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"Integral Education Framework for the Evolution of Human Consciousness in the Light of Sri Aurobindo"

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Introduction

What is the purpose of education? To acquire skills for earning one's livelihood? To develop social awareness for better citizenship? To foster intelligence and character? Or to embark on the journey of self-discovery? However impossible it may seem, intuitively, we believe it encompasses all of the above! But what if one were to examine the school and college curricula today? What would be found is nothing more than a poor attempt to provide solely the skills for earning one's livelihood, merely a remnant of the Industrial Revolution, where educational factories were established to create manpower that assisted in maximising production and economic benefit (International Commission on the Development of Education).

Human development, in its current form, prioritizes material advancement above all other facets of humanity. The impact of this is notably evident in our relationship with the very ecosystem we belong to: nature. We are often unaware of how our actions influence the surrounding world because we fail to see the dead fish floating in a local pond as a direct result of our dumping. I only read about it in an enclosed, air-conditioned room, so it never has the desired impact! We inhabit so-called 'safe spaces', leaving our children with little opportunity to experience the joys and beauty of trees, birds, the sun, and the ocean (Dewey; UNESCO, Reimagining Our Futures Together). If education in its current form cannot provide the necessary tools to create a better tomorrow, what should the framework of good education be? What criteria should we use to measure our success? These questions demand our urgent attention (Krishnamurti). The following attempts to answer that very question.

The 5 Pillars of Education for Tomorrow

The education for tomorrow will be child/learner-centric. The role of the teacher will change from an instructor to that of a guide and a facilitator (Krishnamurti). For our model of education to be relevant and effective, it must have the following fundamental components:

1. It must be Holistic and Integral (3R to 3H to 3A) (Bloom).
2. It must be Contextual (pertaining first to the direct environment the child dwells in) (Johnson).
3. It must be Experiential (it must both draw from and provide experiences to a child in his growth) (Kolb).
4. It must be Trans-disciplinary (it must stretch beyond the impositions of specialities and provide a synthesised view of the world) (Nicolescu).
5. It must enable the development of Wisdom & Intuitive Skills that transcend linear & logical reasoning (Hogarth).

1. Holistic and Integral Education (3R to 3H to 3A)

Over time, we have come to understand that the world needs to move away from the 3Rs (Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic), which served us well during the Industrial Age (Bloom). The paradigm has shifted toward the 3Hs (Head, Hands, and Heart).

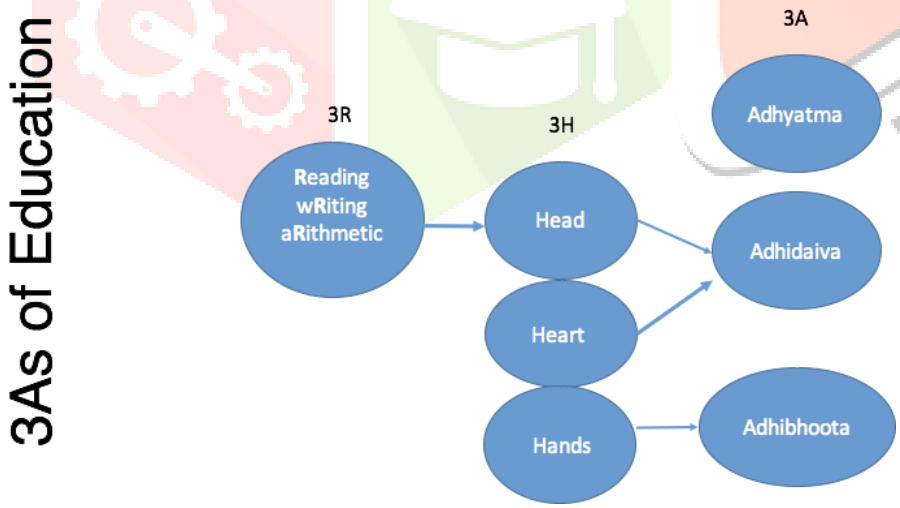
While this represents a more comprehensive approach to education, it is still insufficiently holistic, as it lacks something distinctly Indian: an appreciation of and connection to the world that transcends the mere physical (Radhakrishnan). To encompass the spiritual dimension by drawing on ancient Indian philosophy and tradition, the 3As are now presented: Adhibhoota (pertaining to the physical, matter, and skills of the hands, etc.), Adhidaiva (involving the mental and emotional faculties, i.e., head and heart), and Adhyathma (addressing the concepts of Soul, Consciousness, and Spirituality) (Vivekananda).

i. Adhibhoota is the physical, material universe, both in its entirety and in its individual parts. In our context, it means the knowledge of the physical and of one's immediate material surroundings, their workings and their existence.

ii. Adhidaiva—Head and Heart. 'Adhi' means under, and 'daiva' means Gods like Agni and Indra, which symbolise Will and Knowledge, respectively. These faculties of Consciousness represent the emotional and mental aspects of human beings.

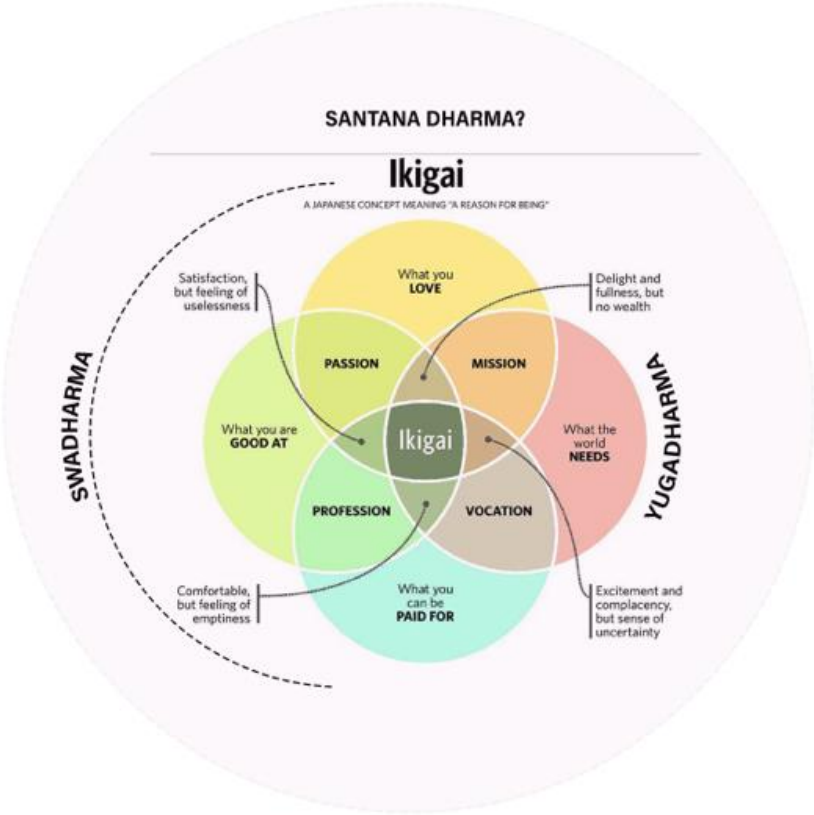
While Adhibhoota corresponds to the Hands in the 3H framework and Adhidaiva to the Head and Heart, the third element, Adhyatma, is the differentiating factor of the 3A framework.

iii. Adhyatma - This is the eternal soul principle in humans that transcends physical, emotional, or mental existence. Adhyatma helps us find answers to life's big questions - the eternal truth of our existence and our ability to elevate our faculties to understand beyond the temporal. Adhyatma expands our consciousness from the individual to the cosmic and then to the transcendental level, where our personality dissolves, and our consciousness merges with the infinite. Our awareness of the world shifts from sensory perception to knowledge through identity. In this state of connectedness, we best understand and appreciate the impact of our actions on every living being. Thus, when we are one with it, we enjoy the universe most and are free from bondage to physicality. We are then truly free (Aurobindo; Radhakrishnan).



IKIGAI and Education

To understand these things in greater detail we must first understand the three roles of man in accordance with Indian philosophy: *Swadharma*, one's own personal driving force, his duty to himself and his family, *Yugadharma*, the need of the times, his duty to his nation and society and *Sanatana Dharma*, his duty towards the realisation of his eternal higher purpose of life.



The purpose of proper education should be to understand one's journey concerning all three roles combined to create a genuinely fulfilling life. Swadharma and Yugadharma also form part of the Ikigai method of discovering one's true calling, but it overlooks one indispensable element: Sanatana Dharma, which represents man's eternal duty and his true purpose in life (Garcia and Miralles; Auluck). A nation, like an individual, becomes truly great when it achieves its profound meaning and purpose in the world by following what Plato would refer to as its essence. India is the oldest living, unbroken civilisation in the world, yet it embodies youthful vitality. This is possible only when civilisation is structured on spiritual principles that possess an inherent regenerative quality, thereby making it ageless and timeless (Radhakrishnan). A case in point is the tenets of the Bhagavad Gita, a treatise on higher living that has not lost an iota of significance over the past three thousand years and remains relevant (Vivekananda). India has served as the flag-bearer for the world to grasp the spiritual depths of our existence. Perhaps it is time we embraced that mantle, the mantle to lead the world toward the third A of education, Adhyatma, which has been absent from the Western imported and imparted education practised in India for the past two hundred years (Dharampal).

2. Contextual Education

Unfortunately, in India today, whether it is Cherrapunji in Meghalaya or the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, the curriculum in schools and colleges remains the same. And equally irrelevant! It emphasizes providing a wealth of information but fails to impart actual knowledge or the ability to apply that knowledge or handle one's context (NCERT; Johnson). The consequence may easily elude anyone: the illusion of effort and examinations seems to foster confidence in the education system. For instance, students in India memorise all the soil types found across the country without the slightest clue about the soil in their own gardens! Research in education concludes that learning must progress from the near and familiar to the remote and obscure (UNESCO, Educating for a Sustainable Future). It is essential to learn about one's context and ecosystem before abstracting that knowledge for application in other settings. Once students comprehend their context and learn how to apply knowledge to it, it becomes simple to expand their affinity to different contexts. Thus, it is vital to consider the curriculum not merely as content, but as a framework and to train teachers to design their content within that framework (International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century).

For instance, in the desert conditions of Ladakh, where rainfall is less than 100 mm, life is sustained by glacial melt water, which significantly differs from the crops that flourish due to monsoon rains. How can students in Ladakh benefit from education if, after 12 years of school and 4 years of college, they learn nothing about their fragile mountain ecosystem and the problems and issues that require attention

and solutions? It is no wonder there is migration to the plains, resulting in the abandonment of their land, parents, and opportunities! Context is defined in three ways: by proximity in space, in time, and in experience. The familiarity of space is easy to grasp as it refers to the physical context. The nearness of time reflects the spirit of the times (Zeitgeist). For example, the spirit of our times today may be characterized as scientific-technological. Nearness of experience contains two facets: native language and Indigenous wisdom, both of which colonisation corrodes and both of which must be urgently reclaimed (Dharampal).

The relegation of one's mother tongue is a distinctly post-colonial feature. Still, here in our motherland, we seem not to be improving the status of native tongues but rather worsening their spread. English as the medium of instruction in most elite schools makes it difficult for many children to access quality education, while its predominance in higher education establishes a monopoly for the privileged (UNESCO, Rethinking Education). One plausible answer to these questions may be a change in mindset, which will initiate a whole host of other changes, ultimately making our country better. A fundamental element of these changes will be recognising that only through the synthesis of oriental and occidental ideas can a better society be envisioned, instead of blindly following our erstwhile colonial masters (Radhakrishnan). The consequence of this would be a transformation of our education system to meet the needs of our people in their contexts, creating a better system of education that does not attempt to teach a Ladakhi child 'F' for fan when he has never seen a fan in his life.

Moreover, a conscious effort is needed to use native languages in education, making Sanskrit the backbone of instruction. Why Sanskrit, one might ask? This is because all Indian languages have Sanskrit as their root, and even the Dravidian languages share deep connections with Vedic Sanskrit (Vivekananda). This connection would provide us access to a wealth of knowledge from ancient Indian scriptures about various topics, including Ayurveda, which focuses on preventing disease rather than curing it. Much Indigenous knowledge is preserved in the vernacular, expressed through idioms, phrases, and sayings relevant to one's context, and it is often lost through the use of English. English can and should continue to be taught as seriously as the mother tongue, as it serves as our medium of interaction with the outside world, enabling the expression of indigenous knowledge to a global audience.

2. Experiential Learning

Humans, unlike any other species, have always used the environment around them to learn and grow. The Gurukul imparted teaching in the open, often using deeply philosophical metaphors about nature to better express complex ideas (Dharampal). We exercised and played in the open, making new friends and learning to be empathetic. Hand, Head, and heart were all developed through nature's blessing. For children to find their Swadharma, it is essential that they experience and experiment with the various facets of education, subjects, and skills and see what interests them most and how it contributes to their immediate communities (Auluck). They must be deeply engaged with their knowledge and their development, something possible only through complete immersion, a blacking out of all else but the task at hand (Kolb). A significant reason why immersion in a subject doesn't usually take place in schools is because the division of a day into 40-minute slots gives not only a superficial understanding of concepts but also an impression of rigid boundaries between subjects. The mind is developed when one is engaged more deeply with one concept than superficially with many. Perhaps it is this understanding that led Finland to do away with their structured forty-minute classes (UNESCO, Rethinking Education).

Our classrooms and testing methods must be experiential and application-oriented (Dewey; Kolb). When children engage in hands-on activities, they recognise their strengths, weaknesses, and best contributions. Engaging with new concepts while applying them enhances understanding, retention, and application-mindedness. Additionally, experiential testing methods improve a child's aptitude in specific skills or knowledge areas for both teachers and learners. For instance, entrance exams to engineering institutions and the UPSC do not assess young minds on what they would actually do as engineers or in administrative and other services. However, this does not mean we lack experiential examinations; for example, entrance exams for the Army in India are deeply experiential and are followed by extensive training. In politics, Singapore instructs schools to select the brightest minds for specialized education in governance (International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century).

4. Trans-Disciplinary Approach

Although it may seem normal today, we began dividing knowledge into subjects to specialise only since the Industrial Revolution, leading to both problems and solutions that are unnaturally limited in their breadth, no matter how deep they may be. Nature makes no distinction between physics, chemistry, and biology. The past makes no distinction between history, politics, and literature. What if we return to that same reality once more, abolishing subjects and instead imparting knowledge grouped into various themes, as will be explored further, to transcend the boundaries of subjects and focus instead on fully understanding an object or theme? I have attempted to manifest something of this nature at MIEB by proposing that subjects be entirely eliminated, and in their place, introducing the following themes:

Theme 1: Who am I?

This theme encompasses the following:

1. The theme divides the being into four segments: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual, drawing from the *pancha koshas* of Indian scripture. They are then further divided: the physical into anatomy, physiology, yoga, sports, and nutrition; the emotional segment into psychology and neuro-chemical biology; the mental into neurology and neuroscience; and the spiritual into religion, philosophy, and spiritual practice.
2. Ideals, beliefs and values
3. Rights and responsibilities
4. Relationships
5. Self Actualization
6. Existential and philosophical investigations into the being and his purpose

Unfortunately, the same human being is studied in bits and parts through Anatomy and Physiology, which are branches of Medicine, Psychology, which is part of liberal arts, and so on. As a result, we have specialists in Psychology who do not understand Physiology, and even those in all the aforementioned fields may lack the larger philosophical perspective that pervades each facet.

Theme 2: The World Around Me

This theme encompasses:

- Culture and context
- Tradition
- Literature
- History
- Geography
- Botany
- Zoology
- Ecology

Theme 3: How does the Natural World Work?

This theme encompasses:

- How do we perceive the world?
- Purification of the senses: for collecting data without bias
- Physics: Energy, Machines, Force
- Inventions and Discoveries
- Chemistry
- Biology
- Maths
- Space

Theme 4: How is the World Organised?

This theme encompasses:

- Economics
- Civics, governance and politics
- food, agriculture, clothing (textiles & fashion), shelter (architecture)
- Army
- Law & Legal frameworks
- Transport & Communication
- International relations
- Man-made interventions: Banking, Hospitals, Schools & Colleges, Various agencies

Theme 5: How do I express myself

- Writing
- Public Speaking
- Story-telling
- Performing Arts
- Vocational education
- Theatre
- Handicraft, sculpting and pottery
- Games and sports

Theme 6: Ideas

The sixth theme encompasses the significant ideas that have transformed our world, such as the Enlightenment, which are studied in their entirety through art history, science and mathematics, literature, and politics. Other major concepts, like 'Democracy,' are also central to our world. Additionally, philosophical epochs in various disciplines, such as the Rococo or Romantic periods, must be explored for their own sake and are examined in a comprehensive manner. This approach provides students access to the best ideas that the human mind has discovered, allowing some of these concepts to permeate our own lives.

5. Bloom's Taxonomy Extended - Higher Order Intuitive Skills (HOIS)

Even in the realm of cognitive learning, attention should also focus on higher-order thinking skills, particularly intuition, rather than merely lower-order thinking skills.

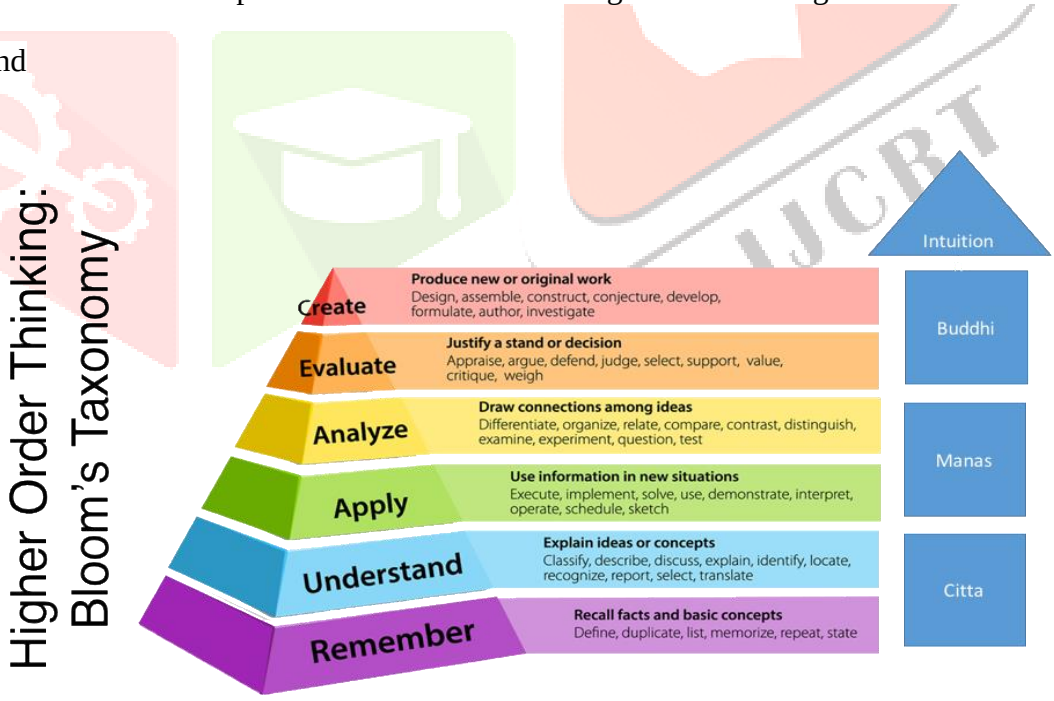
The lower-order thinking skills are:

a. Remember
b. Understand, and
c. Apply

These can produce clerks and workers but not designers, innovators and entrepreneurs.

To produce innovators and entrepreneurs we need to foster high order thinking skills which are:

a. Analyse
b. Evaluate, and
c. Create

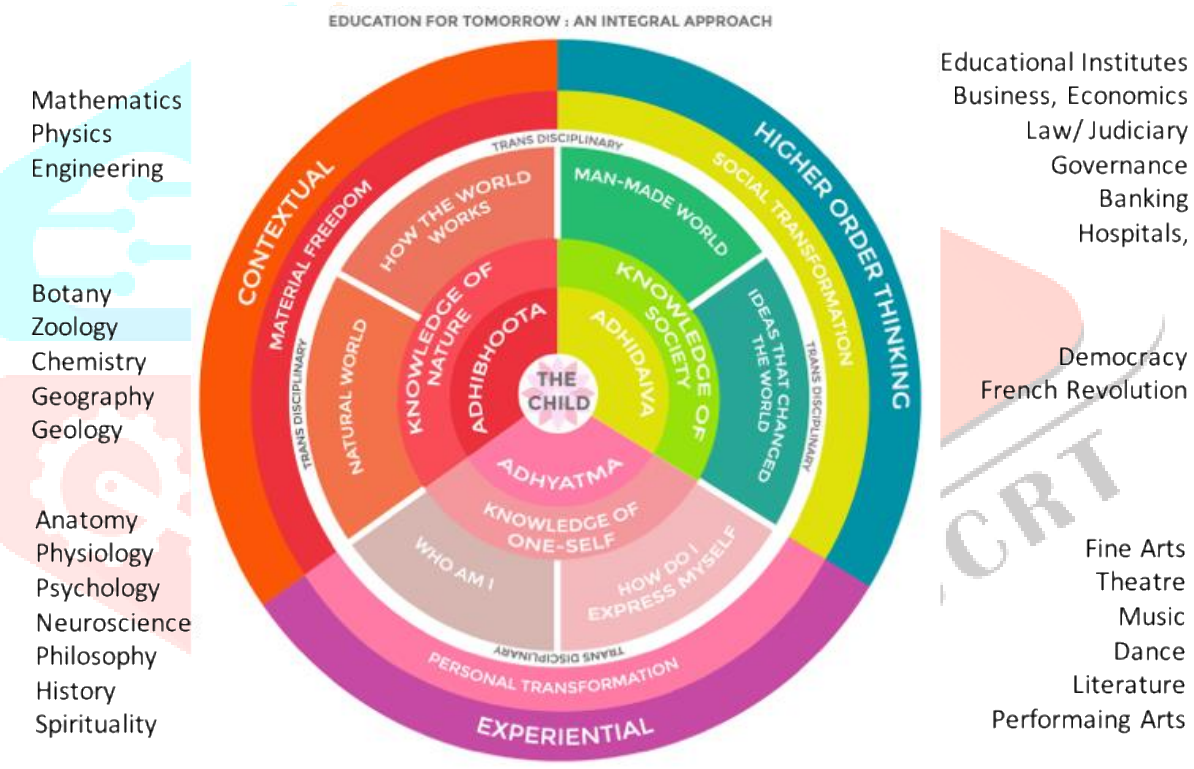


For example, the lower-order thinking question in Geometry would be: If the length of a rectangle is 5 metres and the breadth is 4 metres, what is the area? Any student must remember the formula, understand it, and then apply it (Bloom) to solve this question. However, to foster higher-order thinking, a more challenging question would be: What shape of a playground would you design if you wanted to maximise the area, and how would you create it? Here, the student not only recalls the formulas for squares, rectangles, and so on, but also understands, applies, analyses, and evaluates the areas before finally designing and constructing the playground (Johnson). Again, we connect Bloom's framework with the Indian system and extend it beyond Bloom! Remembering and understanding correspond to Citta, which refers to both passive and active memory. Applying and analysing relates to Manas, the sense mind that

evaluates data collected by the senses. Evaluating and creating correspond to Buddhi, the higher faculties of the mind. However, the Indian system extends beyond this to the faculty of Intuition, the next higher capability that our evolutionary journey hints at (Hogarth; Cera and Sinclair). Artificial Intelligence (AI) has already shown the potential to penetrate the first three layers of Bloom's taxonomy: Remember, Understand, and Apply. This suggests that, in the near future, many jobs within these lower tiers of Bloom's Taxonomy will likely be replaced by AI (UNESCO, Reimagining Our Futures Together). Therefore, our education system must equip students with the ability to employ higher-order skills – analyse, evaluate, and create- to tap into the dormant faculties of intuition. Skills that make us human, such as soft skills and empathy, will be increasingly valued, as they cannot be replicated by machines. Ultimately, this is what ensures our survival and continuation as human beings.

Education for Tomorrow: An Integral Approach

The comprehensive framework I propose to address the challenges in today's education system regarding curriculum design, development, and pedagogy is titled " *Education for Tomorrow: An Integral Approach*. " This framework considers all relevant factors. Firstly, it is child-centric, viewing each child as a flower that must be nurtured into existence rather than forcibly shaped into a pre-conceived mould. It recognizes the teacher's role as that of a facilitator to befriend, rather than a dictator to fear. This framework can best be depicted using the concentric circular image shown below.



The epicentre is the child who radiates three aspects of his being – the *Adhibhoota* (the physical), the *Adhidaiva* (the mental and emotional), and the *Adhyatma* (the spiritual). *Adhibhoota* is the knowledge of nature and the physical world, advanced through the trans-disciplinary themes of "Natural World" and "How the World Works, " enhanced through contextual education, leading to material freedom. *Adhidaiva*, the knowledge of the collective, is addressed by the themes of "Man-made World" and "Ideas that Changed the World" and is made possible through systems and movements inspired by the higher faculties of man, leading to social transformation. Finally, Adhyatma represents knowledge of one's inner potential, enriching experiential education and exploration of "Who am I?" and expressed through various human endeavours in the arts, sciences, and literature, leading to personal transformation and man's true purpose, *Sanatana Dharma* on earth!

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