



# **Aurobindonian Perspective of Education for Raising Physical Consciousness: Insights for Training and Practices**

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## **ABSTRACT**

According to Sri Aurobindo, the human body is bound by certain limitations. The body has come to its present state after taking a long evolutionary journey. However, the process of evolution has not come to an end. In the long run, it would be transformed into a divine body. It would be free of its limitations and rise to become immortal. It would not be susceptible any more to diseases and old age. This transformation cannot be accomplished by any human endeavour. Yogasana, exercises, games and sports, proper diet and a few other things can help us to begin the journey. However, whatever we do on our part, we will not be able to 'transform' the body. Only a much higher Divine Consciousness would be able to achieve this seeming to be unfeasible task. On our part, we can make the body ready enough to receive the Divine Consciousness. The potentialities of the body must be fully exploited so that it can be a fit base to contain the Divine Consciousness. How can we work upon the consciousness of the body? It can only be done with the help of our mind. The Supramental being envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual collaborator the Mother, would have a transformed body, life (Vital), and mind. The mind must grow towards perfection in order to be able to induce that into the vital and the physical(body). Sri Aurobindo's concept of Integral Education focusses on the education of all the aspects of a human being- physical, vital and mental. The contemporary education system is mainly centered around the mental aspect. The vital and physical education till now, have been grossly neglected. This article explores Aurobindonian perspective of physical education for raising the body consciousness to a higher, Divine Consciousness.

Key words: Aurobindonian perspective, Physical Education, Transformation, Physical, Vital, Mental, Supramental, Divine, Consciousness

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## **1. Introduction**

Technology has made our life easier but on the other hand, it has made life fast and restless. It has promoted sedentary lifestyle leading to serious health issues. Pollution of air, water and the soil have added to the miseries. Packaged food and fast food with artificial preservatives, colouring substances, flavours and other additives are posing serious health risks. Obesity, diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular diseases have almost engulfed our world. The diseases have brought fear to the minds of many. Most of the people are combating stress arising out of personal relationships, pressure at workplaces, life ambitions, and societal expectations.

The adverse consequences of a first-paced lifestyle have compelled many to turn their faces towards yoga and exercises. Many people have started taking proactive measures to remain healthy. Yoga practices effectively help to make the immune system robust. They are also effective in reducing anxiety and depression.

Sri Aurobindo, a great seer, envisages a divine life and the coming of a new race, the supramental beings, upon the earth. Man by transforming his physical, vital and mental consciousness and by breaking their present limitations, can only take a leap into the Supramental era. The supramental body would not be susceptible to diseases, decay and death. However, the present human body with its limitations cannot hold the supramental consciousness within. Yoga, exercises, and diet with their limited capacity cannot take the body beyond its last limits. In no way, our present contrivances can make the body absolutely free of these limitations. The only way to achieve this is to raise the physical consciousness from its present state to a much higher Divine Consciousness. The consciousness of the body must be raised to be aligned with the Truth Consciousness.

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## **2. Objectives of the Study**

The basic objectives of this paper are-

1. To know the aim of life as propounded by Sri Aurobindo.
2. To know the idealistic future of human body as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo.
3. To know the Aurobindonian perspective of physical education for raising body consciousness.

4. To know the practices which can be incorporated into present day education.

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### 3. Methodology

The researcher has adopted a Qualitative Research Approach for the present study. Content analysis has been used as the basis for the study. The researcher has consulted both primary and secondary sources such as books, online journals etc.

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### 4. Aim of Life

Integral education propounded by Sri Aurobindo focusses on all the aspects of a human being: physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. It must be noted that all these aspects are interrelated as all of them share a common goal. They are in conformity with the aim of life. Education is very much related to life and therefore, it must be in harmony with life and its aim. It is obvious that education cannot walk altogether on a different track than that of life. Now, what is the human life aiming at? In order to understand this, we need to understand the concept of evolution. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy revolves around the concept of evolution of consciousness.

Life evolved in matter and after that mind evolved in life. This clearly indicates that life was already embedded in matter as a potential. So also, mind was existing in life as a seed, as a possibility. The process of evolution is preceded by the process of involution. Through involution, the Supreme Consciousness has come down step by step till it reaches the stage of matter. So, involution is the ladder through which the Supreme Reality has descended. Through the process of evolution, the consciousness or spirit hidden within the matter would go on manifesting itself with an aim to reach the Absolute. This journey till now has been from matter to life to mind. Mind is best represented by the appearance of man on earth. However, with mind, the process of evolution has not come to an end. It would go further. Sri Aurobindo observes-

From the clod and metal to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man, so much has she completed of her journey; a huge stretch or a stupendous leap still remains before her. As from matter to life, from life to mind, so now she must pass from mind to supermind, from man to superman ... (Sri Aurobindo, 1997)

So, man will be surpassed by a higher race, the superman. So, we are only in a middle state of the evolutionary process.

Man is a transitional being; he is not final. As it did not begin with him, neither does it end with him. He is not its evident crown, not its highest issue, not the last clear sum of Nature. Nature has not brought out in man her highest possibilities; she has not reached in him the supreme heights of consciousness and being; as there was before him the infrahuman, the insect and animal, so there shall be after him the superhuman, the superman. (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p.265)

Now, man is mostly guided by reasoning which is a faculty of the mind. But the superman with supramental consciousness will not gather knowledge through his five senses or his mind. He will be guided by the Divine Consciousness within him. As the mind is far superior to the consciousness in plants and animals, so also the supramental consciousness is far superior and altogether a different faculty than mind.

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### 5. Body's goal to be a fit instrument of the Divine

We are aspiring for the perfection of our total being. Therefore, in this quest, the physical part of the being can never be left behind. It is the base of the being. When we strive to establish a divine life upon this earth, along with the transformation of the vital and the mental, there is a need for the transformation of the physical. "The divine life will reject nothing that is capable of divinisation; all is to be seized, exalted, made utterly perfect." (Sri Aurobindo, 1998)

In the past, the great seers treated the body as an obstacle in the path of spirituality. Due to its inertia and inconscience and closeness to matter, it was thought that it could not be a fit instrument of the Divine or it would be a barrier for spiritual perfection. The limitations of the body, it was thought, made it unsuitable for a transformation. A transformation means "self-exceeding". Sri Aurobindo opines that this self-exceeding is possible.

Even in its fullest strength and force and greatest glory of beauty, it is still a flower of the material Inconscience; the inconscient is the soil from which it has grown and at every point opposes a narrow boundary to the extension of its powers and to any effort of radical self-exceeding. But if a divine life is possible on earth, then this self-exceeding must also be possible. (Sri Aurobindo, 1998)

The present human body is full of limitations. It gets afflicted by disease, old age and death. It is unfit to be a divine instrument. It is fit to house the mental consciousness but not suitable to hold the supramental consciousness. For such a divine consciousness, a radiant, divine body is a necessity. Sri Aurobindo notes-

Man is a mind imprisoned, obscured and circumscribed in a precarious and imperfect living but imperfectly conscious body. The superman will be a supramental spirit which will envelop and freely use a conscious body, plastic to spiritual forces. His physical frame will be a firm support and an adequate radiant instrument for the spirit's divine play and work in Matter. (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p.157)

Therefore, the body has to be made a fit instrument of the Divine. A superficial change would not do this. The body must go through a process of "transformation". All the elements of mortality must be replaced with the essence of immortality, "its pain has to be translated into Bliss and its ugliness into Beauty." (Reddy, 1991, p.318)

In the past, many had dreamt of a heavenly world. The method to build a world of perfection was thought in terms of changing the outer environment and strengthening the capacities of the human mind. But Sri Aurobindo wants to establish the new consciousness in the body. "For, it is only in the body that the New Consciousness can establish itself permanently." (Reddy, 1991, p.317). Whatever is established at the level of the body becomes permanent. Things that are established at the level of the mind may fade away or disappear altogether. The philosophies and ideologies of ancient times which reigned over the human minds are no longer the prime occupation of modern minds. On the other hand, the habits of the body and its way of living have not been changed much. If the body accepts something such as a vibration or a consciousness, it holds on to it. This nature of the body has its own advantages and disadvantages. While it has been easier to make progress in emotional, mental and even spiritual domains, the body has not undergone eye-catching changes in the journey of evolution. Most religions have considered it as an impediment or a barrier and therefore, neglected and rejected it. However, Sri Aurobindo has given us the assurance that the human body can be transformed to become a divine body. (Reddy, 1991, pp. 317-318)

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## 6. Mind must lead from the front

The mind can play a vital role towards the perfection of the body. However, for that the mind must be perfected. The mind must be made free from relying upon the "physical mind" and even reasoning for gaining knowledge. The physical mind and reasoning are very much prone to errors. The mind, therefore, must begin to grow in the light of intuition. Then the next desirable thing is the mind has to bring the life-energy, body and its consciousness under its own control. Sri Aurobindo observes-

If the mind can take up and control the instincts and automatism of the life-energy and the subtle physical consciousness and the body, if it can enter into them, consciously use and, as we may say, fully mentalise their instinctive or spontaneous action, the perfection of these energies, their action too become more conscious and more aware of themselves and more perfect. (Sri Aurobindo, 1998)

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## 7. Physical transformation of the human body

The body has reached a crucial point in the evolutionary journey. Whatever the potentialities it has gained till now, must be utilized fully. It would help it to rise further in evolution, of course to a point which is allowed by nature. However, it must be remembered that the things done by us through physical means are not fully secure and the body would have its limitations. The body at any point may fall prey to internal imbalance or outside shock. If we aspire for a higher perfection, the limitations of the body must be broken and overcome. "One direction in which our consciousness must grow is an increasing hold from within or from above on the body ..." (Sri Aurobindo, 1998)

The Supermind or the supramental consciousness is the consciousness of the Supreme or Sachchidananda. It is a link which connects the Sachchidananda on one side with the mind, life, and body on the other side. Sri Aurobindo reveals that only the Supermind has the power to bring the transformation of the human body.

It is Supermind alone that can penetrate the dense matter and touch the golden fountains of immortality at the bottom of Matter. No other intermediary force or power can do this stupendous work of breaking open matter's somnambulism and awaken it to its true status. (Reddy, 1991, p.320)

The body must be readied to receive the Supramental consciousness and be transformed. The Mother, the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo says that the body must be made strong as well as plastic to be a fit instrument to receive the truth-force. The body is a very faithful servant. It does not judge its masters and blindly obeys them. It is not aware of the harm it does to itself by following the whims of its masters. Who are its masters? The vital and the mind. The Mother (1999) points out- "The mind with its dogmas, its rigid and arbitrary principles, the vital with its passions, its excesses and dissipations soon destroy the natural balance of the body and create in it fatigue, exhaustion and disease." (p.7)

The body is imprisoned by the vital and the mind. We need to make it free from their clutches and bring it under the direct supervision of the psychic being - the godhead within us. Then only "a new harmony will manifest in the body, reflecting the harmony of the higher regions, which will give it perfect proportions and ideal beauty of form." (The Mother, 1999, pp.7-8). This harmony is never static; it is progressive in nature as it goes on perfecting itself. After that, the body will be gradually able to shun its limitations and walk on the path of immortality.

As soon as the body has learnt to follow this movement of progressive harmony, it will be possible for it to escape, through a continuous process of transformation, from the necessity of disintegration and destruction. Thus the irrevocable law of death will no longer have any reason to exist. (The Mother, 1999, p.8)

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## 8. Physical education

Physical education should strive to elevate the body to a higher level of perfection through proper training.

... whatever type of body a man may have, he must accept as a starting-point and bring out, by a concentrated effort and an appropriate training, the possibilities it contains and make it into a fit instrument for as perfect a life as possible. (Saint-Hilaire, 2014)

Training should be imparted to inculcate in children the good habits of cleanliness, yoga and exercises, food, sleep, etc. Some body defects can be brought down or even cured by corrective gymnastics. Athletics, games, exercises can help one to control one's impulses, reactions and also sexual energy. Training of the senses should also be included in physical education. Eyes and ears should be trained to increase their power of perception. Whenever there is a call made upon the body parts, they should be ready to respond to the call quickly. Coordination among body parts and mastery over body reflexes can be brought about through gymnastics, body balancing etc. (Saint-Hilaire, 2014)

The Mother (1999) says that physical education must be "rigorous and detailed, far-sighted and methodical." The body is known to be habit-forming in nature. The habits of the body must be brought under the reins. It must be trained to shun rigidity and learn flexibility so that it can fit itself with changing circumstances and changing requirements of the being.

The Mother (1999) stresses the following practices with regard to education of the body.

### ***8.1 Knowledge of the body and its functions***

The child must be taught about the different parts of the body, their structure and functions. This will help him/her to observe them and bring control over them. The body postures play a vital role as wrong body postures invite many problems in future. Children must be trained to sit, stand and walk properly. If right habits are formed early, they would not be a burden to the child at a later stage.

### ***8.2 Diet***

There are several theories about food. But we must remember that "the instinct of the body, so long as it remains intact, is more reliable than any theory." The body has an instinct and it can detect which food is harmful to it. If a child finds a few food items distasteful, s/he should not be forced to eat them.

### ***8.3 Distinguishing desire from need***

The child must be taught to differentiate between desire and need. Eating out of greed brings all the troubles. From an early age, the child should be encouraged to appreciate simple, nutritious, appetizing food. Certain foods make the body heavy and dull and so, better be avoided. Food is meant to provide energy to the body and keep it healthy. So, it should never be used as a means for punishment. When a child does something wrong, sometimes parents tell her/him that s/he would not get any sweets as s/he has not behaved properly. The Mother observes- "In this way, you create in his little consciousness the impression that food is given to him chiefly to satisfy his greed and not because it is indispensable for the proper functioning of his body."

### ***8.4 Illness is a sign of weakness***

Parents and teachers should encourage the children to develop the habits of maintaining cleanliness and hygiene. Cleanliness should be a thing of enjoyment for the child. However, for achieving this target, we must be careful that no feeling of fear is instilled within the child. "Fear is the worst instrument of education and the surest way of attracting what is feared." The child should be aware of the advantages of a healthy body and should have admiration for good health. Sometimes, it is seen that the child feigns illness to attract the attention of her/his parents, teachers, or friends. S/he may do it also to escape from homework or any such difficult and boring task. This trick should not work for the child. The Mother says, "On no account should this pernicious tendency be encouraged. Children should therefore be taught that to be ill is a sign of weakness and inferiority, not of some virtue or sacrifice."

### ***8.5 Prominent place to games and sports***

It is unfortunate that many schools are without playgrounds. Games and sports should be given an important place in the child's education. Games and sports "more than all the medicines in the world, will assure the child good health." They also help in keeping the child happy and maintaining good physical as well as mental health. Medicines are known for their harmful effects and so, only should be used when it is very much indispensable.

### ***8.6 Adequate rest and sleep***

As the child grows, the number of hours of sleep decreases. The child must get enough time to rest and sleep. Usually, a minimum of eight hours of sleep is required for a growing child. The place of sleep must be quiet and well-ventilated. The child should follow an 'early to bed and early to rise' routine. Late night study should be discouraged. The time before midnight is good for giving rest to the nerves. During daytime also, there is a need for relaxation. The children should be taught relaxation techniques at an early age.

### ***8.7 Aspiration for beauty***

The goal is to realise beauty at every level. Good health and physical strength as well as balance of the body are the most important characteristics of a body of beauty. The supramental body will be a body with divine beauty. Beauty is an aspect of the Divine. The child must be taught to "aspire for beauty, not for the sake of pleasing others or winning their admiration, but for the love of beauty itself; for beauty is the ideal which all physical life must realise."

If proper physical education is imparted starting from childhood, many physical defects can be avoided. If one starts at a later stage, one should be prepared to come across the already formed bad habits, rigidities, and defects. The preparation to embark upon a programme for the body will take longer time and demand patience and perseverance. The Mother assures, "But if you keep alive within you the ideal of beauty that is to be realized, sooner or later you are sure to reach the goal you have set yourself." (The Mother, 1999, p.17)

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## 9. Importance given to physical education in NEP 2020

NEP 2020 has placed significant emphasis on physical education. It advocates inclusion of courses on games and sports along with other courses in the curriculum. It states the importance of forming dance circle, sports circle, health club, yoga club etc. Every higher educational institution should have counselling facility to address the emotional problems and stress of students. (*National Education Policy 2020*)

The policy has given a place of importance to health education. The curriculum should include lessons on nutrition, balanced diet, sanitation, cleanliness, fitness, wellness etc. The students should be aware of the adverse effects of alcohol, drugs, cigarette etc. "In order to assist students develop fitness as a lifetime attitude and to reach the levels of fitness envisioned by the Fit India Movement, sports integrated learning will be used in classroom activities." (Dsouza, 2022)

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## 10. Conclusion

The Integral education propounded by Sri Aurobindo (and the Mother) aims at the holistic development of a child. Whereas the present education system mostly stresses educating the mind (Mental education), it grossly neglects the other aspects of a human being. Sri Aurobindo envisions the replacement of the physical (body), vital (emotions and life energy), and the mental (mind) consciousness with the Divine Consciousness. To make necessary progress in this direction, a child must be brought up in a conducive environment. Games and sports and physical training must find their due place in the school curriculum. It is a reality that our education system is far away from the ideals envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. Apart from regular academic subjects, NEP 2020 has given importance to games and sports, exercises, yoga, health education, and art and craft. This may be the initial step which may lead to open up further avenues.

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