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CONCEPTION OF EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIAN TRADITION AND CULTURE AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

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Abstract

At the outset, let us ask the question as to why we need to explore the concept of education in the ancient Indian tradition and why we want to ascertain the relevance of that concept to the present time. Justification for this exploration could arise if we ask a further question, as to whether our present system of education is relevant to our own times and if we are prepared to undertake a critique of the present system.

DO WE NEED TO CHANGE THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF EDUCATION?

There is a view that the present system of education is, after all, quite reasonable and what we need is to make it a little more sophisticated, much more polished, with some modifications here and there like vocationalisation and job-orientation, and what we further need is to ensure accountability of teachers and educational institutions. It has even been prominently asked, in defence of the present system, if we ourselves are not the products of that system and whether we are not, more or less, quite well-equipped to deal with our responsibilities.

There is, on the other hand, a more progressive view, which does not admit that we, the products of the system of education, are what we ought to be, that a better system could have made us better equipped, in terms of both personality and skills; and capable of meeting the demands and challenges of our times. The spectrum of this view is quite wide and at one end, it advocates some major reforms and at the other end, it advocates a number of radical reforms. In any case, this view argues that education must aim at the integral development of personality and that we need to have complete education for the complete human being. It pleads for the harmonisation of the physical, vital and mental faculties and it also recognises that the mental personality itself requires harmonisation of the rational, the ethical and the aesthetic. Two further propositions are also added: first, that the

personality develops best when the educational atmosphere provides to every student a good deal of freedom - freedom in pursuing inner inclinations, freedom in regulating the pace of progress, and freedom in determining directions of education. Secondly, that education should be so child-centred that it not only puts the child in the centre of the classroom but also in the centre of society itself.

Implications of these contentions are momentous. They require major changes in the attitudes of teachers, parents and educational administrators, even of the students themselves. They demand applications of new methodologies of education and transformation in the classroom situation, teaching-learning materials and in the established routine of the educational institutions; they also demand radical reviews of curricula, syllabi and the current examination system.

Closely connected with these demands, life-long education is also being underlined. Correspondingly, great expansion of non-formal education and open system of education is also being advocated. Finally, the concept of learning society is being increasingly proposed as the right setting for all the innovations and reforms of education.

DIFFICULTIES:

The major difficulties in implementing these important proposals are threefold: (i) as noted above, these reforms call for great changes in the attitudes among all the partners of education and these changes are not at all easy or facile;

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(ii) they also imply difficult structural changes, which need to be conceived, designed and implemented on a sustainable basis; and there are no agencies that could accomplish these tasks; and (iii) they require not only major funding but also prudent planning, prioritisation and delicate balancing between the acts of modifying or dismantling the old and that of creation of the new.

NEED FOR BOLDER REFORMS:

It is in the context of this situation, that serious and sincere educationists feel hesitant to make some further and bolder proposals, particularly in the context of the Indian system of education, - the proposals which are indispensable and which can be postponed only at the peril of risking loss of cultural identity and even of crippling the very soul of India.

Let us examine this aspect in some detail.

We are all aware that the current Indian system of education was designed by the Britishers for their narrower purposes and for promoting in our country the western view of India, - her past and her period of decline or backwardness and the cure by which they thought India could occupy some place among those countries, which could tolerably be described as "civilised". Unfortunately, what the Britishers designed has hardly been altered even after our attainment of independence and whatever changes have occurred can only be regarded as cosmetic in character. Worst of all, those institutions which had come up under the influence of the nationalist movement, came to be closed down or they were obliged to fall in line with the "normal" system of education, designed by the Britishers. And the financial allocations made to the education departments were distributed among the increasingly multiplying number of institutions belonging to the "normal" pattern. Free India's money was thus pumped more and more vigorously to spread in India on a vast scale that very system which the nationalist leaders had dreamt to demolish once independence was attained. This situation is continuing with increasing vigour and unless we bestir ourselves vehemently to think afresh and design afresh one does not see how else we shall be able to redress the harm that we are inflicting on generations upon generations and to the cause of Indian renaissance.

FREE INDIA'S FAILURE:

It is noteworthy that the greatest representatives of the Indian renaissance, from Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati to Sri Aurobindo, had perceived in the ancient Indian system

of education such an uplifting and inspiring model that they had all advocated for free India, a national system of education rooted in the ancient Indian conception of education; which would, at the same time, cater to the ideals of internationalism and universality. They had all dreamt of free India where students would relive the presence and guidance of the wise and benign and courageous Rishis who had sown in the soil of India the seeds of perennial inspiration. They wanted to recreate sanctuaries of living souls who could be fostered by teachers who would like Vashistha and Vishwamitra, Vamadeva and Bhardwaj, remain unfettered by dogma or any restraining force. They wanted perfect harmony between the human and the natural, between the individual and the universal, between the mundane and the supramundane. Their message was clear that the ancient Indian concept of education should not only be revisited by free India but should also be resurrected, renovated and perfected by the aid of all that is modern and useful, by all that is Indian and universal.

LET US DO THE NEEDFUL

There is no point in crying over the fact that free India has so far failed in giving shape to the dreams and aspirations of these great pioneers. But is it not overdue that we try to understand them, get into the heart of the ancient Indian system of education, evaluate it in the light of the needs of today and tomorrow and design for our children something new that will give to them the best fruits of their heritage and also the best fruits of modern advancement?

II

THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ANCIENT INDIAN CONCEPT OF EDUCATION:

If we study the Veda and the Upanishads and the related literature from where we can get some glimpses of the ancient Indian concept of education, we shall find that there were three special characteristics: Firstly the fact that the educational process had resulted from the understanding of the fullness of life, its own methods of instruction and how these methods can be employed by teachers to secure acceleration of the progress of students. The second characteristic is related to the astonishing fund of integral knowledge that could serve as the foundation of the contents of education. And the third emerges from the ancient pursuit of individual and collective perfectibility in the light of their laborious experiments related to the human potentialities.

Let us briefly elucidate them.

1. EDUCATION AND LIFE: METHODS OF EDUCATION; ROLE OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS:

Education was conceived as something springing from life itself, and it was conceived as a part of the organisation of life and it was designed to relate education with life and its highest possible fulfilment.

It was observed that life itself is the great teacher of life, that life which is in its outer movement a series of shocks of meeting between individuals and circumstances, has in its inner heart a secret method of progression from untruth to truth, from darkness to light and from death to immortality. It was further observed that this process of life can be systematically organised and methods can be built by which the intended progression can be accelerated. Accordingly, education came to be conceived as a methodised organisation of life in which threads of progression are so woven that each individual can be aided to bring about judicious acceleration of the rate of his growth and development.

In this conception, the home of the teacher represented the fabric of life in which educational process was subtly and methodically intertwined in such a way that all life was education and all educational activities throbbed with life-experience.

The home of the teacher, which came to be called the ashrama or gurukula, was centred around students and each student received individual attention. The teacher looked upon his task as that of an observer, as a helper, as a guide, - not as that of a taskmaster. He taught best, not so much through instruction, as through the example of his wisdom and character and through his personal and intimate contact with the soul of each student. He had no rigid or uniform methods; but he applied every possible method in a varying manner in regard to every student. For Satyakama, the teacher would apply the simple method of learning through the activities connected with grazing the cattle; for Shyetaketu, the teacher would apply the method of meaningful questioning and demonstration through apt examples; Pippalada asked his pupils to dwell for one year in holiness and faith before they could put their questions; and Bhrgu was asked by his father and the teacher, Varuna, to concentrate himself in thought and discover the truth of Matter, of Life, of Mind, and of the Supermind and of the Bliss by successive and higher and higher meditations. Often the teacher communicated through silence so as to destroy the doubts in the minds of the pupils; the teacher taught students in groups but also individually'. The teacher, in fact, utilised every incident of life for imparting knowledge

and experience.

The student was looked upon as a seeker, not to be silenced by any dogmatic answers but to be uplifted in higher processes of thought, meditation and direct experience or realisation. In the educational process, student's enthusiasm, utsaha, was of utmost importance. Svadhyaya was the cornerstone of the learning process. Nothing was imposed upon the student except the willing acceptance of the discipline. The pupil was the brahmacharin, devoted to self control and askesis; he was asked to obey the command of the teacher, knowing very well that the teacher asked nothing arbitrary and only laid down the path by which self-perfection can be attained. The teacher was the Rishi who knew the innermost needs of the growth of the soul of the student and he had the knowledge and power to place each student on the right road to perfection. It was left to the student to walk or run on that road, according to his ability, inclination and rate of progression.

The teacher and the pupil lived a joint life, a life of joint prayer, of joint endeavour, of joint conquest of knowledge. Just as the student sought the teacher, even so, the teacher, too sought the student. As a teacher in the Taittiriya Upanishad announces: "May the Brahmacharins come unto me. From here and there, may the Brahmacharins come unto me."

An important element in the organisation of education was that of Time, kala. The teacher knew that everything in life has a rhythm of germination and flowering, and every process of life has a rhythm of development, which can be measured in terms of time. The teacher, ensured perfection. He knew how the student can be enabled to arrive at progression, neither too quickly nor too slowly, but by slow building up of foundation and rapid process of the blossoming of the faculties. Each student was, therefore, helped to obtain judicious rate of progression and judicious rate of acceleration.

The most important element in the educational process was the illumined condition of the teacher, - his state of knowledge, his command over different domains of life, his ripe experience, his wisdom, his realisation.

This brings us to the second characteristic of the ancient Indian concept of education.

2. INTEGRAL KNOWLEDGE: IMPORTANCE OF THE INTELLECT EXPLORATION AND REALISATION OF THE SUPERCONSCIENT

As we study the Veda and the Upanishad, we are struck by the profundity and loftiness of the knowledge that the Rishis had attained. The Veda and the Upanishads can rightly

be regarded as the records of "integral knowledge", - the synthesis of God-knowledge, self-knowledge and world-knowledge. The Rishis, the composers of these great compositions had arrived at the secret methods of attaining deeper and higher states of consciousness; and they had formulated various forms of concentration, which served as the key to knowledge. They had discovered that what the world revealed to us in response to our seeking and questioning depended on the state of sincerity, of impartiality, of complete identity between the subject and the object of knowledge. Thus they knew the secret of intuition, revelation, inspiration and discrimination. But they knew very well also that knowledge can be attained by senses, by reasoning and by intellectual thought.

The famous Gayatri mantra of Vishwamitra singles out one faculty of the human being as of singular importance, without whose cultivation and concentration, the best or the highest cannot be attained. This is the faculty of dhi, the pure intellect. This mantra indicates that it is only when the intellect can be trained in the system of meditation and contemplation that the major step in the process of knowledge can be taken. This Gayatri mantra also indicates that Vishwamitra had discovered the highest domain of luminous knowledge, which is symbolised as Savitri. He had further discovered that intellect can be so trained that it can succeed in concentrating upon that higher Light. Finally, it indicates that the intellect can be properly directed when it joins itself with Savitri, with the most beautiful form of creative Light.

The Vedas and the Upanishads abound with thousands of statements and indications that the world can best be known when its source is known and only when its relationship with the individuals is known, - individuals who take it as a field of their experience, their enjoyment, their bondage and their liberation. The modern psychologist takes great pride in his discovery of the unconscious and the subconscious, but the Rishi, the Vedic teacher, had discovered even the inconscient that which was wrapped darkly in the shroud of darkness. He had discovered also how the inconscient awakens and becomes the subconscious and how the subconscious and the conscient are related to each other. He had also the assured knowledge of the deeper and deepest domains of consciousness that lie behind (not below) the outer layers of consciousness. He had also scaled the heights of the superconscient, and not stopping anywhere, he had declared that as one rises the ladder higher and higher, more and more becomes clear as to what still remains to be known. The Vedic Rishi declares his own state of knowledge where all darkness gets shattered

and where his soul, like the falcon, liberates itself from the hundred chains of iron and soars above in the wide sky of consciousness in liberation, to the unmixed truth and to the unmixed bliss. The Vedic Rishi tells us of the secret of immortality and of the great path by which that secret can be attained by every human being.

The ancient Indian concept of education had its foundations in the Vedic and the Upanishadic integral knowledge. Its aim was to transmit to the new generations this knowledge and to develop it further by means of fresh quest and experimentation.

3. HUMAN POTENTIALITIES AND PURSUIT OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE PERFECTIBILITY:

The third characteristic of the ancient conception of education was its emphasis on harmonisation of different aspects of personality so that the physical being of the individual is made a strong base for sustaining the growth and perfection of the vital, mental and higher aspects of personality. The Taittiriya Upanishad speaks of five sheaths in the human being, all of which need to be integrated, - annamaya, the physical, pranamaya, the vital, manomaya, the mental, vijnanamaya, the supramental, and anandamaya, the bliss that is conscious and self-existent. The Vedic and the Upanishadic Rishis had made a thorough study of the problem of integration and come to the conclusion that the mental being, manomaya, is the leader of the physical and the vital, - prana sharira neta, and that it is by developing the mental powers that the vital and the physical can be controlled and mastered, although the real and lasting integration can come about only when one develops higher degrees of consciousness which transcend the mental consciousness.

According to the ancient Indian psychology, the physical, the vital, and the mental can be uplifted to their higher perfection when the Spirit is made to manifest its four powers, the power of wisdom, the power of heroism, the power of harmony and the power of skill in works. The Purusha Sukta of the Rigveda makes it clear that these four powers are all spiritual in character and that it is when all of them are fully manifested that the deepest divinity can become operative in our dynamic life. At the same time, the concept of swabhava and swadharma was developed on this basis, a full exposition of which we get in the Bhagavadgita. Each individual has, according to this system of knowledge, a predominant force which gives rise to a special tendency in the being, either of wisdom or of heroism or of harmony or of skill. This

predominant tendency is what is called swabhava and each individual needs to be given the freedom to develop on the lines of one's own swabhava. The Indian system of education made a special provision so that each swabhava receives the necessary aid and framework of development as also the system of culture and the system of developing those qualities which can ultimately foster and nourish the totality of the personality. It was a later corruption of this great psychological principle of swabhava that led to the development of caste system, where swabhava was the least to be considered and its inner truth was sacrificed in favour of the system of determination by birth and system of privileges and handicaps - a parody of the ancient insights of profound psychology.

Nonetheless, the ancient system of education in India, in its peak period, produced amazing results in terms of development of faculties and capacities, and their integration, a supreme example of which is to be found in the personality of Sri Krishna who was at once a spiritual teacher, a heroic warrior, a great harmoniser, and skillful worker, who could excel in the task of a charioteer in the field of Kurukshetra. If we consider the spiritual history of India and also its history of dynamic activities that built up great edifices of mathematics and natural sciences, medical sciences, numberless philosophies, teeming dharmashastras, profusion of literature, art and architecture, and powerful administration and system of governance, we shall find that these great achievements were traceable to the ancient system of education. This system, though spiritual in character, did not reject the life on the earth but laid it down that the higher achievements are to be attained in the life of the earth, - here itself, iha eva.

This system put forward the conception of shreshtha, and pointed out various qualities that we should expect in the ideal personality. This conception was emphasised because it was consciously recognised that people tend to follow the best and distribution of the best qualities among the people at large can be effected only by encouraging and fostering the best.*

In the heart of the shreshtha, these qualities blossomed: benevolence, love compassion, altruism, long suffering, liberality, kindness and patience; in his character, the qualities of courage, heroism, energy, loyalty, truth, honour, justice, faith, obedience and reverence. These qualities included also a fine modesty and yet noble pride and power to govern and direct.

The shreshtha was required to develop in his mind wisdom and intelligence and love of learning, opening to poetry, art and beauty and dedicated capacity and skill in works. In his

inner life, he had the urge to seek after the highest and nourish the spiritual turn. In his social relations and conduct, he was strict in his observance of all social responsibilities as father, son, husband, brother, kinsman, friend, ruler, master or servant, prince or warrior, or worker, king or sage. Shreshtha, the best, was an ideal seeker of the spirit endowed with robust rationality, both spirit-wise and world-wise, nobility and devotion to dharma. He was tolerant of life's difficulties and human weaknesses, but arduous and self-disciplined.

* As Sri Krishna points out in the Gita:

"Whatsoever a great man does, the same is done by others as well. Whatever standard he sets, the world follows the same."(Bhagavadgita 3.21)

The ancient system of education at once indulged and controlled man's nature, it fitted him for his social role, it stamped on his mind the generous ideal of an accomplished humanity, refined, harmonious in all capacities and noble in all his endeavours; and above all, it placed before him the theory and practice of Yoga, the theory and practice of a higher change, and it familiarised him with the concept of a spiritual existence and encouraged in him a hunger for the divine and infinite.

The scope of the ancient system of education was comprehensive; it rejected no discipline of knowledge, no means of expression, - literary or artistic, - no craft, and technology that could make for best utility of matter and substance. The Indian tradition speaks of sixty four sciences and arts, and it catered to the education of women in such a liberal way that we still speak of great examples of Lopamudra, Gargi, and Maitreyi. In the courses of study, apart from the study of the Veda, which was in itself a great science and art of living, emphasis was laid on comprehensive training of all that could equip each one for the role that was suitable to each individual on the lines of swabhava and swadharmas. Study of healthcare and Ayurveda was also an important part of the programme of study. In course of time, six Vedangas had developed as also four Upavedas and a number of other sciences and shastras. With the development of Buddhism, a different system of education developed which laid great emphasis on practices of asceticism, rules of dharma and studies of philosophy, medicine and other sciences. This also had an effect on the orthodox system of education, and in due course of time, different systems of education developed. But the history of this development does not concern us here.

IMAGE OF THE ANCIENT INDIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION:

Of the ancient Indian system of education that flourished for a considerable period of time, we have in our mind an inspiring image as it is described in a few pages of the Upanishads. This image has been presented to us by Sri Aurobindo in the following words:

"The sages sitting in their groves ready to test and teach the commoner, princes and learned Brahmins and great landed nobles going about in search of knowledge, the king's son in his chariot and the illegitimate son of the servant-girl, seeking any man who might carry in himself the thought of light and the word of revelation, the typical figures and personalities, Janaka and the subtle mind of Ajatashatru, Raikwa of the cart, Yajnavalkya militant of truth, calm and ironic, talking to himself with both hands without attachment to worldly possessions and spiritual riches and casting at least all his wealth behind to wander forth as a houseless ascetic, Krishna son of Devaki who heard a single word of the Rishi Ghora and knew at once the Eternal, the Ashramas, the courts of kings who were also spiritual discoverers and thinkers, the great sacrificial assemblies, where the sages met and compared their knowledge."*

* Sri Aurobindo: *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Centenary Edition, p.280.

III

QUESTION OF RELEVANCE:

It is not possible to go into greater details and delineate a more precise and comprehensive description of the ancient Indian conception of education. But while considering the question of the relevance of this concept to the needs and demands of our own times, we should distinguish between the essence and outer forms in which that concept was made operative in the ancient times. It is evident that we have to concentrate on essence rather than on outer forms.

IDEAL TEACHERS:

In the first place, it is not easy to find in our current times Rishis like Vashishtha and Vishwamitra and Yajnavalkya around whom the ancient system was built. But still, we can make use of the ideal and consider as to how that ideal can be brought nearer to actuality and what conditions of atmosphere, conception, vision and equipment would be necessary to create among our teachers a new aspiration to embody in themselves those qualities and concerns which

dominated the ideal teachers of that antiquity. It is not entirely impossible to build up a new system of teachers' training through which new roles of teachers can be visualised and imparted to the coming generations of teachers.

That the task of the teacher is not primarily to teach but to observe the students and to guide them on the proper lines which are suitable to their potentialities, inclinations and capacities can be emphasised. That the teacher's instruments are not confined only to methods of instruction but include also the example of the inner character of the teacher and his capacity to enter into the depths of students' inner souls can also be stressed. That the teacher must concentrate and embody vast and true knowledge and continue to learn more and more can also be underlined. In any case, the country can take a major decision to create such conditions where the image of the ideal teacher is made vividly visible, so that we can have in the coming decades a growing number of teachers who can approximate in their qualities and in their character as also in their knowledge and skills to the ideal teacher of our ancient system.

This we should strive to do, not only to maintain our continuity of cultural development but also because the ancient Indian pedagogy was extremely sound, and India will stand to gain if that pedagogy can be brought back to life, and can be further enriched by applications of the results of various progressive educational experiments which have been conducted in India and in different parts of the world during the last two centuries.

CHILD-CENTRED EDUCATION: INTEGRAL EDUCATION ON THE LINES OF SWABHAVA AND SWADHARMA:

Modern emphasis on child-centred education is consonant with the care that was bestowed upon the child and the brahmacharin in the home of the teacher in our ancient system. And there is no doubt that the more will this emphasis be translated into practice, the more will our modern system begin to resemble our ancient system in spirit, although not in outer form.

Among the idea-forces which have powerfully emerged in the modern world and which will determine the future, there are two which will stand out for their universal acceptance. The first among these is the conception of the right of all individuals as members of the society to full life and the full development of which they are individually capable. No ideal will persist which will allow an arrangement by which certain classes of society should arrogate

development and full social fruition to themselves while assigning a bare and barren function of service to others. And the second idea is that of individualism, which proclaims that the individual is not merely a social unit, that he is not merely a member of the human pack, but he is something in himself, a soul, a being, who has to fulfill his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or assigned part in the truth and the law of collective existence. The individual thus demands freedom, space, initiative for his soul, for his nature, for his swabhava and swadharma, to use the Indian terms. These two ideas together are bound to force contemporary system of education to undergo such a radical change that the ideal of the integral development of personality is given highest importance and, considering that the concepts of integral personality are getting increasingly enriched under the stress of modern search of the inner soul, the ancient Indian concept of education, in which integration of human personality was sought to be effected by the fourfold powers of the soul will be found directly relevant and useful. It is increasingly recognised that the human beings of the present day are so acutely torn by the inherent conflicts between the rational, the ethical and the aesthetic that they are obliged to look for something else, something higher than the rational and the pragmatic, something spiritual and much more truly effective in solving the problems of life.

It is often contended that the Indian system of education had for long been instrumental in sustaining the pernicious caste system and therefore, in the new atmosphere where casteless and classless society is being envisaged, the Indian system will be found to be entirely irrelevant. But this is a misreading of Indian history and it commits the error of attributing what happened at one stage during the period of decline to the entire long history, a system of four varnas, but this system was quite different from its degenerated and distorted caricature that the later caste system represents. In any case, without going into disputes regarding the ancient chaturvarnya and the later caste system, two things can be safely stated that the individual develops best when he develops on the lines of inherent propensities, potentialities, capacities and predominant interests; and secondly, that the individual develops perfection only when all the potentialities are developed and integrated into a harmony. This is now being increasingly acknowledged in the modern educational psychology, and this was already acknowledged and practised to a greater or a lesser degree in the ancient system of education. The Indian educational theory and practice laid special emphasis on swabhava and swadharma and on the idea of fourfold personality which can be perfected by

developing the individual soul, conceived not as an ego but as a harmonious entity which has its own uniqueness and which yet lives by mutuality and harmony with the totality. This theory and practice will be found most relevant to the task of rebuilding a new system of education.

TEACHER EDUCATION:

It is also increasingly recognised that corresponding to the aim of the integral development of personality, the teacher also must have a personality that is very well developed and integrated. Our present system of teacher education is not only superficial but also mechanical and uninspiring. The time that we have allotted to the programme of teacher education, which practically comes to eight months, is hopelessly inadequate, and the wiser counsel that we are now hearing in our country is that we should institute an integrated course of teacher education, which can extend over to four to five years. This wise counsel seems destined to succeed, and we shall therefore be in a better position to design a comprehensive programme of teachers' education. In that design, all the valuable aspects of the ancient concepts of education and the ancient concept of the role of the teacher will find some kind of rebirth and renewal.

ENVIRONMENT:

It is often contended that one of the most salutary aspects of the ancient system of education was the setting that was provided to the Gurukula, - the setting of a forest, which was remote from the hustle and bustle of worldly life. It is, however, argued that this condition is hardly feasible in our times and this reduces the relevance of the ancient system. The argument has some force, although it must be stressed that after independence some educational institutions have been provided with beautiful settings, but unfortunately, many of them have been ruined by human misuse. Many private schools also are being developed in our country in beautiful settings. In any case, it is true that with the development of modern media, the isolation which was sought for the educational institutions in ancient times has now become almost impossible. But these practical difficulties do not contradict the truth that the educational institution must be set up in such a beautiful environment that the harmony between human being and nature can become a part of the organisation of life and therefore a powerful medium of education. If this truth is kept in view, it will serve a great purpose when our country will be required to build increasing number of educational institutions, even in remote villages and groups of hamlets. The importance of environment, of

surroundings full of vegetables, flowers and fruits, can never be underestimated, and the fact that our ancient system of education had underlined this important aspect will remain a permanent contribution to the higher causes of civilisation.

CONTEMPORARY CRISIS: VALUE-EDUCATION: SPIRITUAL EDUCATION:

It is important to note that there is an increasing awareness both in India and the world that the contemporary crisis is fundamentally the crisis of the disbalancement of an exaggerated development of the outer structures and organisations and means of physical and vital satisfactions on the one hand, and the neglect of the ethical and spiritual dimensions of human life, on the other. One, therefore, hears of the crisis of character, crisis of values and crisis of spiritual evolution. Gripped as we are in this crisis, we are bound to look for the knowledge of ethics and spirituality, of values and of the knowledge that can bridge the gulf between the life of matter and the life of spirit. In the West, increasing number of leaders are now speaking of return to basics, and in India we have begun to conceive of programmes of value-education. This subject has not yet received the attention that it deserves, but there is no doubt that under the pressure of circumstances or of our enlightened foresight, when we shall explore this subject, we are bound to raise three important questions, helpful answers of which will largely be found in our ancient Indian conception of education.

MEANING OF VALUES:

1. The first question will be related to the meaning of values, particularly when they are not to be restricted only to the domain of morality but will also extend to the domain of aesthetics, rationality, and even to the domain of supra-rationality. This question will become complex when we come to consider values of physical education, vital education, and mental education in the context of integral development of personality and of the perfectibility of the individual and the collectivity.

SCIENCE AND VALUES:

2. The second question will be related to science and values, particularly when humanity is awaking to the necessity of directing scientific knowledge towards the goal of higher welfare of humanity. This question will again become complex when we examine the claim of scientific knowledge that knowledge by its very nature has to be scientific and that the knowledge of values is not strictly speaking knowledge. The question will be

whether this claim is sustainable in view of the growing idea that knowledge is not a matter merely of inductive or deductive process of thought but that even instincts, desires, emotions, aspirations, faith and intuition give clues to knowledge and are themselves imbued with knowledge. This will necessarily lead us to the question of harmonising positive knowledge with axiological knowledge and of developing an integral system of knowledge.

VALUES AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE:

3. The third question will be related to relationship between self-knowledge and pursuit of values, particularly when it is seen that pursuit of values demands increasing self-control and self-mastery, which in turn, are related to self-knowledge. For, as it was realised by the ancient Rishis, the Self cannot be known except through self-discipline, and self-discipline cannot become perfect without the true knowledge of self. Again, this question will become complex when it is realised that self-knowledge is intimately related to world-knowledge and God-knowledge. It will be seen that these questions will oblige us to converge upon the profound psychological, ethical and spiritual knowledge which was so central to the ancient Indian conception of education.

MODERN KNOWLEDGE: PHYSICAL, SUPRAPHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE:

We realise that modern knowledge is expanding at a tremendous rate of progression; in course of this rapid movement, materialism of yesterday is being increasingly overpassed. Philosophical inadequacy of materialism has become obvious when we see that the advanced materialists of today refrain from making any metaphysical propositions, including those regarding materialism. The argument that science can deal only with matter is also being overpassed. The development of life sciences, psychological sciences and humanistic sciences has shown that what is important in science is the scientific method but not the unsustainable assumption that this method can be applied only in the domain of matter. As a matter of fact, the boundaries between the physical and the supra-physical are being broken up quite rapidly and as against the earlier assumption of materialism that only that is real which can be physically verified, it is clearly proved that the basic sub-atomic substratum of matter is physically invisible although real. Even in technological

matters, dependence on material means alone is being increasingly substituted by inventions which reduce dependence on material means, such as in the case of wireless telegraphy.

INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF THE YOGIC KNOWLEDGE:

With these developments, we can see that the knowledge of the physical will gradually or rapidly depend, for its further development or completion, to knock at the doors of the supraphysical knowledge. And, in that context, the importance of the knowledge - physical and supraphysical - that constituted the contents of the ancient Indian system of education will come to be underlined.

And this will lead also to the study of Yoga as a science. As Swami Vivekananda had declared, Yoga is science par excellence, since it proceeds by the scientific method of observation, experimentation and verification, of repetition and of rectification as also of continuous expansion. And with the admission of the Yogic knowledge, it appears that the entire body of discoveries made by the Vedic and Upanishadic Rishis and by the subsequent numberless Yogic explorers will become the central focus of advancing research. Already some Western scientists are turning to the knowledge that Yoga can provide, and we can foresee that this movement is bound to move forward. And this will enhance the relevance of the heritage that we possess of the ancient Indian conception of knowledge and education.

RENEWAL OF THE OLD SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE: NEED FOR DEVELOPING NEW KNOWLEDGE:

This is not to say that all that we need today and tomorrow was already contained in the ancient Indian system; although ofttest and central discoveries of the secrets of the Spirit were made in those ancient times, there is still much more

to be done in the coming days. New knowledge of matter and new knowledge of spirit are likely to be the preoccupation of the seekers all over the world. It is also possible that the older synthesis of knowledge will be replaced by newer synthesis. But still old foundations will always be found to be not only relevant but of basic value.

As we visualise these future developments, we can see at once how they will affect our present day curricula and our entire present system of educational aims, educational methods and educational contents. Radical changes will be required; and we shall need to revisit the ancient Indian concept of education and derive from it valuable insights, which can guide us in the right direction, provided we also take care to embrace the latest results of the latest educational research and experimentation that has been conducted in India and elsewhere.

UPANISHADIC SECRET OF EMBRACING UNENDING KNOWLEDGE:

We have to realise that our present Indian curricula hardly provide to our students any adequate idea of the unbroken history of Indian culture, which extended in the past at least beyond five thousand years. If we are to give even a faint idea of this vast canvass of Indian culture, - which incidentally, is indispensable if we want to sustain our cultural identity, - and if we are to add, as we must, also the new and expanding horizons of knowledge, which are vastly developing, we shall be obliged to consider ways and means by which our entire system of curriculum making and our system of educational methodology can undergo radical changes. We shall have to find a central answer to the question as to how to master knowledge when it is very vast and when it is expanding at an exponential rate. And shall we not be tempted to listen seriously to the Upanishadic declaration that there is a kind of knowledge having acquired which all can be known?