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INTEGRAL EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA FROM VEDAS AND UPANISHADS TO VEDANTA

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Abstract

Western scholarship usually ignores the contributions from other civilizations, India for instance. At the same time, contemporary India seems to have forgotten to some extent the deepest achievements of its own tradition. Moreover, modern culture has often produced some kind of despise against ancient traditions as opposed to the freedom and emancipation of the modern world. This paper tries to unveil all the depth and beauty of Indian philosophy of education, especially through major traditions such as Vedas, Upanishads and Vedanta. It also tries to show that the pedagogic message of the sages of modern India revives all the depth of the ancient tradition. This long history of holistic education in India through 35 centuries may enrich the Western insights with figures such as Steiner, Montessori or Dewey, aware that intercultural dialogue will be one of the major challenges of the XXIst century. It becomes crystal clear through this paper that the vision of integral education in Indian culture was inseparable from the spiritual/mystical dimension, or to put in reverse terms, the spiritual domain constituted the very foundation of the educational process in Indian philosophy of education, a fundamental point that would be again emphasized by Indian modern philosophers such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo and even Krishnamurti.

Keywords: Philosophy of Education; Integral/ Holistic Education; Indian Education; Vedic Education; Gurukula; Indian Philosophy; Hinduism; Vedas; Upanishads; Vedanta.

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1. Introduction

Indian educational philosophy through history

It is well known that an integral philosophy of education was already developed in India by the Gurukulas –communities of masters and pupils- of the **Vedas** –the most ancient holy books, which constituted originally an oral tradition from teacher to student, as it also happened in other spiritual contexts-. The Vedic tradition was continued by the enlightening contribution of the Upanishads and Vedanta.

As the renowned scholar R. Panikkar stressed, the whole Vedic culture continuously emphasized that philosophy must be based on experience; not the empirical experience of the senses but the inner mystical experience or the third eye of knowledge.¹

The Vedic sage did not play with ideas or words like so many Western thinkers or scholars; his knowledge was not merely intellectual or bookish –as in modern mainstream schooling-. The Vedic sage investigated something that became of the greatest interest for quantum physicists such as M. Planck or R. Goswami: he explored and described fields of energy and consciousness, and hence layers of reality beyond the empirical spectrum of the senses. That is why so many quantum physicists have been fascinated by the Vedas of India. This philosophical experience of Ancient India has nothing to do with the merely intellectual bookish “philosophy” of modern Europe; Greece, and in particular Greek philosophy from Orphism to Neoplatonism, was closer to Vedic India than to modern Europe.

In this Vedic context, education could not be the merely intellectual bookish training of modern mainstream schooling; Vedic education was essentially –to put it in modern terms- experiential towards self-learning; it was also child-centred. Quite obviously, it would have been highly appreciated by the modern precursors of integral or progressive education, such as Rousseau, Steiner, Montessori or Dewey, who unfortunately did not know anything about it or very little.

According to Vimala Thakar, reputed translator of the ancient scriptures and herself a genuine seeker, the time of the Vedas was a time of geniuses, lovers of nature, lovers of life, lovers of all things and all that exists, from the cosmos entire to the smallest reality vibrating in the depth of every atom. The Vedic sages were true seekers and seers, who tried to apprehend the manifest and the non-manifest, and who understood –thousands of years before quantum physics and relational theory- that the key lies in the relation and in interdependence.²

After the Vedas, the **Upanishads** underline the unity of Man and Cosmos, and constitute a profound and sincere research into the nature of Reality. Quite often, this research is unveiled through the beautiful dialogue between master and pupil, imbibed with mutual love and respect, and total freedom of inquiry. Ultimately, Upanishad education is the search for the meaning of Life, and the realization of it in each one of us. In this genuine pedagogy, self-experience could never be replaced by any teaching coming from outside.

This inspiring heritage from Ancient India would be revived in the modern age by the major spiritual masters of the country, such as Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and her spiritual companion, the Mother of Pondicherry, and great poets like R. Tagore. In the last years, Sri Sathya Sai Baba has kept alive this legacy in touch with the modern world in order to transform it from inside and from the real change within each one of us.

Vimala Thakar captured with touching words all the depth of the Vedic and Upanishadic Gurukula. In her “Glimpses of Ishavasya”³, she proclaims that the era of Vedas and Upanishads was an era of total and unconditional freedom of thought; Westerners who reduce the striving for freedom of

¹ Cf Panikkar R. (1997), “LA EXPERIENCIA FILOSOFICA DE LA INDIA”, Trotta, Madrid, p 19-20.

² Cf Vimala Thakar (1991), “GLYMPSES OF ISHAVASYA”, Vimal Prakashan Trust, p 3-5.

³ Cf Vimala Thakar (1991), p 7-8.

thought to Western history should take it into account. In simple and poetic terms, she explains that Vedas and Upanishads was the era of the living word: the profound communion between master and pupil. This pure kind of relationship was not institutionalized; it was not organized. Contrary to what many Westerners wrongly assume about India and other Ancient traditions, there was no authority from the side of the master, but an unconditional love at the service of the education of the pupil. In Vimala Thakar's own words, Vedas and Upanishads was the era of absolute freedom between master and pupil, with such a cordiality and warmth, respect, affection and love between them.

Few times in history has education reached such a height and purity, and has cast such a pristine light over this world. Unfortunately, Western culture still ignores these treasures from the Ancient civilization of India. But even more deplorable, contemporary India also ignores to a great extent its own treasures from its deepest tradition.

The Vedic/ Upanishadic heritage would be refined by the major school of mystical philosophy of India, **Vedanta**. Nevertheless, the same kind of Gurukula-based education and the same spirit of philosophical inquiry through Sadhana –inner work- were cultivated by other traditions and schools, like Samkhya, Tantras, and the different sects within Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism.⁴

Unfortunately, this profound Indian heritage is still largely ignored in the West, and virtually forgotten in India today. Still, several spiritual and educational organizations are striving through their daily work to revive it. The **Indian Renaissance** already started with Swami Narayan and Sri Ramakrishna; it was further expanded by Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, etc, and has been enhanced in the last years by the vast mission of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Besides, the typically Indian educational community of master and pupils would develop in the transition from the Ancient World to the Middle Ages, and would become more institutionalized through the **Medieval universities**, both Hindu (Taxila, Mithila, Nadia, Varanasi, etc) and Buddhist (Nalanda, Vikramashila, Odantapuri, etc), culminating an unparalleled history of spirituality, mysticism, philosophy, science and education -and, in short, self-inquiry into the deepest truths-. In the Middle Ages, before the Muslim invasions of North India, the Indian

⁴ Cf: Altekar A.S. (1948), "EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA", Bros, Varanasi/ Banaras,
Chaube A. and S.P. (1999), "EDUCATION IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL INDIA", Vikas, Delhi,
Das S.K. (1986), 'THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF THE ANCIENT HINDUS', Gian, Delhi,
Keay F.E. (1992), 'ANCIENT INDIAN EDUCATION', Cosmo, Delhi,
Mookerji R.K. (1989), 'ANCIENT INDIAN EDUCATION. BRAHMANICAL AND BUDDHIST', Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi,
Rakhe S.M. (1992), 'EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA', Indian Books Centre, Delhi,
Sarkar S.C. (1979), 'EDUCATIONAL IDEAS AND INSTITUTIONS IN ANCIENT INDIA', Janaki Prakashan, Ashok Rapath (Patna),
and Suresh Chandra Ghosh (2001), 'THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA', Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi.

universities emerged as an extension in the number and seize of different kinds of communities of teachers and students, called “**parishads**” or “**tols**”.⁵

In the Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad we already find the word “parishad”. In the VIth chapter, we can Shvetaketu Aruneya joining in the “parishad” of the Panchala.⁶

In the Dharma Sutras of Gautama, Vasishtha and and Baudhayana, and also in the Laws of Manu, a set of regulations is established on the composition and running of the “parishads”.⁷

In some places like Taxila, the capital of Gandhara in the North-West of the Subcontinent, all sorts of academic studies flourished mingled with spiritual inquiry, both in the Hindu and the Buddhist lineages, with illustrious students such as Panini. This resplendent city of Ashoka’s Empire, rebuilt by the Greeks who came with Alexander the Great, became one of the major centres for intercultural dialogue in the Ancient World.

Both in South and North Asia, through the Theravada or Mahayana schools, the **Buddhist community –Sangha-** would also evolve profound and beautiful expressions of this kind of holistic education on spiritual grounds. Among the Buddhist universities, Nalanda stands as the brightest gem. This kind of Buddhist university –like the Hindu- would be in modern terms both higher secondary school and college. Above all, it developed an integral and interdisciplinary curriculum and a spirit of inquiry and freedom of thought that could inspire many in Asian countries like India today in order to transform the present scenario dominated by rote memorizing and robotic education.⁸

Outside Buddhism, we should not forget other Asian traditions like Taoism, or the priceless contributions of Sufism. In many other cultures of mankind, even among the so-called “primitive”, education has been regarded in holistic and spiritual terms.

At the outset, **what is the Sanskrit word for “education”?**

In the richness and depth of Sanskrit language, there is not a single word but many, already expressing the very core of the Indian philosophy of education –which is totally integral or holistic on spiritual grounds-

- “**Shiksh**” is a verb that we find in the Vedic hymns meaning “to learn”.

⁵ Cf: Chaube A. and S.P. (1999), Gurumurthy S. (1979), ‘EDUCATION IN SOUTH INDIA. ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PERIODS’, New Era Publications, Chennai/ Madras, Sarkar B.K. (1912), ‘THE PEDAGOGY OF THE HINDUS’, Chuckervetty Chatterjee, Kolkata/ Calcutta, and Thapar R. (1979), ‘ANCIENT INDIAN SOCIAL HISTORY’, Orient Longman, Hyderabad.

⁶ Cf BRIHAD ARANYAKA UPANISHAD, VI, 2, 1.

⁷ Cf DHARMA SUTRAS OF GAUTAMA, XXVIII, 48-51, of VASISHTHA, III, 20, and of BAUDHAYANA, I, 1, 5-13, and the LAWS OF MANU, XII, 108-113.

⁸ Cf Mookerji R.K. (1989), “ANCIENT INDIAN EDUCATION. BRAHMANICAL AND BUDDHIST”, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.

- The word “**adhyayana**” is used in later sacred books –Brahmanas, Upanishads and Sutras- meaning “going near” (the Guru, the teacher).
- “**Upadesha**” refers to the oral teaching that the student receives from the master.
- “**Svadhya**” refers to the study that the student carries on alone after the teacher’s instruction.
- “**Vinaya**” is closer to the Latin term “educare” from “educere” –to unfold from within what is already inside-.
- “**Bala Vikas**” –the blossoming of the boy/ child- constitutes the most beautiful Sanskrit expression to render the Latin idea of “educere”.
- “**Gurukula**” is another major Sanskrit concept, cardinal in the historical development of Indian spirituality, philosophy and civilization; as we have seen above, it is the community of the master and the disciples.
- “**Upanishad**” –which gives name to the mystical/ philosophical books developing the Vedas- literally means “sitting near” –the master or teacher-.
- “**Upanayana**” literally means “to be brought to” –the master or teacher for initiation- . It hence refers to the most important form of initiation for boys in the history of Indian civilization.

Let us see now which were **the educational institutions in the Indian tradition.**

- “**Ashram**”: the house of the master/ teacher with disciples.
- “**Parishad**”: the assembly of learned men who welcome students for their education. In fact, “parishad” means sitting on a circle -around the teacher-.
- “**Tol**”: similar to the parishad, a simple house where the master/ teacher receives students for their education.
- During the Medieval period, parishads and tols came together forming the Indian **Universities**, some of them especially famous like Taxila, Mithila, Varanasi or Nadia.

The oldest and major sacred books of India, **the Vedas**, are constituted by four collections – “samhitas”- of hymns: Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva Veda.

The oldest collection, the Rig Veda, contains around 1000 hymns divided in 10 books – “mandalas”-. Each book is related to a sage or “rishi”, which implies a whole lineage from father to son or from master to disciple. Quite early, the pedagogic function of the father was completed by a “guru” –master- that the student -“chela”- would find outside the family through the initiation –“upanayana”-.

Some form of incipient education is already manifest in the Rig Veda, VII, 103, which becomes even more clear in later hymns of the Rig Veda such as X, 71.

R.K. Mookerji warns us that the Vedic pedagogy is very far from modern schooling; the Vedic teacher and pupil seek for the highest knowledge or wisdom –“jnana”- very different from the merely intellectual bookish knowledge in utilitarian terms in modern mainstream schooling. Then

the very method of the educational process is determined by these higher goals and this spiritual/metaphysical world view.⁹

The Vedic pedagogy was supported by the double method of “upadesha” and “svadhyaya”:

- the first meaning the instruction given by the teacher;
- and the second the personal study undergone by the student.

The Vedic syllabus was truly integral, incorporating the learning of the hymns and rituals, the correct pronunciation of the Sanskrit “mantras”, grammar in a broader sense, etymology, logic, astronomy and cosmology. There was a scientific and mathematical content in the Vedic syllabus –obviously not in the mechanistic frame of mind of the modern age- which was inseparable from the spiritual quest–, a unity of science and spirituality that we also find in Pythagoras and Plato in Ancient Greece-.¹⁰

This profound kind of education was provided through **three successive steps**:

- **“Akshara-prapti”** or **“shravana”**, listening to the master and learning the hymns by heart.
- **“Artha-bodha”/ “arthavada”** or **“manana”**, when the master explained to the disciple the meaning of the hymns in depth, in metaphysical terms. This means that Vedic education had nothing to do with the robotic system predominating today in India, where there is only rote memorizing without even understanding. Vedic education was truly conceptual and also integral. Indian education was also **Socratic**, which means that the **dialogue** was essential to the educational process.
- **“Nididhyasana”/ “Dhyana”** –meditation- and **“tapas”** –wrongly translated as penance, when it would be closer to our notion of contemplation-. In the third stage, the student shifts from intellectual understanding to the inner experience; the Vedic teaching is a living experience from inside –that is why Prof. R. Panikkar insisted on the notion of the Vedic Experience-. With the third stage, Vedic education reaches its depth and truly integral nature. It is not a mere intellectual training, even less rote memorizing for future priests; it brings the student towards an ontological transformation, the unfolding of the metaphysical truth from inside.

The metaphysical insights of the Vedas were developed by the Upanishads, jewels of human culture, heights of the human spirit, praised in the highest terms by Western scholars like J. Mascaro, a Catalan indologist from Majorca, or the German scholar M. Muller. Some of the Romantic authors already knew about the Upanishads and were deeply impressed by them, just as the forerunners of quantum physics later.

The pedagogy of the Upanishads deepens into the Vedic educational system, producing the finest expression of the Indian Gurukula, still developed by the later Vedanta with major figures such as Shankara or Ramanuja. The Upanishadic/ Vedantic Gurukula constitutes one of the summits of human culture and one of the peaks of education in human history. Only the obstinate cultural imperialism of the West has overlooked the grandeur of this unique educational philosophy and

⁹ Cf Mookerji R.K. (1989), p 34.

¹⁰ Cf Mookerji R.K. (1989), p 49-50.

practice, from which the modern world could certainly learn a lot, and find deep insights for the future of education.

When we understand the philosophical method of J. Krishnamurti, the renowned sage of the XXth century, we can realize that the pedagogic depth that he unveils is deeply akin to the Upanishads and Vedanta. The Upanishadic/ Vedantic Gurukula cut with the paraphernalia of the Brahmanic world; it is like a lighthouse casting a clear light upon the most important things of life. It does not impose anything to anybody. We are free, like the Indian “chela”, to open eyes or to decide to continue to be blind. Similarly, Krishnamurti cut with the paraphernalia of the Theosophical Society to go to the essence of Theosophy, to the most important things; and like the Indian “guru”, he just invited his audience to observe and investigate within themselves in order to experience by themselves.

In the words of J. Mascaró, the Upanishads are the Himalaya of the human soul. The Catalan scholar from Majorca was always amazed by the grandeur of the questions and the simplicity of the answers. The Upanishads are basically dialogues between master and disciple –like Plato’s Dialogues-; this dialogal character already points at the very nature of the cosmos –which seems to be basically relational-, as quantum physics and relational theory have comprehended in the XXth century.¹¹

Through these fascinating and beautiful dialogues, through this genuine Socratic pedagogy, the Upanishads unveil the most important things of life: the depth of our consciousness and the breath of our life, through a passionate exploration of reality and ourselves, finding the Light of the Pure Consciousness inside. According to Mascaró, the Upanishads sing the glory of light and love, and beyond the darkness of sorrow and death, they proclaim the victory of life, the plenitude of life and our participation in this plenitude. Few scholars have grasped the beauty and the depth of the Upanishads like the Catalan indologist from Majorca.

For the philosopher and sage of Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo, the Upanishads are the unifying spirit blending science, spirituality, philosophy and poetry. The Upanishadic philosophy is not a mere intellectual speculation, but all the depth and breath of the living word and the living truth, grasped by the inner sight in the joy of the pure word. The Upanishads do not repeat what others say. They do not build systems of beliefs to be imposed upon others. They do not tell us what we must think. They constitute the awakening of oneself to the inner being, the awakening to our own reality. In this fascinating adventure of human consciousness and life, they evolve through free inquiry and genuine dialogue in the warmth of love.¹²

Krishnamurti’s pathless land can be trodden on the shining shores of the Upanishads, precisely because in the Upanishads there are no paths other than self-inquiry in freedom and dialogue in the warmth of love. Krishnamurti’s highest ideals were realized by the Upanishads –and by some schools of later Vedanta-. Krishnamurti’s pedagogy was based on a genuine relationship imbued with love and free self-inquiry through dialogue with a truly spiritual mind. This is exactly the educational philosophy of the Upanishads. The core of the Upanishadic pedagogy was not the

¹¹ Cf Mascaró J. (2001), “DIALEGS AMB L’INDIA”, Proa, Barcelona.

¹² Cf Sri Aurobindo (1996), “THE UPANISHADS”, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, p 1.

syllabus but the relationship between master and disciple –the major theme of Krishnamurti-. The Upanishad is inseparable from the Gurukula.

Unfortunately, India has forgotten it –we can only observe the aberrant robotic system prevailing still today in education- and the West has ignored it –the inertia of cultural imperialism is stronger than many may think-.

As we mentioned above, Vimala Thakar beautifully expounded all the depth and light of the Upanishadic Gurukula. In her own words, the era of Vedas and Upanishads was an era of total freedom of thought; it was the era of the living word: the communion between master and disciple. This relationship was not institutionalized or organized; there was no authority nor coercion. There was total freedom between master and disciple, and profound respect, affection, and love. Krishnamurti's vision totally fulfilled –in the Upanishads of India; a lighthouse for mankind, if only mankind wants to look towards the light-.¹³

2. The Ancient Gurukula of India

As we have seen above, the Gurukula is the community of the master and his disciples. This educational institution of Ancient India, through which the highest culture of the subcontinent has been formed, **presents a set of characteristics.**

- The master had a small number of disciples around him, around a dozen to a maximum of twenty.
- The boys would be above the age of reason (8/ 11) till adulthood (21).
- The Gurukula was residential, hence master and disciples were living together.
- The relationship between master and disciples was imbued with pure love, respect and communion.
- The master was a guru, guide and friend, father and mother –the ideal teacher according to modern educationists such as Steiner, Montessori or Dewey-.
- He was naturally and sincerely respected and venerated by the students.
- The boys saw each other as brothers in a spirit of community life.
- The master deeply respected the freedom of thought of his pupils;
- Which means that the main pedagogic methods were the Socratic dialogue and free self-inquiry towards self-realization.
- The teaching was basically oral.
- The master combined collective classes and personalized tuitions, though the pedagogy was basically individualized –child-centred-.
- Elder students were taking care of the younger at the same time. (This pedagogic practice was discovered by the British in India and then incorporated into the British Public School system –though the original spirit was deeply altered-.)
- The educational process usually evolved in natural surroundings, arising a sense of beauty and communion with Nature and the Cosmos.
- The whole life of the Gurukula was imbued with a certain ethos or atmosphere, which was value-based and essentially spiritual.

¹³ Cf Vimala Thakar (1991).

- The syllabus was truly integral –in the context of that epoch-, although its foundation was inherently spiritual/ mystical –realizing by oneself the highest truth-.
- Together with the proper educational process, the boys were also invited to perform some manual work and have some responsibility in the community life.
- The educational process was inseparable from an initiation –Upanayana-.
- In a few words, the Gurukula combined a simple life with the highest or deepest thinking.
- However, the profound integral nature of this kind of education was not satisfied with the second eye of knowledge –the intellect- and linked it to a deeper more experiential form of inner realization.
- Therefore, the education of the Gurukula was essentially transformative rather than informative.
- The Indian Gurukula complied with the most salient features of Platonic philosophy: beauty and love, together with the highest truth and a higher good, all that the history of conflict and violence upon Earth has devastated, all that modernity has buried in the name of “progress” to exalt a purely technocratic civilization.

The Chandogya Upanishad presents a boy, Narada, who pays a visit to Sanatkunara, requesting the master to teach him.¹⁴

The master asks the boy what he has studied and the boy replies:

- The four Vedas
- Brahma-Vidya -the knowledge of the Absolute-
- Deva-Vidya -the knowledge of the Gods-
- The knowledge of the demons and the spirits
- Bhuta-Vidya -the rituals-
- Itihasa-Purana -epics and mythology-
- Nidhi -the science of chronology and chronicles-
- Ekayana –ethics-
- Kshatra-Vidya -political science-
- Rasi –mathematics- and Vakovakya –logics-
- Nakshatra-Vidya -astronomy/ astrology-
- Vedanam Veda -the Veda of Vedas, grammar-
- Sarpa/ Devajana-Vidya -the arts-.

As we can see, a truly integral syllabus.
The boy has not been lazy, he has studied a lot.

However, the master lovingly replies to the student with a mind filled with knowledge that now he must learn what lies beyond all that knowledge, which is not outside –in external teachings- but inside: his deepest identity or true self. This is his own reality, and also his true freedom. But this cannot be taught from outside; it must be discovered and realized by oneself from within.

This was the core of this profound educational philosophy from India.

¹⁴ Cf CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD, VI, 1, and VII, 1.

3. Conclusion

The Renaissance of Indian Educational Philosophy in the Modern Age

Following the deepest education from India and Buddhist Asia, modern students may learn not only to understand by themselves but to understand themselves, to realize whom they are in depth, so that they become aware of their true self and they realize it in freedom. Students may then awake to higher levels of consciousness, where love and compassion for all beings develop naturally into service to others in true solidarity with all and the cosmos entire.

India has a long, outstanding, and probably unique tradition of mystical philosophy and integral education on a spiritual foundation. In the modern age, from the XVIIIth century onwards, the subcontinent has nurtured again an astonishing lineage of sages and spiritual masters, such as: Swami Narayan, Mohan Roy, Dayananda Sarasvati, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Ramalinga Swami, Shirdi Sai Baba, R. Tagore, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Yogananda Paramahansa, Ma Anandamayi, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Swami Ramdas, Shivananda, J. Krishnamurti, Vimala Thakar, Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, Mata Amritanandamayi, Ganapati Saccidananda, Sathya Sai Baba, etc.

One of the first masters who revived the depth of the Ancient Gurukula, the community of teacher and pupils, conveniently adapted to the modern world, was the privileged disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, **Swami Vivekananda**, who received in his youth a scholarly education and who travelled to America and Europe, producing a tremendous impact on the Western mind. Vivekananda tried to renovate both the mystical philosophy of India, in particular Vedanta, and the holistic education on spiritual grounds coming back to Vedas and Upanishads. In particular, he pointed at the convergence between science and spirituality, something that would develop more clearly with the development of quantum physics and relational theory, and that is still going on today. This spiritual master was also a pioneer of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

In terms of education, his revival of the Ancient holistic education of India emphasized the spirit of the Gurukula and the formation of character of children with positive and spiritual values. Needless to say, Vivekananda made an attempt to adapt the Ancient heritage to the modern world, in coherence with his synthesis of science and spirituality. Until today, the Ramakrishna Mission has continued to carry on the shining legacy of Swami Vivekananda and his master, Sri Ramakrishna.¹⁵

In this period that has been called the Hindu or Indian Renaissance, the renowned poet of Bengal, **R. Tagore**, would also offer enlightening directions towards humanistic education linking the best achievements of the West and the treasures of the Indian tradition. Like Vivekananda, Tagore would contribute to develop an understanding and appreciation of Indian civilization in Western countries.¹⁶

¹⁵ Cf Vivekananda on education:

-“Education. Compiled from the Speeches and Writings of Swami Vivekananda”, ed. By T.S. Avinashilingam, 1957,

- "Education", 1999,

-“The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. Part IV”, 1932.

Another sage of the modern age who has brought a decisive contribution to holistic education with human and spiritual values has been the world-famous “guru” of Pondicherry, **Sri Aurobindo**, together with his spiritual companion, Mirra Alfassa, known as **the Mother**. Their spiritual and educational endowment constitutes a treasure of wisdom still to be rediscovered. There are educational institutes, attached to the main ashram of Pondicherry and the centre in Delhi, which implement their educational philosophy. Moreover, there are many schools throughout India which follow this model of integral education with a spiritual basis.

According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the human being is essentially a soul and a divine reality, capable of removing the veils of ignorance, and acquiring the awareness of his or her true I. Hence, the human being can progressively transform its limited human nature into a divine infinite nature. Consciousness presents several levels or layers until super-consciousness. This integral vision of human condition requires an equally integral concept of education. Instead of pressurizing the child from outside in order to insert him or her into pre-established social moulds fabricated by the adults, education should help the youth to unfold from within its harmonious growth as an organic and integral being towards its own human and divine realization. Since the human being is ultimately a soul in spiritual evolution, education should teach the child how to educate itself, and how to develop its own inherent capacities –of different kinds: practical, intellectual, aesthetic, moral and spiritual-.¹⁷

The educational institutes inspired by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother promote through an integrated pedagogy:

- the harmonious growth of the body
- the development of personality and character, with ethical principles and positive values
- the training of mental faculties in the different fields of sciences, social studies and humanities, stressing the unity of knowledge and the link between the sciences and the humanities
- the cultivation of aesthetic taste through the arts
- and the awakening of the soul destined to rule the whole being.

Last but not least, **J. Krishnamurti** was an original and fascinating sage of the XXth century. The famous writer A. Huxley said about him that it was the most impressive talk that he had ever listened to; it was like hearing a discourse of Buddha himself. Like Swami Vivekananda, Sri

¹⁶Cf Tagore on education:

- "Morada de paz (Santiniketan)", 1995,

- "Sriniketan", 1991,

- "Human Values. The Tagorean Panorama. Translations from Shantiniketan", ed. by P. Bhattacharya and S.K. Chakraborty, 2008,

- "Ideals of Education", 1929,

- "The Centre of Indian Culture", 1921.

¹⁷ Cf Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Education:

- "Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Education", ed. by Vijay, 1973.

Cf Sri Aurobindo on education:

- "A System of National Education", 1970,

- "The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo. Vol. 8. Karmayogin. Political Writings and Speeches. 1909-1910", 1997,

- "Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo", ed. by A.B. Purani, 1982.

Aurobindo and the Mother, and Sri Sathya Sai Baba today, Krishnamurti was especially fond of education, and he naturally developed a beautiful relationship with children that could easily remind us of the Ancient “guru” with his pupils. While he was always reluctant towards spiritual organizations, he embodied in depth the very spirit of Vedas and Upanishads.

According to this “reluctant messiah” of our time, as he has been called, there should not be in the educational relationship any kind of superiority or inferiority; teacher and student should interact on an equal basis –as it was in the Vedic and Upanishadic Gurukula, or in the lay and monastic community around Buddha-. Moreover, Krishnamurti insisted that true education could only be based on mutual respect, profound affection and pure love –again, as it was in the Indian Gurukula and the Buddhist Sangha-. Only then, said the modern sage, can there be a natural and free relationship between teacher and pupil, and mutual understanding. Otherwise, we will have fear and oppression, as it has so often happened in this world. Only from this freedom and love, can education become an assistance to understand oneself.¹⁸

From Krishnamurti’s point of view, modern education has ended up in a historical failure; instead of teaching how to think, it has become an instrument to teach what we must think. This oppressive and at the same time technocratic pedagogy has finally destroyed humanity and created the chaos around us.

In front of this desolate scenario, Krishnamurti defends an education that helps children to understand the significance of Life in their own existence, in joyful community and the warmth of love -the only state of consciousness that can change the world, since it represents the only true change inside each one of us.

In Krishnamurti’s words, we are not separated; we are the world.

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