure of the alternative worlds through large number of visitors or devotees, who visited for the spiritual retreats. The 'trespassing' was penetrating, when visitors or devotees shared their ideas in talks, exhibitions etc. At LB and the AID, there were workshops and presentations on storytelling, healing, dramas and dance programs. At SAICE, the number of the visitors was the largest. These were professors from Indian or Foreign universities or independent researchers, who shared their work. There were presentations by music maestros at both the Ashram and Auroville from the world over. Therefore, in my interpretation these two esoteric worlds held their special character in almost all the forms, were quite restrictive at some places yet the boundaries were flimsy. In my opinion, this was the strength of these systems. Even though these two institutes were occupied and focused with the vision of the Masters, because of which they were often left out on the forum of mainstream discussion<sup>ii</sup> on education in India. Still the alternatives in this field had given two major inputs. First, these boundaries which enclosed spaces and carried out their experiments allowed the 'outsiders' to participate at various levels. Second, they had formed 'network' of individuals, which formed a fraternity of individuals mainly students, friends and even the centers based on the Integral Yoga principles. As a result, there were affiliations, friendships, which formed a strong 'networking' of organizations and individuals. The networking facilitated exchange of various ideas and activities like art forms, pedagogy through study circles, discussions on the worldview. Individuals then practice the ideas learnt or came out with publications at Pondichéry and all over the world. The collective 'self' due to Faith therefore, requires more elaboration and organized study.

### **Evolving Views for Human Development and Education**

The views that emerge from the fieldwork are for an integrated, relational aspect of the Human Development and Education and even their respective conceptualization. Alternatives protect and at the same time nurture the capability of individuals. I would say that the schools relied on domains, norms, age specificity to organize learning of individual child or even adult but this dependence was not in monolithic and exclusive manner.

- As elaborated in the review chapter, that the domains have more justified discussion in the works of the Mother. The data showed that all the domains were addressed in all three schools.
  - All domains are important for individual development. Overlapping of domains is important feature that should be the focus of study and not a single domain. Overlapping of domains can be linked to various researches in academics; mainly those, which study the affective aspect of cognition. This has been mainly studied as 'motivation' in learning. But it needs better conceptual analysis as the works of the Mother provides and with valid episodes from the field.
  - The most innovative practice at the two institutions was linking of physical with mind and emotions. Researches and philosophy had especially discussed about it but it was commendable to find the idea in practice so simply and naturally at the two institutes.
- Norms about each domain from the 'outside' world were in the form of textbooks, content of learning or rules in sports. The participants implemented these only after adaptation. The teachers made these norms suitable to the goals of learning of these two institutions. In some areas, norms were under reformulation. The case of *Dehashakti* and emerging possibilities of learning for body was clear example of this. The school at Auroville struggled whether they could redo the program of PED at the Ashram or the program would find its own ways in the choices of individuals. Individual, norms and collective formed a relational triad to understand the development.
- Students followed the activities at their own pace. This can be associated with the French Education system where focus is on the pace of learning of individual child.

Their policy also states that pace of the learning of a child is the decisive factor for his/her level or class or 'cycle' rather than the biological age.

- Learning was largely individualistic with several choices available to an individual child. The choices were more as children grew older. Age was an accepted and essential but not an absolute norm.
- The practices questioned the social norm of adult-child hierarchy. Most of the data showed adults especially the teachers analyzed their authoritative roles as adults to guide the child.
- Children could move around, opine and made choices. Students made their individual timetable at SAICE in 'free progress' was clear example of this. At LB choosing the afternoon activity or older students chose to spend time at the high school in order to make choice for their future education program supported the argument that freedom as necessary for individual development.
- Individuals reported certain pressure of the small, closed, and experimental features of the two institutions. These were, managing linguistic ability in different languages, performance especially in the sports, and feeling incomprehensive or unsure about the 'outside' world. This raises certain doubts about what does development with reference to an institution imply as it might become totalistic if the individuals are not sufficiently conscious of the ideas behind it.
- Relevance of *Sadhna* as mentioned in Indian scriptures was a crucial indicator for individual development. *Sadhna* is an intricate and esoteric process which has helped many seers in different areas to give relevant knowledge about human existence. Where knowledge of various concepts or domains and existential issues almost go hand-in-hand. The idea has relevance for many individuals (even outside these two institutions) in regulating their learning and life. Places like the Ashram and the Auroville to great extent have achieved the application of *Sadhna* in real life issues and serious work on this could help the area of Human Development
  - Researcher in this context spent time with *Sadhaks* especially at the Ashram and even at Auroville. I found their life trajectories and work they did indicative of their understanding of life, self and education. An objective

study of the lives and experiences of *Sadhaks* focusing on *sadhna* could be relevant.

- This might be more relevant with auto-ethnographic method where the difference between 'self' and the 'experience' of the phenomenon is less and would not flow through the 'otherness'. The experience of other *Sadhaks* is useful only when even the researcher experiences his/her *Sadhna* and identify with *Sadhaks*.

#### **Future thought and researches**

Faith based or related organizations or missions multiply and erect ubiquitously. The researches quoted in chapter two are from the West and study mainly Christianity. However, in India not only we have many religions but also we have secular religions and spiritual movements like Integral Yoga and Integral Education. Each mission or religion could be understood better in the light of its vision before embarking upon the political, social and economic implications of the programs they have. A conjoint effort to understand an ideology or worldview in the light of its ideals and other variables of academics would be more relevant rather than a study based entirely on the ideals or a study that brings in only variables of the academic discourse.

Future researches need to study the community outlook in detail with economic and human relations aspect of the community. The study found relevant data on management of funds, individuals' issue with money and 'no money' policy of Auroville. All these would throw more light on collective aspects of human development in an experimental lifestyle. The study also found relevant friendship patterns, man and woman and even adult-child relation, which needed more in-depth study. A research completely from the view of children would be quite useful in answering how 'child-centered' innovation appears and how much it is in the child's interest in his/her view.

#### **A Final Thought: An Oasis in the Desert**

In order to conclude about the various effects of Innovation drawn from the field work we would say that Innovations are thoughts, ideas, and theories formulated into practices, structures, and institutions initiated or mentored by the Masters and are carried forward by the participants' faith. Innovations and their special character is necessary since there is a place where one is relatively free from the current and over rising debates of hierarchy of



economic, society and politics. These factors have valuable influence on curriculum as Apple (1976) has highlighted in his major work on Curriculum and Ideology. The individual or material referred however, may not be completely free from these socio-economic and political undercurrents but might be still away from the 'direct' influence of the political and economic agenda of life. The visits from the experts from 'outside' and the participant's zeal to change in these experiments acted as conductors to lessen the error of hierarchy of any dominant view whether individualistic or collectivist. However, in my view a debate or discussion within an individual with the process of *conscientization* or even among the individuals could be useful for: a) further growth of the new ideas, b) which are germinating, or c) others, which are thriving.

This research was a trail with faith about the practice of a worldview. The study could be relevant for the 'future' and for the mainstream discussion about these experiments, their view of life, of human existence, of action, and of learning. The participants' effort to practice might fall short of the ideals or as I would like to say they might 'appear' to fall short; but at the same time several other relevant practices emerged which the world view might have not visualized. Alternatively, in the case of Integral Worldview, which has left scope in the form of freedom for individuals to participate and create.

The future direction has strong elements of continuity of several ideals as faith and curricular related rituals and practices. It has scope of uprising of several new practices or thoughts as knowledge forms, several other centers and strong aspiration of better and new forms of such ideas. However, a 'dialogue' within and with the 'outside' world is essentiality of the contemporary times.

### Endnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> An often shared view by the participants were that they (participants) were still 'far away' from the aims of Integral Yoga and yet to achieve them. Therefore, any research would be incomplete reporting with reference to the truth.

<sup>ii</sup> I felt this first time at the Inaugural address of an International Conference in India where stress was on Indian thinkers on education mainly Gandhi, Tagore and Krishnamurthy while Sri Aurobindo was not mentioned and nor were his Integral Schools.