

INTEGRAL EDUCATION
by Arul Dev
Guest Faculty, IIT Madras

Integral Education is a call for a revolutionary approach to education, one that takes the best of our ancient traditions and marries it with the best of technology and methods of modernity. It is not losing one for another but retaining the best of both and making a courageous leap forward.

Let us take examples of a few best practices from the ancient learning systems that are worth retaining:

- The student learnt under the aegis of a Guru or a guide. The Guru took up the overall responsibility for the student's development and in turn the student fully surrendered to the guidance, with almost a single minded pursuit of holistic learning.
- The student learnt subjects, arts, poetry and gardening, only to name a few amongst the many different intellectual and practical aspects of life. This led to the overall development of the mind, emotion, body and soul of the student. By the time they completed the study, most of them were well-formed mature adults ready to face the world in all aspects of life.

Today's modernity has lost the essence of some of this in its aim and method. In its aim, increasingly students look upon education as a route to a lucrative job or studies abroad. This has led to studying for the sake of scoring high marks or selective reading of what may be relevant to the project or assignment at hand. Love for the subject; and learning to study the subject in depth, to master it, and allow the knowledge to be revealed are long last arts. Subjects have been compartmentalized and narrowed down to amassing and outputting information. The true purpose of education however is to kindle the inner fire within that leads to knowledge and self-discovery. Also the faculties of mind, emotion and body are hardly developed, but also often curtailed with the overload of information and a diminishing interest from the students for real learning.

Modernity has come up with it many tools and methods using technology that is making education self directed and accessible to anyone across the globe. Many universities are sharing their curriculum and coursework through many open source online forums. The world has become a global village, where a true learner can easily reach across to a stranger across the globe and discuss on something they are studying and researching upon.

This attempt in Integral Education is to marry the best of ancient and modern learning systems and facilitate the total development of the student.

Two aims for Integral Education towards this can be stated as:

- Igniting the inner flame within oneself – the spark that holds the knowledge of one's truest nature. Once this spark is lit, learning becomes self-directed as the inner flame guides the unique flowering of the student and the blossoming of their wisdom.
- Facilitating the total development of faculties:
 - **Mind:** Concentration, intuition, synthesizing what is learnt, creativity, originality, precision, widening, clarification of ethics and values.
 - **Vital:** Emotional balance, resilience, appreciating beauty and balance, formation of healthy and conscious habits and discipline.
 - **Body:** A holistic development of body and health, through sports and other activities.

The educational period is also the time when the individual identity of the student can form and come to the forefront. This is the possibility for the student to discover his/her true inner nature and life purpose. When this is not done the student passes out of the system but is largely unclear about what exactly they need to do in life and the profession that will utilize their gifts most. Integral Education begins by encouraging the student to ask the question 'Who am I?' and 'Why am I here?'"

A quote by Norman C Dowsett, summarizes clearly the larger role of education -
"One simple definition of an individual would be one who has organized himself around his central being - found his potential and in consequence has something unique to contribute to life."

Can Integral Education play this larger role? Earlier we had religion and the family ecosystem playing this role of helping the student to find their center and life purpose. Now religion has dwindled in its influence and family has shrunk. So if this role is not played by education, the young students who pass out are largely unprepared to face life.

Integral Education has three inseparable components:

- The Teacher, playing the role of a guide or mentor
- The Student, playing the role of a seeker or learner
- Knowledge that is invoked through the teacher – student relationship

Integral Education begins to flower when the following three qualities become present within the teacher–student relationship and knowledge is invoked as a living presence.

Focus transcends the gathering and assimilation of information, to a more holistic approach of developing all the inner faculties and potentials. Emphasis is on a total development with a complete perfection of the body, life force, mind and deeper heart. A deeper knowing becomes present beyond analytical and conceptual methods of learning.

Integral Education Project:

This article is based on work we have been doing over the last four years. We have developed a model of consciousness called Telos, which maps the various layers of mind, life force, body and deeper self, based on the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Using the model we have been guiding teachers and students to ensure that there is overall development of all faculties and space created to ask deeper questions pertaining to life.

Our work over the last four years has just begun. There are miles to cross to ensure that some of these principles are grounded in the way education is imparted in several schools and colleges across India.