

# AIMS OF TRUE EDUCATION: SRI AUROBINDO AND MAHATMA GANDHI

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In this paper, key similarities and differences between Sri Aurobindo's and Mahatma Gandhi's approaches to Education are theoretically examined to address a few fundamental questions: a) what is human and what is human destiny; b) what is the aim of life and aim of true Education; c) what is the "social" relevance of Gandhian and Aurobindonian thoughts on education?; and d) can Gandhian educational philosophy be considered Integral?

This essay is an attempt to understand Gandhi's vision for education in the light of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's approach to Integral Education. Given that the four guiding questions are closely inter-connected I offer this write-up as an initial attempt at weaving together some responses, with full awareness that many gaps are bound to remain. I am already familiar with some critical gaps, particularly regarding the ideal of human unity as envisioned by these two thinkers, the pedagogical and curricular differences and similarities, and larger differences between the visions and works of these two thinkers—their educational thought being an integral piece of that vision and work. My focus in the present work is on their views of the aim of man<sup>1</sup> and education.

## **Aims of Life and Aims of Education**

Based on a deep and conscious awareness of the significance of socio-cultural variations in the concept of man, his life and destiny, of the nation and of humanity and the life of human race, which get reflected in the

respective philosophies of education, Sri Aurobindo developed his scheme of integral education rooted in the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self creation, to her eternal spirit (Raina, 2000). India, according to Sri Aurobindo, has seen always in man, the individual, a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body, a conscious manifestation in Nature of the universal self and spirit.

Integral Education is based on this conception of man. This truth of man's existence also carries within it the truth that it is important to distinguish and cultivate in man "a mental, an intellectual, an ethical, dynamic and practical, an aesthetic and hedonistic, a vital and physical being, but all these have been seen as powers of a soul that manifests through them and grows with their growth, and yet they are not all the soul, because at the summit of its ascent it arises to something greater than them all, into a spiritual being, and it is in this that [India] has found the supreme manifestation of the soul of man and his ultimate divine manhood, his *paramartha* and highest *purushartha*" (Sri Aurobindo, 1956/2004, p. 15).

Integral Yoga is the basis for Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision of Integral Education. Integral Yoga is a grand synthesis of several major schools of Yoga—Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga. Without rejecting any of these Yogas, Sri Aurobindo takes the idea of Yoga to the next level—Yoga of self-perfection. But he is careful in explaining that the principle of Integral Yoga is "not perfection of the human nature as it is but a psychic and spiritual transformation of all the parts of the being through the action of an inner consciousness and then of a higher consciousness which works on them, throws out their old movements or changes them into the image of its own and so transmutes lower into higher nature. It is not so much the perfection of the intellect as a transcendence of it, a transformation of the mind, the substitution of a larger principle of knowledge—and so with all the rest of the being" (1993/2000, pp. 9-10).

This transformation or self-perfection, Sri Aurobindo explains, begins with the discovery and knowledge of the powers, principles and process of self-realisation. It requires a patient and persistent personal effort in growth and change. Integral development of different parts of the being—physical, vital, mental and psychic and—brings about a transformation into a spiritual being. Such a transformed and spiritualized being is the final goal of Sri Aurobindo's system of Integral Education.

"[Education's] central aim is the building of the powers of the human mind and spirit, it is the formation, or, as I would prefer to view it, the evoking of knowledge and will and of the power to use knowledge, character, culture,—that at least if no more" (Sri Aurobindo, 1956/2004, pp. 9-10). True

and living education helps to “bring out to full advantage, makes ready for the full purpose and scope of human life that is in the individual man, and which at the same time helps him to enter into his right relation with the life, mind and soul of the people to which he belongs and with that great total life, mind and soul of humanity of which he himself is a unit and his people or nation a living, a separate and yet inseparable member” (pp. 13-14).

A truly Integral Education should have three central aims: 1) for an individual, it is growth of the soul and its powers and possibilities, 2) for the nation, the preservation, strengthening and enrichment of the nation-soul and its *Dharma*, and 3) to raise both the individual and nation into powers of the life and ascending mind and soul of humanity. “And at no time, will it lose sight of man’s highest object, the awakening and development of his spiritual being” (Sri Aurobindo, 1956/2004, p. 16).

In the light of these central aims of education, learner’s education and training of the intellect divorced from the perfection of moral and emotional nature is injurious to human progress (Sri Aurobindo, 1956/2004). Moral training can’t be “imparted” in the same way as the training of the mind, because the “heart is not the mind and to instruct the mind does not necessarily improve the heart” (p. 27).

It appears that many of the truths expressed in earlier paragraphs find their equivalents in Gandhian thoughts on education. The emphasis on body, heart, mind and spirit in the educational process is most visible one. As Cenknor quotes Gandhi—“Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education” (1976/1994, p. 102). Like Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi also emphasises the cultivation of the heart and refinement of human emotions and impulses. “True education is that which cultivates the soul or the spirit, and leads ultimately to the full and complete development of man’s body, mind and spirit...Literacy then is not the primary goal of education: it is the cultivation of character, and the development of the spirit; it is the education of the heart not the head” (Richards, 2001, p. 12).

The interconnectedness of the individual, nation, and humanity is another important commonality. However, in my readings of Gandhi I haven’t come across anything similar to nation-soul or soul of the people, which is an essential and important aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s thought. Once the truth of a collective soul, as Sri Aurobindo explains, is thoroughly understood and accepted, one can readily accept the immense variation and diversity in the mental, vital, and physical expressions that are manifested

in a group whether it is a community, nation, or the entire world, and at the same time continue to aspire for an inner human unity. What Gandhi does emphasise quite strongly is the social orientation of education, and the role of schools in reconstructing society. I shall revisit this point a little later in the essay.

The true aim for education, for Gandhi, is derived from the whole purpose of life, which “is to know the Self, the *Atman*, which is akin to knowing the Truth, and realizing God” (Richards, 2001, p. 12). A system of education, therefore, should help learners to understand the meaning of such a quest for Truth. Gandhi emphasises a conception of Truth that is not static, dogmatic, or rigid, and one that is same as Reality (*Sat*) and in identity with the Self within (*Atman*). This Self within is at one with the essence of the universe. The quest for Truth therefore is same as seeking to know the true nature of the Self. The Truth here is indivisible, One and implies the essential unity of all existence. This Oneness, however, manifests itself in multiple forms, as reflected in Gandhi’s quote cited by Richards—“What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source. I cannot, therefore, detach myself from the wickedest soul nor may I be denied identity with the most virtuous” (2001, p. 3).

For Gandhi, this knowing the Truth happens by listening to the inner voice, that is, knowing the Truth in the Self through the Self. But he is also quite clear that it would not be appropriate for anyone to claim to hear the inner voice without showing in the first place a measure of self-discipline, single-minded devotion, and indifference to worldly interests. “Truth resides in every human heart, and one has to search for it there, and to be guided by truth as one sees it. But no one has the right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth” (Gandhi, cited in Richards, 2001, p. 8). So what is truth for one person will not necessarily be truth for another. But the Truth with which Gandhi is concerned is that which can’t be grasped through the instrument of mind, which as Sri Aurobindo reminds us emphatically, is not an instrument of true knowledge.

Thus, the truth that the individual is a soul in its true essence also seems common to both Gandhian and Aurobindonian thought. But let’s look a little deeper.

### **Education for the Individual**

For Gandhi, education should help prepare and direct the learner toward the true purpose of life, which is to realise the *Atman*, the Self, which he

also views as realising God. But Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between the psychic being that is individual and embodied, and grows from life to life; and central being (*Atman*, Self) which is immortal and remains the same through all lives. The psychic being is the link between the outer personality and nature, and the highest *Atman* or Self. It can also be understood as the evolving soul, the soul of the individual evolving in the manifestation, the soul-individuality. Though the word “soul” is sometimes used as a synonym for psychic being, in Sri Aurobindo’s terminology there is a difference between the two. The soul is the divine essence or spark of the Divine in the individual, the psychic being is the developing soul-personality put forth by the soul as its representative in the evolution. This psychic being evolves and grows by its experiences in the manifestation; and as it develops, it increasingly aids the evolution and growth of the mental, vital and physical parts of the being.

It is this psychic being that takes an important place in the educational thought of Sri Aurobindo. For him, education must help prepare the learners grow in their psychic being, so it can develop and manifest itself. Because it is this psychic being that supports “the evolution or the unveiling of the Divine Consciousness on earth, so that one day there will be Divine Life possible right here on earth” (Huppés, 2001, p. 9). Gandhi doesn’t make this sharp distinction between the evolving and immortal soul and as a true Advaitin values the Self- or *Atman*-realisation as the true and ultimate aim of life. For him, the final aim of life stops here, at the realisation of Self, the realisation of God, *Moksha* or *Nirvana*.

For Sri Aurobindo, that is the beginning of his Integral Yoga, and this Self-realisation is one part of the triple transformation that he views as necessary for the transformation of the individual, society, humanity and the earth as a whole. The first transformation is the psychic realisation or transformation when the psychic being in man becomes the guide and true leader, and his physical, vital, and mental are perfect instruments of this true inner guide, the psychic being. The second transformation is the spiritual realisation or the Self-realisation that Gandhi values as the aim of life. But for Sri Aurobindo, this Self-realisation or *Moksha* is not the goal or ultimate aim of man’s life; it is a sure step toward the Supramental realisation and establishment of the Supramental Force on the Earth itself. Also, the realisation of the Self or *Atman* is partial if there is no transformation of the lower nature of man in the Light and Spirit of the Divine. This deeper transformation is needed for the Life on Earth to be transformed into a Life Divine. The central purpose of Integral Yoga is understood as: “Transformation of our superficial, narrow and fragmentary human way of thinking, seeing, feeling, and being into a deep and wide spiritual consciousness and an integrated inner and outer

existence and of our ordinary human living into the divine way of life” (Pandit, 1992, p. 127). The practice of Integral Yoga emphasises the need for personal transformation as a way to act towards a deeper transformation of the evolving outer world with a goal to enable a progressive and fundamental change in individual and collective consciousness.

In the light of these aims of life and the destiny of man emphasised by Sri Aurobindo, one begins to see the fundamental difference between his and Gandhi’s thoughts on the role of education. For Gandhi, education must prepare the learners for Self-realisation or liberation (*Moksha*). He emphasised the ancient Indian wisdom—*Sa vidya ya vimuktaye*<sup>2</sup> (“That which liberates is knowledge”). In his socio-political and educational thought, Gandhi talked about two kinds of liberation. One form of liberation consisted in securing the freedom of the country from foreign rule, which for him would also include developing indigenous models of social, economic, educational development. Such freedom, however, may prove short-lived if not understood in the right perspective and light of the other kind of liberation (*Moksha*) which is for all time. As an Advaitin, he is referring to the liberation from the cycles of birth and death on the earth, from the suffering of the world, and he is emphasising this liberation, *Moksha*, as the ultimate goal for life (one of the four *purusharthas*, other three being *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*). It is important to emphasise here that this liberation is an individual liberation, and does not transform the earth-nature in any way.

Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, is not satisfied with individual liberation. He sees it as an escape from life, from the world, a negation of the spirit. He envisions a spiritually transformed man, a spiritually transformed humanity, and a spiritually transformed life on earth, a divine life. As he writes beautifully in his epic poem, *Savitri*:

A high and blank negation is not all,  
 A huge extinction is not God’s last world,  
 Life’s ultimate sense, the close of being’s course,  
 The meaning of this great mysterious world.  
 In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power.  
 Awaking, it can wake the trance-bound soul  
 And in the ray reveal the parent sun:  
 It can make the world a vessel of Spirit’s force,  
 It can fashion in the clay God’s perfect shape.  
 To free the self is but one radiant pace;  
 Here to fulfill himself was God’s desire

(Sri Aurobindo, 1950/1993, pp. 311-312)



It is this fulfillment of the man in this world, the inner and outer transformation that is necessary for this fulfillment, and the evolution of consciousness that facilitates such transformation that are behind Sri Aurobindo's thoughts on education and its aims. Education, in this light, becomes the means to prepare learners for such transformation, which requires that all parts of their being—physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual—are properly prepared and developed to manifest a harmonious and integral personality. The emphasis is more on integral development, instead of emphasising any one or two aspects of personality. For Gandhi also, education should provide for a harmonious development of the learner, but one can also trace certain special emphases that Gandhian model places on basic education and working with hands.

### Social Aim of Education

Education is not a matter that concerns only the individual; it also deeply concerns the society, the collective. And both Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi recognise and deeply value the inter-connection between individual and collective, as reflected in their thoughts on education including its aims. But again one notices a key difference. "The key to Gandhi's social thought and concept of man is characterised in one word: *sarvodaya*" (Cenkner, 1976/1994, p. 97). A strong emphasis on *sarvodaya*, the upliftment of all, certainly gives a very clear orientation to Gandhi's educational approach. He emphasises the significance of school and education for the upliftment of the oppressed of the society, for the organic development and growth of the community, and for building the nation. The "social" role of man, in the sense of what an individual can do for the society, is thus emphasised here. At the same time, the purpose of education for Gandhi is to raise man to a higher moral and spiritual order through the full development of the individual and the evolution of a new man, a *satyagrahi*, one that grasps the truth. This man-making goal of education, for Gandhi, is achieved by service to mankind, by self-giving.

Sri Aurobindo is also equally concerned about the relation between the individual and the society. But he also emphasises that an individual "is not merely a social unit; his existence, his right and claim to live and grow are not founded solely on his social work and function. He is not merely a member of a human-pack, hive or ant-hill; he is something in himself, a soul, a being, who has to fulfill his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or his assigned part in the truth and law of the collective existence" (Sri Aurobindo, 1949/998, p. 24). At the same time, we are also reminded that "as the society has no right in suppressing the individual

in its own interest, so also the individual, in Sri Aurobindo's view, has no right to disregard the legitimate claims of society upon him in order to seek his own selfish aims" (Kishor Gandhi, 1965/1991, p. 67). So there is a much more equal relation between the individual and society in this view, which has implication for the education as well.

An Integral Education, in Sri Aurobindo's view, will not emphasise society's demands over the individual's need for inner development and growth. It will allow complete freedom to the individual soul to grow and evolve in a multi-faceted and harmonious way. At the same time, the social nature of man will not be ignored because not only will the learning be happening in a communal setting and in close relations with the teachers, but more importantly, the role of individual transformation in the larger, spiritual transformation of humanity will be emphasised and modeled for the learners. In the light of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts on the destiny of mankind, this truer and deeper connection between individual and collective in the evolution of consciousness is the basis of Integral Education. Education, in this view, is the means for facilitating individual transformation to prepare man, one individual at a time, for a collective transformation. The nature of upliftment that is of concern to Sri Aurobindo is the upliftment of consciousness—individually and collectively.

Human society, in its present nature—with all its pleasures and pains, abilities and limits, gains and losses, convergences and conflicts, peace and war—is a creation of human consciousness that is in its turn limited by and subject to its present nature. As long as this consciousness remains, all adjustments and readjustments, all revolutions and re-organizations, re-thinking and re-planning in the society and its structures—political, economic, cultural— will be devised by the same consciousness that created the earlier structures, and are therefore bound to solve problems facing humanity only for a short period of time, if at all they are able to solve any. So what is needed? A new consciousness is the key. What will be this new consciousness? A consciousness that is wider, higher, and deeper than the one in which the humanity persists at present. A consciousness which enables the separative, divisive, egoistic tendencies that are presently behind every action and decision we make in our personal and social conduct to transform and evolve into unifying, integrative, harmonising, and ego-less tendencies.

This deep transformation does not happen all at once in masses of humanity, but is a long and arduous process that happens one individual at a time. It occurs through an evolutionary ascent of consciousness and through Divine Grace represented in the descent of Supramental Consciousness that transforms the nature and process of evolution itself.



Sri Aurobindo has illuminated for us the nature of this new supramental consciousness, the conditions necessary for coming of a new spiritual age, the kind of gnostic beings who will be the pioneers of spiritual age, and the nature of transformed social structures in such a spiritualised society. However, it is important to note that these details are not presented in absolute terms based on some abstract sociological projections, but are only indicated as hints in the light of spiritual realisations and experiences of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

This new consciousness does not evolve in a vacuum. It is the most natural progression for an individual consciousness, and indirectly for the group or societal consciousness. This is where the aim of Integral Education comes to the forefront again. It is the evolution of consciousness in the individual that the education is concerned with, but this evolution is an integral part of the evolution of societal consciousness. And in this way the social impact of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts on education are just as important as Gandhi's, but they are emphasising different things. Gandhi is deeply concerned with human society as it exists now, the product of mental consciousness, and all its inequities and sufferings. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, compels us, with our feet planted firmly in the present, to set our eyes on the society of the future that he envisions for us, the spiritualised society that would be the result of a supramental consciousness. Gandhi persuades the learners to act for changing the lives of the marginalised and the oppressed, and in the process, transform and grow in their character. Sri Aurobindo reminds us that "[t]o hope for a true change of human life without a change of human nature is an irrational and unspiritual proposition; it is to ask for something unnatural and unreal, an impossible miracle" (Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 1059). The social orientation of education for Gandhi is valuable because social engagement facilitates moral and spiritual development and transformation of the learners. Sri Aurobindo is concerned with the integral development and transformation of inner and outer nature of the learners and educators, and a centre of education that experiments with such a system of integral education becomes a dynamic ideal for the society through the very nature of its work in facilitating individual and collective evolution of consciousness.

At this point I visit the fourth question that I listed at the beginning of this essay – can Gandhian philosophy of education be considered Integral? I am tempted to say, no. Is it holistic? Certainly yes. But it is not integral in the sense of the term used by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. "Integral" in the Aurobindonian sense is a term that comes from the Sanskrit word "*purna*," which means "complete." In more general terms, holism concerns itself with all aspects of existence, which includes physical, emotional,

instinctual, mental, moral, social and spiritual aspects; it looks upon them as equally valid and contributing for growth and evolution. But without transformation of these aspects of existence, a true integration or synthesis is not possible. Cenkner (1976/1994) explains:

Integralism is possible in Sri Aurobindo's system through transformation. He integrated experience not through a forced juxtaposition of realities and levels of being. Diverse principles and realities do not unite on their original level but are first transformed and then enter into a greater synthesis. For example, matter and spirit enter into synthesis only if matter loses its imperfections and limitations, but when it does so it can be integrated on a new level, a spiritual level, of being. The work of transformation is the work of man and the divine; transformation takes place most significantly on a supramental plane. What appears diverse is transformed and then integrated in such a way that unity and not opposition exists in the diversity (p. 147).

It is in this sense that the Integral transformation achieved through an evolution of consciousness becomes much wider, higher and deeper than holistic transformation.

The Gandhian vision of education is concerned with the whole person, but it is not concerned with the divine or spiritualised human, an integrally transformed human. It emphasises the spiritual goal of man, but it is not concerned with the spiritualisation of humanity. It values the liberation (*moskha*) of man, but it doesn't envision the supramental transformation of the earth-life itself.

### **Spiritual and Psychic Education**

In this last section I touch upon another important difference between Gandhian and Aurobindonian thought on the matter of spiritual education.

A spiritual education, in the light of Sri Aurobindo, would help the seeker to view both Spirit and Matter in a new light. Spirituality, in his vision, is an adventure in consciousness with matter for its basis, because the material or the so-called mundane world is neither false nor illusory, but is a truth, a reality shrouded in falsehood and illusion. Therefore, one seeking for Truth must change one's attitude to matter. Sri Aurobindo speaks of the necessity of the spiritual transformation of man which begins with the discovery of the psychic being. The education of the psychic is based on the view that true education aims at the growth of the soul and spirit rather than intellectual, moral or even religious knowledge.

For Sri Aurobindo, an adventure in consciousness begins with psychic education which may be seen as his special contribution to educational theory and praxis. Sri Aurobindo emphasises that the principal function of education is to facilitate the learners' process of discovering their psychic being. Psychic being, the psychological centre of an individual, is the spark of Divine that is spontaneous, direct and luminous, and supports the vital, the physical and the mental being. "[T]he true secret whether with child, or man, is to help him find his deeper self, the real psychic entity within. That, if we ever give it a chance to come forward, and still more, if we call it into the foreground as 'the leader of the march set in our front,' will itself take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of the psychological being towards a realization of potentialities" (1949/1998, p. 33).

Education in this respect becomes a social approach that is aimed at providing the best opportunity for exercise, expression and growth of psychic being. As Cenknner describes:

The starting point is to discover within oneself that which is independent of external reality and the physical body, that is, the discovery of a sense of universality and limitlessness...The educative process is twofold. The first step is surrender to that which is beyond ego, and the second step is to will an identification with one's psychic being.... The four vehicles of learning – the vital, the physical, the mental and the psychic – respectively, cultivate power, beauty, knowledge and love and hence liberate man from material conditioning, desires, ignorance and suffering. This fourfold approach to education is simultaneous, beginning at an early age and all organized homogeneously around the psychic centre. The psychic movement inward which is complemented by opening outward to higher existence brings spiritual transformation (1976/1994, p.170).

For Gandhi, a thoughtfully conceived and open-minded approach to religious education which values and welcomes comparative understanding of various religions becomes an important component of good education. For Sri Aurobindo, psychic education is something not connected with any religious education but a way to prepare learners for a spiritual seeking beyond religion. However, Gandhi's emphasis on religious education does not imply that he doesn't value the primary spiritual aim of education – an aim that is not bound by any one particular religion but points to something that transcends any constructed view of religion.

Sri Aurobindo would also admit that spirituality can be understood and practiced through religion, but he also cautions strongly that religion has

a tendency to become...well, like religion, and therefore dogmatic, creedal and limiting. As he writes in *The Human Cycle*:

There are two aspects of religion—true religion and religionism. True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical and practical being of man, and to inform and govern these members of our being by the higher light and law of the spirit. Religionism, on the contrary, entrenches itself in some narrow pietistic exaltation of the lower members or lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, forms and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system. Not that these things are altogether negligible or that they must be unworthy or unnecessary or that a spiritual religion need disdain the aid of forms, ceremonies, creeds or systems. On the contrary, they are needed by man because the lower members have to be exalted and raised before they can be fully spiritualised, before they can directly feel the spirit and obey its law. An intellectual formula is often needed by the thinking and reasoning mind, form or ceremony by the aesthetic temperament or other parts of the infra-rational being, a set moral code by man's vital nature in their turn towards the inner life. But these things are aids and supports, not the essence; precisely because they belong to the rational and infra-rational parts, they can be nothing more and, if too blindly insisted on, may even hamper the supra-rational light. Such as they are, they have to be offered to man and used by him, but not to be imposed on him as his sole law by a forced and inflexible domination. In the use of them toleration and free permission of variation is the first rule which should be observed. The spiritual essence of religion is alone the one thing supremely needful, the thing to which we have always to hold and subordinate to it every other element or motive (pp. 177-178).

It is this "spiritual essence of religion" that will form the basis of comparative religious education for Gandhi, as this quote of his illustrates:

To me religion means Truth and ahimsa or rather Truth alone, because Truth includes ahimsa, ahimsa being the necessary and indispensable means for its discovery. Therefore, anything that promotes the practice of these virtues is a means for imparting religious education and the best way to do this, in my opinion, is for the teachers rigorously to practise these virtues in their own person (Gandhi quoted in *Young India*, December 6, 1928, as cited in Cenker, 1976/1994, p. 114).

In addition to emphasising the universal essentials of religion, Gandhi also had specific views on what a curriculum of religious education should

look like, what type of writings should be used in such a curriculum. He also emphasised that a study of other religions besides one's own will give the learner a grasp of the underlying unity of all religions and will also provide a glimpse of that universal and absolute Truth which lies beyond the dust of creeds and faiths. Thus the ultimate aim of such a religious education will also be to prepare learners to eventually experience the search for Truth, the spirit's seeking for the Truth beyond religion.

It seems to me, however, that such a comparative religious education may not always lead towards facilitating a move beyond the mental/intellectual understanding of the oneness of all religions or belief. It may just be a really great and transforming way to intellectually grasp the wisdom of *Ekam Sat, Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*<sup>3</sup> (Truth is One, Sages speak of it by different names) but whether such an intellectual acceptance may also create some openings for learners to feel or experience a central aspiration or a seeking for an inner life is not certain. Perhaps this is because of the human tendency (or mind's tendency) to fall into the trap of religionism (as Sri Aurobindo explains) and steer away from the true spiritual essence of religion. It is here that I find Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's approach of psychic education much more appealing and powerful.

Gandhi's primary approach to spirituality, though beyond the narrow chauvinistic religiosity, is still grounded in the "universal essence of religion." Whereas for Sri Aurobindo, spirituality is about that which is beyond religion, though religion also has the spiritual essence. For Sri Aurobindo, education should help facilitate the opening of learners' minds and hearts to a universal spirituality, should help prepare learners mentally, vitally and physically in such a way that it facilitates a gradual opening or flowering of the inner psychic being, and should instill in learners an aspiration for personal truth through self-search and self-knowledge. For Gandhi, education should help learners develop a sense of universal spirituality through a genuinely respectful and empathic understanding of different religious traditions (though Gandhi also emphasises moral and spiritual development through other important means such as service, manual labor, etc.)

I wish to end this paper with the following passage from an essay by Nolini Kanta Gupta, titled, "The spiritual genius of India." The following words convey succinctly the difference between religion and spirituality, which add an important dimension to the differences between the kind of religio-spiritual education Gandhi envisions and the kind of psychic and spiritual education emphasised by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I include these lines here also because in a rather unique way, they also represent a fundamental difference between Gandhian and Aurobindonian visions

of education. While Gandhian educational thought might have been more influenced with the essence of religion as presented in the following words, Sri Aurobindo's thought seems to be based more on the view of spirituality as described in these words. Though of course, this may not fully illustrate all the important details that make each of their visions unique and relevant.

Religion starts from and usually ends with a mental and emotional approach to realities beyond the mind; Spirituality goes straight forward to direct vision and communion with the Beyond. Religion labors to experience and express the world of Spirit in and through a turn, often a twist, given by the mental being—*manu*—in man; it bases itself upon the demands of the mental, the vital and the physical complex—the triple nexus that forms the ordinary human personality and seeks to satisfy them under a holier garb. Spirituality knows the demands of the Spirit alone; it lives in a realm where the body, the life and the mind stand uplifted and transmuted into their utter realities. Religion is the human way of approaching and enjoying the Divine; Spirituality is the divine way of meeting the Divine. Religion, as it is usually practiced, is a special art, one—the highest it may be, still only one—among many other pursuits that man looks to for his enjoyment and fulfillment; but spirituality is nothing if it does not swallow up the entire man, take in his each and every preoccupation and new-create it into an inevitable expression of its own master truth. Religion gives a moral discipline for the internal consciousness, and for the external life, a code of conduct based upon a system of rules and rites and ceremonies; spirituality aims at a revolution in the consciousness and in the being (Gupta, 1976/1993, p. 117).

Inspired by the above words, I wish to claim that in Gandhian vision, the ultimate aim of education is to help learners develop *human* means of meeting the Divine. In the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the ultimate aim of education is to help learners develop *divine* ways of meeting the Divine and bringing the Divine on Earth.

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