

# *Globalization and Higher Education: Exploring Holistic Learning Through Sri Aurobindo's Thought*

STEPHEN R. WHITE  
*Appalachian State University*

**ABSTRACT:** The challenge for scholars in higher education is to explore globalization as not only a social problem but also to explore visionary ideas from which to conceptualize globalization. This challenge requires that we construct new prescriptive models for a global studies agenda that advances a more subjective humanitarian existence; consistent with research of today's college students learning dispositions. The proposition presented here is that Indian philosopher Sri Ghose Aurobindo's (1881-1955) Neo-Hindu evolutionary theory of human, psyche and social evolution can provide the foundation for augmenting a new Holistic model of contemplative learning of globalization as meaningful Ultimacy.

**Keywords:** globalization, higher education, holistic education, Sri Aurobindo

**RESUMÉ:** Les universitaires doivent faire face à la mondialisation non seulement d'un côté social mais aussi d'un côté visionnaire à partir duquel ils doivent la concevoir. C'est un enjeu où il faut reconstruire de nouveaux modèles normatifs pour un programme d'études internationales qui met en avant une existence humanitaire plus subjective et qui tient en compte les dispositions d'apprentissage des étudiants de collèges d'aujourd'hui. La proposition présente la théorie néo hindoue du philosophe indien Sri Ghose Aurobindo (1881-1955) sur l'évolution humaine, psychique et sociale qui peut servir de pierre angulaire pour développer un nouveau modèle holistique de formation sur la mondialisation en tant que finalité incontestable.

**Mots-clés:** mondialisation, enseignement supérieur, enseignement holistique, Sri Aurobindo

*"There is an evolution of the consciousness behind the evolution of the species and this spiritual evolution must end in a realization, individual and collective, [that] Man is a transitional being who has seen that there can be a higher status of consciousness [state of existence] than his own. ..."*

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

### *Higher Education in Our Age of Globalization*

Scholars assert that current economic, political and social globalization has been occurring since historical epochs of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century's international expansions such as Western Imperialism. How globalization is framed here is that today is an entirely new human and social phenomenon because it is truly *global* in scope. It is truly a planetary phenomenon due primarily to scientific technological advancements. Technological developments in our age are resulting in social and psyche interconnectedness on a world-wide scale that is accelerating toward becoming more expansive (Steger, 2013).

Over the last quarter century, global studies in higher education have explored how these global developments may forever transform the way we think about each other and influence the future social reality constructed. The emergence of a new epoch of globalization issue are especially challenging for those of us in higher education. This is especially true for those of us who are ethically committed to educating toward a future existence where global cooperation is the dominate culture and planetary citizenship is held in the same social esteem as pious nationalism.

For others, globalization is the idea that humankind is evolving into an interconnected social system producing a corresponding higher level of collective consciousness on a planetary scale. As such, humankind now has a collective responsibility to facilitate current and future evolutionary movement toward the construction of a novel global culture and to cultivate collective consciousness on an earthly scale (Bruteau, 2001; Campbell, MacKinnon, Stevens, 2010; Friedman, 2005).

Without question theorizing about globalization is an intensely convoluted undertaking because it is a multifaceted sociological phenomenon and epistemologically an intensely interdisciplinary quandary. Primarily this is true because the perception of globalization varies depending on the position that is being advanced when defining it. Globalization can be framed from a conservative, neo-liberal, critical theorist, or postmodern perspectives while defining diverse problems such as global

convergence and cultural divergence, worldwide social homogenization or global heterogenization, and local needs in conflict with national, regional, and international interests (Fitzen & Zinn, 2011; Stromquist, 2002; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000).

These educational perspectives reveals how convoluted globalization is to frame and address appropriately; certainly there does not exist "one best way." Is there another insight that is often overlooked at that provides important insight as to how to approach global studies in higher education; an approach through the humanities and arts and letters. Due to the severity of present day international problems, speculative and creative idealistic global thought holds minimal interest for most in that academy. Nevertheless, I assert that the time is ripe for a resurgence of scholarly interest in higher education for a critical yet a creative positive muse in which to provide the foundations for global studies; that is cultivating minds who strive for a sense of idealized meaningful purpose in these times.

#### *Holistic studies and the quest for meaning*

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) conducted two major studies on students' and faculty's the perspective of spirituality, its role in their lives and how to their education experience and psychological development. Their finding revealed for students 76% are searching for deeper meaning and purpose in life. Of the 40,670 faculty at 421 colleges and universities 70% of faculty seek to develop a meaningful philosophy of 69% and believe that meaning musing is essential to integrate into one's life (Hoppe & Speck, 2005; Speck & Hoppe, 2007).

The realization from both HERI's extensive research of students and faculty is that meaningful learning is becoming a serious component of academic discourse that requires new ways to teach and learn about social issues. Today's students and this generation of faculty are active contemplative questions between material pursuits and spiritual quest within quite often within global context.

UCLA's HERI and other contemporary educators research findings supports nickel infusing Aurobindo's thought and intellectual musing within a global studies agenda that explores globalism with the context of meaningful Ultimacy. There is much to reorient all peoples of the planet toward the future. The world today is grounded upon fragmented cultural perspective that perpetuate national sovereignty, social segregation, autonomous individualism, and competitive market economics. Nothing less

than a collective social transformation is required through education so that future peoples of the planet do not become dysfunctional global citizens. Aurobindo's theories of global evolution does seem to indeed bridge the challenge of education today while challenging our learners' inner drive for meaning learning and intellectual musings of Ultimacy regarding tomorrow's global state of being. The suggestion here is that one source in our quest for a sense ultimate meaning of our globalizing life-world is that of Sri Ghose Aurobindo's thought.

Miller (2005) states defines holistic education as the process of learning that extends beyond that of objective reality. He writes that "he attempts to nurture the development of the 'whole person'... [Through] addressing spirituality in the curriculum [which] can mean reawakening students to a sense of awe and wonder" (p.2).

In concert with holistic education is the recent emergence of contemplative teaching and learning. Barbezat and Bush (2013) state that through creating meaning learning through thoughtful content and context that it deepens learners' abilities to contemplate the inseparable spiritual causes of truth, compassion and justice. In essence the higher experience becomes more meaningful and promotes one's deep musing on the Ultimate purpose.

Sanders (2013) believes that the academy must seek to develop minds that are attentive to the ever changing social life world but also to their inner life world that provides meaningful contemplation. These characteristics have never been in more demand than today with an increasingly complex and growing interdependent global community. Thus global educators must seek intellectually fulfilling notions of an interconnected world to infuse into contemplative means of thinking and learning.

Forbes (2003) asserts that social transformation will not occur without a sense of vital purpose, an idealistic vision that empowers individuals for social change. More specifically he argues that an effective motive for social action will not emerge without an idealism of "Ultimacy." To educate toward the construction of a global social order that is a greater state beyond our present social reality, without an idea of Ultimate meaning is like putting the cart before the horse. Concepts of social Ultimacy constructs "meaningful mental models" of potential social transformation that can be manifested as purposeful social praxis. Education is the social platform from which to disseminate knowledge infused with notions of ultimate meaning (pp. 18-22).

Forbes thinks that global education can advance a shared vision relevant to greater society while also being subjectively meaningful to the individual. Thus a vision of cooperative engagement in a cause for social progress is one of the noblest actions an educator can aspire. However, effective social action requires as its foundation an affective idealistic concept of Ultimacy (p. 22). Forbe's hypothesis is a rational and logical argument for global educators to explore as contemplative global thought in search of a theoretical foundation for a sense of educating toward the future.

### *Sri Aurobindo's Thought*

Sri Ghose Aurobindo (1872-1950) was an avant-garde intellectual and neo-Hindu philosopher. He sought to philosophically reconcile Western scientific rationalism with Eastern transcendental metaphysics into a holistic narrative of ultimate reality (Chaturvedi, 2002).

Born in Calcutta India, Aurobindo was educated at Cambridge University in Great Britain. His academic interest was broadly interdisciplinary: political science, education, sociology, psychology and philosophy. He was profoundly influenced by Western thought: empirical pragmatism, logical rationalism and romantic idealism. The idea of human evolution as perpetual motion became the foundation of his sociological theories, political ideology and educational thought (Bruteau, 1971, 1974; Dalal, 2001; Purani, 2001; Susai, 1993).

After graduation from Cambridge, Aurobindo returned to India. There he became politically active in the nation's struggle for independence from British imperialism. He became an extraordinary political statesmen and a revolutionary activist in the people's struggle for national liberation. At the time, the British authorities labeled him as the most dangerous revolutionary in India. Eventually he was captured and charged for sedition, and imprisoned to solitary confinement for some time (Gandhi, 1992; Heehs, 1989; Varma, 1998).

While confined to incarceration he experienced a spiritual transformation. He claimed to have experienced a Divine presence "as all beings and all that is"; a mystical vision all of reality in a state of unification. Thereafter Aurobindo immersed himself in the study of Hindu philosophy of metaphysical monism; a non-dualistic Absolute Reality that exists behind the empirical world of physical appearance, was now the nexus of his thinking (Bruteua, 1974; Feys, 1977; Vrekhem, 1998, Zaehner, 1971).

Aurobindo was convinced that his time of national political activism was over and that his future responsibility was to the greater service of advancing international social cooperation and the conscious transformation of all humankind. He began researching human evolution as being interconnected as manifestation of the “absolute reality”. Humankind’s empirical life-world without (evolution) and the metaphysical psyche-world within (involution) are interconnected and evolving toward Ultimate Reality. He set out to see through the empirical life-world only to realize that our ultimate unification is that behind outward physical appearance. He stated that it is easier to experience the finite being of the real world but it is more difficult to see the infinite unification of being. From this realization; Aurobindo began writing volumes of scholarly works on social issues and while psychologically developing a metaphysical notion of evolving minds (Heehs, 1999; Singh, 1989).

Political action, social praxis and the quest for self-involution are interconnected human endeavors which he termed as *Integral Yoga*. Integral Yoga seeks to change of our psyche inner self and social outer life as a process of global evolution (Aurobindo, 1971, 1985a, 1985b, 1990, 1998a; Kluback, 2003).

Integral Yoga is not a specific physical or psychological methodology. Rather it is a process of numinous evolutionary energy that causes increasing levels of transformation of the psyche-world that is observable as a radical shift in our social life-world without; the ultimate goal of human evolution (Aurobindo, 1993; 1998b; Overzee, 1992; Rishabachand, 1993; Wygant, 2001).

Aurobindo states:

The way of yoga must be a living thing not a mental [psychological] principal or a set [physical] method to be struck to against all necessary variations.... a spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in matter is a contrast developing self-formation till the form can reveal the indwelling spirit...the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence  
(Chaturvedi, 2002, pp. 54-55).

Aurobindo’s theory is that evolution is a long historical process with a universal energy causing a dialectical intercourse between spiritual decent into the world resulting in evolutionary assent of the human psyche. The idea being that involution is the incarnation of the divine on earth through descent into the collective embodiment of human consciousness. This evolutionary interplay between the numinous energy and the human psyche corresponds to progressive social movement through humankind’s

individual and collective advancement, globally (Aurobindo, 1974b).

Within this context, Aurobindo asserts that planetary evolution has resulted in distinctive earthly realms of existence. Each earthly realm has a discernable evolutionary direction and elevated appearance of the psyche. He identifies four distinct yet unified earthly realms with a corresponding reality: *Material realm* (physical reality), *life realm* (biological reality), *intellectual realm* (psyche-social reality), and *metaphysical realm* (higher consciousness-spiritual reality) (Aurobindo, 1998b; Combs, 1996; Vrekehm, 1998).

He describes how matter evolved into life resulting ultimately in the emergence of the human species with an elevated level of consciousness. With the advent of the human species a more complex process of evolution was set in motion. Because evolution is in perpetual motion, it follows that the human species cannot be the end point of previous evolutionary movement but is a unique transitional stage (Aurobindo, 1998a, 1998b; Dalal, 2001; Vrekehm, 1998).

He theorizes that there has evolved seven evolutionary states of mind (psyche) with distinctive degree of consciousness more elevated than the previous level: *Physical mind* is the most basic state of the brain producing elemental consciousness. *Vital mind* is the state of life mind with a level of consciousness associated with meta-cognition and affective modes of thinking. *Higher mind* (a transitional state) is the state of mind resulting in the first level of elevated consciousness. It is a transitional state between base biological mind and that of reflective knowing (higher consciousness). *Illuminated mind* is a more complex level of consciousness that has characteristics of intuitive knowing and producing hyper-visionary thinking. *Intuitive mind* represents a distinct state of mind and level of consciousness empowered by an astute awareness of Absolute Reality. This degree of consciousness is found manifested in extraordinary persons endowed with innovative insights and a novel sense of relevance regarding the future human evolution. *Over mind* (a transitional state) is a state of mind characterized by a transcendental level of consciousness. It is the cognitive ability for integrative thinking, unitary knowing and mystical insight resulting in future human evolution and eventual global-unity.

*Supramind* (i.e., Supermind) is a future state of mind, the highest state of human psyche and total transformation of the human species into a new breed of life and mind on Earth. While all the previous levels of minds are supported solely by physical

and psyche realms of realities. Aurobindo defines the Supramind as stage where the human psyche is bathed in Life Divine; it will totally transform consciousness and empower individuals to reconstruct human relations into a social solidarity constructing a collective new global unity (Aurobindo, 1974a, 1991, 1998c; Mukherjee, 1990; Satprem, 1985).

Aurobindo writes (1974a):

The animal is the living laboratory of the evolutionary urge, illuminating and change must take up and re-create the whole being, mind, life, and body: it must not be only an inner experience of the divinity but a remodeling of both the inner and outer existence by its power; it must take form not only in the life of the individual but as a collective life of Gnostic beings [Supermen] (p.68).

Aurobindo declares that the notion of Life Divine is not a theory of another worldly reality, strictly an esoteric idealism. Life Divine is a tangible energy infusing ever-higher expressions of consciousness bringing about greater evolutionary unfolding through humankind into the world. Supramind results in individuals becoming fully aware of their uniqueness as well as their psyche and social unification with others without perceived contradictions between the two. The process of involution of Life Divine on planet Earth is resulting in the birth of a new species, a “Gnostic being” or a being of knowledge, endowed with the capacity to steer future social evolution toward a state of global-unity (Aurobindo, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c).

Thus, for Aurobindo, humankind is currently in movement toward a new stage of evolution is resulting in an increasing number of individuals’ experiencing a deeper degree of consciousness desiring a unifying global evolution. Accordingly, our age is witnessing the advent of a new and novel social life-world being born that will become vastly more advanced than our stage of existence. The involution of divine spirit into individual’s psyche development toward increasingly advanced levels of collective consciousness. As a result, societies will continue to evolve toward greater interaction and thus converge amongst themselves constructing even greater social globalization (1974b):

The appearance of mind and body on earth makes a critical step, a deceive change in the course of evolution ...the being has become awake and aware of himself; there has been manifest in mind its will to develop, to grow in knowledge, to deepen the inner and widen the outer existence to increase the capacities of nature. Man has seen that there can be higher states of existence than his own.

For truth and knowledge is an idle gleam if knowledge bring not power to change the world (p.51).

The convergence of humanity into an intensified global-unity will not result in an impersonal society of estranged individuals but will actually unite individuals. The transformation of consciousness will result in persons becoming free of self-interested ego driven individualism through becoming reflectively aware of their own psyche development within the context of others experiencing the same process. Currently humankind has entered a new age of accelerated personal involution and social evolution on a global scale. The consequence is that the transformation of an individual's self-consciousness is perpetuated through the intensification of social interaction with others who are experiencing the same evolutionary progression. A harmonized collectivity of consciousness, the Supramind is creating a New Human Specie (1974b; 1985a, 1991).

### *Closing Thoughts*

Postmodernism is the philosophical advocacy of exploring competing theoretical points of view and challenges us to contemplate and honor diverse perspectives (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008; Lindholm, 2014; Palmer & Zajone, 2010). From this perspective, the infusion of Aurobindoian thought into a global education model is within the philosophical disposition of postmodernism. Aurobindoian thought is an Eastern idealistic paradox to the Western realist analysis of globalization. His thought is not an analysis of human global evolution but an evolutionary mythos to be dialectically contrasted against empirical perspectives of globalization. Holistically, the educational objective in exploring his thought is to move learners toward a reflective vision of social cooperation and contemplate consciously one's identity as global citizens (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011; Johnson & O'Grady, 2006).

Thus assertion here is that Aurobindoian thought has core values that can serve as part of the foundations for global education agenda as stated here: (1) Humankind as species is still in evolutionary movement, (2) humankind's current state of existence is only a transitory one, (3) current evolutionary movement is progressing on a global scale toward a point of human unity, (4) consciousness is the apex of past evolutionary phenomenon and focal point of future evolutionary expansion, (5) the expansion of consciousness, on both the individual and collective level, has now empower humankind to direct

evolutionary movement, (7) for the next social evolutionary apex to be fully realized demands cooperative action and global solidarity on the part of humankind. Perhaps the most significant educational value of Aurobindoian thought is the idea that humankind must become educated of the actual possibility of globalization as a meaningful reality. Aurobindo argued that current political ideologies are insufficient to create a real sense of meaningful "Ultimacy" (Aurobindo, 1995, 2000; Lithman, 2003; Dowset, 1977; Dowset & Jawal, 1976; Satprem, 1985).

If humankind is to survive current international conflict then a radical transformation of human consciousness must first occur to reconstruct society. Thus his globalist and humanistic evolutionary ideas contextualizes current globalization within a futurist intellectual framework of Ultimate concern (Aurobindo, 1998b; Hamilton, 2004; Kluback, 2003; Monor, 1998).

As Aurobindo proclaimed:

The coming of a spiritual age must be preceded by the appearance of an increasing number of individuals who are no longer satisfied with the normal intellect, vital, and physical existence of man, but perceive that a greater evolution is the real goal of humanity and attempt to effect it in themselves, and to lead others to it, and make it recognized goal of the race. In proportion as they succeed and the degree they carry this evolution, the yet unrealized potentiality, which they represent, will become an actual possibility of the future (McDermott 1987; p. 7).

For the first time in the history of the Earth, a species has emerged that can consciously participate in its own evolution and consciously direct its own journey into the future. This phenomenon presents an unprecedented opportunity for educators. Globalization today can be advanced through meditative actions and reflective thoughts opening up inestimable untapped human energies.

Again, he states (1974b):

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the humankind mind has achieved its certain directions and enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the material life has been raised up by man's ever active mind and life-will, structure of unmanageable hugeness and complexity... (p.55).

Social and political interaction between the West and East, environmental awareness, advancements in science and technology and developments in global education are objective proofs of evolutionary movement toward global-unity and a shift in humankind's collective consciousness (Aurobindo, 1974b, 1985a, 1985b; Hamilton, 2004).

Some may view Aurobindo's thought as being too peripheral for serious academic consideration and to esoterically speculative to have pragmatic application for a global studies agenda in higher education. The concern is that such idealistic metaphysical rumination distorts us from educating for present day solutions of real social problems. These criticisms do have some validity, but we must honor the voices within and their visions of the external social world without of today's college students as revealed by UCLA's HERI massive research – they are tomorrow's global citizens.

Aurobindo articulates an inspiring vision of the Ultimate reality of the future evolution of humankind and the emergence of a global psycho-social reality that can empower a global education agenda in a new and novel way (Chaturvedi, 2002):

The unification of mankind is underway, though only in an imperfect initiative, organized but struggling against tremendous difficulties.... which is not limited by present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference.... international spirit and outlook must grow up and international forms and institutions; even it may be such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship and a voluntary fusion of cultures may appear in the process of the change....A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race...if this evolution is to take place (pp. 69-71).

In summation, Aurobindo adamantly asserted that human progress is occurring despite continuing international socioeconomic strife and political conflict. The future of human evolution is not merely an individual affair but a communal one. The global community exists to serve the individual but is the duty of the individual to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the community. Consequently he visualizes a future state of existence that will embrace us into a new global collective social reality of authentic global-unity (Aurobindo, 1974b; Bruteau, 1971).

Aurobindo's philosophy intellectually challenges students and faculty alike to deeply ponder holistically: What is the "ultimate, meaningful purpose of globalization?

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**Address for Correspondence**

Stephen R. White, D. Arts  
Professor of Higher Education Studies  
Appalachian State University  
Rich College of Education  
1496 Bairds Creek Rd  
Vilas, North Carolina 28692  
whitesr@boone.net