



The Indian Concept of Education : A Review

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Abstract : The ideal of education has been very grand, noble and high in ancient India. Its aim, according to Herbert Spencer is the ‘training for completeness of life’ and the molding of character of men and women for the battle of life. The history of the educational institutions in ancient India shows how old is her cultural history. It points to a long history. In the early stage it is rural, not urban. British Sanskrit scholar Arthur Anthony MacDonnell (1854-1930) author of A History of Sanskrit Literature says, “Some hundreds of years must have been needed for all that is found” in her culture. The aim of education was at the manifestation of the divinity in men, it touches the highest point of knowledge. In order to attain the goal the whole educational method is based on plain living and high thinking pursued thought eternity.

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As the individual is the chief concern and centre of this Education, education also is necessarily individual. It is an intimate relationship between the teacher and the pupil. The relationship is inaugurated by a religious ceremony called Upanayana. It is not like the admission of a pupil to the register of a school on his payment of the prescribed fee. The spiritual meaning of Upanayana, and its details inspired by that meaning, are elaborated, in many texts and explained below in the proper place. By Upanayana, the teacher, “holding the pupil within his as in a womb, impregnated him with his spirit, and delivers him in a new birth.” The pupil is then known as Dvija, “born afresh” in a new existence, “twice born” (Satapatha Brahmana). The education that is thus begun is called by; the significant term Brahmacharya, indication that it is a mode of life, a system of practices.

“India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe’s languages: she was the mother of our philosophy; mother, through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics; mother, through the Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity; mother, through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all”.

– Will Durant, American historian

This conception of education moulds its external form. The pupil must find the teacher. He must live with him as in member of his family and is treated by him in every way as his son. The school is a natural formation, not artificial constituted. It is the home of their teacher. It is a hermitage, amid surrounding, beyond the distractions of urban life, functioning in solitude and silence. The constant and intimate association between teacher and taught is vital to education as conceived in this system. The pupil is imbibing the inward method of the teacher, the secrets of his efficiency, the spit of his life and work, and these things are too subtle to be taught.

It seems in the early Vedic or Upanishad times education was esoteric. The word Upanishad itself suggests that it is learning got by sitting at the feet of the master. The knowledge was to be got, as the Bhagvad Gita says, by obeisance, by questioning and serving the teacher.