

Educational Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh: A Social Work Perspective

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Abstract: Sri Aurobindo Ghosh was a freedom fighter, social reformer, philosopher, educationist - all rolled into one. His philosophy at one hand India have few world class educational institutions churning out high quality manpower on the other hand we have one of the highest number of illiterates. Though literacy rate has logged sharp jump post Right to Education (RTE) implementation aiming to achieve universal literacy, the quality of education remains a big concern. Educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo illuminate the paths to address the pressing challenges plaguing our education system. His philosophies offer insights, which can be profusely useful for teachers, professional social workers in effectively discharging their duties and improve our education system.

Key Words: School, social workers, education, philosophy.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Present day ill of Indian education system can be understood from huge number of illiterates, educationally unemployed, degrading value system etc. India have also made substantial progress in enrolment to achieve our MDG commitment of universal literacy, but questions have been raised on quality of our education. Also wide gap in educational achievements among states have been noted. In one hand states like Kerala, Mizoram have shown high literacy rate on the other states like Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh etc fared poorly on this count. Some of the pressing issues and challenges haunting our educational system - dropout, issues of dismal utilization of available input, inadequate input etc.

Apart from the involvement of teachers, education social workers, counsellors have role to play improving the educational system. School social workers work in some areas, like addressing the drop out rates, counsel students, facilitating learning, address scholastic problems etc.

Since, social workers are involved in both formal (schools, colleges) and informal (school dropout, adult literacy, remedial classes); they must understand the situation and equip them to solve the challenges our education system facing today. As Sri Aurobindo was a great educationist; his philosophy of education has much to offer to the school social workers to play their role more effectively, while discharging their duties in an educational set up. This research shall be qualitative in nature. Though the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is universally applicable for all the teachers, counsellors, social workers world over, I shall discuss his educational philosophy in Indian context and synthesise it with the role of school social workers.

2. CURRENT STATUS OF EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA:

Exploring the education system it was discovered that the “Indian education system portray some noteworthy achievement along with numerous failure and problems. The educational scenarios can be observed in the paradox of best educational institutions on par with international standards on the one hand and largest number of illiterates in the world on the other” (Education and Research, 2008, p 35)ⁱ.

“The education system particularly formal is a carry over of the British and no much changes have been witnessed since Independence. Some of the characteristics of our educational systems are rigidity, irrelevant syllabus, single point entry, outdated teaching and learning methods, poor infrastructure, inhuman examination system etc” (Ibid, p 35)ⁱⁱ. Mostly there is no scope for useful, value based education in our education system and school education is incongruent with the need and contemporary life and environment of the students.

“It can be observed that our education system still continues to be dominated by models and value systems adopted during the colonial regime. This system put emphasis on narrow individualism, unhealthy competition, mere acquisition of information and examinations. Also it places extraordinary importance on the formal school and overlook both non-formal and recurrent education”(Stroup, 1960)ⁱⁱⁱ.

It can be observed that in our country dual system of education is operating – highly sophisticated private schools for the rich and poor quality government schools for the poor. The shapes and condition of rural schools are pitiable and shocking. Most of the schools in our villages are run without required standard input and some of the

inputs like students teacher ratio, infrastructure, blackboard, playgrounds, drinking water, toilet facilities are absent in majority of schools. We also often hear about students teacher issues. Still today stick is wielded and physical torture is inflicted upon the students. In some cases harsh treatment by some cruel teachers have caused permanent damages and also deaths of some students. School social workers in partnership with stakeholders like children, family, school staff, community, government officials etc, have the above challenges before them to address through their professional knowledge and expertise.

3. NATURE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK:

Social work services were first established in schools of Boston, Hartford and New York in the early 20th century. "Social Work in the schools was in response to the passage of compulsory school attendance laws, new knowledge about individual differences among children and a realization of strategic place of the schools in the lives of the children" (Education and Research, 2008)^{iv}.

School social work is deeply embedded in the roots of the society's mandate to the schools in imparting education and training to the children to the fullest potential. Specialists are placed in schools for the purpose of the smooth functioning of schools. School social work is related to a particular school system, outside community, the characteristics of the pupils, and the conditions they face. W. A Friedlender says that school social workers work with the child, the family, the school staff and the community. School social work pay attention to the unique individual needs of the child and offer opportunities for success and achievement to the child.

The school social workers focus on social functioning and on the needs of the child to make the best possible use of the teaching experience. The school social workers are concerned with the fact that forces within and outside the child may block the child's use of the school experience. The social workers work with teachers, principals, pupils, parents to deal with the challenges facing the child. They function as consultants, counsellors and shares knowledge with students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. They provide link between the school and social agencies. They also provide diagnostic, counselling and treatment services to individuals, groups etc. Social workers collaborates with the educational team and address issues and problems surrounding the teaching learning needs of the pupils. School social workers address the issues of absenteeism, behavioural problems, scholastic backwardness, economic backwardness, hostile home environment, disability and other health related problems.

Professional social workers, counsellor are needed in formal and informal schools for the proper development of the students. A social worker identify children with learning and adjustment problem, diagnose the reason for the same and do tailor made intervention in consultation with the students, their families, school authorities etc to address the issues confronting the students.

The field of education covers a wide area and encompasses different age groups and it provide scope for the professional social work intervention. Education sector is ranging from pre-school through college level education and research institutions as well as adult and continuing education. Professional social workers need to develop qualities like be sensitive to psycho-social needs of the children, students; the need for love, security, trust, praise and recognition etc. These skills are needed for working with children in Anganwadi centres, schools etc.

4. Educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh:

Shri Aurobindo bases his philosophy on the original Vedanta of the Upanishadas. "He believes that earlier Vedanta represent an integral or balanced view of life and believes that man is the maker of his own destiny. According to him education is a big tool to achieve the target. He also believed that the best thing in man in his spirituality. He was an intellectual who intensely analyzed human and social evolution. According to him, the education must emphasize on the whole aspects of human life such as physical, psychic, mental, beauty, power, knowledge and love etc. Integral Education is basically the cultivation of these aspects in human being" (Saini, 2017)^v.

Sri Aurobindo propounded certain principles of teaching, which are to be kept in mind by the parents, educators, teachers, counsellor, social workers, policy makers etc. "According to Sri Aurobindo, that 'nothing can be taught'. He further says that the knowledge is already dormant within the child and for this reason, it needs to be brought out. He then emphasized that the teacher does not need to impart knowledge to the pupil, but should show him how to acquire knowledge. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster. He is a helper, guide, counsellor and the role of the teacher is to 'suggest and not to impose'. He should not train the pupil's mind, but should show him how to perfect the instruments of knowledge and help him and encourage in the learning process. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within, but only shows to the pupil, where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface"(Lal, 2013)^{vi}. So the role of the teacher, parents, professional social workers etc are to act as a facilitator to bring out knowledge and give right direction to realise the best potential of a child.

"Anjana Rani (2016)^{vii} also backed the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo in her research paper and described a teacher as a guide, helper and stimulator. She stressed that the teacher should train the child to educate himself / herself, to develop his own practical intellectual, moral and aesthetic capacities and to grow independently.

She also discussed Shri Aurobindo's philosophy of education that the teacher facilitate the pupil to see the six senses i.e., sight, sound, taste, smell, touch and mind train to make them as keen, subtle and sensitive as possible. Sri Aurobindo puts emphasis on intuitive power and says that an ideal and liberal teacher is he, who encourages and welcomes this intuitive power in the pupil and allows the child to grow into the way of his own perfection. The best way to help the child is to put him on the right road to his own perfection and encourage him to follow it". Therefore, the children should be encouraged and directed to analyze their bad qualities and habits and cultivate good qualities and habits. The child should be given an opportunity to put into action the moral impulses that is lying within him or her.

"Aurobindo emphasized integrated curriculum for the students, which includes activities, subjects and spiritual experiences - all in a unifying whole. He also suggested activity method, observation, self-discovery, discussion method, learning by doing, learning by self-experience during teaching learning process"(Kaur, 2015)^{viii}. The methods suggested by Aurobindo must be noted by the school social workers, academicians, administrators and other stakeholders.

"He believed that educational institutions are 'laboratories of evolution' and teachers are 'evolution agents,' stewards of the movement. Educational curricular activities must be a synthesis of Western positivism with Eastern metaphysics, as well as other global cultural values"^{ix}. Children should be provided space, conducive environment, so that they gain more and more knowledge by their own. "According to him any retrained and imposed environment stunt the growth and natural development. Aurobindo vouched for self-discipline, which was the cure of impressionistic discipline"(Kaur, 2015)^x. He also emphasized human beings must keep abreast with the march of truth and knowledge, fit themselves for existence under actual circumstances, and their education must have substance and must be modern in life and spirit" (Ghosh & Mother. 1956, p. 8)^{xi}.

His philosophy also emphasised the moral and value education. "To Aurobindo, education of values was the most important. He believed that the best thing in the man is his spirituality"(Rani, 2016, p 157)^{xii}. "Aurobindo believes that education is to develop the pupil morally. According to him only that education is true, which helps the child to develop his intellectual and moral capacities to their higher limit. Without moral and emotional development, mental development becomes harmful to human progress"(Ibid, p 157)^{xiii}.

5. Relevance of educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh to the school social workers:

Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo deals with the potential of the children, students and how a teacher can facilitate the students to develop to their fullest. "Qualities which form moral attitude of our young man are 'the thirst for knowledge, the self-devotion, the purity, the renunciation of the Brahmin the courage, ardour, honour, nobility, chivalry, patriotism of the kshatriya the beneficence, skill, industry, general enterprise and large open handedness of vaisya the self-effacement and loving service of the Shudhra. He emphasised that a teacher must be a man of integrity. As a philosopher Aurobindo devoted to Indian ideals, values and culture. He advocated for spiritual advancement to the highest level" (Ibid, p 157)^{xiv}.

Views of Aurobindo Ghosh are very much relevant to the teachers, parents, school social workers and other stakeholders. Working with the students, diagnosing the challenges facing the child and doing apt intervention are some of the roles played by the school social workers. The role of the social workers extend to pertaining areas. The school social workers visit home of the students, prevent school drop outs, reducing stress and perform other related tasks. He also deal with the psycho-social problem of the students, children etc. The social workers also generate awareness on social evils like substance abuse, sexual abuse, child labour and similar issues and other important aspect related to the students and child development. The school social workers play roles like facilitating school-community relation and provide a variety services to students in special education programmes.

The educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is very much pertinent to the school social workers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. "It is vitally important for the social workers and other stakeholders to understand that in educational settings, they are neither teacher nor an administrator, but act as a facilitator. Social workers assert her / his position as a human service professional, so that the job in the question is well understood by the school authorities, students and staff members" (Origin and Development of Social Work in India, 2008)^{xv}. School social workers may be the first to discover difficulties a child is facing in home, school, community. Subsequently, he may diagnose and take a call on intervention to rectify the dysfunctions.

India has implemented the Right to education in 2009 and made tremendous progress in enrolments. But quality still remains a big concern apart from huge adult illiterate population. There is a need to deal with present crisis staring at India and social workers may play big roles. So they need to understand the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

Social workers in school settings deal with the problems like high dropout rate, retention problems, education of girl child, inclusive education, infrastructure problems, availability of teachers, quality of education are some of the areas of the concern, where social work professional play their role. With passage of time, it was realised that schools and colleges need social workers and counsellor for the proper development of students. In education setting social

workers, identify children with learning and adjustment problems, discuss and implement course of action with the students, their families and school authorities. So keeping in mind the roles of the school social workers, it must be emphasized that the school social workers must keep the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. It will go a long way in understanding the students, their needs and do the apt interventions to realise the best potential lying dormant within the students.

6. CONCLUSION:

Sri Aurobindo expounded an educational philosophy which assumes that a child has full potential to grow and develop and become anything. The teachers need to act as a facilitators and not as masters. His philosophy is also based on the value system. Social workers, educators key role are to counsel, encourage, guide, facilitate, help etc. For the school social workers to perform their roles effectively, they must understand educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. His philosophy acquaints the school social workers with the newer dimension of the child and equip them to deal with the children in a clearer and better way and help them discharge their duty effectively. His philosophy illumine the path and enlarge the scope of full thinking along the new lines. So the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo helps not only the school social workers, but also other stakeholders.

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