

EDUCATIONAL THOUGHTS OF DR. ANNIE BESANT (1847-1933)

Navdeep Kaur*

ABSTRACT

Annie Besant was an educationalist with high aims and ideals. She emphasised on the need for India to develop a national spirit to take its place among the nations of the world and to develop educational methods founded on Indian ideals. She became the founder of National Education under the name of the Society for promotion of National Education. She brought a new spirit in the country and worked tirelessly for the promotion of education.

Keywords: *Annie Besant, Educational Thoughts, National Education*

Introduction

Annie Besant's educational philosophy is based on the theosophical ideal of education according to which each child should receive an education suited to develop his particular and individual faculties. He should be imparted education which will make him useful as citizen in his community and his country.

Brief Life Sketch

Annie Besant (1 October 1847 – 20 September 1933) was a prominent British socialist, theosophist, women rights activist, writer and orator and supporter of Irish and Indian self-rule. She was an Irish lady who made India her home. Annie Besant coming from an aristocratic Irish family made India her home. Annie Besant had a good education from the early years. She studied several books on philosophy and religion. She married a clergyman. She had many doubts about the belief of Christian Church. After some years, she left the church and became a free thinker.

Theosophical Leader

Annie Besant was greatly influenced by the teaching and philosophy of Madam Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society in London and became a member. Annie Besant supported the movement for the Status of Women in England. She came to India as a leader of the Theosophist movement and founded many schools and colleges on its principles, in India. She also wrote many books and pamphlets on religion, socialism, politics, education and the status of women, both in England and India.

Supported the Independence Movement

During her many fruitful years of service to India, Dr. Besant strongly supported the movement for Independence, and took an active part in the freedom movement from her headquarters in Adyar, Madras. Dr. Besant loved India. Her respect and understanding of India's religion and cultural heritage was profound.

***Research Scholar, Punjabi University Patiala, Punjab, India**

She studied Hinduism and delved deeply into its philosophy. She wrote many books and brochures on Hinduism. Dr. Besant's support of India's aspirations and struggle for freedom evoked much opposition from her English Countrymen, but she regarded India as her adopted homeland. She strongly criticised the conduct of British in India and openly defended India and Afghanistan against the oppressive politics of the British. Annie Besant died in 1933, after leaving an indelible mark on India education, the fight for women's rights as well as on India's aspirations for freedom. While in London, Dr. Annie Besant wrote several books and pamphlets on Population, Physics, Physiology, Biology, Socialism, Status of Women.

In India her publications include-

- 1) Education as a national Duty (Benaras, 1903)
- 2) The Education of Indian Girls (Benaras, 1903)
- 3) Principles of Education (Madras, 1915)
- 4) Education for the new Era (London, 1919)
- 5) Theosophical Education Report (Madras, 1917)
- 6) Some Lessons From the Mahabharata (Benaras, 1899)
- 7) Sri Ramchandra, the Ideal King (Benaras and London, 1901)
- 8) Hindu Ideals (Benaras and London, 1904)
- 9) Sanatana Dharma: An Advanced Textbook of Hindu Religion & Ethics (Benaras, 1904)
- 10) The Universal Textbook of Religion and Morals (Adyar, 1914-1915, 3 volumes)
- 11) Lectures on Political Science (Adyar, 1919)
- 12) Legends and Tales (London, 1883)
- 13) Civilization's Deadlock and the keys (London, 1924)
- 14) Kamala Lectures: Indian Ideals in Education & Philosophy, religion and Art (Calcutta,1925)
- 15) World Problems of Today (London, 1925)
- 16) India Bound or free (London& New York, 1925)

LIFE PHILOSOPHY OF ANNIE BESANT

Annie Besant was a firm believer in the philosophy of Theosophy that emphasised the following two principles-

- 1) The Unity of God who is the Universal source of all existence.
- 2) Universal Brotherhood of man.

Religious Views of Annie Besant:-True religion, according to Annie Besant consists not only in one's feeling towards God but also in performing duties towards our fellowmen. A morally good man who doesnot believe in God at all, is in a far higher state of being than the man who believes in God and is selfish, cruel and unjust.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF HER EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

1) **All Round Education:-**Annie Besant writes, "I look forward to a time when every child shall receive, in the national schools, the elements of a literary, scientific, artistic and technical education. No boy or girl should leave the school ignorant of our literature, or of the wonders of science. He should delight in beauty. He should also learn some definite means of bread-winning, let it be tailoring, cookery or carpentry or any trade or profession. Every pair of hands should be able to do at least some one thing well by which an honest living may be earned. "Emphasis on the development of Individual Faculties:- Dr. Besant's educational philosophy is based on the "Theosophical ideal of Education- Each child should receive an education suited to develop his particular and individual faculties. Such an education should be imparted which will make him useful as a citizen in his community and his country.

Aims in Education:-Education should draw out the child's capacities, and develop and train these capacities so that he becomes a healthy and useful member of a civilized society.

The objects of such an education are-

- 1) To train the body in health, vigour and grace, so that it may express the emotions with beauty, and the mind with accuracy and strength.
- 2) To train the emotions to love all that is beautiful.
- 3) To sympathize with the joys and sorrows of others and to inspire to serve others to love our elders as our parents, treat our equals as our brothers and sisters, and youngsters as our children.
- 4) To find joy in sacrificing for great causes for the helpless and compassion for those who suffer.
- 5) To train and discipline the mind in right thinking, right judgement and memory.
- 6) To subdue body, emotion and mind spirit.

In short, education should make man a good citizen of free and spiritual commonwealth of humanity.

Annie Besant divided the entire period of education in life into three parts. These are as follows:

(i) First period: - 1 to 7 years:

- 1) The physical health and development of the child's body should be the chief concern of parents and the teacher. The child's entire future depends on the care bestowed on the child during the first seven years of his life. Nothing in later years can fully make up for insufficient food or insufficient light, exercise and sleep, during this period.
- 2) This is also the period for cultivating observation for training the senses into alertness, accuracy and grasp, for training hand and finger skills of memory- especially the word memory

which is very quick and retentive in childhood. Nursery rhymes remain in the memory for life. Rhymes and poems employing succession of events, names or dates learnt in childhood, are never forgotten.

3) No abstract reasoning processes should be forced upon the child during this period. His attention should be directed to observation of sequences of facts but not the logical processes. The brain cells are not sufficiently inter-related to make any train of reasoning intelligible and there is no sense in memorising logical sequences which are not understood by the child.

(ii) Second Period: 7-14 Years: Main characteristics and nature of Education;-

During this period, Education in this period should be chiefly directed to the development and training of emotions, and thus to the building of character. Histories containing largely of biographical stories of great men of varied types, saints, heroes, martyrs, political, artistic and literary leaders in every department of human life- these should inspire enthusiasm and shape the ideals of developing boys and girls. In this way character will be built and the channels of right emotions will be prepared. Thus when the great emotional rush which follows the attainment of puberty is upon the youth, that rush will find channels ready to receive it, to render it uplifting the beneficial, instead of degrading and mischievous.

(iii) Third Period; 14-21 Years:

This should be the time of intellectual development of hard and strenuous mental labour. The reasoning faculty should be thoroughly trained by logic and mathematics. Specialization in some areas should prepare the youth for his future career.

Curriculum at Different Stages:-

Curriculum at First period: 1-7 years:- Tales of noble deeds and heroism should be narrated

from the earliest days. Emphasis should be on health, physical dexterity and skills, nursery rhymes, cultivation of word-memory, observation of sequences of facts, love of beauty arousing of sympathy for the poor and helpless.

Curriculum at Second period: 7-14 years: - History and biography, Geography, Physics, chemistry and Geology should be taught. Practical and laboratory work in the science should be included. Algebra, Geometry and Arithmetic should occupy an important place in the curriculum at this stage.

Curriculum at Third period: 14-21 years:- Since this is the period of the rapid intellectual development, Logic and mathematics should be taught intensively. The sense of duty to one's fellowmen should be taught through civics and Social Studies. Sciences such as Biology, Physiology and Psychology should be mastered. Literature, Philosophy, Economics should occupy an important place. Various aspects of the Arts should be included in the curriculum. Specialization in some chosen field should prepare the student for his future career in life, during this period of his education.

Religious Teaching:- Religious education should begin with easy stories in the child's stages of education and pass on to Metaphysics in the later years in all of the three stages, being adapted to the intelligence and understanding of the student.

Physical Training:- Physical Training should be all-pervading, and should be adapted in theory and practise to the physical development and needs of the growing pupil in all the three stages.

ANNIE BESANT'S CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION

1. **Free and Universal Education:** Annie Besant strongly believed and preached that there is no such thing as racial superiority. The white races and the so-called higher castes of people are not in any way superior to other people. Domination by races and castes of people over others is totally unjustified. All people in the world are endowed with intelligence and ability, regardless of race or caste. There should be free schools established for universal free and compulsory education in India. No one should be denied the right to education and upward mobility.
2. **Establishing Educational Institutions:-**Dr. Besant's support of India's national aspirations led her to encourage and support many innovative educational efforts. She founded many schools and colleges . The central Hindu School and College was founded by her in 1898 in Benaras. It later became the Benaras Hindu University. She also founded the Theosophical Institute at Adyar, Madras, among many others.
3. **Vocational Education:-**Dr. Besant's was a strong advocate for vocational education in schools . By the end of schooling, every pupils should have learnt some trade or craft: carpentry, cooking, tailoring or any useful skill or vocation, to enable him to earn in living, at any stage in his educational career.
4. **Organisation of Clubs and Organisation:-**Not only did she start the Central Hindu School and College at benaras, she organized its debating clubs and many sports organizations.
5. **Emphasis in High Standards:** She was an excellent teacher and educational administrator, who set high standards for other teacher and organizers around her. She was admired and loved by her students and colleagues for her dedication efficiently in educational endeavours.
6. **Involvement of students in social reforms:** She took a firm stand against childmarriage which was widely prevalent in India at that time. Students were discouraged from marryinf while they were still studying, and they and their parents were made to realize that the students were not mature enough to assume adult responsibilities.
7. **Instilling nationalist Spirit:-**She gave speeches on nationalism, freedom and social reform in schools and colleges as well as in public. This made the students realize their responsibilities to live and work for a free India.

8. **Promotion of Women Education:-**Annie Besant was an ardent promoter of women's education in India. She organized many groups to strive for the furtherance of girl's schools and colleges in many parts of India where facilities did not exist, and girls and women were neglected. She worked to raise the status of girls and women through education.
9. **Inspired enthusiasm for educational promotion and report:-**Due to Annie Besant's pioneering work in education , many committees, parsi, muslim, Christian, AryaSamaj, Dev Samaj, Brahmo Samaj and others started schools for their youth on modern lines. She inspired a great deal of enthusiasm for education in India at a time when the british neglected educational betterment and expansion to fit the needs of the country, in their schemes.

To sum up, Annie Besant lived and worked in India during the period when Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Arbindo Ghosh and Mahatma Gandhi were carrying on their revolutionary ideas and ideals in the social, educational, religious and political fields. She had a great zeal and missionary endeavour for the promotion of education, especially of women education, social reform and India's freedom.

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